



# Robby the Christmas Robin

*...is not in a Christmas mood!*

*by Dale Treadwell, with artwork by Declan Kenny*

**Naturally Wild**

capture their imagination!



Published by Naturally Wild © 2014  
Gumtree Cottage  
Carrs Cross  
Colehill, Kinnegad  
Co. Meath

ISBN: 978-1-78280-173-3

Design by The Drawing Board ([www.thedrawingboard.ie](http://www.thedrawingboard.ie))  
Printed by: Optimal Print Solutions, Dublin

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And speaking of legal stuff, don't forget:  
Irish robins are protected by the Wildlife Act.

# Robby the Christmas Robin

*Is not in a Christmas mood!*

I'd like to dedicate this book to my father Barry,  
to celebrate his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Thanks Dad, for your inspiration and insight  
into the natural world, as well as imparting on  
me a suffer-no-fools, take-no-prisoners, and  
most importantly, jesting attitude to life.

## Foreword



Robby has so much to learn about what the other birds in the garden eat. There really is enough food to go around but Robby doesn't know that yet. Thankfully Dale will help Robby and everyone else learn what each bird we see in the garden will eat. It is good to share all the food, and our gardens, with Robby and his friends.

Dale, you have once again brought the world of our Irish garden birds alive with *Robby the Christmas Robin*. I hope everyone who reads this wonderful story will remember to feed the birds each winter. Robby and his friends will be ever so thankful.

I hope this storybook has strong wings and takes flight into everyone's home.

Eric 'The Birdman' Dempsey





I t's getting cold in the garden on the eve of Christmas.

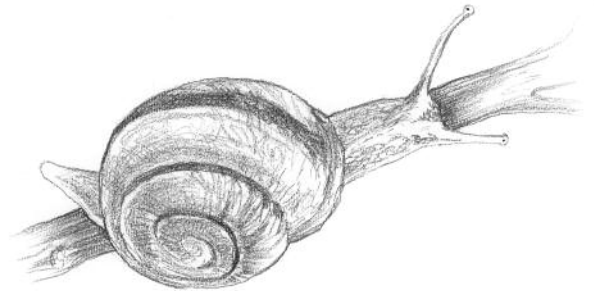
The first snows of winter are nearly upon us. But Robby the Robin isn't in much of a Christmas mood. He feels he has to protect his patch to ensure that he has enough food to eat during this lean time.



Simon the Song Thrush is a bigger customer than Robby. But Robby is very brave and makes a lot of noise to scare Simon off his patch.

*Chirpy, Chitter, Chant!*

“I’m Robby Robin,  
Toughest guy around.  
Puff out my scarlet breast,  
I’m going to stand my ground.”



There was really no need for all that fuss as Simon can break the shells of snails for his dinner. Robby can't do that. So Simon is no threat to Robby's fare.



Bertie the Blackbird, another big guy in the garden, comes into Robby's turf. Robby jumps up and down to frighten Bertie off.

*Chirpy, Chitter, Chant!*

“I'm Robby Robin,  
Toughest guy around.  
Puff out my scarlet breast,  
I'm going to stand my ground.”



There was really no need as the garden is full of berries from rowan trees, whitebeam and holly bushes. Bertie has lots to eat and won't eat Robby's breakfast.



Gordon Goldfinch visits the garden and Robby is unimpressed.

*Chirpy, Chitter, Chant!*

“I’m Robby Robin,  
Toughest guy around.  
Puff out my scarlet breast,  
I’m going to stand my ground.”



Robby needn't be that flustered as Gordon is quite happy eating teasel seeds. Gordon won't be stealing Robby's brunch.



Ben Blue Tit flies into Robby's garden and Robby is not amused.

*Chirpy, Chitter, Chant!*

“I'm Robby Robin,  
Toughest guy around.  
Puff out my scarlet breast,  
I'm going to stand my ground.”



Robby doesn't need to be so mean, as Ben is happy eating sunflower seeds and won't be eating any of Robby's lunch.



Larry Long-tailed Tit swoops into Robby's area. Robby is raging mad!

