

12 ACRES IN OHIO

America's Favorite Backyard Bird

Gena Husman/Robin Arnold

At dusk, near the end of February this year, we saw a flock of 30-40 robins in the field just behind the shed. It's not uncommon for some robins to form flocks and remain in cold northern areas all winter, while others migrate southward. As spring approaches, the flocks break up, the migrating robins come back, and the males begin claiming their territory, usually



in the same area they nested in in previous years. The maple tree outside our bathroom window was home for many years to a robin family that built its new nest on top of the previous year's nest.

It is the female who selects the site and builds the nest. She works from inside the nest; first making the outer walls with twigs and grass, then carrying mud which she shapes into the inner cup of the nest by rotating her body and pressing it with her breast.

Within a few days she lays her first egg. She lays an egg a day until she has her clutch of 3-4 eggs, which she then begins incubating for 12-14 days. Typically, there are two broods each year.

Around the end of April, we found 4 nests in various spots around the property. One of the most notable was in a tangle of poison ivy vines about 4 feet off the ground. Robin noticed it one morning when she took the dogs for a walk and we checked it daily. The eggs finally hatched and both parents carried food to the screaming babies—the one who begged loudest got fed first and most. The nestlings fledged after 13 days and we watched as the parents hovered nearby to feed and protect the young birds. After the first week, the female took off to start a second nest. The male stayed to care for them until about the fourth week, when the juveniles were able to fend for themselves.

In the last 3-4 years since we've let the land go, we've noticed an increase in the number of robins. More cover has meant more nesting sites. The increase in open, wet areas has provided more worms for food and mud for nest building. The good news is that in early spring most yards provide just what the robin needs, making it one of our most common backyard birds, and one of the easiest to watch. By the time you read this many robins will be sitting on their second clutch of eggs.