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THE BROWN THRASHER: OFFICIAL STATE BIRD OF GEORGIA (USA)

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Creatures of the air, gifted in song, winged, loveliest of them all

Carl Linnaeus

The Brown thrasher is the state bird of Georgia (USA). This bird is threatened today so it is important to discover all the features of it and find out more about the bird (Fig. 1, 3).





Fig. 1. The Brown Thrasher. M Lysenko, and M. Vorobey (right).

Fig. 2. Our Student project group: V. Novokhatska,



The land that is today the state of Georgia has been inhabited by people for thousands of years (Fig. 3). When Europeans first arrived, various tribes of Native Americans lived throughout the state. The two major tribes were the Cherokee and the Creek. The Cherokee lived in the northern part of Georgia and spoke an Iroquoian language. The Creek lived in the southern portion of Georgia and spoke the Muskogean language.

Fig. 3. Map of the United States with Georgia highlighted.

Both the Cherokee and the Creek were considered part of the "Five Civilized Tribes." The Seminole tribe of Florida grew largely out of the Creek peoples of Georgia [46; 38].

In 1928, the school children of Georgia selected the brown thrasher (Toxostoma rufum) as the state bird. According to Nature Magazine (April, 1932),

"The Campaign was inaugurated by the Fifth District of the State Federation of Women's Clubs and was sponsored by the Atlanta Bird Club and kindred groups."

Proposals were made to the Legislature and bills to adopt the brown thrasher as the state bird were introduced, but no action was taken.

On April 6, 1935, the brown thrasher was declared the state bird of Georgia by proclamation of Governor Eugene Talmadge (Fig. 4, 5), see the videos [9; 18].

Thirty-five years later, at the urging of the Garden Clubs of Georgia, the Georgia General Assembly passed Joint Resolution No. 128, that designated the brown thrasher the official Georgia State Bird and the Bobwhite Quail the official Georgia State Game Bird. The resolution was approved on March 20, 1970 [27].

Thus, The Brown Thrasher, a big, foxy red songbird with a repertoire of more than 1,000 song types, became Georgia's state bird in 1935 by a proclamation of the governor. In 1970, at the request of the Garden Clubs of Georgia, the legislature recognized the thrasher as Georgia's official state bird.



Fig. 4. Georgia official state bird: the Brown Thrasher. Fig. 5. Georgia State Bird and Flower (Toxostoma rufum) (Cherokee Rose / Rosa laevigata)

Also, the Brown Thrashers are one of the best and most spectacular singers of all North American birds (Fig. 6). Avid bird watchers enjoy the chance to see and hear these birds [28]. Brown thrashers sings from a small patch of young oak and bushes in the middle of prairie. Sometimes singing from the very top of the tree, sometimes from within the bushes [7], see the video [11]. Fig. 6. Singing Brown Thrasher.



The Brown Thrush, or Thrasher, by which names this bird is generally known,

may be said to be a constant resident in the United States, as immense numbers are found all the year round in Louisiana, the Floridas, Georgia, and the Carolinas. Indeed some spend the winter in Virginia and Maryland. During spring and summer they are met with in all our Eastern States. They also enter the British provinces, and are sometimes seen in Nova Scotia. It is the most numerous species found in the Union,

excepting the Robin (Fig. 9) or Migratory Thrush. Those which breed in the Middle and Eastern Districts return to the south about the beginning of October, having been absent fully six months from that genial region, where more than half of the whole number remain at all seasons. They migrate by day, and singly, never congregating, notwithstanding their abundance. They fly low (Fig. 7), or skip from one bush to another, their longest flight seldom exceeding the breadth of a field or river. They seem to move rather heavily, on



Fig. 7. The Brown Thrush flies low. Photo by Kerri Farley.

account of the shortness of their wings, the concavity of which usually produces a rustling sound, and they travel very silently [4], see video [16].

The brown thrasher has been noted for having an aggressive behavior, and is a staunch defender of its nest (see the video [8]). However, the name does not come from attacking perceived threats, but is believed to have come from the thrashing sound the bird makes when digging through ground debris [7], see video [21].

Brown thrasher (Fig. 8) is longer-tailed and slightly larger than a robin (Fig. 9). Rich rufous upperparts and heavy dark streaking on whitish underparts. Yellow eyes. Often skulks in thick vegetation in scrubby fields and forest edges. Mimics other species in its song, delivering a complex string of paired phrases (see the video [19]).







Fig.9. American robin.

The brown thrasher resides in various habitats. It prefers to live in woodland edges, thickets and dense brush, often searching for food in dry leaves on the ground.

It can also inhabit areas that are agricultural and near suburban areas, but is less likely to live near housing than other bird species [7].

