

Brown Thrasher

Toxostoma rufum

Brown Thrashers occupy shrubby edge and successional habitats, frequently sharing their breeding territories with Gray Catbirds. Nesting thrashers prefer fallow fields dominated by dense shrubby thickets, the brushy margins of woodlands, and shrubby thickets along fencerows and roadsides. Multiflora rose hedges bordering farm fields provide acceptable habitats within intensively farmed areas where other brushy nesting sites are scarce. However, thrashers do not exhibit the same adaptability in their choice of breeding habitats as is displayed by catbirds. Thrashers definitely prefer dry upland sites and only rarely occur near water. They avoid urban residential areas, although thrashers will occupy brushy thickets bordering rural residences. This species also normally avoids woodland openings and other wooded habitats, but a few pairs may be found in formerly grazed woodlots with dense shrubby cover.

Despite their more restrictive habitat requirements, breeding Brown Thrashers are widely distributed summer residents in Ohio. The Atlas Project produced records from 748 priority blocks representing 98% of the statewide total. They were fairly evenly distributed within every physiographic region with records from every priority block in the Illinoian Till Plain region and 94.7–98.6% of the blocks in the other regions. Their relative abundance on Ohio Breeding Bird Surveys exhibits a slightly different pattern. Thrashers appear to be most numerous in the Illinoian Till Plain and Till Plain regions, approximately twice as numerous as in the other regions.

The Atlas Project records were nearly equally divided between probable and confirmed breeders. Territorial males and pairs in suitable habitats composed most reports of probable breeders. Confirmed breeders included adults carrying food for young in 117 priority blocks, active nests in 70 blocks, recently fledged young in 49 blocks, and adults exhibiting distraction displays in 16 blocks. The “30” code was used to confirm breeding in 67 blocks, primarily in the Unglaciated Plateau, Till Plain, and Glaciated Plateau regions (30, 19, and 11 blocks respectively).

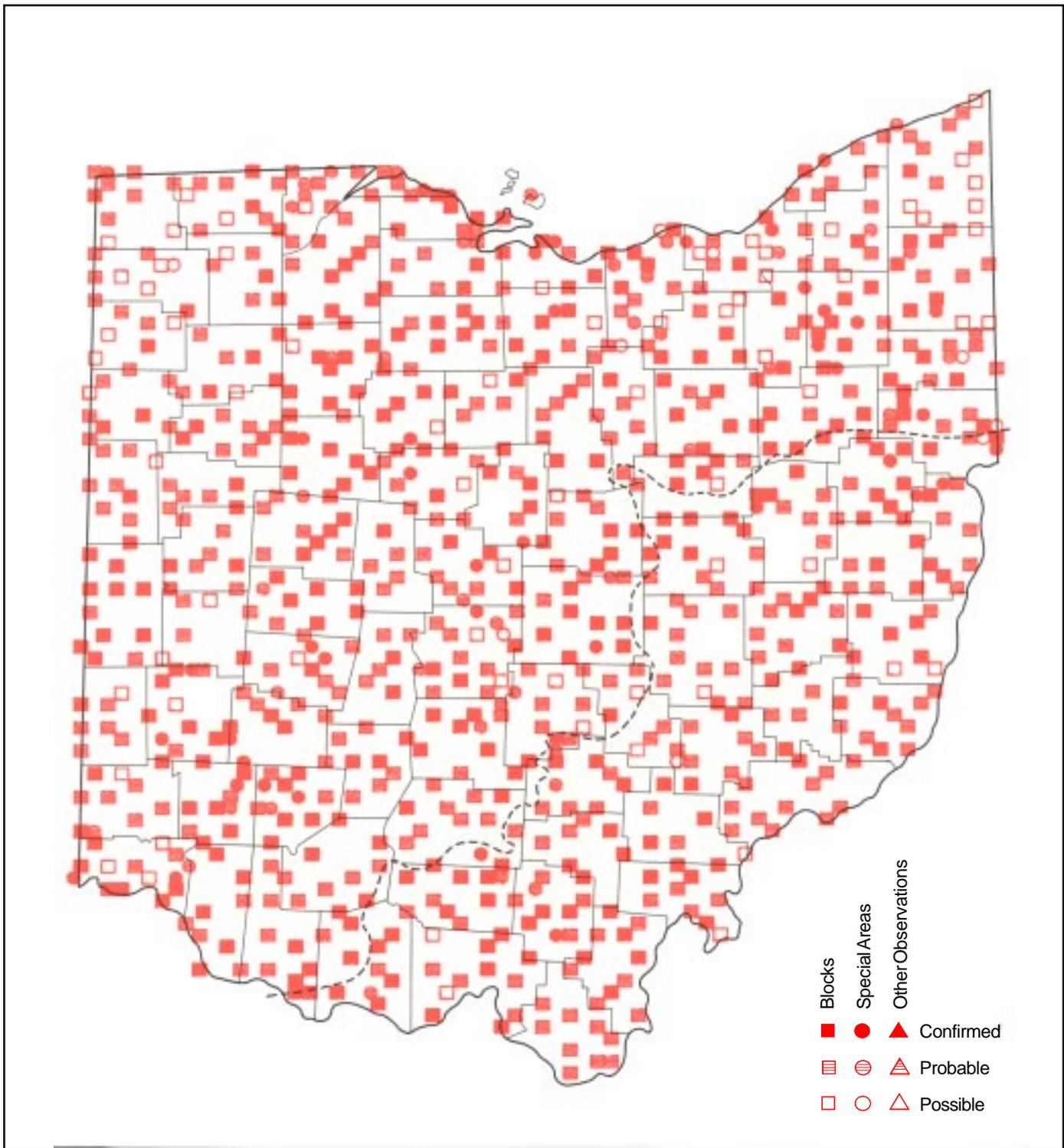
The statewide distribution and abundance of Brown Thrashers has not markedly changed during this century. Jones (1903) described them as fairly common summer residents throughout Ohio. A similar status was assigned to thrashers by Hicks (1935), noting they were fairly common to common residents in every county. However, they became locally distributed in some areas such as Adams, Scioto, and Lawrence counties in southern Ohio where breeding pairs were generally rather rare (Hicks 1937). Their numbers have remained reasonably stable during subsequent decades, although some local declines have been evident in portions of central and western Ohio where intensive agricultural land use practices have eliminated most suitable nesting habitats (Peterjohn 1989a).

Some thrasher nests are placed on the ground under dense cover such as thick bushes and the branches of fallen trees. However, most nests are placed at heights of 2–10 feet in dense woody cover, particularly hawthorn trees, tangles composed of roses and other thorny shrubs, and grape vines (Trautman 1940, Williams 1950).



Tim Daniel - Division of Wildlife

Most thrashers apparently attempt to raise two broods annually in Ohio. Nest construction begins during the second half of April and continues into May. Nests with eggs have been discovered by April 30–May 3 (Campbell 1968, Richter 1939), although earlier egg dates are likely in the southern counties. Most first clutches are laid during the first half of May. Fledgling thrashers have been observed by May 27 (Trautman 1940), but most are observed between June 5 and June 25. Renesting efforts and attempts to raise a second brood are responsible for reports of nests with eggs through July 18 (Jones 1903). These attempts normally produce fledglings during late July and early August. The latest nests have produced recently fledged young through August 20 (Trautman 1940).



Analysis of Block Data by Physiographic Region

Physiographic Region	Total Blocks Surveyed	Blocks with Data	% with Data	Regional % for Ohio	Ave. # Individ per BBS Route (1982–1987)
Lake Plain	95	90	94.7	12.0	2.1
Till Plain	271	266	98.2	35.6	4.0
Ill. Till Plain	46	46	100.0	6.2	5.3
Glaciated Plateau	140	137	97.9	18.3	1.7
Unglaciated Plateau	212	209	98.6	27.9	2.3

Summary of Breeding Status

No. of Blocks in Which Species Recorded		
Total	748	98.0%
Confirmed	327	43.7%
Probable	352	47.1%
Possible	69	9.2%