

# Hermit Thrush

## *Catharus guttatus*

Breeding Hermit Thrushes are normally associated with northern woodlands, primarily coniferous and mixed communities although they also occupy deciduous woods. In eastern North America, their breeding range encompasses most of Canada and the northern United States as well as the upper elevations of the Appalachian Mountains south to western Virginia (AOU 1983). Since the Pennsylvania and West Virginia populations of these thrushes are restricted to these mountains, this species does not appear to be a likely member of Ohio's breeding avifauna. However, the cool humid microhabitats and hemlock forests at scattered locations in eastern Ohio that support various birds normally associated with northern forests are also frequented by a small population of breeding Hermit Thrushes.



Picture to be added

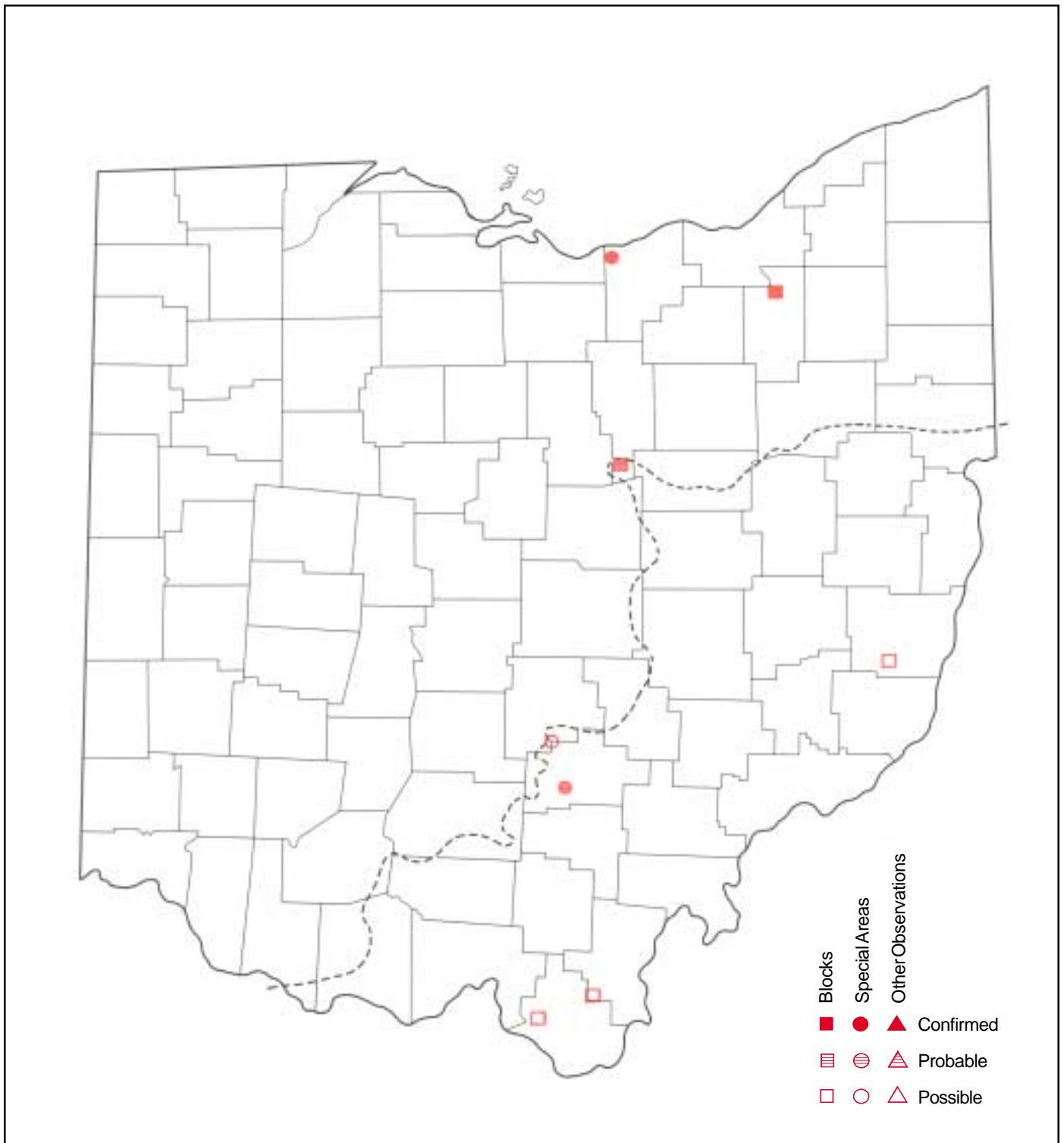
The first nesting records of Hermit Thrushes in Ohio were from the former Pymatuning Bog in Ashtabula County. Hicks (1933a, 1935) reported summering individuals in 1928, 1930, 1932, and 1933, finding nests during the latter two years. This population disappeared by 1935 following the bog's destruction. The next summer record was from Conkles Hollow (Hocking County) in 1953 (Brooks 1953). Two males were reported from the area but nesting was not confirmed. Since the early 1960s, Worth Randle has regularly censused Hocking County hemlock forests and discovered nesting pairs at Conkles Hollow in 1966 and 1976. These records apparently indicate Hermit Thrushes were only irregular summer residents in this county during these decades. Nesting thrushes were also discovered at Mohican State Forest (Ashland County) in 1979 (Peterjohn 1989a).

