



“Back off!!!”

## **Brunswick Wildlife Extraordinary Ordinary Bird**

If you pal around with birders, you will quickly learn some of the language. For example, there are “junk birds”. Pigeons, starlings, and house sparrows generally fall into this category. Their numbers are great and their value low for most birders due to their origin.

Then there are a lot of ordinary birds. These are “justa birds”...justa dove, justa mockingbird, justa house finch, etc. These birds are commonly found on most field trips in the Lower Cape Fear and, of course, they were probably visiting your backyard while you were out birding.

Most of us catch ourselves before saying “justa” because even ordinary birds are extraordinary. Extraordinarily beautiful and possessing unique behaviors which make them fun to watch. This is why I never pass up good photo ops of common birds like cardinals, mockingbirds, jays, and robins.

For today, I chose the American Robin as the poster bird to represent extraordinary ordinary birds. It is the largest, most abundant, and most widespread member of the thrush family which also includes the Eastern Bluebird. They are easily recognizable by appearance and by their loud, sing-song vocalization.

Robins breed throughout most of North America. Northern populations are regional migrants spending the winter in the lower forty-eight states or Mexico.

In summer, robins nest in our yards; however, their numbers are greatly increased around the Lower Cape Fear during winter. Most likely, you have experienced one of the massive

fall or spring migrations. Unless Cedar Waxwings have beaten them to it, robins will clean the ripe berries off hollies in a feeding frenzy.

Robins are partial migrants. The distance traveled is based on the availability of food...mainly earthworms and other soil invertebrates in spring and summer and fruit in the fall and winter. During the non-breeding season, robins form large foraging and roosting flocks, which enables them to better find berries.

The spring robin migration is nature's notice that spring is near! The spring hordes are equally impressive. During spring migration I am amazed at the huge numbers foraging on wet roadsides on US 264 between Swan Quarter and Roanoke Island. You literally have to be ready to take your foot off the accelerator to avoid hitting one flying across the road.

Generally robin populations appear to be increasing or stable throughout their range. They have benefited from urban development, from parks to backyard gardens, and agricultural development that provides rich sources of year-round food.

A great way to get in touch with extraordinary ordinary birds plus some that are less common or even rare is to join one of the upcoming Christmas Birds Counts. These local counts are part of National Audubon's 109<sup>th</sup> Christmas count of birds throughout North American, held from December 14 to January 5, 2009. More information about this count may be found on the National Audubon website: <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/>.

The Wilmington count, which includes a portion of Brunswick County north of Brunswick Town, will be held on January 3 and the Southport count, which includes Bald Head and the eastern portion of Oak Island, on January 4. For more information, contact the Wilmington compiler, Sam Cooper, at 910-799-3825 and Juanita Roushdy, President of Cape Fear Audubon and the Southport compiler, at 910-454-8948.

Everyone including beginning birders may participate. Less experienced birders will be paired with experienced birders.

Another opportunity to be a "citizen scientist" while watching extraordinary ordinary birds is approaching. The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, will be held on February 13-16, 2009. For the four-day event in 2008, valuable data was compiled from a total of 85,725 checklists that were submitted documenting the nearly ten million birds of 635 species that were observed. For more details on participating in 2009 go to: <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>.

To close, a question: are the birds in these photos anything other than extraordinarily beautiful?

John Ennis



A robin fledgling was one of my 2008 yard babies



Got berries?