

= Long @-@ billed thrasher =

The long @-@ billed thrasher ( *Toxostoma longirostre* ) is a medium @-@ sized resident songbird of South Texas and eastern Mexico . It bears a strong resemblance to its close relative the brown thrasher in appearance , calls , and various other behaviors ; however , the two species do not overlap in range except in the winter when the brown thrasher will temporarily reside in the northern range of the long @-@ billed .

The bird is a large sized mimid that is not especially wary , but it will take precautionary measures to prevent itself from being potential prey . Like other thrashers , it is named after its sweeping methods when searching for food , not for thrashing predators , although they are aggressive defenders of their territories .

= = Taxonomy = =

The specific name *longirostre* is derived from the Latin words *longus* long and *rostrum* bill .

There are two subspecies of the long @-@ billed thrasher . *T. longirostre longirostre* was first described in scientific literature by Frédéric de Lafresnaye in 1838 as *Orpheus longirostris* , while *T. longirostre sennitti* was described by Robert Ridgway a half @-@ century later .

*T. c. sennitti* ( Ridgway , 1888 ) Sennett 's thrasher . Range extends from southern ( particularly south central ) Texas to the Rio Grande Valley and the Mexican states of Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosi .

*T. c. longirostre* ( Lafresnaye , 1838 ) . Range is in eastern Mexico , within the states of Querétaro , Tamaulipas and Veracruz southward to Puebla .

Along with the brown thrasher and Cozumel thrasher , the three are part of a superspecies *rufum* clade . Plumage patterns and bill shapes were originally used for grouping , and the birds also were shown as closely related with genetic studies .

= = Description = =

This bird is slender and long @-@ tailed , averaging 26 @.@ 5 ? 29 cm ( 10 @.@ 5 ? 11 @.@ 5 in ) in length and about 70 g ( 2 @.@ 5 oz ) in weight . It is also a large sized thrasher that is close in size to the American robin .

*T. c. sennitti* is described with a grayish @-@ brown crown with a rufous color appearing in the back , rump , rear , and shoulder . Broad white tips located on the greater and lesser primary coverts and dullish @-@ brown with rufous brown edges on the primary and secondary coverts gives the closed wings an appearance wing with rufous colorings . The chin , throat , chest , and belly can appear to be white or a pale @-@ buffy white , although the chest and belly contain keenly blackish oval shapes . The underwing is buffy @-@ white . The iris is typically either orange or orange @-@ yellow , with a dull brown bill with its base of the lower mandible appear to be pinkish grey . *T. c. curvirostre* is similar with an exception to being smaller , darker , and have a red @-@ tinged appearance with buffy @-@ white underparts .

Juveniles have dusty streak marks on its rump , with buffy @-@ white undertail coverts .

= = = Similar species = = =

This thrasher shares a striking resemblance with the brown thrasher . However , there are a number of differences . Its face is more gray in contrast to the reddish appearance of the thrasher . The underparts are whiter , less buffy , and more robustly colored , an eye that appears more orange and beady , and generally a longer @-@ bill that is blacker and stands apart from the face . The long @-@ billed 's overall appearance has more contrasts in its pattern in comparison to the thrasher .

The sage thrasher , which shares some its distribution with the long @-@ billed , is smaller , grayer , and its rectrices are of a more distinguished white color .

## = = Distribution and habitat = =

This species is a resident in southern Texas north to San Antonio and Aransas , south through north @-@ western Mexico to central Veracruz , east to eastern Coahuila , San Luis Potosi and Hidalgo . The breeding density is at the highest among the Rio Grande Valley . Although it was a resident in the lower Rio Grande Valley , a significant amount of the its habitat was destroyed for agricultural purposes , and its population decreased from the 1930s to the 1970s . Some human activity that has introduced former grassland areas is thought to some help the species , and still is a common resident in its range . Climate change has been suggested for some of its expansion In Texas as well , as there was some evidence of a northern and eastern migration of counties over a five decade span ( 1957 @-@ 2007 ) . With the exception of vagrants found in New Mexico and Colorado , the species is a permanent resident of its range .

## = = Behavior = =

Long @-@ billed thrashers usually stay hidden on or near the ground , though it may sing from conspicuous perches . Whenever it searches for insects on the ground , it will energetically turn over ( " thrashing " ) leaves and other litter . It also can be spotted singing on exposed perches above its thornbush fortresses . Males generally are spotted singing from March until the mid @-@ summer , excluding instances of singing song snatches periodically to balance the year . It is generally not wary , possibly because is not easily approached . The flights of the long @-@ billed are generally close to the ground , short , erratic with exaggerated fluctuations . Long @-@ billed thrashers are staunch defenders of their territories ; it will defend its nest ferociously , including against humans .

The longest recorded lifespan of the species was one individual recovered on 30 September 1965 , at age 7 years and 3 months , after being banded ( on 24 Aug 1959 ) in Alamo , TX .

## = = = Voice = = =

The song is warbling and resembles other thrashers ' songs but is especially rich and musical , though occasionally scratchy . Phrases are often repeated two to four times . A distinctive call is a " loud , rich whistle cleeeoeeep " or " mellow , whistled tweeooip or ooeh " ; other calls include " a loud sharp chak " and " a very rapid , sharp rattle chtttr " , and tsuck and verrs sounds during territorial disputes that resemble calls of its close relative the brown thrasher .

## = = = Breeding = = =

The general nesting habitat of long @-@ billed thrashers is amongst dense vegetation with spiny shrubs and trees in order to make the nest inaccessible to potential predators . Nests have also been found in plants such as willows , mesquite , huisache , cacti , or yucca .

The nest is a bulky cup placed in thick low or mid @-@ height vegetation and made of materials such as twigs , straws , and grasses . The female lays 2 to 5 eggs described as bluish @-@ white with dense reddish @-@ brown and gray speckles ; the appearance is indistinguishable from the brown thrasher . Most of the egg laying for the long @-@ billed in Texas occurs in April and May , and May and June in Mexico , though dates have been as late as June and July , respectively . The eggs hatch over a period of 24 days . Unlike most thrashers , however , the hatching process is synchronous . Both parents are responsible for incubation , which lasts 13 or 14 days as well as feeding the fledglings . They are rarely victims of brood parasitism by the brown @-@ headed cowbird or bronzed cowbird .

## = = = Feeding = = =

In order to locate food , it forages on the ground by rapidly sweeping its bill from side to side tossing

leaf @-@ litter upwards and behind itself , then goes to scratching the ground for food . Their diet consists of invertebrates such as grasshoppers , beetles , and other insects , crustaceans , gastropods , and an adequate amount of vegetable matter , especially berries .