



# Rusty Blackbird

*(Euphagus carolinus)*

**STATUS**

SARA  
Alberta

SPECIAL CONCERN  
SENSITIVE

British Columbia  
Saskatchewan

BLUE  
NO STATUS

**PRIMARY HABITAT**

Coniferous/wetland/early-seral

**TERRITORY SIZE**

Colonial, ~11–37 ha

**NEST TYPE**

Trees, shrubs, stumps near water

**NEST REUSE**

No

**STAND LEVEL**

Riparian buffers, voluntary buffering of vernal pools, with focus on short, small-diameter conifers.

**LANDSCAPE LEVEL**

Coniferous wetlands with short trees, including burned-over stands, are most valuable.

The Rusty Blackbird breeds up to the northern tree line in Canada, farther north than any other North American Blackbird. Its nest is usually within 12m of water and is often reused by Solitary Sandpipers.

**BREEDING WINDOW**



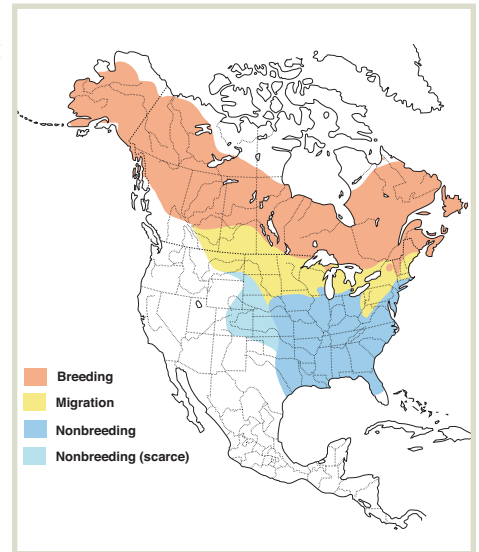
## HABITAT ECOLOGY

- The Rusty Blackbird has a northern breeding range, where it is mainly found in wet coniferous forests (mainly black spruce and tamarack) near and along bogs, muskeg swamps, beaver ponds, and streams.<sup>1</sup>
- Nests are usually built in dense thickets of small conifers (e.g., 3–6 m black spruce with <8 cm dbh or 1–3 m balsam fir) or, where coniferous trees are limiting, deciduous shrubs (e.g., willow).<sup>2,3</sup>
  - Nests are typically built within 12 m of water, on average.<sup>3</sup>
  - Important habitat features for nest sites include shallow or vernal pools containing aquatic invertebrates and insects<sup>4</sup> (including recently burned wetlands<sup>5</sup>).
  - Stand age appears to be less important than the presence of short conifers, whether due to recent disturbance (e.g., harvest) or due to stunted growth on wet/low-productivity sites.<sup>6</sup>

## RESPONSE TO FOREST MANAGEMENT

- Harvest effects in western forests are poorly understood for Rusty Blackbirds. While they have been observed in harvested stands containing residuals up to 30 years postharvest, sample sizes have been too low to conclusively infer a positive response to harvesting.<sup>7–9</sup>
- Some studies of reproductive success in New England suggest that harvested stands near coniferous wetlands may act as ecological traps, however results have been mixed and local studies are needed.
  - In one study, Rusty Blackbirds preferentially nested in <20 year-old regenerating clearcuts than in unharvested stands. However, nests in harvested stands were less than half as likely to successfully fledge young than nests in unharvested areas.<sup>3</sup>
  - In another study in the same region found that harvest history did not affect nest success, but rather that survival increased with increasing densities of trees ≤4 cm dbh around nests.<sup>10</sup>

## RANGE MAP



## STAND-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continuous, 75 m buffers are recommended around coniferous bogs, fens, and other wetlands suitable for Rusty Blackbirds. These buffers should provide nesting habitat and increase nest survival.<sup>3,11</sup>
- Voluntary buffering of, or retention patches anchored around, small or vernal pools is recommended, particularly if the surrounding vegetation contains short, small-diameter, dense conifers (black spruce, tamarack, or balsam fir).<sup>1,10</sup>
- Precommercial thinning of small-diameter conifers is discouraged in cutblocks adjacent to coniferous wetlands or streams, as the reduced cover will make Rusty Blackbird nests more vulnerable to predators.<sup>10</sup>