

# American Robin

## *Turdus migratorius*

**Winter Range:** Florida, NE Mexico, SW United States; residents exist in most of the States and into SW Canada

**Summer/Breeding Range:** Canada (breeding)

**Migration:** Short-distance or non-migratory.

**Preferred Habitat:** Lawns/short grass areas mixed with trees and shrubs, also riparian and early-successional forests in NW of range.

**Diet:** Invertebrates, esp. earthworms, and fruit.

**Nesting Characteristics:** First nest built low in evergreen tree, second nest higher in deciduous tree. Often just below thick layer of foliage, <3 m above ground. Constructed of leaves and twigs cemented with mud from worm castings. Usually constructs new nest for each brood. Recognizes BHCO eggs and will puncture and remove these from nest. Clutch of 3-5 sky blue or blue-green unmarked eggs.

**Lifespan:** Max reported 13 years, 11 months. Likely that near-complete population turnover is 6 years.

**Conservation and Management:** DDT causes increased mortality and reduced nesting success. Robins are poisoned by earthworms in diet because earthworms are resistant to DDT's effects and may have DDT levels 5x greater than surrounding soil. Pesticide use associated with adult mortality (due to poisoning) and reduced nesting success (due to lower number of earthworms treated lawns). Population stable to increasing.

**Fun Facts:** Largest, most abundant and most widespread NA thrush species. Moved across Great Plains with the introduction of earthworms in the early 1900s. Nest monitoring, handling eggs and handling nestlings does not interfere with nesting success. Can produce three successful broods in one year.

# Northern Cardinal

## *Cardinalis cardinalis*

**Range:** year-round resident in south-eastern Canada, eastern and central US, and parts of northern, eastern, and western Mexico and Central America. Breeding range has expanded north since the mid-1800s, probably because 1)warmer climate, 2)human encroachment into forested areas, increasing edge habitat, 3)increased winter food availability from feeding stations (bird feeders)

**Preferred Habitat:** Shrubs, small trees, edge habitats, plantings around buildings

**Diet:** Mostly seeds, fruit, and insects. Can peel grapes in bill to remove pulp and seeds (discards skin). Sunflower seeds are the preferred commercial bird seed.

**Nesting Characteristics:** Can start building nest as soon as late February. High rate of nest failure at all stages. Male and female may select site -in thick tangles of vines or twigs in shrubs and small trees (.25-12m). Female builds the nest, crushing twigs in her bill, bends them around her body as she turns in the nest. Bowl-shaped nest made with a rough outer layer, leafy layer, bark layer, and grassy lining. Nests are rarely reused. Clutch of 2-5 eggs. Eggs are grayish white, buffy white, or greenish white speckled with pale gray to brown.

**Lifespan:** Oldest wild female - 15 years, 9 months. Oldest wild male - 13 years, 2 months

**Conservation and Management:** Deaths from exposure to various chemicals has been reported. Both sexes will attack their reflection in windows and mirrors. Human alteration of the environment has generally been beneficial (increase in edge habitats).

**Fun Facts:** State bird of 7 US states. Both male and female sing. Plumage color is the result of ingestion and deposition of carotenoid pigments obtained from the diet during molt and may signal mate quality. Males sing throughout the year. Pairs may remain together throughout winter, but not often between seasons. Competes with Gray Catbird and American Robin for nest sites and feeding grounds.

# House Wren

*Troglodytes aedon*

**Winter Range:** Southern US and Mexico

**Summer/Breeding Range:** Southern Canada south to lower/middle US.

**Migration:** Collisions with tall TV towers suggest HOWRs migrate at night.

**Preferred Habitat:** Edge habitats, open shrubby wood-lands, woodlots, forest edges, residential areas with trees

**Diet:** Mostly small invertebrates

**Nesting Characteristics:** Readily uses human-made bird houses and have been found to prefer boxes with an exterior color of red or green over those that were blue, yellow, or white. They will also nest in a variety of crevices or cavities - old boots, cow skulls hung on walls, old woodpecker holes, etc. Prefers to nest close to vegetation, but not in locations where visibility is low. Male begins to construct nest with small twigs in an empty cavity, female completes the nest with more sticks and a lining of grass, inner bark, hair, and feathers after choosing a mate. A second brood is almost always attempted, reuse of a cavity is common. Clutch of 3-10 eggs. Eggs are white, pink-white, or grayish, speckled or blotched with reddish brown.