Sightings during the Atlas Project improved our understanding of the current status of breeding Hermit Thrushes in Ohio. A small population of 2–4 males annually summered within the hemlock forests of Hocking County, primarily in the vicinity of

Old Man's Cave State Park, Cedar Falls State Park, and Conkles Hollow State Nature Preserve. This population may be slowly increasing, since at least six males were counted in these forests during 1989. A small population of 3–5 males also resided in Mohican State Forest, numbers that have remained fairly stable throughout the 1980s. A single pair has occupied Virginia Kendall Park in Summit County since 1982, and recently fledged young were observed there during several years of the Atlas Project. Adult thrushes performing distraction displays were noted in the Chance Creek area of Lorain County during 1983, but this species does not appear to regularly inhabit this site. Territorial males were also reported from Lawrence, Gallia, Belmont, and Hocking counties, but these individuals occupied unsuitable habitats, disappeared shortly after they were discovered, and almost certainly were unmated. Based on these records, the current statewide breeding population of Hermit Thrushes probably totals no more than 8–12 pairs.

Within Ohio, breeding Hermit Thrushes are restricted to relatively cool mesic hemlock forests. Their territories usually include both mature habitats with a closed canopy and very open understory and ground cover, and younger edge habitats where the understory vegetation is fairly dense. Their nests are normally located in the younger habitats where they are concealed by the dense vegetation. The adults regularly forage in both habitats, but the male's song perches tend to be in the older woods where his beautiful song can carry considerable distances. This species occupies a much greater variety of breeding habitats elsewhere in its range, from the dry sandy pine barrens of Long Island, New York, to wet deciduous and mixed woodlands bordering bogs in northern Canada (Andrle and Carroll 1988, Peck and James 1987).

Hermit Thrushes normally nest on the ground, frequently at the bases of shrubs and small trees. A few pairs may build nests at heights of 1–3 feet in dense shrubs and saplings (Peck and James 1987). These nests are very difficult to locate, and relatively little information is available on their breeding chronology in Ohio. Nest construction has been noted as early as April 30 in Hocking County, but these activities are seemingly most prevalent during May and early June. The few confirmed breeding records indicate most clutches are apparently laid between mid-May and mid-June. Recently fledged young have been reported as early as June 22 in Summit County, although young from the later nests do not fledge until July. Double broods have been reported elsewhere in their range (Peck and James 1987), and could be expected in Ohio.



**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	—	—	—	—
Till Plain	271	—	—	—	—
Ill. Till Plain	46	—	—	—	—
Glaciated Plateau	140	1	0.7	20.0	—
Unglaciated Plateau	212	4	1.9	80.0	—

**Summary of Breeding Status**

No. of Blocks in Which Species Recorded		
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0.7%</b>
Confirmed	1	20.0%
Probable	1	20.0%
Possible	3	60.0%