

Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

Considered by many ornithologists to be the most numerous land bird in North America, Red-winged Blackbirds are some of the earliest migrants to return in the spring. They are **sexually dimorphic**—males are glossy black with vibrant red wing flashes called **epaulets**, while females have drab brown and cream colouration that provides superb camouflage at nesting time.

Their favourite habitat is along the shore of freshwater marshes where females alone weave bulky cup-like nests of grass and reeds. Males are **polygynous**, i.e. they mate with as many as 10 females and aggressively defend multiple sites at once. Their loud **oh-kee-ree** call serves as a warning to intruders including other birds, raccoons, and mink.

Both parents feed the nestlings (females do the bulk of the work) and youngsters leave the nest approximately 11-14 days after hatching. Depending upon local conditions, two to three clutches may be raised each year.

For many North American native groups, the Red-winged Blackbird is a living symbol of ancient wisdom.