

BIRDS IN OHIO IN 1912



*A man's interest in a single bluebird is worth more than
a complete but dry list of the flora and fauna of a town.*

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

THE THRUSH FAMILY

IN THE CLASSIFICATION OF BIRDS, the thrushes have been accorded first place. As songsters, they take high rank; their voices being wonderfully sweet and expressive. They are wood-inhabiting, for the most part, and migratory. During migrations, they are more or less gregarious, when they frequent gardens, fields, and woodlands in flocks. The group is represented in Ohio by five species of true thrushes and two closely allied species — the Robin and the Bluebird. The true thrushes occur only in summer or during the migrations; the Robin and the Bluebird are also summer residents but are of more or less frequent occurrence in all sections of the state during winter. The food of the thrushes and their allies is very similar and is largely insectivorous, consisting for the most part of injurious forms. The greater portion of fruit eaten is of wild varieties and agreeable only to the birds.

BLUEBIRD*

Sialia sialis (Linn.)

BECAUSE OF THE ASSOCIATION between the Bluebird and springtime, it is one of the best known of our birds. In spring its cheery warble is in harmony with the season, and its plaintive notes in the fall suggest the dying year. It is essentially a summer bird, though large numbers winter in the extreme southern part of the state and small numbers in all parts. It is a lover of the open fields and sunshine and is esteemed by country folk, in general, more than any other bird. Two or three broods are reared in a natural cavity; in a tree, post, or rail; or in a box provided for the purpose.

Of its food, seventy-six percent consists of insects and other small animal forms; twenty-four percent is of vegetable substances, taken mostly in winter. Of the whole food, beetles constitute twenty-eight percent, grasshoppers twenty-two percent, and caterpillars eleven percent. Its only offense is the eating of a few beneficial beetles, amounting to eight percent of its food for the entire year. The Bluebird is harmless as far as vegetable food is concerned, as this consists of wild fruits and seeds taken when insects are difficult to obtain, including blackberries, pokeberries, and juniper berries; the fruit of bittersweet, greenbriar, and Virginia creeper; and sorrel, ragweed, and grass seeds.

By way of encouragement during the breeding season, nesting boxes should be provided. Planting shrubs which retain their fruit through cold weather may be the means of inducing many Bluebirds to winter over nearby. Protection should be given them at all times.†

* Now Eastern Bluebird.

† It is, through the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918.

ROBIN*

Planesticus migratorius (Linn.)†

LONG ASSOCIATION with the abode of man has won for the Robin wide acquaintance, both in rural communities and in towns and cities. At one time a forest dweller, it has gradually adapted its manner of living to changed conditions, incident to the settling of the country, until, at present, few are found nesting far from the haunts of man. When not molested, little fear is shown of man. The Robin is a ground feeder, being especially partial to lawns and gardens. Little preference is shown in the selection of a nesting site, and nests are frequently found in the most unlooked-for places.

At the approach of fall this species becomes gregarious, deserting its summer haunts for the open woodland, where in large numbers it forages for wild fruits and insects.

The food varies with the season; the most easily obtained is usually taken. More than one-third of the entire food consists of injurious insects; forty-seven percent of wild fruit; and four percent of cultivated fruit, which is taken principally during June and July when wild fruit is scarce. Wild fruit is eaten every month of the year and is the most important food for half of the year. The Robin is one of the most important enemies of the white grub, besides which cutworms, wireworms, various caterpillars, various beetles, and many other insects injurious to crops are eaten in varying proportions.

Wild fruits seem to be preferred before cultivated, but of the cultivated kinds, the small sorts suffer most, and the man having but a few cherry trees or a small patch of strawberries loses most heavily. The planting of wild fruits around the orchard, especially those which fruit at the time when cultivated small fruits ripen, will save much of the cultivated crop which would otherwise be lost. All wild fruits are eaten by the Robin, but a few favorites are wild cherries, wild grapes, sumac, poison ivy, elderberries, and mulberries.

* Now American Robin.

† Now *Turdus migratorius*.