



## Veery

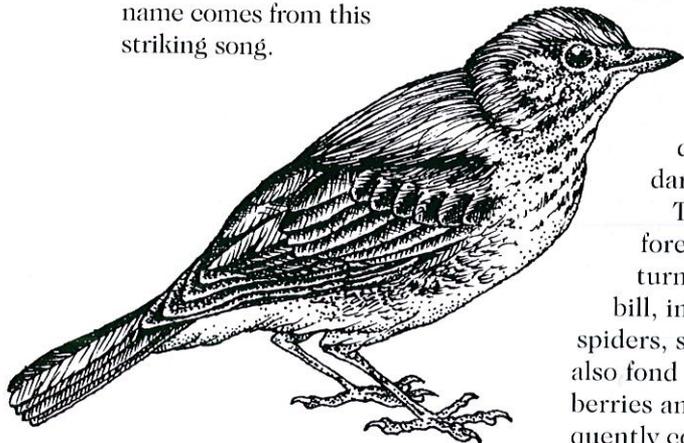
BY TROY E. CORMAN

NONGAME BIOLOGIST

ILLUSTRATION BY NATHAN REDWOOD

**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Catharus fuscescens*. Genus from the Greek *katharos* meaning pure, referring to purity of song. Specific epithet from the Latin *fuscescens* meaning brownish, a likely reference to the warm, reddish-brown coloration of the plumage.

**DESCRIPTION:** 6.5 to 7.5 inches long. Sexes alike, uniformly reddish-brown upper parts, white underparts with faintly spotted, pale buffy breast, pale gray sides, and indistinct whitish eye ring, setting this bird apart from other North American thrushes. The western subspecies, *salicicola*, is darker and less reddish on the upperparts and has heavier spotting on the breast. In juvenal plumage, the upper parts are spotted with olive. The veery's liquid and flutelike song, often described as haunting, wheels downward: *vee-ur*; *vee-ur*; *veer*; *veer*. Its common name comes from this striking song.



**DISTRIBUTION:** This neotropical migrant's primary breeding range includes southern Canada south to central Oregon, northeastern Utah, south-central Colorado, northern Iowa, Pennsylvania, and down the Appalachian Mountains to northwestern Georgia. It winters in South America from northern Colombia east across Venezuela and south to Amazonian and central Brazil. Since 1936 a few breeding pairs have been detected in Arizona (at least irregularly) along the West Fork of the Little Colorado River southwest of Springerville. This is the most southwestern breeding location for the species.

**HABITAT:** Moist deciduous woodlands and damp ravines open enough to encourage a fairly dense undergrowth of shrubs or ferns. In the West, prefers thickets of willow, alder, and dogwood along streams and lake edges.

**BIOLOGY:** The veery arrives on its breeding grounds in late April and May, with departure in late August and September. The species is considered shy and difficult to observe in its preferred shady

haunts. Hearing the distinct song is often the best way to detect its presence. Like most thrushes, males often sing before dawn and again as darkness falls.

The veery forages on the forest floor, hopping along, turning over leaves with its bill, in search of insects, spiders, snails, and worms. It is also fond of many types of wild berries and seeds, which frequently comprise half its diet.

Nest building takes six to 10 days. The nest is usually on or near the ground, in the base of a sapling or shrub, in vines, on a stump or bank, or on the ground on a moss hummock or grass tussock. The nest commonly has a base of decaying leaves and is built of grass, bark strips, small twigs, and moss, and often lined with finer materials such as pine needles. The veery usually lays four (range 3 to 6) pale to medium blue, usually unmarked eggs. Incubation takes 10 to 12 days, with the nestlings fledging after another 10 to 12 days.

Nest predators include red squirrels, chipmunks, and snakes. In some parts of its range, the veery is a fairly common brown-headed cowbird brood host; some nests contain more cowbird than veery eggs.

**STATUS:** The veery is included on the Department's draft list of *Wildlife of Special Concern in Arizona* (AGFD in prep.). It is not listed or proposed for listing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as endangered or threatened. However, like all songbirds, it is protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

**MANAGEMENT NEEDS:** Very little is known about the breeding biology of this species in Arizona. Maintaining and enhancing scrub willow, alder, and dogwood regeneration through reduction of riparian grazing by livestock and elk would benefit the species. This would also help regulate cowbird populations. Reducing recreational disturbance near the only known nesting location from May through July would also help to ensure this species' presence in Arizona. ♣