

Seymour, Iowa  
Feb. 28, 1981

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SCOTT

Dear Tom,

This is a long, drawn-out account of the Rathbun Curve-billed Thrasher. Pete may want to cut a lot of it. I think as I read it over that I am trying to alibi for not checking it out sooner.

I guess the outstanding feature of this winter's <sup>birding</sup> is the large flocks of Mourning Doves and Robins that wintered over. Twice in January I saw flocks of approx. 60 Mourning Doves. The other flocks have been smaller, one of about 25 last Thurs.

✓ On Jan. 9 the Robins moved into our town. Everyone was calling to report large numbers in their yard. We counted 27 at one time in our yard. The large numbers stayed about two weeks (until they'd stripped the flowering crabs, no doubt), and then gradually dispersed but not entirely. We have never been without two or three around. Unfortunately a single Robin will drive off my flock of Waxwings from the apples I keep out. My theory is that this large group of Robins was slowly migrating South. Because it had been such a good fruit summer (lots left on and under the trees) and because of the open winter they were in no hurry to get South.

✓ I have had a female White-winged Crossbill at my feeders for a week. We had been on vacation (neighbor boy keeps the feeders filled), and she was here making herself right at home at all the feeders when we returned last weekend. Her overall shape and size is surprisingly like the female Purple Finch, but her splashy white wing bars, more subtle streaking, yellowish tinge and the profile view of her beak makes for easy identification.

As you know, we've had a good winter at the Lake with many wintering waterfowl, at least one Snowy Owl, Snow Buntings and several Bald Eagles.

We've had large flocks of Purple and Gold Finch at the feeders, a few Pine Siskins and a persistent Yellow-bellied Sapsucker!

I was so glad you got to see the Thrasher after your long drive.

As ever,

Charlotte Scott

## The Curve-billed Thrasher at Rathbun

In September a friend, Jinnie (Mrs. Bob) Drum, mentioned that she had a strange gray, long-tailed bird in her yard. Her home is on the north shore of Lake Rathbun--a 25-mile drive from Seymour. I suggested it might be a Mockingbird and told her to look for white wing patches. The next time I saw her she assured me it wasn't a Mockingbird--I suggested other possibilities such as Townsend's Solitaire. Then I was gone for a month and Christmas intervened before I saw the Drums again, but they still had the bird. Jinnie reported it was getting (?) mottling on its breast and had an amber-red eye. I asked her to check the length of its bill, and she called to say it was as long as the distance on through its head. She never did mention the decurved bill, but we were both sure by now that it was a Curve-billed Thrasher.

By this time I was making trips trying to see the bird and finally on January 28, I had a very good look, <sup>and could confirm it</sup> It came first to the Drum's asparagus bed where it worked in under the dead foliage seeming to use its long bill more than its feet. Then it flew to a perch nearby (it has never eaten at their feeder) and sat for sometime so that I was able to observe that it is indeed gray, gray (absolutely no brown or taupe) with mottling of a darker gray on its breast. The eye is very red, and the bill not as curved as the bird books show. The belly is creamy-white with rich buffy coloring on the flanks. The white on the tips of the outside tail feathers is evident only when it flies and then only as a "hint". I feel this bird is a plumper bird than our Brown Thrasher, but it may be because he has his feathers fluffed more in our cold weather.

Other birders who were unable to see him in the Drum's yard and who went to the brushy area toward the Lake always reported that they heard him before they saw him--his prodigious scratching seems to have paid off however, as he has survived two snowstorms with no help from anyone in what has to be alien habitat.

I think the bird book picture that looks the most like the Rathbun bird is the one in The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds.