

Bendire's Thrasher (*Toxostoma bendirei*)**Species Status Statement.**Distribution

Bendire's thrasher ranges from Sinaloa to southern Utah, and from central New Mexico to southeast California (England and Laudenslayer 1993, Parrish et al 2002). It is present on its breeding areas (including Utah) from approximately March through August (England and Laudenslayer 1993, Utah Birds). The species winters in southern Arizona, southern New Mexico, and northwestern Mexico, where a portion of the population resides year-round. Within this range, its occurrence is patchy and associated with sparse deserts and shrublands.

Records from Utah (1927-2018) are concentrated in the Mojave Desert portions of Washington County and nearby in the Great Basin (Iron County). However, it has been reported from as far north as the Uinta Basin and Tooele County, and as far east as Grand and San Juan counties (eBird, Utah Birds).

Table 1. Utah counties currently occupied by this species.

Bendire's Thrasher	
GARFIELD	UINTAH
IRON	UTAH
KANE	WASHINGTON

Abundance and Trends

The estimated global breeding population of Bendire's thrasher is 83,000 with 67% spending some part of the year in the U.S (Partners in Flight 2019). Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data show declines of -4.00% per year (95% CI: -6.14 to -2.04, Sauer et al. 2017) and an overall population loss of 86% across the range over the last 34 years (Rosenberg 2016). However, because sample sizes are low, confidence intervals are wide (Sauer et al. 2017). At the current estimated rate of decline, Bendire's thrasher populations will decline by another 50% in 18 years (Partners in Flight 2019b).

This species is difficult to detect and remains little studied. Only 22 individuals were detected during 82 transect surveys conducted in New Mexico in 2015 (New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, unpublished report). The Utah population of Bendire's thrasher is estimated to be 910 by Partners in Flight (2019a). Only one Bendire's thrasher was detected during directed surveys in Utah in March and April of 2018 (UDWR files). A Desert Thrasher Working Group, which Utah joined in 2018, was formed in 2011 to address concerns about the status of Bendire's and associated thrasher species.

States variously designate this species as a Bird Species of Special Concern (California), a Species of Conservation Priority (Nevada), and a Species of Greatest Conservation Need (Utah, New Mexico and Arizona).

Beyond the state wildlife agencies, Bendire's thrasher is classified by the following organizations as:

- The International Union for Conservation of Nature - *Vulnerable* on the Red List of Threatened Species
- Partners in Flight - "RECOVER: Red Watch List – Species with extremely high vulnerability due to small population and range, high threats, and range-wide declines" (Rosenberg et al. 2016, Partners in Flight 2019a)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - a priority species at the continental and Bird Conservation Region scales on the Birds of Conservation Concern list (draft USFWS 2017)

Statement of Habitat Needs and Threats to the Species.

Habitat Needs

Bendire's thrasher is a southwest desert species mainly associated with sparsely vegetated low scrub habitats, and occasionally with relatively open grassland or woodland with scattered shrubs or trees (England and Laudenslayer 1993, Parrish et al 2002). It tends to nest in the lower portions of spiny shrubs (Ehrlich et al 1988) and feeds on insects and small fruits on the ground or in low branches (England and Laudenslayer 1993). Individuals are not often found in densely vegetated areas like riparian corridors, however they might occupy edges of these areas.

Threats to the Species

Operative threat assessments are wanting because Bendire's thrasher is not well understood (AGFD 2012). Some authors have indicated that urban and agricultural expansion destroys habitat and eliminates this bird. Others reported this species being capable of existing in association with such expansion (England and Laudenslayer 1993). A recent assessment of the possible effects of climate change on California birds resulted in Bendire's thrasher vulnerability rating increasing in that state (Gardali et al 2012).

Table 2. Summary of a Utah threat assessment and prioritization completed in 2014. This assessment applies to the species' entire distribution within Utah. For species that also occur elsewhere, this assessment applies only to the portion of their distribution within Utah. The full threat assessment provides more information including lower-ranked threats, crucial data gaps, methods, and definitions (UDWR 2015; Salafsky et al. 2008).

