

Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz Protocol

February 2014

The Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz aims to harness the observational power of the birding community to learn more about Rusty Blackbirds during their northward migration. We are interested in learning more about migratory timing, stopover hotspots, and consistency in stopover locations during migration. Researchers will use data from this Blitz to target conservation efforts and research initiatives.

Recording Your Field Observations

1. **Search for Rusties wherever you like during your state or province's target Blitz dates.** This species is often associated with shallow water, such as wooded wetlands, beaver ponds, or roadside ditches. However, Rusties can be found in a variety of other habitats, such as agricultural fields, cattle feedlots, or pecan orchards. Some state or provincial coordinators may have suggestions for geographic areas or habitat types to focus on.
2. **Perform a "traveling count" at each location to survey for Rusty Blackbirds.** Traveling counts consist of a survey that is ideally five miles or less in length. These counts should be conducted on foot where possible and might consist of walking a nature trail or birding your local park. If birding by car, consider getting out of the car and conducting a search either at periodic intervals or specific locations. Please record your location at the mid-point of your traveling survey. One goal of the Spring Migration Blitz is to understand Rusty Blackbird habitat use during migration, and by accurately recording each survey location and surveying smaller areas, we will be able to more accurately link observational data with specific habitat information.
3. **Optional: Keep a complete species list, and record numbers of each species at each discrete birding location.** While the primary survey goal is to find Rusty Blackbirds, recording all the species you observe will allow researchers to better understand the flocking behavior and general biology of Rusty Blackbirds. If you feel comfortable identifying and recording everything you see, please do. When tallying birds, please take special care when counting blackbirds.
4. **Record your observations in the field;** include date, location, species, numbers, survey start time, survey duration, and distance traveled. It is also helpful if you note habitat type, vocalizations produced by Rusty Blackbirds, and Rusty Blackbird behavior, although this is not mandatory.
5. **Optional: Take photos of the Rusty Blackbirds you observe and the habitat they are in, or record vocalizations produced by Rusties in the field.** While collecting this extra data is certainly not mandatory, pictures and recordings will help verify species identity, sex ratio in flocks, behavior, and habitat preferences.
6. **Submit your data whether or not you detected Rusty Blackbirds.** Understanding when and where Rusty Blackbirds are not detected will help us further understand habitat use and migratory timing.

Submitting Your Data

We will collect all Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz data through eBird (www.ebird.org). eBird is an online tool that allows birders to keep track of their personal records while making their observations available to scientists. If you already have an eBird account, please log in using your existing account. If you are a new eBird user, you'll have to click the "Register as a new user" link at the top of the page to create an account.

1. **Sign in to eBird and navigate to the "Submit Observations" tab at the top of the page.**
2. **Enter your location** using latitude/longitude or the map provided.
3. **Enter your observation date.**
4. **Under Observation Type, select Other: Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz from the drop-down menu.** Fill in additional information as requested. Note that this survey option will only be available between 1 March and 15 July 2014.
5. **Fill out the checklist of species that you saw.** Enter numbers for each species you saw or heard in the appropriate boxes; if you don't have numbers, use an "x" to indicate presence. Indicate "Yes" in response to "Do you want to report age/sex information or add species comments?"
6. **Fill out information about age and sex for Rusty Blackbirds observed.**
7. **In the comments field, please record the following information, separated by a semicolon:**
 - a. **Habitat** (see optional data sheet for a list of potential habitat types)
 - b. **Type of Vocalization Produced** (see Identification Guide for descriptions of vocalizations)
 - c. **Behavior** (Feeding on ground, feeding in trees or shrubs, feeding in water, loafing, staging to roost, roosting, flying, etc.)

So, for example, if you observed a small roadside ditch, producing the "Kerglee" vocalization while foraging, you would enter: Roadside ditch; kerglee; foraging on ground.
8. **Confirm your results and submit your observations.**
9. **Repeat this process for each discrete location that you sampled for Rusty Blackbirds.** Remember, the more closely your data is tied to a specific location, the more we will be able to understand about specific habitats used by Rusty Blackbirds during spring migration.

Submitting Data Using a Phone App

Some birders prefer to submit their observations to eBird in real time using their phones. Unfortunately, phone apps do not offer the option to select an "Other" type of count, or to enter comments. If you submit your initial observations by phone, please select "Traveling" count, and when you get home, modify your response to the "Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz" survey type and add any comments or notes you have recorded.

Thank you for participating in the Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz!