



The Robin

The robin is undoubtedly the nation's favourite bird. In a 2015 survey it was reported that *'37% of British people say the Robin should be Britain's national bird. This is more than three times as many as vote for the runner up, the barn owl, on 11%'*

The robin is also one of the most common - with more than six million breeding pairs. It doesn't migrate, being mainly sedentary and not moving more than 5km, so it is here with us for every month, and every season, of the year.

As the Christmas season is fast approaching, it seems appropriate to ask why can we expect a number of the cards that we might receive to depict a picture of the robin - almost certainly with a background of snow and or holly. The link between robins and Christmas was given a major boost in Victorian times. The postmen of those times wore bright red uniforms and were nicknamed 'Robins'. As the Christmas season approached people would eagerly await the arrival of the postman, and as a result greeting card artists would start to design greeting cards with this theme. It was a short step to swap the postman in his red uniform for an actual robin - to begin with depicted with a card in its beak. Some think that there is a hint of paganism in our choice of robin for our Christmas cards - Mark Cocker in 'Birds Britannica' says 'like the holly wreath with its bright-red berries, it provides a splash of living colour in a dead world'.

Many people think that the robin they see in their garden is the same one revisiting time and time again. Sadly, mortality is high in robins and its causes are many and varied. Only about 40% of fledged birds will survive from one year to the next, with the average life span being no more than 1 year, 1 month. However, the good news is that high levels of mortality are compensated for by high productivity, with many pairs having up to three nests per year - such that the robin population has increased by over 40% since 1970.

Severe winter weather can have a major negative impact on robins. A robin can use up to 10% of its body weight during one cold winter's night, and unless able to feed well every day to replenish its reserves, a prolonged cold spell can be fatal.

So, bird tables can make a big difference to the survival of robins. The favourite bird table treat is mealworms. Other useful foods are dried fruits, cake and biscuit crumbs, fats, cheese and meaty kitchen scraps.

So go on - put out the bird table and give the robin a Happy Christmas too!

And don't forget to buy bird seed, fat balls and peanuts well ahead, ready for [Big Garden Birdwatch](#) during the weekend of 28th- 30th January, 2022.

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