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American Robin

Turdus migratorius

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The American robin, *Turdus migratorius*, is one of the best known birds in North America. Robins are the largest member of the thrush family. Thrushes have large eyes, long legs, and strong bodies. Robins are known for their habit of feeding on earthworms in lawns and for the song they sing in the morning and evening during spring and summer.

American robins are very common and can be seen throughout the United States along forest borders, in orchards, gardens, parks, and backyards. They can be found

in southern Canada and south through Mexico, all the way to Guatemala.

Some robins migrate or fly south, for the winter. They fly to places where the weather is warm—Baja California (Mexico), the Gulf Coast, and Florida. They can fly up to 30 to 36 miles per hour and may fly 100 to 200 miles per day.

Robins fly in flocks or large groups when migrating. The flocks may include 50 to 100 birds traveling together. They do this for protection from predators and to find food and shelter.

Some robins do not migrate if winters are mild. They are called resident birds.



Where they live and why

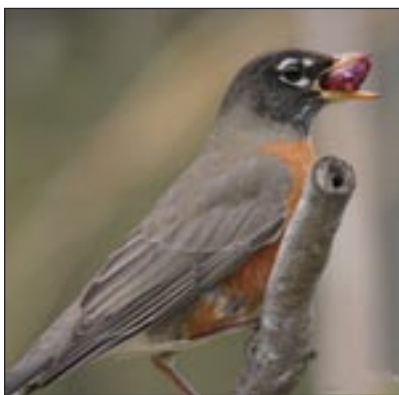


Photo: Joyce Gross

Besides insects and worms, robins like fruit, especially in fall and winter.

The American robin lives wherever there are trees or large shrubs. Many neighborhoods provide good habitat, where robins feed on insects and worms in lawns and nest in gardens and parks. They prefer partially open areas for feeding. Robins require generous amounts of fresh water for drinking and bathing.

Most robins find shelter in bushes and trees. They need a place to hide from predators, rest, raise their young, and find protection from the weather. They use dense evergreen trees and shrubs, dead trees or snags, and nesting boxes. Suburban areas with a mixture of lawns, flower beds, gardens, shrubs, and trees make excellent robin habitat.



Species description

Adult males are gray-brown, with a darker head and tail. The bill is bright yellow, and the chin is lightly striped with white. Robins have a white rim around their eyes. The breast is brick red, with a small white patch on the lower belly. Females are somewhat duller in color than males. Juvenile (young) robins have a speckled breast and back, rather than the bright red breast and dark back of adults. Robins are 8 to 11 inches long. They weigh 2 to 3 ounces and have a wingspan of 14 to 16 inches.

Robins eat a variety of foods. They run across the ground searching for earthworms, beetles, grasshoppers, ants, termites, caterpillars, flies, spiders, and snails. They also eat a lot of fruit in the fall and winter.

The breeding season for robins is from April through July. When the female finds a partner, she begins to build a nest with the male's help. The nest is cup-shaped and made from grasses or small twigs mixed with small amounts of mud. She



Illustration: Cindie Brunner

and lines the nest with fine grass.

Nests usually are located 10 to 20 feet high in a tree or occasionally may be found in bushes or on the ground. The female also may use a level human-made structure such as a window ledge or platform as her nest site.

Robins are one of the first birds to begin laying eggs in the spring. The first clutch or group of eggs usually is laid in late April or early May. The female generally lays four light blue eggs, which she incubates (sits on) until they are ready to hatch after about 12 to 14 days.

The young are born without feathers and with their eyes closed. Their parents feed them insects until they are ready to fledge or leave the nest when they are 14 to 16 days old.

Baby robins cannot fly for the first few days after they leave the nest. Their parents lead them to low shrubs and trees where they first learn to climb and jump. Within a day or two, their wings grow stronger and they begin to take short flights. Their parents continue to feed them, and within a week or two, they are ready to be on their own. When the young are strong enough, the robins may roost in big groups.

Robins may nest up to three times each year, so while the male is watching the fledging young, the female will incubate the next clutch of eggs.



Creating habitat



The best way to attract robins is to plant some of their favorite food sources. Trees and shrubs that provide fruits such as Indian plum, thimbleberry, bitter cherry, huckleberry, and Oregon grape are good choices. You also can make robin feeders. Robins don't eat bird seed. They like chopped apples, berries, and mealworms. Robins like to feed in lawns and open areas, so having some areas with short grass is beneficial.

Providing water is important for robins because they like to drink and bathe regularly. A shallow pond with a muddy area is ideal since robins use mud for nest building. Other attractive features include birdbaths with misters and drippers. These devices help prevent mosquitoes and keep the water fresher.

Planting trees and shrubs that provide cover is important. Some good choices are vine maple, currant, oceanspray, and California wax myrtle.

You also can make structures to provide shelter for robins. Nest platforms offer robins a place to build a nest. Plans for platforms can be found in books or on the Internet. A good example can be found at http://www.learner.org/jnorth/images/graphics/n-r/robin_nestbox.gif.

Robins have many predators. Domestic and feral (wild) cats kill many robins each year. Young robins are especially vulnerable when they are learning to fly because they are on the ground. Crows, jays, owls, and hawks prey on baby robins.



Photo: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Lee Karney

You can attract robins to your yard by planting trees and shrubs that produce berries.

Pesticides, or chemicals put on the land, can kill or harm robins. Pesticides also may kill worms and insects, a major food source for robins. The robins are affected when they eat the poisoned worms or berries. We can help keep robins safe by keeping cats indoors, setting out nest platforms, and by not using chemicals on our lawns and plants.

Robins help control insect populations. They also are very important for spreading seeds and for the growth of new trees and bushes in new areas. The fruit they eat contains seeds, which robins may drop in other places. Robins play an important role in nature and are fun birds to watch.



Photo: Lang Elliott

Robins are known for their cheerful song.

Fun facts

- ✈ Robins usually lay three or four light blue eggs.
- ✈ When a baby robin is born, its skin is transparent enough that you can see through it.
- ✈ Robins fly 30 to 36 miles per hour.
- ✈ The robin is the state bird of Connecticut, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

Learn more!

Csuti, Blair, et al. 1997. *Atlas of Oregon Wildlife*. Oregon State University Press, Corvallis.

Ehrlich, Paul R., et al. 1988. *The Birders Handbook*. Simon & Schuster, Inc., New York, NY.

On the Web

<http://www.naturesound.com/birds/pages/robin.html>

<http://www.wbu.com/chipperwoods/photos/robin.htm>

<http://www.enature.com/fieldguide/showRguide.asp?rguideID=712&speciesID=2194>

<http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/ramaps.html>

<http://www.birdsforever.com/robin.html>
<http://birds.cornell.edu/BOW/AMEROB/>
<http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/id/framlst/i7610id.html>

<http://www.nhptv.org/natureworks/robin.htm>

<http://www.learner.org/jnorth/search/Robin.html>

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