*Chirpy, Chitter, Chant!*

“I'm Robby Robin,  
Toughest guy around.  
Puff out my scarlet breast,  
I'm going to stand my ground.”



Robby doesn't need to be so nasty. Larry loves to eat peanuts and won't take any of Robby's snacks.



Steven Sparrow alights into the yard, and Robby scares him off.

*Chirpy, Chitter, Chant!*

“I’m Robby Robin,  
Toughest guy around.  
Puff out my scarlet breast,  
I’m going to stand my ground.”



Steven Sparrow likes eating scraps of bread from the bird table  
and won't deny Robby his dinner.



Charlie Chaffinch hops into Robby's patch. Robby is not pleased.

*Chirpy, Chitter, Chant!*

“I'm Robby Robin,  
Toughest guy around.  
Puff out my scarlet breast,  
I'm going to stand my ground.”

Robby can calm down. Charlie is content collecting grass seeds, not competing for Robby's cuisine.

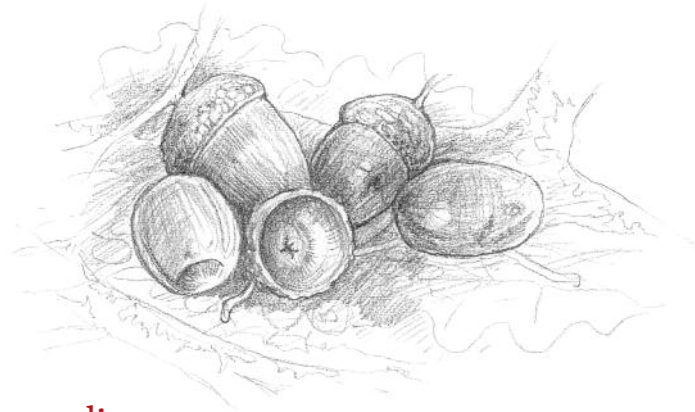




Jasper Jay swoops down into Robby's spot. Robby is even more upset.

*Chirpy, Chitter, Chant!*

“I'm Robby Robin,  
Toughest guy around.  
Puff out my scarlet breast,  
I'm going to stand my ground.”



No need for Robby to be so annoyed. Jasper dines on acorns so he won't be a threat to Robby's supper.



Robby is still hopping mad about all the intruders when he sees Rosy Robin pecking through some leaf litter. Still angry, he keeps jumping up and down and making noise...

*Chirpy, Chitter, Chant!*

Silly Robby!

He finally recognises it is Rosy Robin, looking for grubs. Robby will have to share. Together they will soon have their own chicks to feed in the spring. Perhaps we can all help Robby and his feathered friends this winter! It is the season of good will, after all.

# GARDENING FOR ROBINS...

AND ALL YOUR OTHER FEATHERED FRIENDS!



Robins often have two and sometimes three broods (or families) a year, starting in mid-April and continuing until August. There may be four or five eggs in a clutch (all of the eggs laid and incubated together are called a clutch). It generally takes about two weeks to incubate and hatch the eggs, and then another two weeks for the fledglings to mature enough and leave the nest site. These little fellas grew up in a plant pot!

Robins are a common bird of the edge of woodlands that have taken to the mixed plantings of urban gardens. These cheeky ruffians have become synonymous with Christmas, perhaps due to their striking red breasts and ever-presence even during the harsh winter weather. They are very territorial and will defend a patch against all-comers – even other female robins. These little guys are quite the garden bully and more than make up for their size in pluck and courage! And of course, they will follow you around when you do a little gardening, hoping to pick up a few grubs.

A garden full of birds is a garden full of life. Birds require water, food and shelter, all of which can be provided easily through plants, bird feeders, bird baths or a small pond, and bird boxes.

#### **Plants that provide berries:**

Rowan, cotoneaster, pyracanthas, holly, hypericum

#### **Plants that provide seeds:**

Birch, teasel, sunflowers, wildflower and grassland meadow plants

If you're not sure about some of these plants, then ask at your local garden centre. You could also allow

a small area of your garden to go 'wild'. These patches of native plants always attract insects, bugs, beasties and birds!

