

## **SAINTS OR SWINGERS? THE MATING SYSTEM AND ASSOCIATED BEHAVIORS OF RUSTY BLACKBIRDS IN INTERIOR ALASKA**

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We examined the mating system of Rusty Blackbirds on Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska, USA, from 2009-2011. This research was in association with members from The Rusty Blackbird Technical Working Group and also part of a large state-wide collaborative research effort studying factors that limit population growth of the species. We used a combination of genetic methods and behavioral observations to determine the mating system. Four polymorphic microsatellites developed for other avian species (QmAAT21, QmAAT37, Aph54, and Mp2-43) were used to assess rates of extra-pair paternity, polyandry, and con-specific nest parasitism. Color banding of individuals, observations of feeding rates, nest defense behavior, and nest visits were employed to identify the social mating system of each nest. Preliminary results indicate that Rusty Blackbirds are not socially monogamous with polygyny and extra-pair paternity present in the study population. There was however, no evidence of polyandry or con-specific nest parasitism. An understanding of the mating system may help identify potential causes of their decline and provide basic reproductive information necessary for future population modeling.

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Courtesy of Gerhard Hoffmann