Between 1966 and 2015 populations of brown thrasher's have declined by 41% according to the "North American Breeding Bird Survey." Like all birds, they suffer from habitat loss, die from exposure to pesticides as well as natural predators like sharp-shinned hawks. In the United States alone it is estimated that the domestic house cat kills from 1.4 billion to 3.7 billion birds a year. Cell towers and skyscrapers kill millions more as birds that migrate often fly at night and whole flocks are killed when they collide with these structures that are unnaturally tall, and of course, cars kill many millions more. With statistics like these one has to wonder how there are any birds left at all [33].

Ecosystem roles include competition with other birds for nesting sites and resources. Also these birds are prey for many snakes and other birds [28], see the **video** [5; 2; 45]: birds of prey

(also known as raptors, include species of bird that primarily hunt and feed on vertebrates that are large relative to the hunter (Fig. 10, 15).

Birds of prey, also known as raptors, include species of bird that primarily hunt and feed on vertebrates that are large relative to Fig. 10. Peregrine falcons (Falco peregrinus).

the hunter. Additionally, they have keen eyesight for detecting food at a distance or during flight, strong feet equipped with talons for grasping or killing prey, and powerful, curved beaks for tearing flesh. The term raptor is derived from the Latin word rapio, meaning to seize or take by force [6].

Brown thrashers are usually territorial and are found in pairs or with offspring during the breeding season. They compete with other birds for habitat and nesting areas. This competition





Fig. 11. Gray catbirds.

results in hostile encounters with birds like gray catbirds (Dumetella carolinensis) (Fig. 11). Mostly it is males that are aggressive towards other birds. During winters brown thrashers often make other birds move out of their feeding areas [22]. To respond to predation, brown thrashers have a few natural defenses. Adults are aggressive and often chase predators from the nest. Adults will use their bill to hit predators, these are large birds and they can cause significant damage to small and medium-sized predators. Other defenses include flapping theirwings and vocalizations [28], see video [8].

Gray catbirds (Dumetella carolinensis) (Fig. 11) have been documented visiting brown thrasher nests to break the eggs. Two hypotheses are proposed to explain this heterospecific egg destruction behavior: resource competition and egg predation. These birds both live in shrubs and have similar timing in breeding. They compete for the resources of this habitat. Once the catbird has broken the egg, usually it will

consume the contents. This egg consumption is consistent with the proposed egg predation hypothesis. The eggs of brown thrashers are also preyed on by many species of snakes (see the videos [48; 30; 13; 23]). Adults and nestlings are preyed on by falcons [28], Fig. 10.

Known Predators: Peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) (Fig. 10; 15), **video [35]**, Eastern yellowbelly racers (*Coluber constrictor*) (Fig. 12), Common garter snakes (*Thamnophis sirtalis*) (Fig. 14), Great Plains rat snakes (*Pantherophis emoryi*), Common king snakes (*Lampropeltis getula*), Milk snakes (*Lampropeltis triangulum*), Prarie king

snakes (Lampropeltis calligaster), Black rat snake (Pantherophis obsoletus), Bull snakes (Pituophis), domestic cats (Felis silvestris) (Fig. 16) [28]



Fig. 13. Eastern yellowbelly racers (Coluber constrictor).

Fig. 14. Common garter snakes

Fig. 12. Coluber constrictor. One of the two brown thrasher chicks from the nest, which was in a bush just a couple of feet off the ground. The parents tried to run off the snake, but it climbed a tree. (Photo by Linda Largent).



Fig. 15. Peregrine falcons (Falco peregrinus)



Fig. 16. Domestic cats (Felis silvestris).

The brown thrasher was originally described by Carl Linnaeus (Fig. 17) in his landmark 1758 10th edition of *Systema Naturae* as **Turdus rufus** (see the videos **25; 1**), (Fig. 18). The genus name *Toxostoma* comes from the Ancient Greek *toxon*, "bow" or "arch" and *stoma*, "mouth". The specific rufum is Latin for "red", but covers

a wider range of hues than the English term. Although not in the thrush family, this

bird is sometimes erroneously called the brown thrush [7; 47].





Fig. 17. Carl Linnaeus.

Fig. 18. Systema Naturae as Turdus rufus by Carl Linnaeus.

The 'brown thrasher' (*T. rufum rufum*) lies in the eastern half of Canada and the United States [32] (Fig. 19, 20).



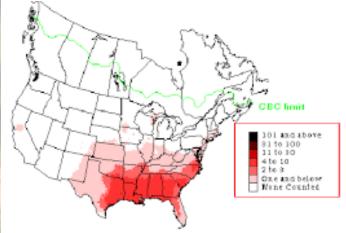


Fig. 19. The brown thrasher.