**Lifespan:** Can live over 7 years

**Conservation and Management:** Fragmentation of forest has increased suitable habitat - the species has been expanding southward.

**Fun Facts:** One of the most thoroughly studied passerines in north America because of their use of human-made nests and because they are ubiquitous. Both males and females sing. Males are very territorial. Pairs do not stay together after the breeding season and may desert and find a new mate for a second breeding attempt during a season.

# Carolina Wren

*Thryothorus ludovicianus*

**Range:** Resident in the eastern and south-eastern US, north-eastern Mexico and the Yucatan Peninsula.

**Preferred Habitat:** Moderate to dense shrub or brushy cover. Prefers moist bottomland to dry upland. Found in wooded residential areas with shrubs.

**Diet:** Mostly insects and spiders

**Nesting Characteristics:** Male starts nests in several locations, but the female picks the final site. Nests in tree cavities, vine tangles, conifer branches, overhangs, or man-made objects like inside garages, bird boxes, mailboxes, pockets of old coats, etc. Both sexes build nest which is often bulky and loosely constructed with bark strips, dried grass, leaves, sticks, moss, hair, feathers, shed snake skin, paper, plastic and string (1-2m high). Three broods can be raised in a season and a new nest is constructed for each attempt. Clutch of 3-7 eggs. Eggs are white, cream, or pinkish white with fine rusty-brown spots.

**Lifespan:** Oldest recap was 6 years, 1 month.

**Conservation and Management:** Warming climate, reforestation, and increase in urban habitats with bird feeders has allowed expansion north.

**Fun Facts:** Maintains territories and pair-bonds year-round. Pair-bonds maintained for life. Only males sing - to defend territory and to attract a mate. "Males often match countersing (i.e., respond to  $\geq 2$  individuals by alternating and sometimes overlapping similar songs) with neighbors, threatening them by providing strong cues to their distance; this is called ranging ([Richards 1981](#)). Only shared songs provide listeners with good distance cues; birds who hear songs not in their own repertoire are unable to accurately range their distance ([Shy and Morton 1986](#)). This phenomenon has been found in other species, and may underlie the evolution of song learning in passerines ([Morton 1986](#))."

# Song Sparrow

*Melospiza melodia*

**Winter Range:** Northern US into southern and central Canada

**Summer/Breeding Range:** Resident through eastern and western US, summer range southern US/northern Mexico and further north through the central US

**Migration:** Variable depending on location - some short-distance, some long-distance, some resident

**Preferred Habitat:** Wide range, often found in shrubby, moist areas. Resident birds are territorial year-round.

**Diet:** Seeds, fruits, and invertebrates (with seeds being more common in the winter and mostly invertebrates in the summer). Prefer millet to other commercial seeds.

**Nesting Characteristics:** Pair searches for nest site, female builds nest - a sturdy, open cup made mostly of grass, weed stems, leaves, and strips of bark. Common in low grass and shrubs (0-4m). Nests almost never reused. One of the Brown-headed Cowbird's favorite host species. Two or three broods per season is common, with up to 7 attempts where birds are resident. Clutch of 1-6 eggs. Eggs are blue, blue-green, or gray-green spotted with brown, red-brown, or lilac.

**Lifespan:** Maximum 8-9 years

**Conservation and Management:** Habitat loss is a threat to some of the less common subspecies.

**Fun Facts:** One of the most diverse and widespread songbirds in North America, with 24 diagnosable subspecies and up to 52 proposed subspecies. Song has 'regional dialects' and is usually sung by the male from a high perch (the female with sometimes sing in response to a territory dispute with another female in the spring).

# Northern Mockingbird

*Mimus polyglottos*

**Range:** Resident through very southern Canada, the US and Mexico with recent northward expansion. Some pairs stay on one territory year-round, other have distinct breeding and wintering territories.

**Migration:** Northern populations may be partially migratory.

**Preferred Habitat:** Parks, cultivated land, second growth habitat, likes lawns for foraging and is common in suburban habitats.

