

# Sage Thrasher — Their song goes on and on

BY BRUCE MCCAMMON

In the summer, Sage Thrashers visit the shrub-steppe communities of north central Washington.

The Sage Thrasher is a robin-sized bird with a 12 to 13 inch wingspan.

Their back is a dull gray and the breast and flanks are streaked. The yellow eye is a helpful field mark for identification as is the relatively short beak and two dull wingbars.



*Bruce McCammon is retired, color-blind and enjoys photographing the birds in north central Washington.*

These birds will run on the ground as they forage for insects. They favor grasshoppers, beetles and caterpillars. They also eat berries during winter months.

Groups of Sage Thrashers may be seen in the winter as they feed on gooseberries, juniper berries or wild currants.

When you go out birding, it is always a good practice to pull safely off the road and stop your



**The Sage Thrasher: fairly dull colors, but with a song that seemingly never ends.**

motor. Roll down your windows and sit quietly for five to ten minutes to listen for bird songs or calls.

The Sage Thrasher song can last for an extended time — it seems to go on forever.

Most birds will not have long bursts of songs so if you hear one that is going on and on and on, start scanning the tops of sagebrush or shrubs for a Sage

Thrasher. They will also perch on fences or posts. Follow the song to the bird.

My most memorable encounter with a Sage Thrasher occurred in the Beezley Hills north of Quincy.

We spent several minutes watching a thrasher sitting on top of sagebrush, singing as only they can. We enjoyed several minutes of continuous warbling as the bird scanned the area. Then it took flight.

Until then, I had never seen a Sage Thrasher fly more than a few feet. This one dropped into the channels between the sage and flew like an F-15 fighter jet. It came directly toward us as it swerved gracefully between sage plants.

It passed directly in front of our vehicle and disappeared on a sinuous path through the dense sage. It was over in just a few seconds but created a last-

ing impression.

I'll always think of the Sage Thrasher as a bird with a song that never ends and the bird that flies like a jet on a mission.

As I write this, we are in a time of social isolation. A great way to stay distant from others is to hop in your vehicle and slowly drive the backroads of our wonderful shrub-steppe communities. You'll find many visiting bird species within a short distance of the roads.

Stop periodically and enjoy the quiet that will be interrupted by the sound of wind or birds singing. Scan the tops of the shrubs and sage for a bird with prominent streaking on its breast. Listen for the song that lasts longer than others.

Once you find the bird, grab your camera and take its portrait. You'll enjoy the memory every time you look at it in the future.