

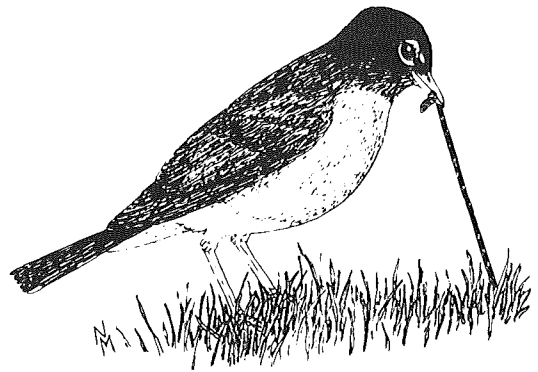
## American Robin

*Turdus migratorius*

Long popularized in verses (many of which refer to the unrelated European Robin [*Erithacus rubecula*]), the American Robin rivals apple pie as an American institution. Certainly it is the most familiar bird to millions of casual observers across the country. The American Robin owes its success, if not its popularity, to its ability to adapt to man-altered environments and to a prodigious reproductive ability. A single pair has been known to raise up to three broods in a breeding season; normally two are raised (Terres 1980).

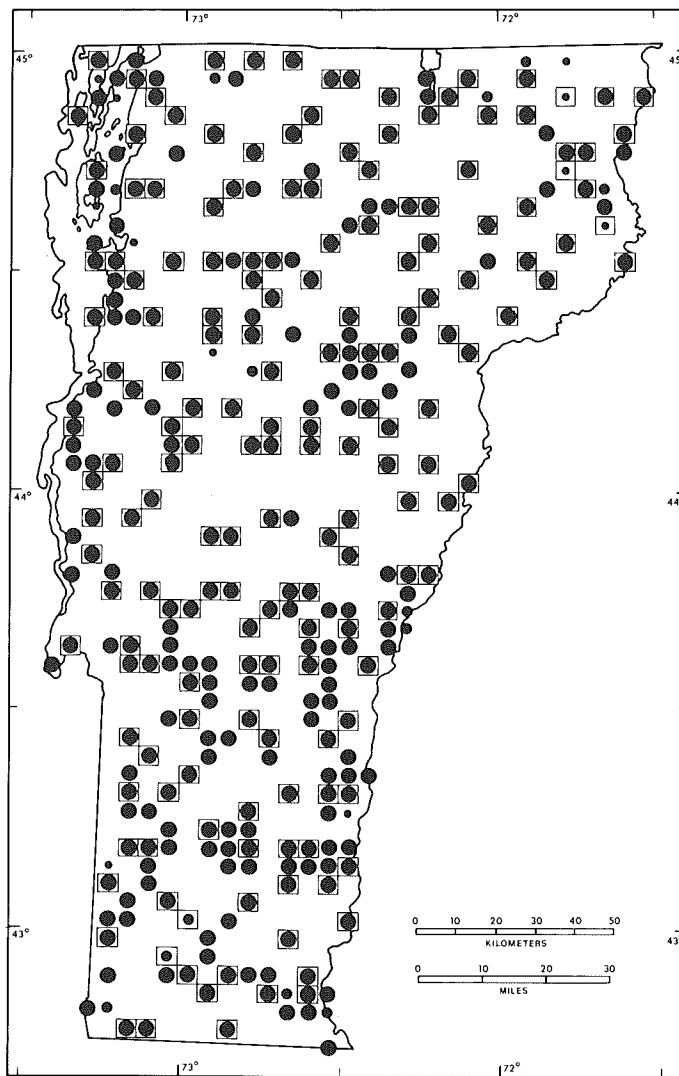
Although American Robins bred in every Atlas Project priority block within Vermont, the species is noticeably scarce, even rare, in forested areas unbroken by roads or human habitation. In the vicinity of such openings, however, the robin thrives, and consequently ranks as one of the most abundant species in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Breeding Bird surveys in Vermont. Around towns and villages their conspicuousness is heightened by their habit of foraging on mowed lawns (Eiserer 1980) and in other open areas for worms and insects, as well as by their prolonged breeding season, which keeps pairs busy about their nest sites from April through July. Cohabitation with man has exposed robins to a variety of toxic chemicals, and reproductive failures noted in robin populations were among the first signs alerting environmentalists to the dangers of DDT (Hickey and Hunt 1960). Though still exposed to a myriad of pesticides and herbicides, robin populations appear to be thriving in areas where they were once depleted (Beaver 1980).

A few hardy individuals may occasionally overwinter in mild years if fruits and berries are abundant, but most of Vermont's American Robins winter in the southern U.S. and Mexico in flocks numbering in the thousands. One of the harbingers of spring, male robins may return to set up their territories in early March, and females may return to initiate nest construction and incubation in



April. Courtship displays are poorly documented for the American Robin despite its abundance around man's residences. Overt displays that lead to pair formation are unknown. Various "tail-flick," "tail-lift," and "wing-droop" displays described by Stokes (1979) are attributed to aggressive behavior rather than courtship. Although males sing vigorously throughout the nesting period, territorial defense is sporadic and the defended territory small (less than 0.1 ha [0.25 a]). Much of the pair's activity takes place away from the area actively defended. Densities of up to 100 pairs per sq km (41 per 100 a) have been recorded in central Vermont woodlands around dwellings and old fields (Nicholson 1978).

Robins prefer evergreens for nest sites early in the year, but nesting success has been found (Knupp et al. 1977) to be higher in deciduous trees once they leaf out. Fences, window ledges, or the ground may be used later in the year. Nest building may be initiated up to 2 weeks before egg laying, but the nest may be reused for subsequent broods (Stokes 1979). The nest, usually a deep cup of mud and grass with a fine lining of grass, may be placed as high as 23 m (75 ft) above the ground, although the normal range is 3–5 m (10–15 ft). Three to 4 pastel blue eggs constitute a normal clutch, but as many as 7 have been noted (Harrison 1978). Seventy-four Vermont egg dates range from April 25 to July 17. Incubation, almost exclusively the female's domain, takes 11 to 14 days, rarely less. The male is inattentive at night and may even roost communally with other males during incuba-



**No. of priority blocks in which recorded**

TOTAL 179 (100%)

Possible breeding: 3 (2% of total)

Probable breeding: 2 (1% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 174 (97% of total)

**Physiographic regions in which recorded**

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	31	100	17
Green Mountains	54	100	30
North Central	19	100	11
Northeast Highlands	16	100	9
East Central	19	100	11
Taconic Mountains	16	100	9
Eastern Foothills	24	100	13

tion; however, both parents tend the nestlings until fledging, 9 to 16 (average 13) days later (Stokes 1979). Sixty-seven Vermont nestling dates range from May 5 through September 1. Fledglings may remain within the male's territory for 2 to 3 weeks, while the female incubates the next brood. Fledglings have been recorded from May 21 through September 1.

Robins are among the easiest species to confirm as breeders. Nests are relatively large and conspicuous, and may persist until long after leaves fall. Occasionally they may even serve as a base for next year's nest. Adults carrying nesting material, food, or fecal matter are easily sighted, particularly

since nest defense and mobbing behavior are common in this species when young are present (Shedd 1982). The newly fledged, boldly spotted young (their spots confirm their phylogenetic ties with other thrushes) are also readily identified. Consequently, American Robins had a higher confirmation rate (97%) in Atlas Project priority blocks than any other species.

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