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## On Egg-Laying Times of American Robins

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The recent paper by Weatherhead et al. (1991) added to our knowledge of the laying hour of the American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) and contains stimulating speculations about the evolution of laying times. Unfortunately, the paper was incomplete in that no reference was made to previous studies of egg laying by American Robins. These studies, although individually based on small samples, collectively comprised about 30 observations of laying by at least 10 females and were consistent with each other. These observations foreshadowed some of the results and conclusions presented by Weatherhead et al. For example, it was first noted almost a century ago that American Robins do not lay in the early morning. Each of eight earlier references on laying by robins agrees on that point; in one paper (Howe 1898), the abbreviations A.M. and P.M. seem to have been transposed. Otherwise, the records indicate that American Robins lay late in the morning and even in the afternoon. As I believe that the earlier contributions of ornithologists should not be forgotten, I list chronologically eight references to laying by American Robins: Howe (1898), Dice (1918), Murray (1930), Herrick (1935), Schantz (1939), Howell (1942), Kendeigh (1952), and Pettingill (1963). According to Ord (1836), Alexander Wilson (who died in 1813) was aware that many songbirds laid early in the morning. Thus, by the time of the first published records of laying by American Robins, it could have been noticed that robins differed from many songbirds in their laying hour. Kendeigh (1952:130), however, seems to have been the first to comment on this difference; since then, this characteristic of the American Robin has been reported in secondary literature (Skutch 1976).

Weatherhead et al. (1991) stated several times that most passerines lay at or around dawn, which indicates to me the time or period preceding and ending at sunrise. Unfortunately, they did not document those statements about laying times, which may have been based on the study by Schifferli (1979) to whom they attributed a similar opinion. Schifferli, however, expressed an apparently contrary opinion in his opening sentence "Die meisten Kleinvogelarten legen ihre Eier kurz nach Sonnenaufgang," which I translate as "Most species of small birds lay their eggs shortly after sunrise." I agree with Schifferli, having read all but 1 of about 45 references from which Schifferli derived his conclusion. Later, he repeated the essence of his opening statement, but also introduced the imprecise terms—"dawn" or "daybreak" and "early morning"—in connection with laying, which may have led Weatherhead et al. (1991) to regard these various terms as synonyms. In my opinion, some are

not. For example, early morning is an inclusive term that includes not only dawn but also the hours soon after sunrise. To avoid confusion, it is preferable to relate laying times to some well-defined event, such as sunrise or the onset of morning civil twilight. Dawn is a less precise term, as it refers not only to the beginning of daylight but also to the period ending at sunrise. Although some passerines lay eggs close to sunrise (Skutch 1952, Scott 1991), few lay much before sunrise.

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