

Student Reference Sheet B



Introduction to the Wood Thrush

(Hylocichla mustelina)

The wood thrush can be found in the moist and shady deciduous forests throughout the eastern United States. Because the population has been declining at a rate of 1 to 2 percent each year for nearly 30 years (1966–1994), it has been the subject of many ecological research projects.

Research conducted on the breeding grounds has centered on the effects of forest fragmentation on nesting success. Forest fragmentation is the name given to the practice of breaking up large, continuous forest into smaller, isolated parcels separated by roads, houses, agricultural fields, utility lines, logging, and other development. Carving up a forested area into smaller parcels creates more forest edge relative to forest interior. This process makes the wood thrush nests more susceptible to predators such as chipmunks,

raccoons, blue jays, crows, and cowbirds. (The cowbird is a “brood parasite” that tends to select forest edges for reproduction and lays its eggs in other birds’ nests. The “foster parents” usually raise the cowbird young at the expense of their own eggs and young.)

The Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center reports that wood thrush nesting success is greatest in large forested areas. Success rates decline in fragmented areas where the smaller forest size results in increased predation on eggs and young.



Wood Thrush Creek Scenario: Present

The area around Wood Thrush Creek has been forested for many years. The area is privately owned, and Wood Thrush Creek is an excellent trout stream.

How many wood thrush nesting territories can be established in this wooded area?

Place 1-inch circles on the map to represent a nesting territory. Circles may touch but not overlap.

Wood Thrush Creek Present

