

Robins struggle to survive in spastic Tahoe weather

By Tom and Cheryl Millham

Robins are a species that migrate to Lake Tahoe in the early spring to nest and raise their young. Then, they leave in the fall, back down to the lower elevations.



So, what is the problem?

Well, in February and early March, as you will remember, the Lake Tahoe Basin had spring-like weather and temperatures. Because of this unseasonably warm weather the male robins thought it was time to head to the higher elevations such as Lake Tahoe to begin setting up territories for the soon to follow females.

They were doing fine until it started to snow.

Robins are ground feeders. They run around the ground pulling up worms or other insects. They also eat fruit – never seed – and berries.

Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care started receiving calls after the first blizzard about robins which were standing around in the snow with no food and what could people feed them.

Here is the list if you would like to help them survive the snowstorms. On your back deck, throw out blueberries, cranberries, grapes and/or raisins. We have one robin that comes down to get raisins, even before we close the sliding

glass door.



A baby
American
robin.
Photo/LTWC

If you have a robin attacking a low window or sliding glass door (and I do mean attacking), you need to help in a hurry. We have seen robins that have attacked windows/glass so viciously that they have made their bill bleed. They have not gone “mad” or “crazy”.

Here is what is happening. The male robins come up to Lake Tahoe first to set up their territories. When the females arrive, they can entice a mate to come to their area. If the reflection is right, this male robin sees, what he thinks is another male robin. When, in actuality, he is just seeing himself and attacks the “new” male.

Birds do not understand glass or mirrors. So, all you have to do is tape up a single piece of paper on the outside of the glass so the robin cannot see himself. He then thinks that he chased away the other male robin and he is happy again. In a few days, you can take down the paper.

Tom and Cheryl Millham run Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care on the outskirts of South Lake Tahoe.