



**Natural Heritage  
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*Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife*

**Wood Thrush  
*Hylocichla mustelina***

State Status: **None**  
Federal Status: **None**

**SPECIES DESCRIPTION:** The Wood Thrush is the largest woodland thrush in New England, known to many admirers for its flute-like song. It is a medium-sized (8 inches in length) migratory songbird, similar in posture to the American Robin but smaller in size (Roth et al. 1996). Male and female plumages are similar, and include a brown crown, nape, back, wings, and tail. The underparts are white with conspicuous black spots on the breast and sides. Adults have a white eye-ring and pinkish legs. Juvenile plumage is similar, but with tawny spots on the back and wing coverts.

**DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE:** The Wood Thrush is a fairly common breeder across Massachusetts, but it is rare on Cape Cod and absent from Nantucket (Petersen and Meservey 2003). The North American Breeding Bird Survey indicates a declining population trend of -3.6% annually from 1966-2003 (Sauer et al. 2004).

**HABITAT DESCRIPTION:** Wood Thrush preferred habitat is mature, moist hardwood or mixed conifer/hardwood forest with a closed canopy and a sub-canopy shrub layer (DeGraaf and Yamasaki 2001). In early summer, this species forages in leaf litter or semi-bare ground by probing and gleaning for soil invertebrates. In late summer (following the nesting season), the diet shifts toward fruits (Roth et al. 1996). Nests are compact cups constructed in dense shrubs or other concealing vegetation, usually less than 6 meters from ground (Roth et al. 1996).

**THREATS:** Habitat loss and fragmentation is the primary threat to the Wood Thrush, both in Massachusetts and on its wintering grounds (DeGraaf and Yamasaki 2001, Roth et al. 1996). Although Wood Thrushes will nest in small woods and residential areas, it is area-sensitive, and habitat fragmentation may cause lower reproductive success due to the effects of nest parasitism, predation on eggs and nestlings, and nest abandonment caused by human disturbance (Roth et al. 1996).

**REFERENCES:**

- DeGraaf, R.M., and M. Yamasaki. 2001. *New England Wildlife*. University Press of New England, Hanover, New Hampshire.
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- Roth, R.R., M.S. Johnson, and T.J. Underwood. 1996. Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*). In: The Birds of North America, No. 246 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.
- Sauer, J.R., J.E. Hines, and J. Fallon. 2004. *The North American Breeding Bird Survey, Results and Analysis 1966 - 2003. Version 2004.1*. USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland.

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**A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan**

**Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife**

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