

**California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System**  
**California Department of Fish and Wildlife**  
**California Interagency Wildlife Task Group**

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CRISSAL THRASHER

*Toxostoma crissale*

Family: MIMIDAE  
B399

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A resident of southeastern deserts. Still fairly common in Colorado River Valley, but local and uncommon elsewhere. Occupies dense thickets of shrubs or low trees in desert riparian and desert wash habitats. In eastern Mojave Desert of San Bernardino and southeastern Inyo cos., also occurs in dense sagebrush and other shrubs in washes within juniper and pinyon-juniper habitats, up to 1800 m (5900 ft). Also resident in Imperial, Coachella, and Borrego valleys, but numbers have declined markedly in recent decades (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Remsen 1978, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Forages mostly on ground, especially between and under shrubs. Uses bill to dig in friable soil and to probe in litter. Diet poorly known, but includes insects, other invertebrates, berries and other small fruits, seeds, and occasionally small lizards (Bent 1948). Laudenslayer (1981) reported a diet of 69% Coleoptera, 10% Hymenoptera, 20% miscellaneous insects, and 1% plant material.

**Cover:** Cover provided by thickets of dense, shrubby vegetation along streams and in washes; frequently mesquite, screwbean mesquite, ironwood, catclaw acacia, arrowweed willow.

**Reproduction:** Builds nest within thicket of desert shrubs or on a forked branch of a small tree. Nest usually placed 0.6 to 3 m (2-10 ft) above ground.

**Water:** Bartholomew and Cade (1956) reported mean water consumption in captive individuals at 20-23°C of about 5% body weight per 24 hr.

**Pattern:** Frequents dense thickets in desert riparian and desert wash habitats.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Yearlong, diurnal activity.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Sedentary. Not migratory.

**Home Range:** In southern Nevada, mated pairs remained in only a few hundred ft of mesquite-bosque oak habitat, based on banding records (Gullion et al. 1959). Reported density per 40 ha (100 ac) include: 0.5 in Arizona desert grassland (Grue 1977); 0.2 to 0.6 pairs in New Mexico creosote scrub (Raitt and Maze 1968); 1.0 pair in Arizona oak woodland (Balda 1970); 2.0 to 3.5 pairs in dunes, and 1.0 to 2.0 pairs in bosque, in southern Nevada (Austin 1970). Ryder and Ryder (1976) found 2 on a 17 ha (44 ac) study site in cat claw-rabbit brush habitat in San Bernardino Co.

Territory: Laudenslayer (1981) reported territory varying from 1.52 ha (3.81 ac) to 3.71 ha (9.28 ac) in mesquite-salt cedar associations along the Colorado River.

Reproduction: Breeding season lasts from February into June with a peak in March and April. Clutch size 2-4 eggs, mostly 2 or 3. Frequently raises 2 broods per yr. Incubation lasts about 2 wk. Altricial young usually remain in nest 11-12 days; up to 16 days. Oberholser (1974) noted small groups, assumed to be families, congregating toward end of breeding season and in fall.

Niche: Of all arid-land thrashers, occurs in coolest, most shaded, and moist habitats. A California Species of Special Concern. Numbers have been reduced greatly by removal of mesquite brushland for agricultural development, and by introduction of tamarisk (Remsen 1978). Off-road vehicle activity also may degrade habitat and disturb these thrashers. Ejects cowbird eggs from nest.

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