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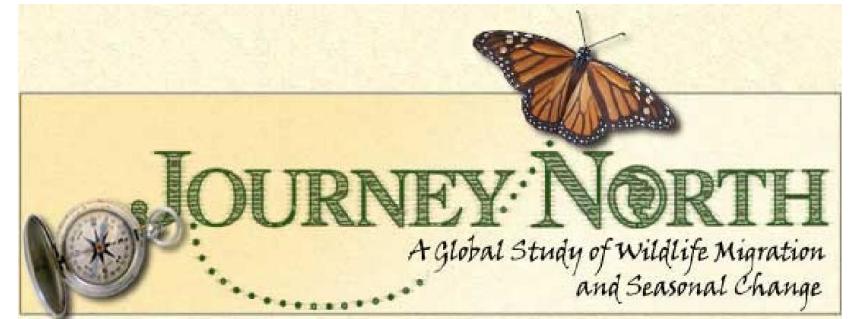


Photo © Sandra Bedford

## What Do Robins Eat in the Wintertime?

Written by Journey North



Photo © Vincent Hevern



Photo © Chris Early

### **An Important Time to Eat!**

Snow covers the frozen soil.  
Earthworms stay underground.  
What do robins eat in wintertime?  
Food is even more important than  
shelter in cold weather. It fuels  
metabolism, giving robins the fat  
and energy they need to move,  
stay warm, and survive.

### **Finding Winter Food**

Winter robins eat berries and other  
fruits left on shrubs, trees, and  
vines. Fruit is high in calories and  
doesn't spoil quickly in cold  
temperatures. Summer's leftover  
fruit becomes a robin's winter diet.



Photo © K. DeMusey



Photo © Journey North

## Follow the Food

Robins are **nomadic** in the winter. They move in search of food. They do not occupy and defend a home territory as they do during the breeding season. Most winter robins travel in flocks. Tens, hundreds, even thousands may fly together.

## Eat and Go

In winter, hungry flocks may appear suddenly on berry-filled trees. The robins feast on the fruit until the tree is bare. Winter robins go where the food is and stay until it's gone.



Photo © Elizabeth Howard



Photo © Ann Cook

## **Favorites First**

Robins eat the tastiest fruits first. By late winter and early spring they may have to shift to less favored, less nutritious leftovers. This robin settled for sumac berries when caught in an April snowstorm.

## **Food as Fuel**

If robins have enough food, they can survive extreme cold. Robins make their body heat by shivering. The energy to shiver comes from food. This robin has also fluffed out its feathers to help it stay warm.



Photo © Dave Mansell

### **Feeding Winter Robins**

You can offer robins frozen or fresh fruit. Place apple slices, raisins, blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, or cherries on the ground. Robins may not visit bird feeders.

Young robins learn that fruit grows on trees and shrubs. They just don't expect to find it anywhere else!



Photo © Journey North

### **Birdseed? No Thanks!**

Even the hungriest robin would never eat birdseed. Robins can't digest seeds and their beaks are not built for cracking. Instead, you could buy mealworms at a pet store for your winter robins.



Photo © Becky Stanton

### Got Water?

Robins need water—even in the winter. When water sources are frozen, thirsty birds must eat snow. You can set out a bowl of shallow water when the temperature is above 10°F. When it's colder, the steam given off by freezing water coats feathers with ice, and the birds can't fly. Bathing is important, though. Dirty feathers lose insulation properties, so a clean bird is a warm bird.



Photo © Cindy Hipschen

### Food For Thought

Warm and fed, this robin survives winter. Do you think he is looking for signs of spring?