

LE CONTE'S THRASHER (*TOXOSTOMA LECONTEI*)

DFG: Species of Special Concern



Description

The Le Conte's Thrasher is a medium-sized songbird, approximately the same size as a northern mockingbird. It is a pale, sandy gray coloration with a long, dark tail and tawny undertail coverts. The bill is black and down-curved.

Habitat

This species is found amongst the arid lands of the southern San Joaquin Valley. Typical habitat consists of sparsely vegetated desert flats, dunes, or gently rolling hills with well scattered saltbush (*Atriplex* spp.) or other desert shrubs. The majority of the shrubs rarely exceed 8 feet (2.5 m) and surface water rarely exists within its

territory. Accumulated leaf litter under existing shrubs provides cover for its primary prey: insects. Beetles, grasshoppers, ants and scorpions are a few of the preferred prey items. The Le Conte's Thrasher will use its bill to dig small pits for insects under the leaf litter. It generally walks and runs on the ground and most foraging is done on the ground. Nests are constructed in thick, dense, thorny shrubs or cholla cactus and consist of three layers. The outer layer is typically constructed of twigs, the middle layer contains smaller twigs, grasses, and some human-made materials, and the inner layer contains fuzzy plant seeds, leaves, or flowers.

Range/distribution

Agriculture and urban development have eliminated considerable habitat for this species within the San Joaquin Valley. Any destruction of substrate, litter, or shrubs affects habitat suitability. Land development or extensive and repeated All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) usage seriously degrades habitat by crushing vegetation and destroying leaf litter and soil surface. Although its range once extended north to Fresno County, it is now primarily found in the arid lands of Kern County.

Photo: © Dr. Lloyd Glenn Ingles, California Academy of Sciences

References

- Grinnell, J., and A. Miller. 1944. *The Distribution of the Birds of California*. Cooper Ornithological Club, Berkeley, CA. 617 pp.
- Sheppard, J.M. 1996. Le Conte's Thrasher (*Toxostoma lecontei*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 230 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.