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## Forests fall silent with acid rain



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Song thrush: the wood thrush looks similar

Birds could disappear from North American forests because of acid rain.

Scientists have found that the pollutant is leading to a decline of one species at least.

It seems to affect the breeding habits of the wood thrush.

The bird lives on mountain slopes of the Eastern United States when it visits to breed during the summer.

A drop in numbers has been seen since the 1960s.

Research into its disappearance has focused until now on habitat loss and destruction.

### Volunteer help

“  
**This is far from the only threat against the bird**  
”  
Ralph Hames,  
Cornell University

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In the latest study, a team at Cornell University looked at a possible link between acid rain, soil acidity and impaired breeding behaviour.

They were helped by an army of amateur volunteers who collected data on the wood thrush across its territory range.

The scientists found a significant negative effect of acid rain on the likelihood of the bird breeding.

"When looking for causes of declines we have to consider changes to the environment in addition to simple habitat loss or fragmentation," Ralph Hames of Cornell University told BBC News Online.

### **Egg laying**

Pollution in the form of acid rain causes a number of effects on trees - from the loss of pine needles and leaves, to their complete destruction.

The implications for birds include fewer insects to eat, more danger from predators and changes to nesting and roosting habits.

A decline in forest food such as snail shells and earthworms may also lead to a deficiency of calcium, which the birds need to lay eggs.

It is difficult to put a number on how serious a threat acid rain is to the wood thrush, says Dr Hames.

"This is far from the only threat against the bird," he says.

The research is published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA (PNAS).

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