Red-Winged Blackbird

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Perhaps the most abundant North American bird, and certainly one of the most studied, the Red-Winged Blackbird has earned quite the reputation. Although some view this species as a pest, due to the crop damage it can cause, others appreciate it for its pleasant song and helpfulness in controlling insect populations and weeds. The male Red-Winged Blackbird is easily spotted by his scarlet epaulet feathers, which stand out in stark contrast to his all-black body. The male can either hide these brilliant red feathers, to avoid conflict with other males, or show them, for courtship displays and territorial defenses.

Interesting Facts:

Family: Icteridae

Scientific Name: *Agelaius phoeniceus*

Location: The Red-Winged Blackbird can be found in wetlands and agricultural areas across North America, ranging from southeastern Alaska and southward to Central America in the summers to southern Canada and southward in the winters.

Migration: Some populations in southern parts of North America are nonmigratory, but almost all northern Red-Winged Blackbirds winter in the South, forming huge flocks that migrate by day.

Nesting: The nest is an open cup woven of grass or marsh vegetation and wet leaves, filled with mud and lined with fine grass. The nest is usually built in or near marshlands or moist, grassy areas. A typical Red-Winged Blackbird lays 3-4 eggs. This species is highly polygynous, with one male having up to 15 different females making nests in his territory.

Diet: In nature, the Red-Winged Blackbird forages for insects, seeds, and grains.

Size and Color: A medium-sized songbird, the Red-Winged Blackbird is generally 7"-9". The male displays all-black plumage and a red shoulder patch bordered by yellow. The female looks strikingly different, displaying drab, streaky brown plumage. An immature Red-Winged Blackbird looks similar to the female with males taking up to three years to become entirely black.

Song: The Red-Winged Blackbird's song is a gurgling "oak-a-lee," while its call is a dry "chek" and "cheer."

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Attracting:	Place a seed feeder in your backyard and fill it with mixed seeds, cracked corn, or sunflower hearts. Place the feeder near trees, bushes, or other forms of shelter, as this species often needs protection from predators.
Life Span:	Approximately 2-3 years in the wild.

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