

THE RUSTY BLACKBIRD HOT SPOT BLITZ YEAR TWO



Last Year, Birders throughout the country scoured the countryside for wintering Rusty Blackbirds to help us understand their distribution and find important local concentrations (hotspots). We learned a lot (see http://nationalzoo.si.edu/ConservationAndScience/MigratoryBirds/Research/Rusty_Blackbird/blitz_results.cfm).

But there is much more to learn. We want to blitz for several years to both locate more hotspots and determine how stable the already discovered hot spots are from year to year. Already, the information gained is being used to implement research and conservation efforts!

With your help....

The “Return of the Rusty Blackbird Blitz” will be bigger and better than the original.

Why a Blitz? The Rusty Blackbird has been steeply declining, with estimates of an **85-99% population drop over the past 40 years**. Although the cause for this alarming decline is not known, winter habitat loss and degradation are likely candidates. Rusties are getting scarce and patchy in their winter distribution, making it difficult to focus research and management we need to save the species. Collaborating with Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's and National Audubon Society's e-Bird project, we are enlisting the power of the birding public (you!) to help locate local, but predictable wintering concentrations of Rusty Blackbirds. We are mobilizing an all out "blitz" to locate Rusty Blackbirds and create a map of wintering Rusty Blackbird "hot spots" that will help focus research, monitoring and conservation attention..

Who? Birders from all of the Rusties' winter range (see below). **AND FOR OUT-OF-RANGE NORTHERNERS: We will be developing opportunities for you to travel south and hit up critically under covered states in the core of the Rusties winter range**

What? During a single 17-day period, volunteers will search for Rusty Blackbirds in any locations and habitats deemed as potentially suitable for wintering Rusty Blackbirds, particularly flocks or concentrations (e.g., dozens or even hundreds of birds). Areas of concentration will be revisited in the future to determine if they are indeed Rusty Blackbird hot spots.

When? January 30 thru February 15th, 2010 – when Rusties become easier to find (males sing!) and the population is relatively sedentary.

Where? We are focusing on the following states known to comprise the Rusty Blackbird winter range: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas (east), Virginia, and West Virginia.

How? It's simple! Use whatever you like – your data base of previous sightings, birding intuition, local legend, or local knowledge – to search the most likely places for wintering Rusty Blackbirds. You can go wherever you like, whenever you like, and as often as you like anytime between the dates of 30 January – 15 February 2010. Checking known places is good. Exploring the unknown for new hotspots is even better! We are simply seeking observations on the number of birds present at each location visited, along with very basic habitat information. All you have to do is submit your observations via e-Bird. We will do the rest! (Failure to find Rusties is important information as well).

Additional Information: We will soon post additional instructions and information on identification, habitat preferences, etc., on the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center's Rusty Blackbird website:

http://nationalzoo.si.edu/ConservationAndScience/MigratoryBirds/Research/Rusty_Blackbird/Information and instructions will also be available on Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's e-Bird site:

ebird.org

BE SURE TO SAVE THE DATES!!!

JANUARY 30 – FEBRUARY 15, 2010

Sponsored by
International Rusty Blackbird
Technical Working Group
Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's
and National Audubon Society's
eBird