

School-to-Nature



Hermit Thrush

The Hermit Thrush belongs to the species *Catharus Guttatus*, which literally means “spotted” thrush. This bird has a rich brown color on the head and back, and a distinctive reddish-brown tail. The underparts are pale with distinct brown spots on the throat, smudged-appearing spots on the breast, and a pale ring around the eye. They behave quite a bit like their cousins, the Robins, when they hunt for insects, worms, and larvae; the tails, wings, and heads move in a similar way, looking for food. But Hermit Thrushes are slightly stockier, more compact, and smaller than Robins (a Robin’s body is 9-11”; the body of the Hermit Thrush, 6-7”). It is the state bird of Vermont.



Hermit Thrushes live in the “understory,” or shrubby lower areas, of the forest; and they prefer the forest edges and more open areas.

They hunt mostly in the leaf litter on the forest floor, hopping from fallen logs to scrape out insects and worms, especially in open areas and on trails. These birds have been seen in the west end of King’s Corner, in the pine forest there.

Hermits also nest close to the ground, creating a small, deeply-cupped nest of small twigs, grasses, or soft pine needles (see the photo), about 4-6” across. The female lays 3-6 blue eggs, which take 11-13 days to hatch. These birds may have 1-2 broods per season.

They are migratory, leaving our area when cold weather takes over; but they leave later in autumn and arrive earlier in spring than other thrushes. They migrate at night, which puts them in danger of colliding with transmission towers and skyscrapers.

The flute-like song of the Hermit Thrush is considered one of the most beautiful sounds in nature. Listen for this whistled song: “*oh, holy holy, aah, purity purity, eeh, sweetly sweetly.*” Fun Facts: there is a Canadian “indie” band named Thrush Hermit, and other bands have used this bird’s name as well, perhaps because the Hermit Thrush is a true songster. It has also been called “the poets’ bird” because the Hermit Thrush and its song have appeared in many poems over the years.

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