



Different names

The Robin's scientific name is *Erithacus rubecula*. The word *erithacus* is derived from the Greek name of a bird similar to the Robin. Rubecula means 'little red'.

The English name Robin goes back to the 15th century, when it became popular to give human names to familiar species. This bird came to be known as robin redbreast, which was eventually shortened to robin.

In Sweden it is called Rödthake, meaning red chin.

The Maltese name is Pitorross, a name derived from the Italian name for the same bird, and means 'red breast'.

In Spain it has several different names: Petirojo (meaning bird with red breast), Pit-roig, Paporrubio, and Txantxangorria.



Funders and partner organisations

Green Recovery Challenge Fund



Myths and legends

A renowned gardener's friend, robins are also sometimes seen as messengers for the spirit world. There are numerous anecdotes about their presence being a comfort following the passing of a loved one. Robins are quite bold and aren't too concerned by the presence of a human which could have aided this reputation.

Other myths include if a robin should enter your house at any time of year except November, it heralded a death in the household.



In Norse mythology, robins were storm birds, sacred to Thor, the god of Thunder.

There are many legends in Sweden, Spain and Malta about how the robin got its red breast. Many are similar with only slight variation from one country to another. One is that when the bird with its beak tried to pull out the thorns that scarred the Savior's forehead as he hung on the cross, a drop of blood from Christ's head fell on the bird's breast and colored its feathers red.

The red color of the robin has in many places been interpreted as the one who brought the fire to humans.

An alternative legend says that the robin's chest was burned when it fetched water for souls in purgatory.

In other stories, his chest is burned by fanning the fire to warm the newborn Jesus, and the burn gives rise to the red color of his breastplate.

In some cultures, the song of the robin was associated with a cry when someone was sick, so it was often considered a herald of death, something like owls today.



Traditions

In Victorian England, postmen wore red coats, and when sending Christmas cards took off commercially in the 1860s, robins were often depicted as postmen with a Yuletide message in their bills. The Victorians even nicknamed their postmen “robins”, since their uniform included a red coat.



Several English and Welsh sports organisations are nicknamed “the Robins”, including Bristol City Football Club, in which the robin features in its crest.

In Sweden, the robin was always welcomed since it was believed that this little bird brought happiness with it. There are several other beliefs from Sweden associated with the robin, including:

- When a bride and groom met a robin when they left the wedding, it meant that they would have a successful marriage.
- If the robin settled near a house, this house was protected from the thunder.
- Anyone who happened to break a robin’s leg would themselves suffer a broken leg.
- Whoever stole a robin’s egg could risk falling victim to the witches and the evil one.
- A hand that killed a robin would forever tremble.

In Malta, many people still believe that the same robin keeps coming to their garden or backyard year after year. The bird is now greatly associated with Christmas season too! So much so that many people have the false impression that it arrives in Malta at around Christmas. In fact, Robins arrive in September or October and overwinter, leaving back to their breeding quarters at around March.

Unfortunately, until 1980’s Robin trapping was a favourite pastime practiced in October by thousands of boys in Malta, even though the bird has been protected since the 1930’s. Most birds died within days of being trapped. A series of educational activities in schools against robin trapping was organised nationwide by BirdLife Malta in the 1980’s. The campaign managed to eradicate this practice for good!

Following the success of this educational initiative, BirdLife Malta broadened its scope to include the environment as a whole and human influence on it. At this point a need was felt to create resources applied to local flora, fauna and habitats, as all existing environment education material was based in other countries. An Action Guide was written by educators within the NGO and distributed to all Primary Schools.

It is important to look at culture and traditions, but also learning from our past for a better future.



The benefits of having birds in your garden

All birds, robins included, add color and music to outdoor spaces. Bird watching is relaxing, and sitting in the patio seems a little more enjoyable when accompanied by songbirds. While birds are delightful, they have much more to offer than aesthetics:

- Caring for birds by providing food and habitats encourages children to spend time outside and teaches them the importance of nurturing mother nature. When kids participate in caring for wild birds, they develop respect for the environment.
- Indigenous trees and shrubs planted in your garden will attract birds, and by eating their fruit and berries, birds will help to disperse seeds to other locations.
- Important members of the food chain, birds offer natural pest control. Wild birds help manage pests, such as mosquitoes and aphids.



3 easy ways to attract birds to your garden

1. Provide shelter

Plant indigenous shrubs and trees, where birds can roost at night and build their nest during the breeding season. Try adding one or two nest boxes for hole-nesting birds.

2. Provide food

A well-stocked bird feeder helps birds survive the harsh winter months when food becomes scarce and/or very hard to find. If you'd like to attract robins at your bird feeder, try with chopped apples, berries and mealworms. They don't eat birdseed. They prefer to forage for their food in lawns and open areas.

3. Install a bird bath

Shallow bird baths provide water not just for bathing but also for drinking. Change the water regularly and clean the bird bath frequently so as not to spread diseases among birds.

