



Photo By: Jared Clarke

Rusty Blackbird (RUBL)

Euphagus carolinus

Description

Rusty Blackbirds are medium-sized blackbirds (~23 cm long) just a little smaller than a robin. Their name refers to their colouration in the fall and winter when adults are rusty brown. It can also refer to their song which sounds like a rusty hinge. During breeding season, males are black all over, with a green, glossy sheen and a bright yellow eye. Females during breeding season are a slate gray with a greenish gloss. They have an upright posture and a sharp black bill. Be aware of Common Grackles, who at a glance could look similar and are sometimes found in similar habitat, but have long, fanned tails and longer, heavier bills.

Known and potential breeding habitat

During breeding season, Rusty Blackbirds are most likely to be found in wet forested areas such as flooded areas, bogs, beaver ponds, and slow-moving streams. They use the wet areas to forage for insects on the ground and water's edge, and nest in nearby trees. In Newfoundland, evidence of breeding has been observed from 3 May to 8 August. Breeding evidence has been found on the Northern Peninsula, in the St. George's Bay area, in central, and in Terra Nova National Park.

Detection Tips

Habitat

Rusty Blackbirds breed in forested wetlands. They build their nests in stands of dense spruce or other conifer trees on the edge of wet areas. You can often find them sitting atop a tall tree singing, or walking along the edge of the water, foraging for insects.

Vocalization

Rusty Blackbird song consists of 2-3 high buzzy notes that some compare to a rusty door hinge. Both females and males sing; males sing to establish territories and females sing while on the nest in response to the male. Call notes sound like a harsh *chek*.

Behaviour

A displaying adult male can be heard making a series of squeaking noises



Forest



COSEWIC Ranking:
Special Concern



NL Designation:
Vulnerable



Blackbirds



Photo By: Maksim Shutov on Unsplash



Photo By: Jenna McDermott

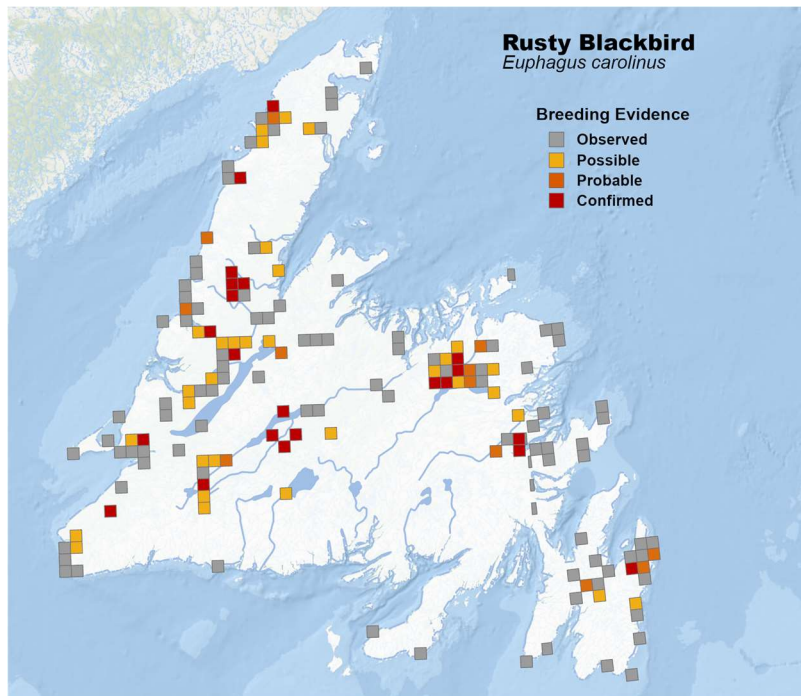
while perched with its tail spread and its bill wide open. Rusty Blackbirds forage on the ground, and can be seen walking, running, or even wading in water. When they collect food to bring to the nest they dive immediately into the branches where the nest is hidden.

Nesting

Nests are placed 3–5 m high in coniferous trees near bodies of water. The outer layer of the nest is made using twigs, grass, and lichens; wet plant material is then added to the inside. Once the wet material dries, the inside of the bowl is lined with grasses. The female builds the nest over 3–4 days and lays a clutch of 3–6 eggs. Eggs are a pale blue-green to pale grey with brown markings. Females incubate the eggs for 13 days. The male visits during the incubation period to bring food to the female, perching nearby where she joins him to be fed.

Breeding Evidence

Most often, breeding evidence for Rusty Blackbirds will be observations of an individual (H) or a pair (P) in a suitable nesting habitat, singing individuals (S), and agitated behaviour (A). Other evidence of breeding that could be seen is courtship display (D), carrying of nesting material (NB), a nest containing eggs (NE), adults entering or leaving a nest site (AE), and recently fledged young (FY). As mentioned, males carry food to incubating females, so be wary of using code CF (carrying food for young) early in the breeding season.



Rusty Blackbirds (*Euphagus carolinus*) were detected in 167 squares in Newfoundland during the past ten years (2011–2021). Breeding was confirmed in 22 of these squares.