

# Swainson's Thrush (*Catharus ustulatus*)

*Pennsylvania Candidate Rare Bird Species*

**State Rank: S2S3B; S5N** (impaired/vulnerable, breeding; secure, non-breeding) **Global Rank: G5** (secure)

## Identification

The Swainson's thrush, a member of the thrush family (Turdidae), is a discrete and secretive woodland songbird. It can be identified by its gray-brown back, buffy cheeks, and buffy eye ring. The breast is white with buffy spotting, almost appearing blurred. The song is a series of ethereal flute-like phrases that slides up in pitch; the only thrush song ending with a higher note. The Swainson's thrush nests in coniferous trees and shrubs. It lays one brood of 3-4 eggs per breeding season, which lasts from mid-April – late June.



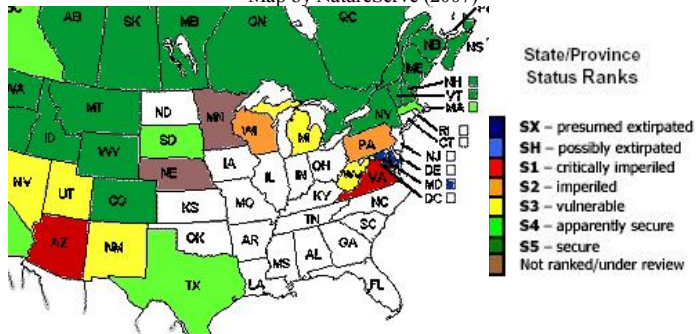
photo source: www.nps.gov

## Range

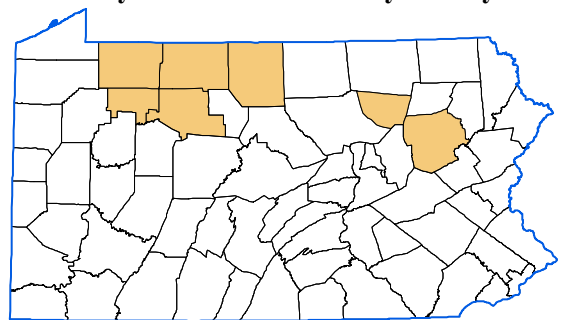
The breeding range of this species extends from Alaska, east across Canada, and south through the northern portion of the Appalachians; it is contiguous throughout the west but absent in the Midwest and southeast United States. Swainson's thrushes winter in the central Amazon.

### North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe (2007)



### Pennsylvania Distribution by County



Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program data 2007

## Habitat

The Swainson's thrush is a circumboreal species that prefers dense coniferous forests for breeding. In the Northeast, the preferred habitat is northern mixed hardwood or conifer forests, such as the Allegheny National Forest and other forested regions throughout the northern tier counties of Pennsylvania.

## Conservation Status

This species is globally secure, but declining throughout much of its range. In Pennsylvania, occurrences of breeding are uncommon to rare, and this species is considered imperiled to vulnerable throughout the state. The decline of breeding Swainson's thrushes is most likely due to the deterioration and loss of boreal forest types. In Pennsylvania, the loss of old-growth forest and logging of mature forest stands has reduced potential breeding habitat for these birds. Continued logging and fragmentation of northern forests and old-growth forests in the east will negatively affect the population status of this species. The Swainson's thrush's dependence on conifers makes it extremely susceptible to deforestation on breeding grounds. The hemlock woolly adelgid is a particular threat. A sustainable forestry practice to reduce fragmentation, such as uneven-aged management or selective cutting, is recommended.

## References

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