The brown thrasher is bright reddish-

brown above with thin, dark streaks on its

Fig. 20. The map of the USA and Canada.

similar in [14], Fig. 21.

buffy underparts. It has a whitish-colored chest with distinguished teardrop-shaped markings on its chest. Its long, rufous tail is rounded with paler corners, and eyes are a brilliant yellow. Its bill is brownish, long, and curves downward. Both male and females are appearance. The iuvenile appearance of the brown thrasher from the adult is not remarkably different, except for plumage texture, indiscreet upper part markings, and the irises having an olive color

Fig. 21. The adult (left) and juvenile brown thrasher.

They feed by sweeping their long bills through leaf litter to uncover insects and other invertebrates (**see video [24]**). They are slow, short-distance fliers with a distinctive jerky, fluttering flight style. Brown Thrashers are monogamous during a breeding season, but it isn't known whether pairs stay together from year to year. They breed in such dense vegetation that little is known of their courtship; the few observations that exist suggest that a courting pair presents each other with twigs or dead leaves, after which the male may briefly chase the female before mating [17].



Brown thrashes are elusive birds and usually seen solo or in pars. They fly low to the ground (Fig. 25) and when they feel bothered, thrashers usually hide into thickets and give cackling calls. These birds spend most of their time on ground level or near it. When seen, it is commonly the males that are singing from unadorned branches. The males' singing voice usually contains a melodic tone

Fig. 25. Brown Thrasher, Toxostoma rufum (USA). and their song are coherent phrases that are





iterated no more than three times. By the fall, the males sing with smoother subsongs and during the winter, they may also sing in short spurts during altercations with neighboring males [3], video [20].

Brown Thrashers

Fig. 26. Singing male. Fig. 27. A present to the male. typically sing phrases only twice before moving on. It is beautiful really, to know someone is always watching over you [10].

Males will sing gentler as they sight a female, and this enacts the female to grab a twig or leaf and present it to the male, with flapping wings and chirping sounds (Fig. 26, 27, 31). The males might also present a gift in response and approach the female. Once mates find each other both sexes will take part in nest building [3].

Brown Thrasher nests are often concealed in thick bushes, hedgerows or brush piles, they are not easy to find. In both winter and summer, the Brown Thrasher is found in thickets and brushy edges of woodland. Yapon (*Ilex vomitoria*) [32] is a favorite cover plant (Fig. 28). The nest is placed in a bush or small tree, usually 0.9–2.4 m (3–8 ft) above ground, but occasionally on the ground. The nest is a rough, bulky cup of twigs, sticks, strips of bark, grass, weed stalks, rootlets and leaves, all firmly interwoven (Fig. 29). The nest is lined with bark of grapevine and other woody plants, fine roots, grass, weed stalks, leaves, horsehair and a few feathers [52], **video [32].**

They then swipe the floor in side-to-side motions and investigate the area they

recently foraged in. Brown thrashers have an array of sounds they will make in various situations. Both male and females make 'smack' and 'teeooo-like' alarm calls when provoked, and 'hijjj' sounds at dusk and dawn. Other calls may consist of an acute, sudden 'chakk', 'rrrrr', a 'Tcheh' sound in the beginning that ends with an 'eeeur', 'kakaka', and sounds reminiscent of a stick scraping a concrete sidewalk [3].

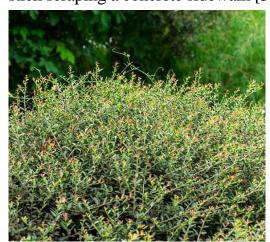




Fig. 28. Yapon (*Ilex vomitoria*). Fig. 29. Yapon (*Ilex vomitoria*): berries. Fig. 30. Brown Thrasher in hand.

The Brown Thrasher is a symbolic representation of stability, balance, harmony, and inclusivity... Whether the Brown Thrasher Bird appears in dreams, visions,



waking life or synchronicities, it is a sign and message that there are enemies, that are scratching their heads wondering why their attempts to thwart your plans have been unsuccessful. Something or someone from the beyond is protecting you [31].

A bird flew into our house from one door and out the other. Brown birds are linked to healing and good health. The meaning of the bird reassures you that if you leave all the weight of your past behind, you will experience a different kind of lightness and freedom in... Yellow birds mean you should keep your guard up. The male sings a loud, long series of doubled phrases with no definite

Fig. 31. Singing Brown Thrasher Bird. beginning or end, described by some people as "plant a seed, plant a seed, bury it, bury it, cover it up, cover it up, let it grow, let it grow, pull it up, pull it up, eat it, eat it." While mockingbirds tend to repeat phrases three or more times, Brown Thrashers typically sing phrases only twice before moving on. It is beautiful really, to know someone is always watching over you [31].

The Brown Thrasher: Body

Length Range: 29 cm (11.5 in)

Weight: 68 g (2.4 oz) Size: Medium (9 - 16 in) Color Primary: Brown, Buff

Underparts: Buff with heavy black streaking.

Upperparts: Red-brown **Back Pattern:** Solid

Belly Pattern: Striped or streaked

Breast Pattern: Striped or streaked [57; 22] (Fig. 32).