**Water:** Make sure to provide a clean, fresh water source in the summer, and keep it from frosting over in the winter. A small pond will also create a wonderful natural habitat, not least for insects that will attract insectivorous birds (birds that like to eat insects), as well as providing a constant supply of water for birds and other animals.

**Insect area:** Build a small log pile which will provide a great spot for insectivorous birds to roost around in, including our Christmas Robin. Leaf piles and uncovered compost areas will also attract birds.

**Bird feeders:** Place feeders in an open area where birds can have a full view all around for potential predators. Some birds like perching sites a couple of metres away from the feeders so they can fly back and forth with tasty morsels. Buddleja is a plant I use for this as it can take a bit of a thrashing. And it's great for butterflies in the summer too!

Use small feeders which can be topped up often, rather than large feeders, which may allow the

contents to get damp over a period of time. The food may then go bad and make birds ill. Your feeders should have small wire mesh. This means adult birds will have to peck out nuts and seeds, and so reduce the chances of fledglings getting accidentally choked with food.

If you have a cat, give it a little bell to wear. This should warn birds in your garden if the cat tries to pounce on them, especially ground-feeding birds that don't like landing on feeders, such as blackbirds and thrushes... and Robby!



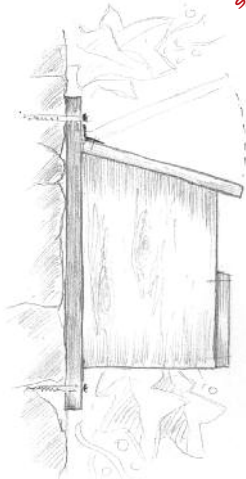
*A Robin is a gardener's best friend*

# Make your own Robin Nest Box

## CONSTRUCTION:

- Use timber. Scrap pine timber, such as old shelving, will work fine. Harder woods will last longer, of course. About 15mm thick is about as thin as you want to go; that should make a strong box that is also warm enough for nesting birds.
- Start with the plank. Mark the various cuts as shown in the diagram. Cut carefully.
- Old rubber bike inner tubes make great hinges! If you are not going to include a hinge of any kind, it would be good to cut a slot in the back piece so that the roof can fit in, making a weatherproof seal. A hinged roof is handy for clearing out the nest box at the end of the season.
- Use nails or screws. Just be careful when using hammers or drills, and also be aware that pine timber can split quite easily, so oval nails are better than round wire ones. If using screws, then it's a good idea to drill slightly smaller holes first.

- Don't be too fussy about the finish. We have seen robins nesting in old kettles and clay pots. They are very adaptable little creatures!
- Your Robin Nest Box is fine about 2 metres off the ground, on a wall, post or fence. They like thick cover, such as ivy, or perhaps an evergreen shrub that will offer plenty of protection in springtime.



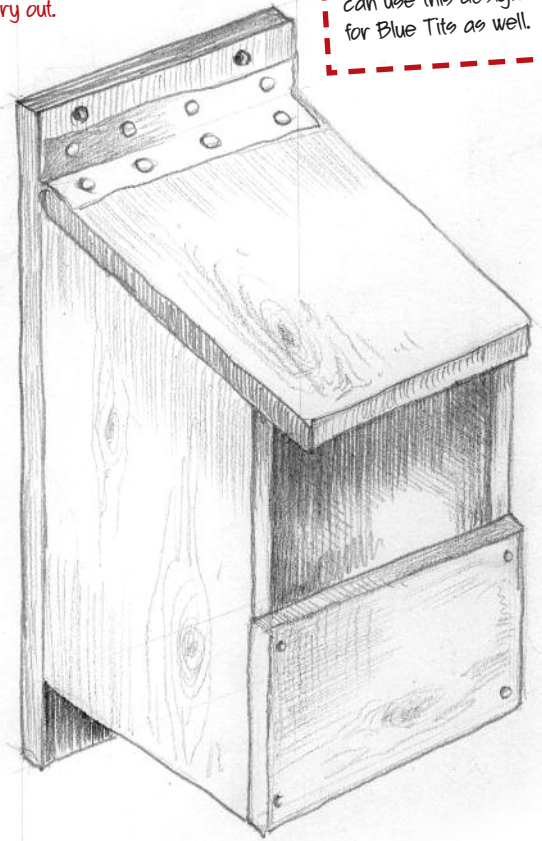
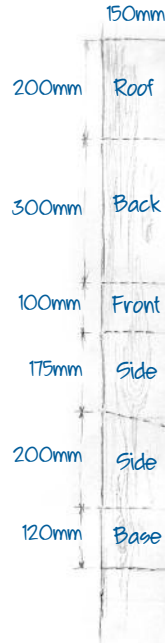
BE CAREFUL USING SHARP TOOLS!  
GET A GROWN-UP TO GIVE YOU A HAND.

