ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Animal Abstract **Element Code:** ABPBJ18080
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CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE

NAME: *Catharus fuscescens*
COMMON NAME: Veery; Wilson's Thrush; Tawny Thrush
SYNONYMS: *Turdus fuscescens*; *Hylocichla fuscescens*
FAMILY: Turdidae

AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION: *Turdus fuscescens* Stephens, in Shaw, Gen. Zool., 10, pt. 1, Sept. 1817, p. 182. Moskoff (1995) states that the Veery was first described by Alexander Wilson in "A. Wilson and C.L. Bonaparte. 1831. American ornithology; or the nature of the history of the birds of the United States. Vol. 2. Constable & Co., Edinburgh."

Subspecies: *Catharus fuscescens salicicola*, first described as *Hylocichla fuscescens salicicola* by Ridgway, Proc. U.S. Nat. Mus., 4, April 13, 1882, p. 374 (AOU 1957).

TYPE LOCALITY: Species: Pennsylvania. Subspecies: Fort Garland, Costilla County, Colorado.

TYPE SPECIMEN: Subspecies: *C. f. salicicola*, USNM 066667 (cotype), 1 male complete skin collected by H.B. Henshaw on 26 May 1873.

TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS: Formerly in the family Muscicapidae; the elevation of subfamilies to family rank and the new taxonomic order has been adopted by the 1997 American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) "Check-list Committee" (AOU 1997 *in* BISON 2000). The AOU Checklist (1957) recognized 3 subspecies of Veery: *fuscescens*, *fuliginosus*, and *salicicola*). Phillips (1991) recognized these and named 2 new ones (*levyi* and *pulichorum)*. *C. f. salicicola* is the subspecies that occurs in Arizona. Veery plus the Gray-cheeked, Swainson's and Hermit thrushes, formerly included in genus *Hylocichla*. Only the Wood Thrush (*H. mustelina*) remains in this genus.

DESCRIPTION: Medium sized thrush, about 6.5-7.75 in long (16.5-19.7 cm). Upper-parts, including back, tail, and wings, uniformly tawny brown; underparts, including throat and chest, buff with only indistinct reddish brown spots (spots larger in western birds). Belly white with gray flanks. Toes and rear of tarsi entirely pallid (Phillips 1991). Bill thin with pale base; face gray with indistinct grayish eye-ring. Sexes outwardly monomorphic but can be separated (within age groups) by wing and tail lengths (Moskoff 1995). Adult wing lengths (both sexes) average 3.8 in (9.64 cm); weights average 32.4 g (Moskoff 1995).

AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION: Most populations of Veery distinguished from other North American *Catharus* thrushes by warmer brown tone of upper-parts and plainer chest. Western populations, with darker brown back and more spotting on chest, best recognized by plainer face than most thrushes, gray wash on flanks, and distinctive voice (Moskoff 1995). In the western United States, Veeries and Swainsons' Thrushes have similar upperpart coloration and spotting on breast. They can be separated by flank color-gray in Veery and brown in Swainsons' and by vocalizations. Peterson (1961) reports that "(1) Swainson's Thrush has broad buffy eye-ring, buffy chest. (2) Hermit Thrush has reddish tail. (3) Gray-cheeked Thrush is grayer brown, lacks buff wash on breast."

ILLUSTRATIONS: Color illustration (Robbins et al. 1987: p.249)
Color photo (Farrand Jr. 1988: p.420)
Color illustration (Peterson 1990: p.277)
Color photo (Moskoff 1995: p. 1)
Color illustration (National Geographic 1999: p.349)

TOTAL RANGE: North and South America. Breeds from south-central and southeastern British Columbia to New Brunswick and southwestern Newfoundland, south to central Oregon, southern Idaho, northeastern South Dakota, northern Illinois, and northern Ohio, in the mountains through West Virginia, western and central Maryland, eastern Kentucky, western and central Virginia, eastern Tennessee, and western North Carolina to northwestern Georgia, and in the Atlantic region to eastern Pennsylvania, central New Jersey, and the District of Columbia. Also breeds in northern Utah and east-central Arizona. Migrates more than 900 miles south to wintering grounds in South America.

RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA: Breeds irregularly along the South Fork of Little Colorado River west of Eager, in restricted riparian habitats (willow-dogwood association). Little is known about breeding biology in Arizona. Only one or two pairs documented in state in any single year. Fewer than five accepted records from the White Mountains.

SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS

BIOLOGY: Their voice is a liquid, breezy, ethereal song; wheeling downward: *vee-ur*, *vee-ur*, *veer*, *veer*. Most common call note is a low *phew* or *view* (Peterson 1961; Moskoff 1995). Farrand (1983 *in* Moskoff 1995) reports the song is rendered as *da-vee-ur*, *vee-ur*, *veer*, *veer*. The song resonates as if singing into a metal pipe. Singing occurs mostly in early morning and (especially) evening.

Little is known about their life span. The oldest known individual lived at least 10 yr 1 mo (Dunning 1992, in Moskoff 1995). In Moskoff (1995), "Snakes (Bent 1949, Pettingull 1976), red squirrels (*Tamiasciuris hudsonicus*), and chipmunks (*Tamias* spp.) take eggs and/or nestlings (Forbush 1927). Dogs and Blue Jays (*Cyanocitta cristata*) may also destroy nests (North American Nest Record Card Program, unpubl. data)."

