



Wild About Birds

Backyard birdfeeding experts!

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BirdChat: Late Summer 2011

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Species Specifics: American Robin

The robin is one of the most beloved backyard birds in North America.

Who doesn't recognize this red breast and hasn't heard its joyous "cheerio, cheeriup, cheerio" song?

At 10", the robin is the largest member of the thrush family. The male has a black head, dark gray back, wings and tail, and a brick red breast; the female has a dark gray head and paler breast. Juvenile robins, like all thrushes, have a spotted breast.

In early spring, about 5-30' high on a horizontal limb or building ledge, the female

robin builds her nest of muddy grass and small twigs lined with fine grasses. She incubates 3-7 blue eggs for about 13 days; the young robins fledge about 2 weeks later. Robins average 2-3 broods each year.

"...one of the most beloved backyard birds in North America."

Robins eat insects and worms; the bulk of their diet, though, is comprised of fruits and berries. In late fall, large flocks of robins can strip trees and shrubs clean of any remaining berries.

Our winters have been so mild the past few years that it's not surprising that robins and other thrushes, like bluebirds, have wintered over in the Cincinnati area. In fact, the robins range has expanded: their breeding territory has moved south and their wintering grounds have drifted northward.

Robins usually go back to their same territory for breeding, year after year. So, next spring, when you hear that cheerful "cheerio", it's an American Robin announcing its return to your backyard

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My "Wreath" Robins

We don't often use the front door at our house, which is a good thing, because this summer a robin decided to build a nest ON TOP of our door wreath!

I walked out the front door early one morning to retrieve the paper and noticed pieces of straw strewn about and splashes of mud on the porch. It wasn't until later that I discovered the beginnings of a robin's nest on our wreath. The wreath was a bit small and flimsy so I never

dreamed she'd finish the nest and lay eggs in it, but she did, and soon we heard peeping as mama bird was busily feeding a brood of baby robins.



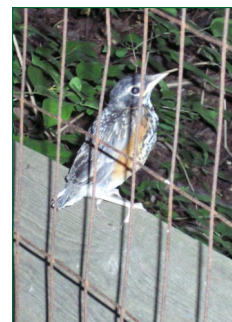
About two weeks later, three of the four little birds

fledged. One young robin stayed behind, screaming for his mama but she would have none of it! She was out in the front yard trying to coax him off that nest. The next day he made it to a bush close to the front porch and, finally, on day three he made it over to the fence and out into the woods.

As much as I enjoyed my robin family this summer, I hope mama robin picks a different location to raise her brood next year.... I really liked that wreath!



Where did everyone go?
Mama!!!!!!



I've made it this far, now what do I do?

Understanding Bird Behavior: Defense

Birds are preyed upon by hawks, owls, cats, snakes, humans, and more! They have developed probably as many different ways to respond to danger as there are species of birds. In this essay we'll discuss some of the more common defensive behavior you've probably observed in your own backyard.

Flee or Freeze –
When the birds at my feeders know that a hawk is in the yard they will either fly to the nearest cover or they will freeze on the feeder.

Threat Display –
If a threatened bird can't, or doesn't, flee and is confronted by a predator they might perform a display meant to scare off the intruder. Some species

fluff up their feathers to appear bigger; some open their mouths as if they are about to attack. Chickadees in the nest have been known to scare off a would-be attacker by making loud snake-like hissing noises.



Mobbing –
I'm sure you have heard a group of blue jays or crows carrying on in the woods and

wondered what they were up to. They had probably come across an owl or hawk in their territory and the "mob" was harassing the intruder.

Distraction Display –
Ground nesting birds often use this technique for protection from danger. Killdeers, a common ground nesting bird in our area, will feign a wing injury to lure predators away from their young then will quickly "recover" and fly away with the enemy in pursuit.

Birds use many different methods to defend themselves, their territory and their young from predators. Watch the birds in your backyard and maybe you'll observe some of this fascinating behavior.

Shop local. Support your community's economy!

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Hummingbird Migration

When should we take our hummingbird feeders down? This is a question we hear very often at this time of year; the simple answer is that you don't take it down until the hummingbirds have all migrated!

Many of you have been told in the past that if you don't take the feeder down, the hummingbirds won't leave. Believe me, this is an old wives' tale! Hummingbirds, like all migratory birds, instinctively know when to return to their wintering grounds. No amount of hummingbird feeders is going to prevent their migration. Now,

there have been documented cases of stranded hummingbirds. I read one account of a ruby-throat that was harbored in a lady's sunroom all winter after getting "lost" during its migratory trip south. But these are rare occurrences indeed!

"...leave your hummingbird feeders up until... October 31st."

Your feeders are stop-over spots for the birds migrating from further north. During migration, hummingbirds are building up fat reserves to help them make that last push across the Gulf

of Mexico. It's about a 600 mile flight and the little guys do it non-stop — about 20 hours!

My suggestion is that you leave your hummer feeders up until 1-2 weeks have gone by, during which time you have seen no hummingbirds. This could be as late as mid-October, so it wouldn't hurt to leave the feeder out until October 31st. This will ensure that all the ruby-throats migrating from North America have the energy required to get to their wintering grounds in Mexico and Central America. We want them healthy so they can turn around and return to our feeders next Spring!

