

The young are fed mostly insects and other invertebrates. The normal diet for robins is astonishingly varied, consisting of up to ninety percent berries and other plant foods in fall and winter to less than ten percent in spring. The earthworms and other invertebrate prey are located by sight, not sound, and are captured by a wide variety of foraging techniques, including gleaning leaves and active pursuit of flying insects. They forage from the treetops to the ground. It has been suggested that the robin's highly diversified diet and foraging techniques have helped make possible their high population levels and wide geographic distribution.

The spread of civilization has had both negative and positive aspects for robins. In the nineteenth century they were heavily hunted for food, and today their close proximity to human habitation subjects them to heavy predation from domestic cats. During the 1950s robins provided the first extensive documentation for the disastrous effects of DDT, when large numbers were found dead on a Michigan college campus following spraying for Dutch Elm disease-carrying beetles. Occasionally when they forage on fruit crops, such as cherries, robins become agricultural pests, and tens of thousands have been legally shot.

In general, however, they have adapted well to human settlement. Cowbirds, whose numbers have increased enormously with the spread of agriculture and deforestation, rarely lay eggs in robins' nests, and when they do, the robins remove them. Robins have expanded their range throughout the west, as irrigation and other human habitat alterations have created suitable environments. They are more common now than in colonial times. Most robins do not migrate to the neotropics, and hence are not threatened by persistent pesticides on their wintering grounds. And, unlike other bird species, they seem to tolerate, if not benefit from, forest fragmentation in the United States. Hence robins are likely to remain into the indefinite future one of our most common and enjoyable birds.

W. E. Davis, Jr.

MEET OUR COVER ARTIST

For the second consecutive month, Barry Van Dusen has provided artwork for *Bird Observer's* cover. Barry has been an independent professional artist for nearly fifteen years. He recently returned from the opening of the important international show, "Birds in Art," at the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum in Wausau, Wisconsin. This year marks the second year in a row that Barry's artwork was included in the show. Barry will also have his Northern Saw-whet Owl portrait on the cover of the November/December issue of *Bird Watcher's Digest*. For scheduled exhibits or information, Barry can be reached at 13 Radford Road, Princeton, Massachusetts 01541.

M. Steele