

Veery *Catharus fuscescens*



Folk Name: Wilson's Thrush, Willow Thrush

Status: Migrant

Abundance: Uncommon to Fairly Common

Habitat: Woodland understory

The Veery is the first of our five species of spot-breasted thrushes. The other four are described in sequence below.

Each of our spot-breasted thrush species have wonderful songs, although the Veery, Hermit Thrush, and Wood Thrush, may be in a class of their own. The Veery has been described as “an exquisite musician” with a “matchless voice.” It sings an ethereal flute-like song that has been called both “indescribably beautiful” and “a haunting melody.”

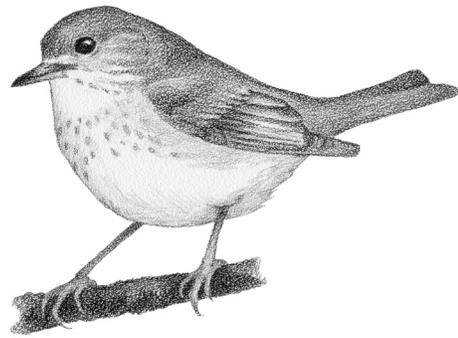
This thrush breeds in the northeastern United States, north into Canada, and in some western states. There is also a breeding population at higher elevations in the Appalachian Mountains from Maryland south to Georgia. It is a neotropical migrant that spends its winters in southern Brazil. Piedmont birders can head to the North Carolina high country each spring to hear this bird sing on its forested breeding grounds on the higher peaks along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The Veery is strictly a migrant in the Carolina Piedmont. It is uncommon to fairly common here in spring and fall. Spring records of birds moving through in the Central Carolinas range from 9 April through 2 June. The latter bird was banded by Bill Hilton Jr. at Hilton Pond in York County in 1993. Fall migrants have been reported moving through from 28 August through 16 October. We have no records from November through March. There are no other acceptable reports from June or July. Our peak count is a tally of 14 birds recorded on a spring count in May 1961.

Robert Ridgway, the pre-eminent ornithologist of the late nineteenth century, received a specimen of a Veery collected by Leverett Loomis in Chester County on October 5, 1888. Ridgway confirmed this Veery was a specimen of the western race *salicicolus*, then called the “Willow Thrush.” He later included this record from the South Carolina Piedmont in his seminal publication “The Birds of North and Middle America Volume IV,” published in 1907.

Elmer Brown had a Veery in migration in Salisbury on May 8, 1927, and another on May 21, 1927, in Davidson. Frank Brown saw and heard Veeries “intermittently” in Davidson from May 9–23, 1929. Elmer Brown noted that these songs needed a little work: “the song was not so perfect as that to be heard a little later in the mountains.”

William McIlwaine sighted a Veery moving through



Charlotte in September 1929. He wrote: “But I did identify positively a Veery on the 12th, and again on the 13th. Possibly it was the same bird. I saw it in the same place—in a thick woods, down by a little stream. Both times the bird was very quiet, and was very shy, relying more on stillness than on flight.”

Grace Anderson and Sarah Nooe reported that a pair of Veeries nested on J. Cliff Crawford’s farm near Statesville in the spring of 1941. This nesting report was published in *The Chat* that year and in *Birds of North Carolina* in 1942, but it is well out of the known breeding range (forests above 3,500 feet) for this species in North Carolina.

Homer Autry heard the song of the Veery in Charlotte on 15 May and again on 19 May in 1953. That fall on September 6, 1953, he found a Veery that had flown into a window and broken its neck. Members of the Mecklenburg Audubon Club collected five specimens of Veery beneath the ceilometer tower at the Charlotte Municipal Airport on the morning of September 26, 1955. Joe and Becky Norwood collected two Veeries at the base of the WSOC tower in Charlotte in early October 1959.



Veery at Latta Park in Charlotte. (Will Stuart)