



Female in winter plumage. ©Tom Benson



Male in winter plumage. ©Laura Meyers



Female in summer plumage. ©Christian Artuso



Male in summer plumage. ©Christian Artuso

## HELPING A SPECIES OF CONCERN

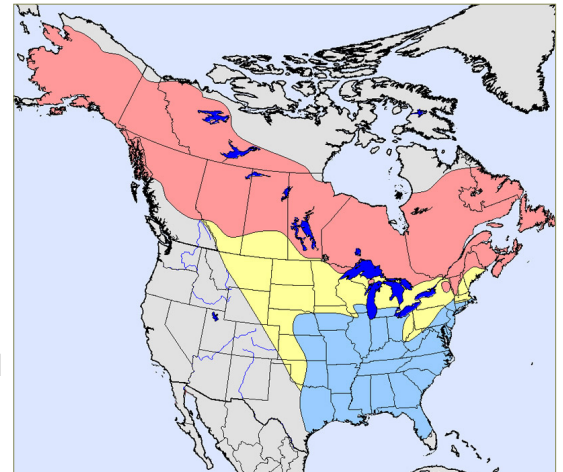
### BACKGROUND

Known for its vivid rust-tipped winter plumage as well as a song like a squeaky hinge, the once abundant Rusty Blackbird appears to be disappearing, and we don't understand why. Difficult to study due to the remote and inaccessible habitats they often favor, Rusty Blackbirds were widely overlooked by scientific study until the mid-1990s, when it became evident they were declining dramatically.

Rusty Blackbirds, or "Rusties," soon earned the unfortunate distinction of being one of the most steeply declining landbirds in North America, losing 85-95% of their population in just 40 years. Spurred by this alarming crash, scientists are striving to better understand Rusty Blackbirds to help conserve this vulnerable species.

### HABITAT

Rusty Blackbirds are migratory and are associated with shallow water throughout their annual cycle. In winter, they prefer wooded wetlands, swamps and wet margins, primarily in the southeastern U.S. They can also be found in open pastures, agricultural areas, and pecan orchards. In summer, they breed in the boreal forest wetlands of Canada and the northern U.S., preferring patchy wetlands interspersed with short conifer trees. During spring and fall, migrating Rusties can be found throughout North America. Look for migrating Rusties in flooded forests, wet fields, at the edges of ponds and lakes, or even in roadside ditches and neighborhood lawns.



■ Breeding resident  
■ Passage migrant  
■ Non-breeding resident

Map data from  
NatureServe



Boreal wetland breeding habitat. ©Shannon Buckley Luepold

### IDENTIFICATION

- Medium-sized blackbird, smaller than a Common Grackle
- Both sexes have bright yellow eyes
- Rust-tipped feathers on males and females in fall and winter
- During spring, rusty plumage fades
- By summer, males are glossy black and females are charcoal gray

## LOOK-ALIKES

Brewer's Blackbird (overlaps mainly in western part of range) and Common Grackle are the most likely species to be confused with Rusties. Other potential look-alikes include Red-winged Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird and European Starling.

Visit [rustyblackbird.org](http://rustyblackbird.org) for more on Rusty Blackbird identification and look-alikes.

## RUSTY BLACKBIRD SPRING MIGRATION BLITZ

Over the last two decades, scientists have made huge strides in understanding Rusty Blackbirds on their breeding and wintering grounds. However, we still know surprisingly little about their migration. In 2014, the International Rusty Blackbird Working Group launched a three-year citizen science monitoring project, the Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz, to learn more about their spring migration.

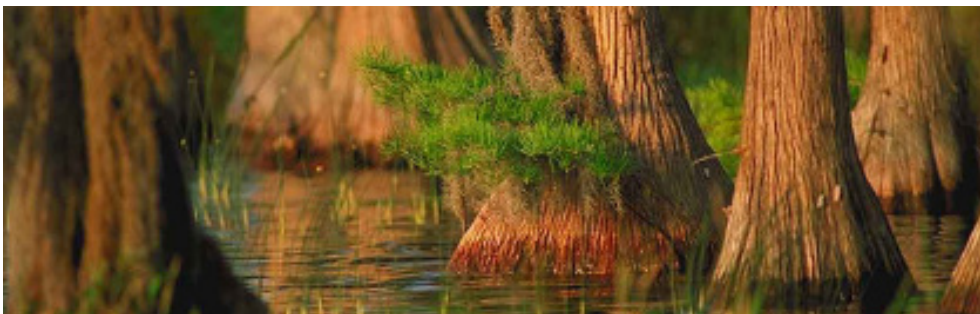
### BLITZ OBJECTIVES:

- Learn about Rusty Blackbird migration patterns and timing
- Identify potentially important migratory sites for Rusty Blackbirds
- Assess how consistently Rusty Blackbirds utilize migratory sites within and among years
- Strengthen partnership efforts to recognize and address Rusty Blackbird conservation
- Promote awareness and engagement among birders and the public regarding Rusty Blackbirds

The project challenges birders throughout the range to seek and report Rusty Blackbirds during spring migration. The Blitz runs March 1-June 15 each year during 2014-2016. Visit [rustyblackbird.org](http://rustyblackbird.org) to identify the Blitz target dates for your specific region. To participate, bird as you normally do, focusing on appropriate habitats. It's important for us to know when and where you looked—**even if you don't find any Rusties**. Report your data via eBird using the "Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz" option.

### HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Participate in the Blitz and report your data via eBird at [ebird.org](http://ebird.org).
- Report Rusty Blackbirds using eBird whenever you see them, all year long. Every observation can help us learn more!
- Spread the word—tell a friend or your local Audubon chapter about the Blitz.
- Help the National Wildlife Refuge System learn more about how and when Rusties and other birds use refuges. Bird a refuge and report your sightings!



Rusty Blackbirds prefer shallow, flooded habitat in winter like this cypress bottom. ©Florida Fish and Wildlife



Common Grackles have thicker bills and longer, more graduated tails than Rusties. Both sexes have iridescent plumage. ©Ken Hansen



Male Brewer's Blackbirds are inkier and more iridescent black than male Rusties. Females have dark eyes with drab brown plumage. ©Bill Bouton

### BLITZ PARTNERS

Alabama State Lands Division | Alaska Department of Fish & Game | Animal Wonders | Audubon Alaska | Audubon Arkansas | Bird Studies Canada | DC Audubon Society | Delaware Nature Society | eBird | Frasier Valley Birding | Green Mountain Audubon Society | Illinois Ornithological Society | Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife | Mass Audubon | Michigan Audubon | Minnesota Ornithological Union | National Aviary | New Hampshire Audubon | Ohio Ornithological Society | Pennsylvania Game Commission | Regroupement QuébecOiseaux | Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History | Strawberry Plains Audubon Center | Tennessee Ornithological Society | The Cornell Lab of Ornithology | Truman State University | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service | Vermont Center for Ecostudies | Virginia Society of Ornithology | Wisconsin Society for Ornithology

For more information visit:  
<http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/>

