

Eurasian Blackbird



Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Subphylum: Vertebrata
Class: Aves
Order: Passeriformes
Family: Turdidae
Genus: *Turdus*
Species: *merula*



Photo courtesy of Jane Patrick

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** The Eurasian blackbird is very widespread throughout Europe and Asia. It ranges from Great Britain all way to the Pacific Coast. They successfully exploit a large range of habitats, from city centers to highland moors, including woodlands, gardens and parks. The blackbirds that reside in Britain do not migrate. During the winter blackbirds from Scandinavia, Germany, the Baltic States and parts of Russia and Finland migrate to Britain.
- **Exhibit Location:** bird exhibit outside pole barn (with peregrine falcon)

Characteristics

- Length: 9-10 inches; Weight: 3-4 ounces; Wingspan: 13-15 inches
- Adult male blackbirds are totally black. They have a bright, golden-yellow bill and a yellow ring around the eye during spring and summer. The bill darkens at the end of summer.
- Adult female blackbirds are brown, often with spots and streaks on their breasts. They have a brown bill (orange in older females).
- Juveniles resemble females, but they have pale spots on the upperparts.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** 3-4 years; **In Captivity:** 20 years or more

Behaviors

- Males establish a territory during their first year, which they hold throughout their lives. The territory is essential for pair formation and nesting, but only part of their food is obtained from within it.
- They forage for food in fields, gardens and croplands.
- Blackbirds molt during the late summer and early autumn.
- Their song/call varies, including a flute-like melody song and a loud “pli-pli-pli” alarm call.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** insects

Reproduction

- The breeding season lasts from early March to late June. The males and females tend to separate for the winter but when mating season begins, they often return to the same partner. The pair will rear 2-3 broods each year.
- The female builds the nest in a hedge, shrub or outbuilding. She uses twigs, stems, dry grass, and mud to construct the nest. She will lay 3-5 bluish eggs, mottled with reddish brown.
- The eggs are incubated by the female for 13 or 14 days. Both parents will feed the fledglings for about 2 weeks, until they are ready to leave the nest. The young will become independent about 3 weeks after leaving the nest.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** insects, worms, small fruits, berries, seeds
- **At the Zoo:** fruit, seeds, complete pellets, insects

Conservation Status

- **IUCN status:** LC (Least Concern); **CITES Appendix:** Not listed
- In England, blackbirds and their nests are protected by law. It is an offense to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird or its eggs.
- Over the last 25 years, blackbird numbers have declined by about 20%. They suffered a sustained decline from about 1970 to the mid-1980s, after which the numbers increased again. The population is still large and they are not in immediate danger. Exact reasons for this decline are not known, but since the changes happened near farmland, it is thought that the decline was due to government policies enacted at that time. Farmers were encouraged to remove hedgerows (blackbird nesting places), to drain damp grasslands, and to increase the use of pesticides. All of these could have affected the availability of their food supply.
- Predators: Domestic cats are the main predators but traffic accidents, flying into windows and starvation are also causes of mortality.

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- Eurasian blackbirds, among other thrushes, have been heard mimicking electronic sounds such as cell phone rings and car alarms!
- The Beatles wrote a song about the Eurasian blackbird, creatively called "Blackbird."
- The Eurasian blackbird is the bird symbol of Sweden.
- This bird has also been known as the European blackbird.

Sources:

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