

(II)

NOTES ON WAKING TIME AND INSISTENT CALLS OF AMERICAN ROBIN

Like other behaviour traits, studying roosting behaviour of birds is quite fascinating and rather challenging too. During my extensive field studies on comparative ecology and biology of Indian barbets (*Megalaima* spp.) I persuaded a determined efforts to observe their roosting behaviour and recorded the emerging and settling time regularly. I found them meticulously accurate in maintaining a regular roosting hour which is governed by the times of sun rise and sun set. Although my intensive study area was Periyar tiger Reserve, Kerala I carried out comparative study on the barbets on 13 locations in the country (Yahya, 1980; 1987; 2001) and found that at most places two sympatric species occurring side by side often differ in their sizes (one larger and the other smaller), and roosting hours. This could be an indirect means of ecological isolation, allowing these congeneric and sympatric species to coexist successfully. The habit of observing the roosting behaviour of barbets enticed me to observe the roosting behaviour of other birds too whenever I got the opportunity (Yahya, 1990a; 1993a; 2014; 2015; Abbasi and Yahya, 2003). Several useful reports are also available in our department on this aspect. While conducting short term studies by the students observing pre- and post-roosting behaviour of diurnal birds is easy, observing nocturnal birds is rather difficult. However, several ornithologists have studied roosting behaviour of owls and other birds. But comparing to other behavioural aspects of birds studies on 'roosting behaviour' has been scanty (Goodman and Shain, 1974).

The American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) is one of the most common birds in North America as well as in Kendall Park area (40.4209° N, 74.5607° W) in Central New Jersey where I reside partially for last several years. As the entire New Jersey is a well vegetated state, (nicknamed as Garden State) the Kendall Park area is largely forested. The lawns and backyard of residential complexes comprise well maintained green mosaic grassy lawns as well as well wooded patches of forests; and the terrain is largely undulated providing good cover not only to many species of birds but also to thriving population of White-tailed deer. Black bears are often seen in certain areas. Several smaller mammals are found crossing the roads. Just near to Kendall Park (East Brunswick) during heavy rains in early summer large scale local migration of Spotted Salamanders, from hibernating ground to nearby pools, takes place that attracts many wildlife enthusiasts of the area. Besides score of birds around, in the morning and late afternoon I often observe family of the deer

grazing at the edge of forest in front of our house through the long glass panel of my dining table or from the house deck. The residents maintain a peaceful environment and the deer and birds are never disturbed by them. I wish such ambience also prevails in India where now population of most wild animals and birds are declining whereas earlier they coexisted more harmoniously.

During winter large flock of Canadian geese graze, honk and fly across frequently in this area providing spectacular sight: Red-tailed hawk, American crow, Downy woodpecker, Blue jay, Titmouse, Boat-tailed grackle, Chickadee, etc are common; the Northern cardinal being the most beautiful. During summer a number of migrants visit the area; once I recorded a flock of over two hundred blackbirds. They moved lawn to lawn rapidly for about 2 hours and surprisingly all were gone by the evening!

While the American Robin is not so vocal during winter and even day time in summer, it becomes excessively vocal during wee hours in summer coinciding its breeding season. However, many are multi-brooder and can raise as many as three broods in a year. It keeps on calling for long time, perhaps announcing its territory but no other movement was seen until day light broke. During heavy raining it keeps quiet. Males are brighter with blackish head and more prominent chestnut under parts. They are omnivorous and keep actively feeding on worms

Table 1: First call records of American robin in Kendall Park in June 2016

S.No.	Date	Sunrise / Sunset *	First call heard
1	05-06-2016	0527 / 2027	0312
2	06-06-2016	0527 / 2027	0315
3	08-06-2016	0527 / 2028	0313
4	09-06-2016	0527 / 2028	0313
5	11-06-2016	9527 / 2028	**
6	13-06-2016	0527 / 2030	0314
7	14-06-2016	0527 / 2031	0315
8	16-06-2016	0527 / 2032	0315
9	17-06-2016	0527 / 2032	0313
10	18-06-2016	0527 / 2032	0312
11	19-06-2016	0527 / 2032	0312
12	20-06-2016	0527 / 2033	0311
13	21-06-2016	0527 / 2033	0314
14	22-06-2016	0527 / 2033	0313
15	23-06-2016	0528 / 2033	0316
16	24-06-2016	0528 / 2033	0315
17	25-06-2016	0529 / 2033	0317
18	27-06-2016	0529 / 2033	**
19	28-06-2016	0529 / 2033	0314

* Recorded from a chart provided locally

** Rained heavily, no record



American robin (Photo by Michael R. Duncan)

and fallen berries (often in groups of 4 to 5) during the day. One afternoon I counted 13 birds on a bare tall branch. A report of Cornell Lab of ornithology mentions that some time as many as quarter million of Robins could gather at a roost site. As given by Kaufman (2000), the song is 'rich, carolling *cheerup cheerio cheerup*, often beginning well before dawn; call notes are thin *seleet*; chuckling *tuth-tuth-tuth-tuth*'.

Taking the advantage of *Sohur* (early morning food for performing fast by Muslims in the month of Ramajan) wake up time around 03 am, In June 2016 I recorded first calls/songs of the Robin for 19 days. With a fluctuation of 3 to 5 minutes they were prompt in the calling/singing. With

some intermittent gaps the post-roosting chirps lasted for long time, usually until emerging for morning chore.

In late afternoon, after performing certain pre-roosting activities such as feeding, chasing one and other, calling, and hopping around they settled around 2040 hrs in low foliage for roosting. At times pre-roosting calls was noted much late in the evening; on June 20 I heard a long chirp at 2050 hrs. Thus on an average they roosted for about 7 hours which is quite less than other common birds of Asian countries. It appears that like human of Western Hemisphere, in summer these birds also take maximum advantage of day length and remain active as long as day light is available; during winter day hours are much shorter here. Despite some efforts I could not observe any siesta in American robins because unlike barbets I had not colour banded any Robin to have close monitoring. In India the Redwattled lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*) and Hawk cuckoo (*Cuculus varius*) often call during various hours throughout night in spring and summer.

The nocturnal (predawn) insistent song/calls of American Robin are quite intriguing. However, to me, most probably these are territorial calls, because I have noted several nests in this locality. I recorded 9 active nests within 6000 m²) and the incubating/brooding parents start calling as early as some light spread in pre dawn hours. They no more remain such vocal during day hours as they can see any intruders and can act appropriately.

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