THE ROBIN

Few birds are as instantly recognisable as the robin. With its bright orange-red breast, neat shape and confident stance, it has become one of Britain's best-loved garden birds.



Robins are fiercely territorial. A male and female may defend their own patch all year round, using song and display to warn other robins away. That beautiful, seemingly cheerful song is also a declaration: this is my territory.

Listen carefully and you may hear a robin almost anywhere — in woodland, parks, hedgerows and gardens. Robins often sing through winter, when many other birds are quiet. Their clear, delicate song can make them seem much closer than they really are.

ROBIN FOLKLORE

A robin may follow someone digging in the soil, waiting patiently for insects and worms to be uncovered. Over generations, this behaviour has helped make the robin a familiar companion to gardeners and woodland workers.



Robins have sometimes been regarded as messengers from the spirit world, particularly after the death of a loved one. Their sudden appearance at a window, in a garden, or somewhere unexpectedly familiar could be interpreted as a sign that a departed person was nearby.

There's also a strong British and Irish tradition of seeing the robin as a guardian of the home. Its appearance could bring comfort, suggesting that someone remembered was still watching over the living.

NESTING

Robins can start breeding surprisingly early. In Britain, nesting can begin as early as March, sometimes even earlier in mild conditions.

A female usually lays 4–6 eggs, which are pale with reddish-brown speckles. She typically lays one egg each day, often in the early morning. The female does most of the incubation, which lasts around 13–15 days. Robins may raise two or even three broods in a year, giving them a busy spring and summer.

They are famously adaptable nest-builders. A nest might be tucked into a bank, hedge or tree hollow — but robins have also been known to nest in shed corners, plant pots, boots and even pockets of discarded clothing.



ROBIN MIGRATION

Most adult robins remain in Britain year-round, often defending the same territory through winter. Some British robins move south or southwest, crossing the English Channel to France, Spain, or Portugal. Females and younger birds are more likely to migrate than established males.

Robins from northern and eastern Europe arrive in the UK for winter, so a robin seen in Britain in January may have travelled from Scandinavia, Germany, or farther east.

Migration usually happens at night, mainly during autumn and spring. Robins navigate using landmarks, the stars, the Sun, and Earth's magnetic field. Rather than forming large flocks, they generally migrate alone and in short stages, stopping to feed and rest.

So Britain's winter robin population is a mixture of local residents, short-distance travellers, and continental visitors.

