

F or The Birds

Mimids In Kinnickinnic Township

By Tom Andersen

Photos taken in Kinnickinnic Township

The Mimidae Family of birds are great singers. They're noted for a wide variety of songs and some species even mimic other birds. There are a dozen species of them in the United States and we are fortunate to have two of them visiting *and nesting* in our Township.

There are 8 Thrashers found in the United States but only one, the Brown Thrasher, is generally found in the Eastern half of the country. They are present in good numbers throughout the Township. At 11" long they are a good-sized bird similar in size to a robin. The length of a bird is determined by the distance from the tip of the bill to the end of the tail. I've often thought of the look on Brown Thrashers face as being that of contempt or scolding. They are, however, a beautiful bird with amazing song.



The secretive Brown Thrasher, *Taxostoma rufum*.

Photo – TA

The Brown Thrasher has many different song types and I have listened to them carry on with all kinds of melodies. To encounter a singing Brown Thrasher is a great treat. Sometimes their song is "all over the place" but fun to listen to for sure.

However, I had no idea just how many "tunes" they could carry! According to Stan Tekiela, Birds of Wisconsin, the male has the largest documented song repertoire of all of the North American birds with over 1100 song types.

The Brown Thrasher's preferred habitat is brushy areas like hedgerows with lots of "tangles". Fencerows between fields or along Township roads are often a favorite site for nest building. They can be seen flying across country roads from one fencerow to another. They can be difficult to spot however once they make cover. They are quite secretive.

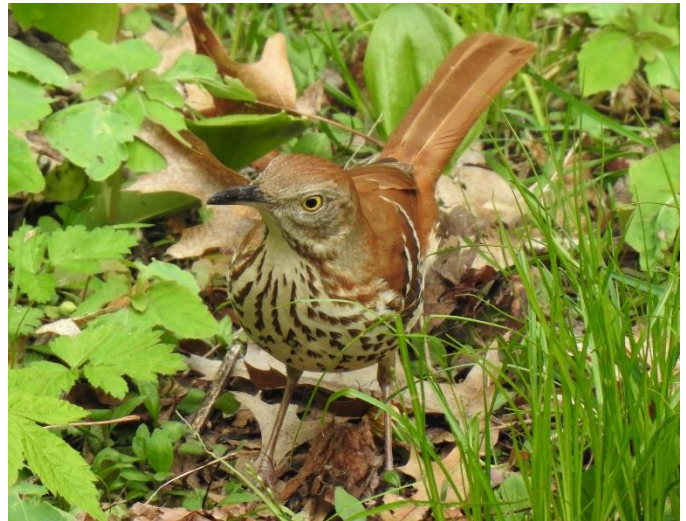


Photo – TA

Brown Thrashers are ground foragers. That said, they will visit bird feeders. Here one is visiting a fly through feeder filled with sunflower seeds and a block of suet.



Photo – TA

Brown Thrashers are a common host for the Brown Cowbird. The Cowbird observes a nesting

Thrasher and then the female will leave her eggs in the Thrasher nest to be cared for by them. A Brown Thrasher nest is usually fairly close to the ground.

I often see the Brown Cowbirds hanging around the feeders in the spring. I have a suspicion that they are watching the other birds in order to follow them to their nests and thereby select a surrogate parent.

Another Mimid that regularly nests in Kinnickinnic Township is the Gray Catbird. Called a Catbird presumably because they make a very catlike *meew*! Usually they have some sort of “rambling” notes and sometimes imitations. At first glance they appear to be all gray with a darker gray topknot. Look carefully and you’ll see pretty reddish-brown under their tail.



Photo – TA

Both Brown Thrashers and Catbirds migrate south in the fall. Expect to see them in the spring in May. The Gray Catbird is off to Mexico or Central America in the fall. The Brown Thrasher likely just heads to the Southern U.S.



The Gray Catbird, *Dumetella carolinensis*
Photo – TA

Catbirds nest in brushy areas and are comfortable around rural homes. Nests are likely not far above the ground. They are not often parasitized by Brown-headed Cowbirds.

Catbirds will regularly visit bird feeders especially if a block of suet is involved. I’ve even seen them enjoying grape jelly out of my oriole feeders.



Note the red-brown under the tail, Photo – TA

Tom Andersen is Editor of *The Current*