

Veery (*Catharus fuscescens*)

NMPIF level: Biodiversity Conservation Concern, Level 1 (BC1)

NMPIF assessment score: 12

NM stewardship responsibility: Low

National PIF status: No special status

New Mexico BCRs: 16

Primary breeding habitat(s): Montane Riparian

Summary of Concern

Veery is a widespread neotropical migrant with a mostly northern breeding distribution. A small number breed regularly in dense montane riparian habitat at one or two locations in northern New Mexico. This state breeding restriction makes this species highly vulnerable in New Mexico.

Associated Species

Yellow Warbler, Black-headed Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting (BC2), Song Sparrow

Distribution

Veeries breed in a wide band across the northern United States and southern Canada, extending further south along the mountain chains of the eastern United States and the Rocky Mountains. This species is a long-distant neotropical migrant, wintering primarily in south-central and southeast Brazil (Remsen 2001, Bevier et al. 2004). At the southern limit of their breeding range in northern New Mexico, Veeries occur only along the Rio Pueblo and tributaries near Penasco in Taos County, and along the Rio Chama in Rio Arriba County (Parmeter et al. 2002).

Ecology and Habitat Requirements

Across its range, Veery inhabits damp, deciduous forests, favoring the dense understory that is often more characteristic of disturbed or early successional habitats. Moisture regime is a chief factor in habitat selection. Heavy shrub cover is critical for this species, which in New Mexico is often associated

with streamside alder thickets. Habitat in northern New Mexico consists of dense montane riparian vegetation alongside streams, particularly along wider valley floors. Narrow canyons are avoided. Other habitat requirements for New Mexico have yet to be studied. In the East, Veeries show area sensitivity with a preference for breeding in larger forest patches (Bertin 1977, Robbins et al. 1989, Bevier et al. 2004).

Veeries are present in northern New Mexico for only a short time, mostly June-July (Parmeter et al. 2002). Nesting often occurs in moist areas. Nests are constructed either on the ground or slightly elevated at the base of a shrub or small deciduous tree. Veeries forage mostly on the ground for insects and fruit (Bevier et al. 2004).

Conservation Status

Species Assessment

DISTRIBUTION	2
THREATS	4
GLOBAL POPULATION SIZE	2
LOCAL POPULATION TREND	3
IMPORTANCE OF NEW MEXICO TO BREEDING	1
COMBINED SCORE	12

Veery is a Biodiversity Conservation Concern, Level 1 species for New Mexico, with a total assessment score of 12. From NMPIF, it receives a high vulnerability score of 4 for threats to breeding in the state.

Population Size

PIF estimates a species population of 14 million. The New Mexico population is very small, possibly on the order of 10 pairs or less.

Population Trend

BBS data show a moderate population decline rangewide from 1966-2004 (annual trend = -1.4, p = 0.00, n = 1072). This species is not well sampled by BBS in New Mexico. NMPIF assigns a score of 3 for local population trend, indicating uncertainty.

Threats

Breeding Veeries may be locally threatened by loss or fragmentation of suitable habitat in riparian areas. Restriction of the state breeding population to one or two locations makes this species highly vulnerable in New Mexico. Unmanaged grazing in riparian areas reduces or eliminates the dense undergrowth Veeries require for breeding, and increases vulnerability to cowbird parasitism (Bevier et al. 2004). Within the Chama area, streamside development can be highly detrimental to continued breeding activity. This species is also rapidly losing forest habitat on its wintering grounds in southern Brazil (Remsen 2001).

Management Issues and Recommendations

Management for Veery in New Mexico should focus on maintaining dense riparian habitat in known breeding locations and nearby areas.

NMPIF Recommendations

- Enhance and maintain potential habitat by promoting dense riparian (especially alder) habitat in suitable areas of northern New Mexico. Populations of beaver may help provide suitable wetland habitat for Veeries (Bevier et al. 2004).
- Maintain dense alder/shrub cover along streams in known or suspected breeding areas in Taos and northern Rio Arriba counties.

Species Conservation Objectives

NMPIF Objectives

- Maintain current number of known singing males (2) in the Penasco area.
- Determine any further habitat requirements for this species in New Mexico.
- Identify new breeding pairs in the Southern Rocky Mountains, especially in the Chama area where recent records have occurred.
- Increase known regularly occurring singing males to 10 by 2014.
- Establish two known viable populations by 2010; three by 2015.

Sources of Information

Bertin, R. I. 1977. Breeding habitats of the Wood Thrush and Veery. *Condor* 79:303-311.

Bevier, L., A. F. Poole, and W. Moskoff. 2004. Veery (*Catharus fuscescens*). In *The Birds of North America Online*. (A. Poole, Ed.) Ithaca, NY: Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology;

Parmeter, J., B. Neville, and D. Emkalns. 2002. *New Mexico Bird Finding Guide*. New Mexico Ornithological Society, Albuquerque, NM.

Remsen, J. V. 2001. True winter range of the Veery (*Catharus fuscescens*): lessons for determining winter ranges of species that winter in the tropics. *Auk* 118:838-848.

Robbins, C. S., D. K. Dawson, and B. A. Dowell. 1989. Habitat area requirements of breeding forest birds of the Middle Atlantic States. *Wildl. Monogr.* 103:1-34.