

# Curve-billed Thrasher:

## First Illinois Record

by Todd Fink and Judy K. DeNeal

**Y**ou know you are in trouble when the question on the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee documentation form asks "Previous experience with this and similar species" and your reply is "None." Such was the situation in which we found ourselves on 16 December 1992. We were being good little soldiers and scouting within the count circle for the Rend Lake, IL Christmas Bird Count which was to occur later that week. It already had been an extraordinary day by any standard, since we had confirmed Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Ross' and White-fronted Goose, Wood Duck, Killdeer, Tree Swallow, and Marsh Wren. But the *creme de la creme* came late in the day.

We had just reached the part of the circle we would cover on count day when a flock of blackbirds lured us down a dead-end road (we can't resist a flock of blackbirds). The weedy roadsides had a few sassafras saplings covered with vines of trumpet creeper and honeysuckle and beyond that were mostly agricultural fields. I had been down this road many times and knew that although it wasn't the most active birding area it was a likely spot for White-crowned Sparrows. Not more than a few minutes before this fated sidetrack, I had mentioned to Judy that a thrasher would be a good bird (meaning unlikely) to find on count day. After the blackbirds moved on, we crept down the road waiting for the white-crowns to pop up ahead of us. Spishing indeed produced these sparrows.

Then I saw another bird that caught

my eye. "There's a thrasher," I said relying on the general characteristics of the bird as it fit that *Toxostoma* template in my brain. But after viewing the bird with my field glasses, I realized this was no ordinary thrasher. "It's got an orange eye!" I said to Judy. "And it's gray! It's a DIFFERENT thrasher!"

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**'This was no ordinary thrasher.'**

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When the bird ducked into cover, I grabbed the camera and window mount and scooted into the driver's seat. Judy, taking care not to disturb the bird by slamming the car doors or by making sudden movements, took over the passenger seat as I put the car into gear. Calling out field marks, we realized the species was one of the southwestern thrashers, but neither of us had seen any of them except Long-billed in the hand or the bush. A quick glance at the National Geographic guide eliminated all but



*Curve-billed Thrasher, Rend Lake, Jefferson Co. 25 December 1992.  
Photo by Todd Fink.*