



Robin - *Erithacus rubecula*

With orange feathers on its chest and its tendency to come close to our homes and follow us around in our gardens, it's not hard to see why the robin is such a popular bird. The fact that, even in the depths of winter, the robin sings, may just be the icing on the cake.

Our resident species tend to dial down their territorial energies during the colder months, and focus on survival. Robins however keep winter territories, and both males and females sing to defend them.

Song

The song of Robins is sharp and wistful-sounding, philosophical perhaps. The phrases tend to trail off, rather than ending definitively. It's as though they are thinking aloud...not quite sure what will come out next...undecided whether they're finished.

The widespread, year-round vocals make it easy to get to know through sheer repetition.

It also has a habit of singing in the small hours, by the glow of an orange street lamp, which adds another dimension to its familiarity. If you hear a song that makes you think of a late walk through the streets, it may well be the robin.

Alarm Call

The most frequent alarm call is a 'ticking' that someone recently described to me as like two glass beads being knocked together.

It's given during the robin's frequent border disputes, and in response to roving cats and other dangers.

It is rather similar to the wren's familiar alarm note but, despite being smaller, the wren has a stronger sound, and it's often strung together into a fast trill. The robin's alarm call is usually given more sparingly, and more erratically.

As they are both species that spend much of their time on the ground, they are both useful for drawing our attention to predators.

Nesting and feeding habits

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You can see from the long, thin shape of their beaks that robins are mainly insect-eaters. They spend a lot of their time picking out beetles and grubs from the earth, which is why they particularly like following us around when we're gardening. In this act we're doing something like the ground disturbance that wild boar do in the woodlands in which robins evolved. But they are very adaptable, and will eat seeds and fruit as well, mainly in the winter months when insects are harder to find.

Robins will raise two, or sometimes three, broods of chicks during the spring and summer, with the first eggs usually laid in April. Robins are famously opportunistic in their choice of nest sites, and will make their nest with moss, and dead leaves and grasses in any sheltered spot, making use of an old shoe, a plant pot or a gap in a wall.

Links

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- [Bird Species Profile](#)
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