Bendire's Thrasher**No Identified Threats - Data Gaps Only****Rationale for Designation.**

Despite poor overall knowledge of this species, a recent review estimates significant decrease in the overall population (Rosenberg et al 2016). Additionally, Iknayan and Beissinger (2018) have suggested that climate change is fueling a general collapse of bird communities in the Great Basin, one region in which Bendire's thrasher resides. Uncertainty about this species (numbers, breeding, habitat use, threats) will hamper efforts to alleviate threats. Designating Bendire's thrasher as a Sensitive Species will facilitate local research leading to defensible data in the event of a listing petition, and the development of more robust management guidelines.

Economic Impacts of Sensitive Species Designation.

Sensitive species designation is intended to facilitate research on, and management of, this rare species. Both are needed to reverse the slide toward Endangered Species Act listing, and the related economic impacts. An ESA listing of Bendire's thrasher could affect infrastructure and development projects in the greater St. George area.

Literature Cited.

- Arizona Game and Fish Department [AGFD]. 2012. Arizona's State Wildlife Action Plan: 2012-2022. Arizona Game and Fish Department, Phoenix, Arizona, USA.
- eBird. Basic Dataset. Version: EBC_relMay2018. Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York, USA. May 2018.
- Ehrlich, P.R., D.S. Dobkin and D. Wheye. 1988. The birders' handbook. Simon and Schuster, New York. 785pp.
- England, A.S. and W.F. Laudenslayer Jr. 1993. Bendire's Thrasher (*Toxostoma bendirei*), version 2.0. The Birds of North America. Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi-org.dist.lib.usu.edu/10.2173/bna.71>
- Gardali T., N.E. Seavy, R.T. DiGaudio, and L.A. Comrack. 2012. A climate change vulnerability assessment of California's at-risk birds. PLoS One 7(3): e29507 [10.1371/journal.pone.0029507](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0029507)
- Iknayan, K.J. and S.R. Beissinger. 2018. Collapse of a desert bird community over the past century driven by climate change. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 201805123. <http://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/early/2018/07/31/1805123115.full.pdf>.
- Parrish, J.R., F.P. Howe, and R.E. Norvell. 2002. Utah Partners in Flight Avian Conservation Strategy Version 2.0. Utah Partners in Flight Program, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, Publication Number 02-27, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA. 302 pp.

Partners in Flight. 2019a. Population Estimates Database, version 3.0. Available at <http://pif.birdconservancy.org/PopEstimates>.

Partners in Flight. 2019b. Avian Conservation Assessment Database, version 2019. Available at <http://pif.birdconservancy.org/ACAD>.

Rosenberg, K.V., J.A. Kennedy, R. Dettmers, R.P. Ford, D. Reynolds, J.D. Alexander, C.J. Beardmore, P.J. Blancher, R.E. Bogart, G.S. Butcher, A.F. Camfield, A. Couturier, D.W. Demarest, W.E. Easton, J.J. Giocomo, R.H. Keller, A.E. Mini, A.O. Panjabi, D.N. Pashley, T.D. Rich, J.M. Ruth, H. Stabins, J. Stanton, and T. Will. 2016. Partners in Flight Landbird Conservation Plan: 2016 Revision for Canada and Continental United States. Partners in Flight Science Committee. 119 pp.

Salafsky, N., D. Salzer, A.J. Stattersfield, C. Hilton-Taylor, R. Neugarten, S.H.M. Butchart, B. Collen, N. Cox, L.L. Master, S. O'Connor, and D. Wilkie. 2008. A standard lexicon for biodiversity conservation: unified classifications of threats and actions. *Conservation Biology* 22: 897–911.

Sauer, J.R., D.K. Niven, J.E. Hines, D.J. Ziolkowski, Jr., K.L. Pardieck, J.E. Fallon, and W.A. Link. 2017. The North American Breeding Bird Survey, Results and Analysis 1966-2015. Version 2.07.2017 USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland, USA.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS]. Draft 2017. Birds of Conservation Concern 2017. United States Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Migratory Birds, Falls Church, Virginia, USA. <http://www.fws.gov/birds/management/managed-species/birds-of-conservation-concern.php>

Utah Division of Wildlife Resources [UDWR]. 2015. Utah Wildlife Action Plan: A plan for managing native wildlife species and their habitats to help prevent listings under the Endangered Species Act 2015-2025. Publication Number 15-14, 385 pp.

Utah Birds. Accessed February 2019.
<http://www.utahbirds.org/RecCom/RareBirdsArc4.htm#BendiresThrasher>