



**Natural Heritage  
& Endangered Species  
Program**

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*Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife*

**Brown Thrasher  
*Toxostoma rufum***

State Status: **None**  
Federal Status: **None**

**SPECIES DESCRIPTION:** Brown Thrashers are large mimids, about 11 ½ inches long. Adults are rufous above, with light underparts streaked with black, a long, rufous tail, and a relatively long, rather down-curved bill. The sexes are alike in appearance.

**DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE:** Data on specific locations of breeding Brown Thrashers are not recorded by NHESP. The North American Breeding Bird Survey indicates a declining Massachusetts population trend of -9.8% annually from 1966-2003 (Sauer et al. 2004). Data recorded during the Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas (1974-1979) confirmed breeding by Brown Thrashers in about 30% of the areas surveyed. Brown Thrashers were recorded across the state, but concentrated in the eastern half of the state and in the lower Connecticut River valley (Petersen and Meservey 2003).

**HABITAT DESCRIPTION:** Brown Thrashers inhabit brushy, early-successional areas, such as old fields, hedgerows, pitch pine/scrub oak areas, powerline rights-of way, and other disturbed areas.

**THREATS:** Nests of Brown Thrashers are predated by snakes, domestic cats, and other birds; there is a high rate of nest predation. In Massachusetts, the continuing decline in suitable breeding habitat is likely to be the major threat to Brown Thrashers. Early successional habitats in Massachusetts are rapidly being converted to development or intensive agriculture. Succession to closed-canopy woodlands and suppression of natural disturbances such as fire (especially in pitch pine/scrub oak areas) also eliminate Brown Thrasher habitat.

**REFERENCES:**

- Cavitt, J.F., and C.A. Haas. 2000. Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*). In: The Birds of North America, No. 557 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.
- Petersen, W. R., and W. R. Meservey. 2003. *Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas*. University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, Massachusetts.
- Sauer, J.R., J.E. Hines, and J. Fallon. 2004. *The North American Breeding Bird Survey, Results and Analysis 1966 - 2003. Version 2004.1. USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland.*

Updated 2015

**A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan**

**Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife**

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