

This resource is based on the following source:

Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

This resource can be cited as:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. 2003, January 6. Florida's breeding bird atlas: A collaborative study of Florida's birdlife. <http://www.myfwc.com/bba/> (Date accessed mm/dd/yyyy).

Brown Thrasher *Toxostoma rufum*

In Florida the Brown Thrasher is a common but inconspicuous permanent resident whose numbers in winter are augmented by migrants from farther north. It is not nearly as abundant as its close relative the Northern Mockingbird. However, it does occur in forested habitats where the Northern Mockingbird is absent.

The Brown Thrasher breeds east of the Rocky Mountains, north into southern Canada, and south to eastern Texas, the Gulf coast and south Florida. It winters in the southeastern United States to south Florida, occasionally well outside these limits.

Habitat. The Brown Thrasher occurs in dry thickets, brushy pastures, forest edges, fencerows, and garden shrubbery. It forages mostly near the ground, where it feeds on large insects and arthropods, berries, acorns, and small amphibians and reptiles uncovered by tossing aside leaves and digging with its long bill. Despite its affinity for the ground, the male often selects the highest available perch to deliver his song. During the nonbreeding season the Brown Thrasher is extremely inconspicuous. Away from feeders, often the only clue to its existence is a barely audible single call given at dawn and dusk and answered by all other thrashers in the neighborhood (F. Lohrer, pers. obs).



Illustration © 1995 Diane Pierce, All Rights Reserved.

The large, bulky nest is built of twigs, bark, and grasses on a low tree branch in a shrub or bush, or sometimes even on the ground. The eggs are pale bluish-white, occasionally greenish, and are spotted with reddish-brown. In Florida the clutch size is usually 3 eggs, incubation lasts 12 to 14 days, and the young leave the nest at 9 to 13 days of age (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

Seasonal Occurrence. Migrants arrive in mid-September and depart in April (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Today the species breeds nearly throughout the mainland and, at least occasionally, in the Keys.

Brown Thrashers are double-brooded and are occasionally hosts to the Brown-headed Cowbird. They are the largest bird in the United States to raise cowbirds (Terres 1980).

Status. The Brown Thrasher breeds throughout most of the state, but is absent from the southwestern mainland and much of the central Everglades. The Brown Thrasher has become a regular breeder in the southern half of the peninsula only since about 1930 and first nested in the Florida Keys in 1986 where it is still a rare breeder (Howell 1932, Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Because of its shy, retiring habits, the Brown Thrasher was confirmed in only 59% of the quadrangles surveyed.

Fred E. Lohrer

Brown Thrasher

