

## APRIL 15 – 30, 2021 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

By Dick Harlow

### AMERICAN ROBIN



1. American Robin, *Turdus migratorius*, male.  
© Dick Harlow

In spring people look forward to hearing the calls of the American Robin or seeing them looking for worms in the front or backyard. That is a sure sign that spring is here regardless of the weather and that summer is not far behind.

We think of the American Robin as being universal to the United States. That is not quite true. There are in fact seven subspecies of the American Robin that are recognized. These subspecies intergrade with each other and therefore are weakly defined.

Those seven subspecies are:

- The Eastern robin (*T.m. migratorius*), this is the nominate subspecies, that breeds in the U.S. and Canada.
- The Newfoundland robin (*T.m. nigrideus*) breeds from coastal northern Quebec to Labrador and Newfoundland.

- The Southern robin (*T.m. achrusterus*) breeds from southern Oklahoma east to Maryland and western Virginia south to Northern Florida and the gulf states.
- The Northwestern robin (*T.m. caurinus*) breeds in southeastern Alaska through coastal British Columbia to Washington and northwestern Oregon.
- The Western robin (*T.m. propinquus*) breeds from southeastern British Columbia southern Alberta, and southwestern Saskatchewan south to southern California and northern Baja California.
- The San Lucas robin (*T.m. confinis*) breeds above 1,000 m (3,300 ft) in the highlands of southern Baja California.
- The Mexican robin (*T.m. phillipsi*) is resident in Mexico south to central Oaxaca.

The male and female Robin look very similar, but you still can tell them apart. The male, (Picture #1 & 3), is brightly colored whereas the female (Picture #2) is much lighter, duller. The dark almost black head of the male contrasts to the lighter almost dark gray to dull gray head of the female. The bright orange-red breast of the male is dominant but muted on the female. Also, the back of the female is lighter gray; all muted colors are necessary to blend in with the environment so they will not stand out. This sort-of camouflage is necessary to protect the female as she sits in the nest and protects the young.

The primary breeding habitat of the American Robin is anywhere there are

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shrubs, trees, or bushes. Suburban, rural or in city parks you will find robins. In the spring robins prefer to nest in evergreens due to the cover that an evergreen provides. For their second nest they prefer deciduous trees with the nest usually not being higher than 7 to 12 feet off the ground. The same would be true for their third nest for those extending nesting in the southern state into July.



**2. American Robin, *Turdus migratorius*, female.**  
© William Young

Before the nesting season, but once early spring arises male robins stake out preferred territory that they will defend. Any other male robin coming into the first robin's territory will be accosted and driven out. If not, the interloper will take over the territory. Once a male has successfully enticed a female to mate, he will defend his nesting territory to the death. Both parents will defend their territory and are responsible for feeding their young. Usually there are four to five young per clutch.

You may see two or more male robins either looking for food or catching worms in the same field or lawn. When that

occurs those robins have staked out that area as a common feeding area where there will not be any confrontation.

It makes absolute sense that territories are set up in the first place. Territories allow a pair of robin's spaces to find food and shelter without competition or harassment from the same species, and time to watch and defend their space from possible interlopers and predators.



**3. American Robin, *Turdus migratorius*, male.**  
© youtube.com

Robin nesting usually starts in April and ends in July. After the nesting season is over and the young are on their own robins tend to gather loosely at first. By Fall robins are beginning to gather in larger flocks and by winter can be seen congregating on berry trees whose fruit becomes more nutritious and palatable with age during Winter.

The primary enemies or predators of robins vary from the egg to juvenile to adult. Squirrels, snakes, jays and crows will feed on eggs or juvenile nest bound young. However adult robins need to fear Cooper's, or Sharp-shinned Hawks and even larger snakes. For that matter robins need to be aware of any bird of prey. Under the right circumstance robins could

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be preyed upon by eagles or owls. Mammals such as raccoons or weasels, prey upon nests and sometimes adults. Probably the worst mammalian predator is the cat either stray or an actual house cat.

Add in all the various predators, robins must deal with daily and then consider the vast number of birds that are killed by flying into radio towers, buildings, and windows. All kinds of man-made structures e.g., wind turbines kill migrating birds of all sizes and shapes. It is fortunate and a wonder we can observe these beautiful, feathered creatures.

### Month of APRIL 1-30, 2021

*All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EST).*

### PRECIPITATION

**Average April Precipitation for Vermont = 2.83 inches.**

**Total precipitation for April was 99.4 mm or 23.9 inches. This is 1.07 inches above the monthly average for this month.**

**Overcast Days: We had 18 days, two weeks and four days of overcast skies. Of those overcast skies 12 days produced rain. Especially the last two days of the month were rainy allowed us to gain on the draught.**