

Gray-cheeked Thrush (GCTH)

Catharus minimus

Description

The Gray-cheeked Thrush is a medium sized (16–17 cm long) songbird with long legs and an upright posture. It has brown/olive gray upperparts, and a grey tint to the face. The belly and sides are marked with brown oval spots, contrasting with the white underparts. These spots become less distinct towards the belly. Females and males look the same. Similar species in Newfoundland include Veery, Hermit Thrush and Swainson’s Thrush, but the Gray-cheeked Thrush lacks any markings around the eye, and lacks red on the back and tail, which are the easiest ways to tell these species apart visually.

Known and potential breeding habitat

The preferred habitat of the Gray-Cheeked Thrush is scrubby coniferous forest, or older coniferous forest with a dense understory. In Newfoundland, they make their nests in the dense understory in stands of fir, spruce, and other conifer species. In Newfoundland, breeding evidence has been observed from 18 May to 27 July, largely on the Northern Peninsula and in small areas of the Avalon Peninsula.

Detection Tips

Habitat

In Newfoundland, preferred habitat of the Gray-Cheeked Thrush includes conifer scrub along the coast, regenerating fir stands (including regenerating clearcuts), and mature balsam fir forests. However, coastal populations have disappeared across most of the island, with the remaining population concentrated at higher elevation areas where habitat persists.

Vocalization

The Gray-cheeked Thrush song is a burry, melodic descending spiral which they sing either perched atop a tall tree, or from the depths of the forest. They also have high pitched calls that sound like “*queer*”, “*vreer*” or “*wheerrr*”. Occasionally, while attacking another male, a male may make whistling sounds with their wings.



Photo By: Darroch Whitaker



Forest



COSEWIC Ranking:
N/A



NL Designation:
Vulnerable



Thrushes

Photo By: Joe Straker on Unsplash

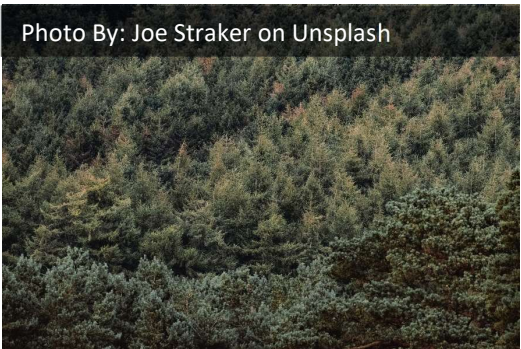




Photo By: Darroch Whitaker

Behaviour

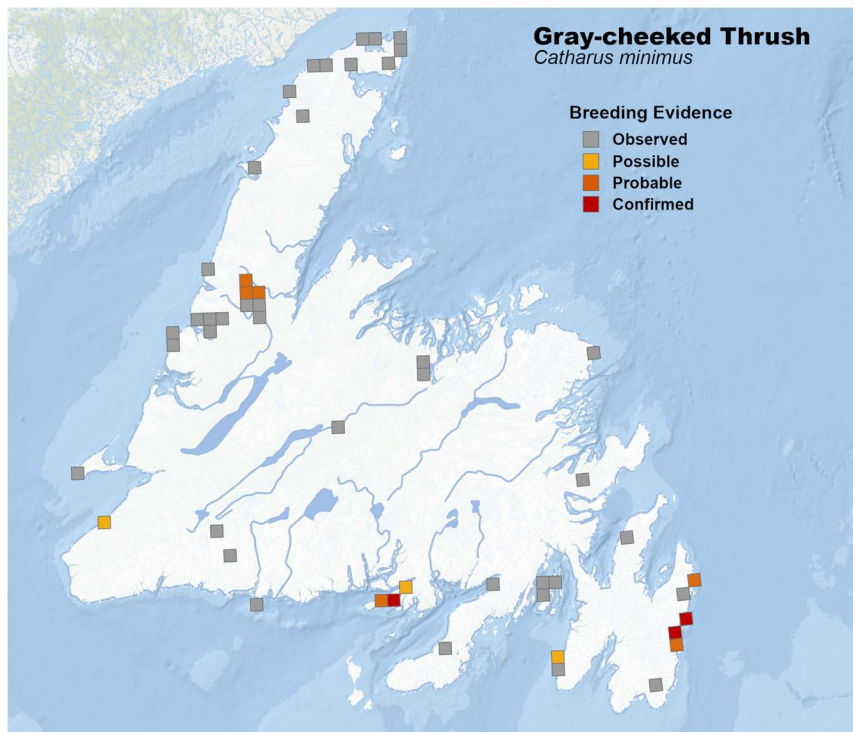
The Gray-Cheeked Thrush tends to remain hidden in trees, making it a difficult species to observe. As a result, not much information is available about their behaviour. They forage for insects by hopping on the ground, kicking leaves and needles aside. Gray-cheeked Thrushes may be semi-colonial (i.e. nest in clusters of pairs) but are typically seen or heard on their own.

Nesting

Nests are built by the females and are typically placed low in shrubs or on the ground. The outer layer is constructed using small twigs, horsetails, and coarse grasses, with a middle layer made of mosses, and the inside of the cup lined with fine grasses. The female incubates the eggs, with a typical clutch size of 4 eggs. Eggs are light greenish-blue with pale brown splotches.

Breeding Evidence

Most often, breeding evidence will be observations of an adult (H) or pair (P) in suitable nesting habitat, an adult occupying the same location for 7+ days on a territory (T), or singing (S). If you're lucky, other possible breeding evidence could include carrying of nesting material (NB) or food (CF), a nest containing eggs (NE), and adults entering or exiting a nest site (AE).



Gray-cheeked Thrush (*Catharus minimus*) were detected in 51 squares in Newfoundland in the past ten years (2011–2021). Breeding was confirmed in 3 of these squares.