Fig. 32. The Brown Thrasher: Body

The Brown Thrasher: Head

Bill Shape: Curved (up or down) (Fig. 33) Eye Color: Orange to orange-yellow. Head pattern: Plain, Malar or malar stripe

Crown Color: Red-brown Forehead Color: Red-brown Nape Color: Rufous or rust

Throat Color: Buff with heavy black streaking.

Cere color: No Data [57; 22].



Fig. 33. The Brown Thrasher: Head.

The Brown Thrasher: Flight

Flight Pattern: Rather fast flight n shallow wing beats. Short flights are made with several rapid wing beats

alternated with brief periods with wings pulled to sides; repeated.

Wingspan Range: 32-36 cm (12.5-14 in)

Wing Shape: Pointed-Wings Tail shape: Squared Tail Tail Pattern: Solid Upper Tail: Red-brown Under Tail: Red-brown

Leg Color: Brown [57; 22], (Fig. 34).



Fig. 34. The Brown Thrasher takes Fly. Photo by Alan Murphy.

The Brown thrashers start breeding from February to June, depending on the area where they are found. Brown thrashers lay 3 to 5 eggs each breeding season (Fig. 35, 36, 37). Incubation takes about two weeks, once the eggs have hatched, nestlings take from 9 to 13 days to fledge. Independence is reached 17 to 19 days later. Brown thrashers breed once yearly. Breeding season varies geographically. Brown thrashers lay three to five eggs each breeding season. Incubation takes about two weeks, once the eggs have hatched, nestlings take from 9 to 13 days to fledge. Independence is reached 17 to 19 days later.

Both parents incubate, brood, and feed nestlings.



Fig.35.The Brown thrasher on nest.

They incubate by sitting tightly on the nest and slip off when disturbed. During the

incubation period, the female does the majority of the incubating. Both parents feed the chicks [44], see videos

[15; 29], Fig. 37, 38, 39.

Nesting Facts

Clutch Size: 2–6 eggs

Number of Broods: 1-2 broods **Egg Length:** 1.0-1.1 in (2.6-2.7 cm) **Egg Width:** 0.8-0.8 in (1.9-2 cm) **Incubation Period:** 10-14 days **Nestling Period:** 9-13 days

Egg Description: Glossy pale blue, pale greenish blue,

or white, with many red-brown speckles.

Condition at Hatching: Eyes closed; pink skin with

scattered tufts of gray-white down [17; 22].







Fig. 36. The nest and eggs.



Fig. 37. The Brown Thrasher's chick. Fig. 38. Feeding chicks. Fig. 39. Baby Brown Thrasher.

The Brown Thrasher: Scientific classification. Toxostoma rufum (Linnaeus, 1758) Taxonomic Serial No.: 178627

Kingdom: Animalia

Taxonomic Rank: Species

Common Name(s): Brown Thrasher (English)

Subkingdom: Bilateria

Infrakingdom: Deuterostomia

Phylum: Chordata Subphylum: Vertebrata Infraphylum: Gnathostomata Superclass: Tetrapoda Class: Aves – Birds, oiseaux **Order:** Passeriformes

Family: Mimidae Bonaparte, 1853 – Mockingbirds, Thrashers Genus: Toxostoma Wagler,

1831 – American Thrashers (Fig. 40)

Species: Toxostoma rufum. (Linnaeus, 1758)

Cuitlacoche rojizo (S moqueur roux (French),

Brown Thrasher (English) [51].



Fig. 40. Brown Thrasher Portrait: Adult (below), Juvenille (in the center)

Synonyms: Orpheus rufus Swainson, 1831

Harporhynchus rufus Baird, 1858

Range mass: 89 (high) g **Average mass:** 68.8 g

Range length: 235 to 305 mm Range wingspan: 94 to 111 mm

Range lifespan. Status: wild, 12 (high) years

Animal Foods: insects

Plant Foods: seeds, grains, and nuts, fruit.

[44; 14], Fig. 41.

To sum up. The Brown Thrasher is also a representation of free will. If things look or appear opposing right now, then you need to be willing to put in the work necessary to allow things and situations to move with ease. Nothing will work unless you're willing to. If you don't like where you are right now, seek



Fig. 41. Brown Thrasher with chick.



Fig. 42. Song bird: Brown thrasher.

clarity before choosing and make choices that will suit your purpose entirely [31].



Fig. 43. Brown thrasher family.

Bird Flying into Window Spiritual Meaning. What you really have to be careful about is that feathers are sent to you for a reason, always be conscious of your thought or what have you been asking for when you receive a feather. from them... If a bird flies into your window it could mean

you are vulnerable to what the

universe has in store for you. Peace and contentment is associated with gray colors. When you receive a green feather it is an indication of healing, nature, plants and everything that has to do with abundance [10].

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