

SPECIES OF THE MONTH**LECONTE'S THRASHER**

NOVEMBER 2024

In Arizona, the LeConte's Thrasher (*Toxostoma lecontei*) is primarily a year-round resident in southwestern and western parts of the state in the most arid regions of the Sonoran Desert. It particularly favors barren habitat with low shrubs, including saltbush, bursage, creosote bush, and wolfberry. The largest populations are found at the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge and the Barry Goldwater Range. It formerly ranged east along the Gila River to Florence, the Santa Cruz Flats, and Avra Valley. Now there are only localized pockets in those areas. The most eastern reports in recent years have been west of the West Silverbell Mountains, including at least 2 birds along Night Sky Road in Pima County found every year since 2021 and a pair along Sagittarius Road in Pinal County between March and May 2021.



LeConte's Thrasher, Santa Cruz Flats, Pinal County, 14 April 2021. Photo by Chris Benesh.

The preferred habitat of LeConte's Thrasher continues to be eradicated due to urban expansion, agriculture cultivation, and utility-scale solar farms, including recently the famous "Thrasher Spot" west of Phoenix. The Arizona Game and Fish Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service consider it a Bird of Conservation Concern. In 2010, the Desert Thrasher Working Group was established to monitor, in collaboration with AZGFD, Bureau of Land Management, and other organizations, the distribution, occupancy status, fledgling movement patterns, and habitat associations of both LeConte's and Bendire's Thrasher (*T. bendirei*) across their range, including Arizona. The goal is to identify threats and develop management recommendations.

Of Arizona's desert thrashers, LeConte's Thrasher is the palest. It is more slender and longer-tailed than Curved-billed Thrasher (*T. curvirostre*) and slightly smaller and shorter-tailed than Crissal Thrasher (*T. crissale*). It is larger than Bendire's Thrasher and has a dark rather than yellow eye, a much longer curved bill, and a different vocalization.

Erratum: In last month's Species of the Month, Short-billed Hawk (*Buteo brachyurus*) was mistakenly identified as a migrant to Florida. It is resident there with some seasonal migration within the state.