

Blackbird

Turdus merula



Native to much of the northern hemisphere, blackbirds are widely naturalised in New Zealand and southern Australia. They were first detected in Queensland at Cooby Dam, Toowoomba in 1986. They are limited to cooler, upland areas of South East Queensland (Stanthorpe to Toowoomba).

Legal requirements

The blackbird is not a prohibited or restricted invasive animal under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*, however everyone has a general biosecurity obligation (GBO) to take reasonable and practical measures to minimise the biosecurity risks associated with invasive animals under their control.



Queensland
Government

Local governments have a biosecurity plan that covers invasive animals in their area and may require additional actions to be taken on blackbirds; some of these may be applied under local laws. Refer to your local government for more information.

Blackbirds are prohibited wildlife under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and cannot be legally kept in Queensland.

This legal status means that, although there is no obligation to control blackbirds, they may be controlled if this is done in a way that causes the animal as little pain as is reasonable.

Local governments do not have an obligation to control blackbirds, but may do so.

Description

The blackbird is approximately 23–29 cm from head to tail (including a 9–10 cm tail) and most obvious during spring and summer when the breeding males sing from vantage points.

The male is glossy black with a bright orange to yellow bill and eye-ring. The female has dark grey-brown upper parts and mottled, light grey-brown underparts, a paler chin and dull brownish-yellow bill. Juveniles are similar to females, with lighter underparts and a streaked crown.

Blackbirds are superficially similar to the common starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*). In summer, adult starlings have iridescent black plumage and yellow bills. In winter, they have black bills, and whitish feather tips giving them a finely spotted appearance. By comparison, blackbirds are 4–5 cm longer, males have yellow eye-rings and a duller, uniformly black plumage all year round.

Blackbirds have a high, fine ‘tseee’ contact call, a distinctive song, and a harsh, almost screeching chatter of alarm when in flight.

Life cycle

Average life expectancy is 2.4 years in the wild, with oldest recorded captive bird reaching 21 years.

Most obvious during spring and summer when breeding males sing from vantage points.

Impacts

Blackbirds can spread weed species, compete with native birds, and damage orchards and vineyards. Unchecked, they could become a pest in fruit-growing areas around Stanthorpe and Warwick.

Habitat and distribution

Blackbirds prefer cooler upland parts of southern Queensland, with remaining areas considered too hot.

They can be found in rainforest, wet sclerophyll, mallee, riverine communities, coastal dune communities, wet mountain ash gullies and dry eucalyptus woodlands, and on offshore islands.

They prefer to forage on ground where leaf litter is plentiful.

Blackbirds also thrive in urban habitats such as gardens, urban bushland, parks, horticultural areas and orchards.

Blackbirds are established in Queensland, with records from the southwest to the southeast, including St George, Toowoomba, Highfields and Imbil in southern Queensland.

More information

For more information contact your local government or visit biosecurity.qld.gov.au.



Female blackbird with dull yellow eye ring and yellowish-brown bill



Common starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