## TIPS:

- Don't put a peg or perch of any kind on the front of your box. Nesting birds don't need them, and perches right near the hole may encourage larger, predator bird species to land and investigate.
- A few small holes in the base will allow unwanted water and dampness to dry out.

## OPTIONS:

If you block up the front completely and drill a 25 mm (1 inch) hole near the top, then you can use this design for Blue Tits as well.



# How to make a Bird Cake Feeder

We hope you get a chance to build the nest box. It's really quite easy to make, and you don't need to be too fussy about the finish. A few pointers:

- Place it firmly on to a wall, fence or post, ideally about 2 metres off the ground, and under partial cover of vegetation.
- Avoid using any wood that is painted, varnished or treated in any way.
- Try and face it away from prevailing wind and rain; in Ireland, that means not facing it south or west.
- If you are lucky to get a resident family of robins, watch and enjoy from a safe distance. Too much disturbance may lead to the parents abandoning the nest site, and we don't want that! It may also be possible to adapt your nest box for a hidden camera. Such devices are becoming quite reasonable in price. Just try and plan ahead for this in terms of nest site, box construction and distance from your house.
- It is a good idea to clean out old nests in the Autumn, and sterilise the box with boiling water to kill parasites.
- If you have pets at home, don't be surprised to find dog and cat hairs lining the nest, which is usually made of grass, leaves and moss.

## WHAT YOU NEED:

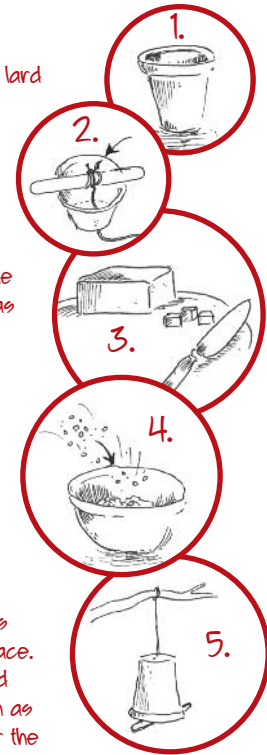
An old yogurt pot or two; some string; lollipop sticks or small twigs; some lard or suet, and some wild bird seed mix. You can also add other bird favourites such as peanuts (for birds), raisins, bits of old cheese, stale cake crumbs, etc.

Prepare the pots first, because your hands will soon be covered in fat and seeds. Carefully poke a small hole in the bottom of the yogurt pot. Cut a length of string about 30 to 40cm long and pass it through the hole you've made. Tie it around the stick or twig. Prepare as many of these as you think you will need.

Now, chop up the lard or suet into small pieces. Add all the other ingredients. Get stuck in to the mixing bowl, and work all the stuff together 'til it's well mixed. This is definitely one occasion where no-one is going to ask to lick the bowl afterwards! If you are working with an adult on this, then you could use some gentle heat to start melting the fat instead of chopping it up. But we think the fun part is getting your hands into the gooey mess in the bowl. Waaah!

Once the stuff is mixed, wedge\* it into the pots, making sure the string is pulled straight, like a candle wick. Allow to set - the fridge is the best place. Once set, hang from a suitable tree. Try and leave some in the pots, and take others out. Both will work, and you may find the nimble species such as Long-tailed Tits can get upside-down easier than others, and will prefer the cake feeders that are still in their pots. Make sure to wash your hands afterwards.