According to Cochran (pers. comm. in Moskoff 1995), "Migratory behavior based on tracking radio-tagged birds from 1965 to 1994 showed nocturnal migratory flights occurred about 1 night in 6, typically after temperatures rise above 22EC, with winds calm or only light surface winds. Birds do not depart during the day."

REPRODUCTION: Upon arriving on breeding grounds (April for southern ranges, to May for northern ranges), males select a territory and aggressively defend it against other Veeries, while at the same time singing to attracts females. Territories range from 0.10 to a few hectares (Bertin 1975, *in* Moskoff 1995). While the male defends the territory, the female constructs the nest. The nest is constructed on or near the ground, often at the base of a small sapling or shrub, or on a hummock of grass or moss. First she builds the platform of moist dead leaves, and then makes a cup using twigs, bark, plant stems and decayed leaves. The nest is lined with other plant detritus and smaller fibers. Nests sometimes come apart when the construction material dries out. Outside diameters of nest range from 8-15 cm, while inside diameters range from 6-7.5 cm. Clutches consist of 3-5 blue eggs. Incubation is carried out by the female for 10 to 14 days, although both sexes share the task of feeding the young in the nest. Hatchlings are altricial with gray down on head and back. The young fledge after 10 to 12 days.

FOOD HABITS: Veeries often forages on the forest floor, turning leaves with their bill in search of food; occasionally searches for food in trees. They consume a diet that is about 60% insects and 40% fruit, feeding primarily on insects when breeding, and on fruits in late summer and fall. They feed on beetles, caterpillars, spiders, centipedes, snails, pill bugs, ants, wasps, and tupulid flies. In the fall and winter, Veeries consume fruit such as spicebush, strawberries, juneberries, honeysuckle, blackberries, wild cherries, sumac, and blueberries. They also may eat invertebrates during the winter season.

HABITAT: In Arizona, Veeries breed irregularly in restricted riparian habitats, in the willow-dogwood association (AGFD in prep, *in* BISON 2000). For Veeries complete range; they inhabit low, moist, deciduous woods, bottomland forests, wooded swamps, and damp ravines; prefers sapling stands of deciduous second-growth or open woods with fairly dense undergrowth of ferns, shrubs, and trees. Habitat selection may depend upon the presence of other thrush species in their breeding range. The Veery may breed in mixed conifer-hardwood forest in areas where it overlaps with the Swainsons' Thrush or Wood Thrush. These birds overwinter in mature tropical forests.

ELEVATION: Occurs at elevations where stream conditions provide sufficient permanent moisture for emergent plants, or for a narrow band of deciduous trees and shrubs. One occurrence in Arizona occurs at 7,375 ft (2249 m) in the White Mountains.

PLANT COMMUNITY: Low elevation plant communities are characterized by cottonwood and sycamore; mid-elevation by white alder (*Alnus rhombifolia*) and bigleaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*); and high elevation by willow (USDA 1991). Western Veeries favor dense willows and alders near water.

POPULATION TRENDS: Not much known about Arizona trends. The Veery is of moderate conservation importance, primarily because of its declining population trends in much of its range (30% decline overall since 1966) and its vulnerability as a long distance migrant, wintering in tropical forests of South America. Fortunately it is still a very common species in most of its eastern range, where it also seems tolerant of some forest disturbance. In the west, this species is indicative of healthy riparian forests.

Per Moskoff (1995), "BBS data for 1966-1991 show significant decreasing trend of -1.0%/yr for U.S. and continent. Short-term BBS data (1982-1991) also show significant decline of -1.4%/yr for U.S., -1.7%/yr for Canada, and -1.6%/yr for continent. From 1966 to 1991, populations increased significantly in 4 states and provinces and decreased significantly in 8."

SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS: None
STATE STATUS: WSC (WSCA, AGFD in prep)
[Threatened, TNW AGFD 1988]
OTHER STATUS: None

MANAGEMENT FACTORS: **Threats:** recreation disturbance (camping and fishing near nest site), and overgrazing in riparian habitat in the White Mountains. **Management needs:** reduce riparian grazing to maintain and enhance scrub willow-dogwood regeneration; reduce camping and fishing near only known nesting location during May-July breeding season.

On wintering grounds, they probably suffered from loss of preferred habitat-tropical broadleaf evergreen forest (Rappole et al. 1983). Fragmentation and loss of second-growth and woodland breeding habitat threaten populations (e.g., in s. Michigan). The Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) is a significant brood parasite. Veeries are vulnerable to increased forest fragmentation which provides cowbirds more access to forest interiors where Veeries nest (Moskoff 1988, 1995).

PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN:

SUGGESTED PROJECTS: Future studies should focus on growth and development of young and immature birds; aspects of feeding; possible geographic variation of songs; and reproduction (Moskoff 1995). Understanding how habitat requirements and sensitivity to fragmentation varies over its large range, will be important for conserving future populations.

LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP: Private.

SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

This species is one that tends to shun disturbance, but may do well in second-growth tropical forest, edges, or wood lots. Unfortunately, however, deforestation in the tropics rarely leads to such habitats, but rather to vast expanses of overgrazed pastures, canefields, and the like (Ehrlich, Dobkin, and Wheye, 1988).

The Veery bears a scientific name that reflects the beauty of its song and coloration: *Catharus*, from the Greek *katharos*, means "pure," referring possibly to the texture of the song, and *fuscescens*, from the Latin *fuscus*, means "dusky" (Choate 1985). It was first described in 1831 by ornithologist Alexander Wilson, who gave the species two names - Wilson's Thrush and Tawny Thrush (Wilson and Bonaparte 1831). (Moskoff 1995).

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