**Diet:** About 50% fruits and 50% arthropods (mostly beetles, ants, bees, wasps, grasshoppers) and some earth worms.

**Nesting Characteristics:** Male may construct as many as three nests before any eggs are laid. Male builds the foundation of twigs and the female adds a few twigs and the lining (grass, roots, dead leaves, trash). Built in shrubs and trees, occasionally on buildings, 1-3m high. Up to four broods per season, commonly overlapping with the male caring for fledglings while the female incubates the next clutch. Clutch of 2-6 eggs. Eggs are pale blue or greenish white, splotched with red or brown.

**Lifespan:** Not well known... caged birds can easily live more than 6 years (with one historical account of a bird living to be 20!) and wild birds with established territories have lived 8 years.

**Conservation and Management:** Introduced in some areas through caged bird trafficking (popular as "pets" from the 1700s to the early 1900s because of their song), have expanded their range thanks to clearing of forested areas.

**Fun Facts:** Males and females sing, but females rarely sing during the summer. Males have a repertoire of often over 150 song types which change and increase in number over its life. Spring and fall repertoires are different. They imitate songs of other birds, other animals, mechanical sounds, and songs of other

Mockingbirds. The song serves mainly to attract females. Highly territorial. Monogamous, usually for the breeding season, sometimes for life.

## Gray Catbird

*Dumetella carolinensis*

**Winter Range:** South Florida, Caribbean, Jamaica, along Gulf Coast in US and Mexico, and south to Panama. Resident along coast of mid-Atlantic states and in Bermuda.

**Summer/Breeding Range:** Eastern US, Great Plains, and south-central Canada.

**Migration:** Nocturnal neotropical migrant. More immature GRCA found along coasts, versus inland, during fall migration. Gives mewing call frequently at stopover sites at dusk and dawn.

**Preferred Habitat:** Dense shrubs, shrub-sapling early successional forest. Present in a wider variety of habitats on wintering grounds, including rain forest, pasture, and citrus groves.

**Diet:** Insects (esp. ants, caterpillars, moths, beetles, grasshoppers, flies) and small fruits.

**Nesting Characteristics:** Usually nests <2m above ground. Nest located centrally in surrounding vegetation, may be near trunk of tree. Bulky, open-cup nest with three distinct layers. Clutch of 1-6 eggs, usually 2-3 broods per year. Eggs are turquoise green, sometimes with small red spots.

**Lifespan:** Max reported 10 years, 11 months.

**Conservation and Management:** Human disturbance beneficial when it creates additional early successional habitat. Large numbers killed by tower collisions during (nocturnal) migration. Breeding population in SE US declining.

**Fun Facts:** Both sides of the syrinx operate independently; can sing two songs at once. Over 100 different syllables incorporated into calls and song. Density increases linearly with increasing shrub density.

## Carolina Chickadee

*Poecile carolinensis*

**Winter Range:** Occurs year-round in south-central and southern US, and southern Midwest.

**Migration:** Non-migratory.

**Preferred Habitat:** A variety of deciduous and coniferous forests, also tree-shrub savannas (but not grassland savannas).

**Diet:** Spring/Summer/Fall: insects, esp. lepidoptera, and spiders. Winter: insects and fruits equally. Caches seeds and invertebrates.

**Nesting Characteristics:** Pairs form in flocks in wintering season. Relies on dead snags or live trees for cavities in which to nest. Pair may excavate and begin building at several sites before settling on where to nest. Will nest in boxes 8m apart, but not as close as 1.5m. Clutch of 3-10 eggs, usually one brood per year. Eggs are white with fine dots to small blotches of reddish brown.

**Lifespan:** Maximum recorded 10 years, 11 months

**Conservation and Management:** Deforestation has decreased available habitat, but availability of food from feeders and nest boxes has been a benefit (although nest destruction by House Wrens is also more likely in suburban areas and may be causing a decline in population).

**Fun Facts:** Active and aerobic when gleaning insects and spiders from branch tips. Between 40% and 60% survive the winter due to specialized adaptations to reduce cold stress, e.g. regulated nocturnal hypothermia. Broader song repertoire than related Black-capped Chickadee, and hybrids between the two exist where ranges overlap.