\* To Wedge: a mixture of 'wedge' and 'splodge'. This new verb doesn't officially exist yet, but we're working on that. Basically, it means to get gooey mixtures into small spaces, such as when you're making bird cake feeders. Wedge. What a great word!



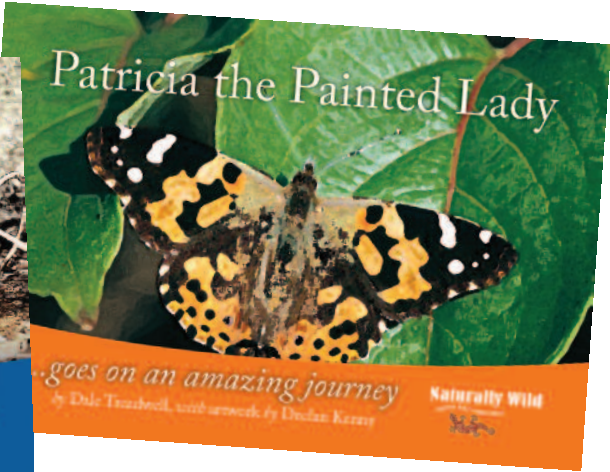
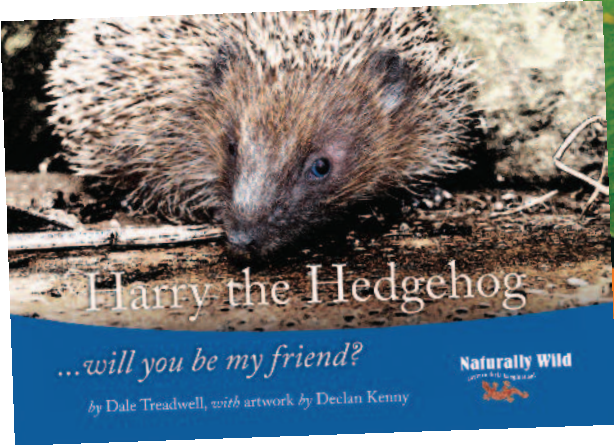
There are many people I would like to thank for helping me put this booklet together. My ever-suffering family first of all for putting up with me and my eccentricities. I love you all. Catriona Komlosi for the use of some of her amazing wildlife photographs, Mr Declan Kenny for his design skills and additional pictures, Ms Catherine Creedon for her editorial experience, and Mr Marcus Collier for his wildlife knowledge, long term friendship and guidance.

Thanks also to the Heritage Council for their support. Anyone involved in Irish wildlife knows that the Heritage Council does fantastic work.

Most of all I would like to thank all the boys and girls, mums and dads, nanas and grandads, teachers and carers who have come out over the years to see our Naturally Wild presentations and listen to my stories, musings and really bad jokes!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dale', written in a cursive style.

Look out for these other titles in the series!



“I’m Robby Robin,  
Toughest guy around.  
Puff out my scarlet breast,  
I’m going to stand my ground...”



With foreword by  
Eric 'The Birdman' Dempsey

It’s getting cold in the garden on the eve of Christmas, but Robby the Robin isn’t in much of a Christmas mood. He feels he has to protect his patch to ensure there is enough food for his family.

Read all about Robby’s adventures and all the feathered friends he meets along the way as he forages for food in the garden.



This is the second tale from Dale Treadwell, the irrepressible\* Aussie with a passion for all things wild! Dale hails from the Australian Outback, but these days he can be found roaming the wild places of Ireland, passing on his wisdom to anyone within earshot. He is a frequent visitor to Irish schools, and makes regular appearances on RTÉ television, where the audiences are always enthralled and delighted (and the presenters often enlightened and occasionally terrified!). The picture on the left is Dale, holding the real life Harry, the star of Dale’s first book, *Harry the Hedgehog – Will You Be My Friend?*

ISBN 978-1-78280-346-1



Supported by the Heritage Council

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
The Heritage Council



\* We looked up ‘irrepressible’ in the dictionary, mainly coz’ it’s such a big word. And guess what? It said: Irrepressible: full of beans, can’t be held down; for example, ‘Dale Treadwell, the irrepressible Aussie.’)

**Naturally Wild**

capture their imagination!



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