

PASSERIFORMES

(Songbirds)

Thrashers



Family **MIMIDAE** (Thrashers)

Crissal Thrasher (*Toxostoma crissale*)



Hend. Bird Viewing Preserve; NV



Overton WMA; NV



Ash Spring; Red Rock Canyon NCA; NV



Hend. Bird Viewing Preserve; NV



Hend. Bird Viewing Preserve; NV

Measurements:

Length: 12" Wing Span: 12" Average Weight: 2.2 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium-large size; dark brownish-gray overall (paler below) with **rufous undertail coverts** (crissum) and under wings; **white throat** with lateral **black stripes**; dark tail (wedge-shaped in flight); long, downcurved, dark bill; pale yellowish iris with black pupils; no sexual dimorphism

Notes:

uncommon; solitary or in pairs; inconspicuous; inhabits dense desert scrub, mesquite thickets, washes, etc., of sw US from se CA east to w TX, and sw UT/s NV southeastward through c MEX; mainly a ground bird, seldom flying in the open; forages on the ground, scratching away brush mainly for insects, spiders, seeds, etc.

Mojave presence: year-round

Comments:

The crissal is not common in the Mojave (mainly the eastern region), but when it is encountered, it is difficult to actually observe, because it is rather secretive. Every now and then, however, you'll get one to pose for you long enough to get a decent photo. Under such circumstances, note the rusty-colored undertail coverts and black stripes on the throat to distinguish it from other similar thrashers that occur in the region.

Family **MIMIDAE** (Thrashers)

Curve-Billed Thrasher (*Toxostoma curvirostre*)



West Rim; Grand Canyon; AZ



MNRLS Headquarters; Dolan Springs, AZ



Dolan Springs, AZ



Dolan Springs, AZ



Dolan Springs, AZ

Measurements:

Length: 11" Wing Span: 13" Average Weight: 3 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium-large size; gray-brown overall, paler below with faint **round** spots, **whitish-gray** throat with pale lateral stripe; long tail (wedge-shaped in flight); **long** curved dark bill, **dark** at base; **orange** iris, dark pupil; no sexual dimorphism

Notes:

common; solitary; primarily found in open desert brushlands of sw US from se CA east to c TX, and se CO/OK south throughout MEX; 6 subspecies; often seen foraging on open ground for insects, spiders, etc.

Mojave presence: year-round (far eastern region)

Comments:

The Curve-Billed is more common than its close cousin, the **Crissal Thrasher**, but less so in the Mojave. However, in Dolan Springs, AZ, where the MNRLS Headquarters is located, curve-billeds can be regular visitors, as this is the westernmost extent of their range. They are not as secretive as the crissal, but you're more likely to hear them before you ever see the birds. Their call is a loud, piercing, somewhat alarming **WICK-WICK**, especially if you're caught off guard! Not at all like the sweet, soft, melodic song of the crissal. Although they prefer insects, I have one that visits the office occasionally to inspect the bird feeder, and alerts me to his arrival--especially if the feeder is too low for his liking! Naturally, I named him Wick-Wick. He's shy, **Pmi3** but he does offer his services for good pics!

Pmi3

Family **MIMIDAE** (Thrashers)

Bendire's Thrasher (*Toxostoma bendirei*)



Dolan Springs, AZ



Dolan Springs, AZ



Dolan Springs, AZ



Dolan Springs, AZ



Dolan Springs, AZ

Measurements:

Length: 10" Wing Span: 13" Average Weight: 2 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium-large size; gray-brown above, paler below with small faint **chevron** spots on breast; pale **buffy wash** on belly and undertail coverts, pale throat; long tail (wedge-shaped in flight); **short** slightly curved dark bill, **pale** base on lower mandible; **yellow to orange iris**, dark pupil; sexually monomorphic

Notes:

uncommon; solitary, secretive; occurs in arid desert brush or yucca scrublands of sw US from se CA east to c NM south into nw MEX; listed as **VULNERABLE**; seen foraging on the ground for insects, seeds, berries, etc.

Mojave presence: summer range; some year-round (AZ)

Comments:

The Bendire can be very difficult to distinguish from the **Curve-Billed** in the field. They both have bright yellow to orangish eyes, but other characteristics are much more subtle. The base of the lower mandible is **pale** on the Bendire (dark on the curve-billed); its bill is **shorter** and **straighter**; the spots on its breast are **chevron**-shaped rather than rounded; and it is less vocal, but with a warbling **melodic** call, reminiscent of **pretty-bird pretty-bird wick wick wick** (perhaps the best field distinguisher). I spotted the couple above (top, center) in November of 2022, and the individual (bottom) in January, 2023.

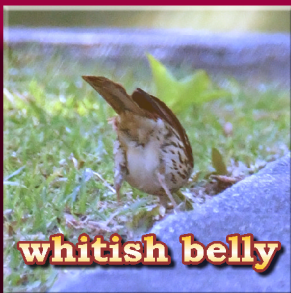
Family **MIMIDAE** (Thrashers)

Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*)



boldly barred below

Lake Tuskegee; Tuskegee, AL



whitish belly

Lake Tuskegee; Tuskegee, AL



brown upperparts

Lake Tuskegee; Tuskegee, AL



two wingbars

long tail

Lake Tuskegee; Tuskegee, AL

Measurements:

Length: 11" Wing Span: 12" Average Weight: 2.5 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; red-brown above, buffy below with **bold spots and barring**; buffy face and throat with brown around chin; long, rufous, rounded tail usually held upwards; two black-and-white wingbars; **white undertail coverts**; slightly curved, dark bill; yellow iris with black pupil; no sexual dimorphism

Notes:

uncommon; solitary or in pairs; prefers fields, thickets, woods, etc., in e NA extending as far west as Alberta (CAN) in the north and NM to the south; 2 subspecies; mainly a ground bird, preferring to walk rather than fly; forages on the ground sorting through leaves and other debris in search of invertebrates, nuts, seeds, etc.

Mojave presence: rare

Comments:

This thrasher is an eastern NA species. In fact, it is the only ground thrasher found east of the Rockies. It is much rarer farther west, but sparse sightings have been recorded throughout the region. Nevertheless, the individual depicted above is the only one I have taken photographs of (Tuskegee, AL, in May, 2021), not because it is rare, but it rarely leaves the safety of thick concealment. This individual braved the openness of a well-manicured front lawn. The bounty of food must have been worth the risk!

Family MIMIDAE (Thrashers)

Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*)



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV



Clark County Wetlands Park; Las Vegas, NV



Hope, Arkansas



CCWP; Las Vegas, NV



Lake Tuskegee; Tuskegee, AL

Measurements:

Length: 10" Wing Span: 13" Average Weight: 1.8 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; gray above, whitish below; darker gray wings with **bold wingbar**; dark tail with **white outer feathers**; long legs; light green to yellow iris with dark pupils, dark eyeline; thin, dark, very slightly curved bill; no sexual dimorphism

Notes:

very common; solitary, conspicuous; at home in a large variety of habitats (open forests, grasslands, deserts, etc.; urban and rural) throughout the US and southernmost CAN, south through MEX and the Caribbean; 3 subspecies; prodigious song repertoire and known for its extensive mimicking abilities; eats insects, spiders, fruit, seeds, etc.

Mojave presence: year-round

Comments:

Mockingbirds can be good models, such as these two from Bear's Best GC in Las Vegas (left) and Pompano Beach, FL (right). Getting good flight pics is another story. They almost always drop **down** from their perch, so focus on a low spot and hope for the best!

