

comfortable checking further. Rigging up a contraption consisting of a kitchen mop, vanity mirror, and lots of duct tape, we were able to determine the presence of what appeared to be three blue eggs. A few days later, when our homemade egg-viewing device became a bit more sophisticated, and we were able to have longer looks, there were actually only two eggs in the nest, so we were not sure if one egg was taken during that time.

As we watched this event unfold, I began to research what food would be helpful to provide for the robins if there were to be any chance this would be a successful nesting attempt. Starting with plumped raisins and bits of fruit, I finally visited Ed Shirley Sports in Morton Grove, where I purchased wax worms, red worms, and, eventually, carefully filleted night crawlers to feed the robins, who slowly became accustomed to their daily feast. The temperatures continued to remain above freezing most days, and I surmised the robins were also getting food from the environment. One day, while preparing for out-of-town guests, I tidied the front yard and observed one of the robins picking at the leaf litter where I had disturbed it.

A *Chicago Tribune* reporter and photographer visited 9 January, and 10 January, an article with a color photograph of the male robin on the nest appeared on the front page of the Metro section (Madhani 2002). Doug Stotz, conservation ecologist at the Field Museum in Chicago, gave helpful scientific data about what triggers nesting in birds. Stotz said the winter robin nesting is perplexing because a bird's biological clock is triggered by the pattern of sunlight that notifies it to breed in spring and summer. "I've never heard of a robin nesting at this time of year," Stotz said. The most likely explanation is that the warm weather made them think they could nest in the winter (Madhani 2002).

Each evening at bedtime, shining my flashlight beam through the window, I confirmed the female robin's presence on the nest. She always sat on the nest facing the street, and although I could not see her body after dark, I could make out the spike of her tail, with her feathers edged in white sticking up out of the nest. The male was visible nearby all day, but disappeared around dusk.

Thursday, 10 January 2002, much to my disappointment, the female was not on the nest in the evening. This was Day 17 of her incubation, and since the average incubation period for American Robin is 12 to 14 days, she may have realized the eggs would not be viable. For the next two mornings, she was back on the nest where she remained throughout the day, but, again, each night she was gone. On her last day of interest in the nest (Day 20), the female was in the tree, occasionally standing on the edge of the nest, a few times leaning into the nest appearing to nudge the eggs. She did not again sit on the nest.

The first significant snow fall since this nesting phenomenon began came 16 January 2002, which was Day 23 since the female had begun incubation. The female robin sat quietly inside the tree most of the day, but did not show interest in the nest. Three robins appeared in the backyard 19 January, and from that date, at least two birds came to the yard for daily visits the remainder of the winter. I continued to feed them rations of raisins, especially on the coldest days and the few days when there was snow cover.

American Robins have nested in our 25 by 125 foot city lot several times in the 26 years we have lived here, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. The robins have used the rafters on the back porch several times, which seemed a good choice considering I once observed an American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) steal a fledgling from a nest in the same spruce tree where the pair of American Robins built a nest the winter of 2001/2002.

David Willard, Curator of Birds for the Field Museum, has accepted the two robin eggs and the nest as part of the museum's renowned collection.

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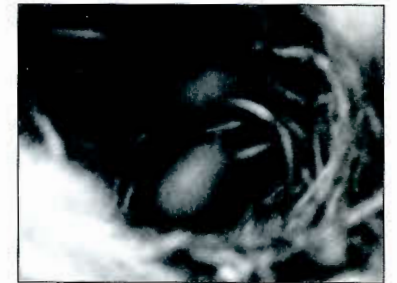
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*An American Robin pair built a nest in a white spruce tree in Chicago the winter of 2001/2002. Photo by A. Stephen Somora, Jr.*



*Two blue eggs were laid in the nest built by American Robins in a white spruce tree in Chicago the winter of 2001/2002. Photo by A. Stephen Somora, Jr.*