

Gray-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus*



Folk Name: Abee's Thrush

Status: Migrant

Abundance: Uncommon

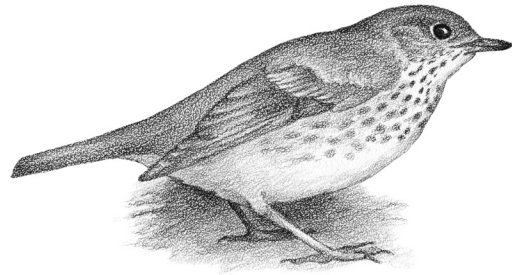
Habitat: Woodland understory

The Gray-cheeked Thrush is our second spot-breasted thrush. This thrush and the Swainson's Thrush are very similar in appearance and behavior. Great care should be taken when differentiating between these birds in the field.

The very closely related Bicknell's Thrush (once considered a subspecies of the Gray-cheeked) is described in the Supplementary Bird List. In 1995, taxonomists decided to consider these birds as separate, valid species. Each is believed to have its own distinct breeding habitat and wintering habitat and they are not believed to interbreed. The Bicknell's Thrush is so similar in appearance to the Gray-cheeked Thrush that identification must be made by capturing the bird and measuring it in hand. The two also have unique songs, but they can be quite difficult to distinguish.

The Gray-cheeked Thrush is an uncommon migrant in the Carolina Piedmont each spring and fall. Spring reports of birds seen in this region range from 27 April through 27 May. Fall migrants have been reported moving through from 4 September through 16 November. The latter bird was photographed at Pee Dee NWR. We have no records from December through March or from the months of June, July, or August. Our peak daylight count is a tally of about 10 birds, but nocturnal monitoring results and tower kill study results indicate larger numbers move through this region in conjunction with fall weather movements.

The Gray-cheeked Thrush, like our other thrushes, forages primarily on the ground. Insects make up two-thirds of its diet at stopover sites during migration. The other third consists of fruits. In 1894, Leverett Loomis reported he observed Gray-cheeked Thrushes in Chester County feeding "exclusively upon dogwood berries" during fall migration. He also noted: "Such food evidently



agrees with them for they are often so fat as to be unfit for specimens."

This thrush migrates at night through the Carolina Piedmont. Many specimens have been collected during tower kill studies. Members of the Mecklenburg Audubon Club collected five specimens beneath the ceilometer tower at the Charlotte Municipal Airport on the morning of September 26, 1955. Joe and Becky Norwood reported a total of 11 Gray-cheeked Thrushes were collected at the base of the WSOC tower in Charlotte in early October 1959.



Gray-cheeked Thrush in Matthews. (Will Stuart)