



Wildlife Window: The Red-winged Blackbird Often Heard Before Being Seen in Rivendell.

By Sue Remy, Ponds & Preserves Committee.

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Abundant across North America and commonly heard and seen in Rivendell with its distinctive call and bold colors, is the **Red-winged Blackbird**. This bird is a familiar sight atop cattails, perched high in trees, on telephone wires, and at your backyard bird feeder. Who hasn't heard the classic sound of a Red-winged Blackbird? Their call is often heard before these birds are spotted. Let's learn more about the Red-winged Blackbird.

Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)



Appearance: Similar in size to a Robin, the stocky, broad-shouldered blackbird has a slender, conical bill and a medium-length tail. Red-winged Blackbirds often show a hump-backed silhouette while perched.

Male Red-winged Blackbirds are hard to mistake with their glossy black bodies and red-and-yellow shoulder badges. They often sit with their tail slightly flared. Females are crisply streaked and dark brownish overall, paler on the breast and often show a whitish eyebrow.

Sound: Where there is standing water and vegetation, such as our wetland preserves, Red-winged Blackbirds are likely to be one of the most common birds you see and hear. Listen for the male's *conk-la-lee!* song.

Behavior & Feeding: Male Red-winged Blackbirds do everything they can to get noticed, perching high and belting out their distinctive song. Females stay lower, skulking through vegetation for food and quietly weaving together their remarkable nests.

Red-winged Blackbirds often gather in huge flocks to eat grains along with other blackbird species and starlings. They eat mainly insects, grains and seeds. Sometimes they feed by probing at the bases of aquatic plants with their slender bills, prying them open to get at insects hidden deep inside.

Breeding: Red-winged Blackbird males are highly polygynous, mating with many females. Males also fiercely defend their territories during the breeding season, spending more than a quarter of daylight hours in territory defense.



[Photos: Bob Frank. Source: AllAboutBirds.org]

Click here to visit the Ponds & Preserves website at <https://www.rivendellcommunity.com/ponds>.

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