

Wood Thrush

Hylocichla mustelina

The Wood Thrush's loud, flute-clear ee-oh-lay song rings through the deciduous forests of the eastern U.S. in summer. This reclusive bird's cinnamon brown upperparts are good camouflage as it scrabbles for leaf-litter invertebrates deep in the forest, though it pops upright frequently to peer about, revealing a boldly spotted white breast. Though still numerous, its rapidly declining numbers may be due in part to cowbird nest parasitism at the edges of fragmenting habitat and to acid rain's depletion of its invertebrate prey.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

The Wood Thrush's pot-bellied body, short tail, straight bill, big head, and upright posture give it the profile of a scaled-down American Robin.

Color Pattern

Wood Thrushes are warm reddish-brown above and white with bold black spots on their underparts. Juveniles show a somewhat muted version of the same pattern. All have a bold, white eyering.

Behavior

The reclusive Wood Thrush hops through leaf litter on the forest floor, probing for insects, bobbing upright between spurts of digging and leaf-turning. The male's clear, flute-like song echoes through the forest in spring and early summer, and both sexes make distinctive, machine-gun-like alarm notes.

Habitat

The Wood Thrush breeds in deciduous and mixed forests in the eastern U.S. where there are large trees, moderate understory, shade, and abundant leaf litter for foraging. They winter in lowland tropical forests in Central America.



Cool Facts

- The Wood Thrush is a consummate songster and it can sing “internal duets” with itself. In the final trilling phrase of its three-part song, it sings pairs of notes simultaneously, one in each branch of its y-shaped syrinx, or voicebox. The two parts harmonize with each other to produce a haunting, ventriloquial sound.
- A songbird like the Wood Thrush requires 10 to 15 times as much calcium to lay a clutch of eggs as a similar size mammal needs to nurture its young. That makes calcium-rich food supplements like snail shells crucial to successful breeding. These are rare in soils subject to acid rain, which may help explain patterns of population decline in the Wood Thrush.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 7.5 - 8.3 inches
- Wingspan - 11.8 - 13.4 inches
- Weight - 1.4 - 1.8 ounces