

Robin



1. Life of a robin

1.1. Courtship

In January it was time for the robins to start their family. A young male found himself a small garden with plenty of hedges and trees. He would sing for days to let the local females know where he was living, and to signal the other males to stay away from his territory.

He found a mate, or should I say, she found him and they started to build a nest. She was better at nest building than him, so she built the nest. It was built in a hedge, not far from the ground in the shape of a cup. She had used dead leaves, moss and hair to build the nest.

He would go out looking for food and often bring bits back for her to eat.

1.2. Nesting

In March, when she was ready, she laid five eggs, one a day. The eggs were white with reddish markings. She would sit on the eggs to keep them warm and protect them from danger. Robins do not like people discovering their nests. Sometimes if they think that the nest has been discovered they will abandon it.

They can nest in many different places, holes in walls, sheds, tea pots, old kettles.

1.3. Growing up

After 13 days the chicks hatched from their eggs. They were completely naked and blind.

The male was kept very busy finding food for the family. Two of the chicks died; one fell out of the nest and was eaten by a cat, and the other who was the youngest died from starvation.

When the remaining chicks were 14 days old they fledged. However, it was another couple of days before they were ready to fly.

As soon as their feathers had grown they left the nest. They could not fly so they hopped around staying very close to cover, with both parents keeping an eye on them.

The female prepared herself for a second brood.

1.4. Territory

Robins are very protective of where they live, their territory, and sometimes will fight each other to the death to keep hold of them. In the summer a pair will defend their territory together. In the winter they split up and defend their own territories.

As soon as a robin sees another robin's red breast, this warns them that they need to defend their territory. There are reports of robins attacking their own reflection in a mirror.

Good territories are important as they provide a continual supply of food. If a robin cannot find a good territory, then it may die of starvation.

1.5. Survival

A breeding pair of robins could be two years old when they die. Within a nest one chick only may survive to the next year.

The main dangers are cold weather, starvation and disease. Sometimes a cat or occasionally an owl or a sparrowhawk may kill a robin. If they stray on to the road they may be hit by a car.

2. General data

2.1. Identification



A young robin.

Size	Great tit size.
Appearance	<p>Robins are people's favourite garden bird. You can't mistake them with their red breast. You've probably seen their pictures on Christmas cards.</p> <p>However, you may be confused by the appearance of a young robin. They do not have a red breast until they are older, and look a spotty brown colour in appearance.</p>
Confusion	Young robins with other small brown birds.
Sound	Sings throughout the year.
When	<p>All year.</p> <p>In the late summer you may think that robins have moved away, but they are in hiding due to moulting, their need to shed old feathers and grow new ones.</p>
Where	Robins live all over the place. They prefer thick, low cover as they feed on the ground.
Movement	Robins hop when on the ground and usually take short flights. They are sprinters rather than long distance birds. They may need to fly quickly out of danger or fly into position to warn another robin away from its territory.

2.2. Feeding

Favourites	Earthworms. They also like spiders and in autumn will eat fruit, berries and seeds.
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Habits	<p>When they are looking for food they will find a low perch to check out what is on the menu. When they see something they like, they will swoop down to pick it up.</p> <p>As soon as they see a gardener they will fly in close and wait to see if he turns up any worms for them. Another friend is the mole who throws up mole-hills and often a robin will find food there.</p>
Other	<p>When the weather is cold and food hard to find they will eat from bird tables.</p>

3. Useful words

3.1. Word search

See if you can find the following words in the word search.

Robin, nest, abandon, territory, hatch, chicks, fledge

R	O	B	I	N	I	P	L	H	F
W	O	A	N	E	E	M	A	B	S
A	E	D	R	S	Y	S	U	S	I
B	A	R	I	T	R	U	K	F	O
A	A	W	H	N	U	C	O	P	E
N	T	E	R	R	I	T	O	R	Y
D	F	T	H	H	A	T	C	H	J
O	A	H	C	K	A	L	O	L	M
N	G	Q	U	S	A	Z	X	N	V
D	F	F	L	E	D	G	E	C	B

3.2. Unscramble the following words

R O W M	
ER SP NT RI	
D E E H G	
AT FE RS HE	
O R O D B	
RE TS N PA	
L O M E	
MN AU TU	
ED FUS CON	
G D N A R E	

3.3. Understanding and problem solving

Now that you know about robins have a go at answering these questions.

What shape is a robin's nest?

Why are robins interested in gardeners digging in the garden?

How does a young robin out of the nest but not yet able to fly keep out of danger?

Why might a robin attack its own reflection?

Make a list of some possible places robins may choose to build their nest.

How can moles be of help to robins?

List some of the robin's favourite foods.

Why are robins difficult to find in the late summer?