

Neither of these appeared to be nesting localities. It is still conjectural whether these two species have, or will have in the future, successfully established permanent breeding colonies in south-central New York State.—Edward L. Seeber, 213 Columbia Street, Ithaca, New York

Food Preferences of Wintering Robins in Central New York State, 1955-1956. —

The winter of 1955-6, in spite of being a rather severe one with respect to amount of snow, ice and below-freezing temperatures (while lacking the extreme cold of some years), might be known at least in the Finger Lakes area as the Winter of the Robins.

The usual scattered reports of one or two Robins kept coming in to me and to the Ornithology office at Cornell throughout December and the first two weeks of January. Three Robins were spending most of their time with a neighbor of mine in Etna, feeding on multiflora rose fruits, and coming at times into my yard for the same food.

On January 15, however, I saw a flock of 18 Robins in Cayuga Heights near Ithaca and was told that up to 25 had been there all winter. The next day, the 16th, the calls and letters began to come in, telling of flocks all around Ithaca and eventually all around central New York State. We kept a record of most of these reports and on January 18, I put a small item in the ITHACA JOURNAL calling attention to the flocks and asking that people note what food was attracting them. Dr. Benjamin Burtt kindly ran a similar note in his weekly column "Keeping Up with the Birds" in the Syracuse POST-STANDARD, asking for the same information. The response was gratifying.

In general the Robins utilized natural food. I had only one report of their eating bread crumbs; one report, third hand, of their eating suet. I put out raspberries and mulberries from my freezer, but they were ignored. Multiflora rose and frozen apples left on the trees seemed to be the favorite foods but fruits of the following were also reported as being eaten: Mountain Ash, several species of Dogwood, Buckthorn, Washington Thorn, Autumn Olive, Cotoneaster, Myrtle, Wild Grape, Barberry, Privet, Cedar, Juniper and Sumac.

One observer saw a Robin locate a caterpillar and another saw one feed on insect eggs. A report came from Clifton Springs of a flock feeding on stone-flies (Plecoptera) in early February. Crows also fed on them.

No one seems willing to make any positive statements about the reasons for the large flocks being present throughout the winter, nor have I found anyone who has determined what population of robins these might have been. Were they northern birds that went no farther south than this? Were they mid-western ones that were driven east by some weather disturbance not evident to us? Were they the usual eastern population that found a great scarcity of food farther south because of late freezes in the spring of 1955 and, unusually early, worked their way back north where food was relatively abundant? Perhaps weather had little to do with it and the relatively abundant food supply played the important role. In any case it was pleasant to have them!

I am indebted to all who sent me their observations on the foods taken by these birds. Sally F. Hoyt, Laboratory of Ornithology, Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y.
