

## Backyard Kids: American Robin Profile

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



The American Robin is one of the best-known birds in North America. It was given its name by early colonists from England because it reminded them of the European Robin, a smaller, unrelated bird that also has a red breast.

The Robin is the largest of the North American thrushes. Before sunrise, you can hear its familiar song, "cheer-up, cheer cheer cheer-up." In many regions, this happy song means the start of spring. The robin was once a forest species, but it has learned to live in neighborhoods with



homes and people nearby. It feeds on worms, fruits, and berries found on lawns, and it nests in gardens and parks.

### Interesting Facts:

**Family:** Turdidae

**Scientific Name:** *Turdus migratorius*

**Location:** American Robins are found in all of the United States and Canada except for Hawaii and the northernmost parts of Alaska and Canada. They are also found in parts of Mexico and Central America. They live in open woodlands, fields, gardens and yards.

**Migration:** Some American Robins migrate, but some populations will stay in place. In spring, Robins faithfully come back to their previous territories and arrive in late March and early April. Males arrive before females by a few days. Males establish their territory with hostile chases and attacks.

**Nesting:** American Robins mate in the spring from April through July. They will have two or three broods a season and return to the same lawns year after year. The female builds a cup-shaped nest with twigs, grass and feathers. She spreads mud on the inside of the nest with her breast. After she lines the nest with mud, she will add grass and other soft materials. Sometimes males will

help collect materials for the nests. Nests are built about 5 to 15 feet above the ground in a tree or bush, though sometimes robins will build their nests on a window ledge or other flat surface on a home. The female lays 3 to 5 bluish eggs, which she will incubate for about 2 weeks. Young are born naked and blind and are fed by both parents. Young birds are fed mostly on earthworms and cutworms and leave the nest in about 14 to 16 days.

- Diet:** The American Robin eats a wide variety of foods including earthworms, fruits and berries, grubs and caterpillars. Robins rarely consume grains or other dry plant seeds.
- Size and Color:** Robins are 9" - 11" long with a wingspan of 14-3/4" - 16-1/2". Normal adult robins are dark gray above, with their head, wings, and tail almost black. Their outer tail feathers are tipped with white and their breast is light brown to rich dark brick red (darker and brighter in males). Their throats are streaked blackish and whitish (more so in males) and their lower tummy, where it meets the tail, is white.
- Special Characteristics:** Robins have a unique hop-and-stop walk in the grass while searching for earthworms. They take a few quick steps, and then stop, as if listening. They may cock their head and then quickly pounce to catch the worm. If they come up empty, they try another patch of grass. Robins are often one of the first birds to sing in the morning. The singing starts again at dusk and sometimes throughout the day. The male robin also uses its voice to protect its territory and to attract a mate.
- Song:** The Robin whistles a "cheer-up, cheer, cheer, cheer-up" melody. Its calls are: "tseep", "tuk, tuk, tuk," or "teeek" or "peek."
- Attract Them:** Robins will use your birdbaths for drinking and bathing. They are not seed-eating birds. They feed on earthworms, their favorite food. They will eat from a bird table or at feeders, however, with trays offering cut up raisins soaked in water, suet, suet mixtures, peanut butter mixtures, peanut hearts, sliced pears, strawberries, and cherries.
- Life Span:** About 10-12 years in the wild.