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Helen F. Wilson’s book, *Robin*, provides an eclectic look at the iconic European bird, especially from a British point of view. Wilson is a geographer whose work emphasizes animal studies, including environments where birds and humans interact. This eye for human/animal interaction appears amusingly in her book, which includes a surprising number of examples of where European robins have built nests in the human-built environment. But it also takes a serious turn when she considers the place of the magpie robin in Mumbai, prized (and often caged) for its song.

The book has seven chapters, modest endnotes, many images, and a one-and-a-half-page bibliography. The chapters include information about the European robin structured around general themes. Chapter themes include: birds referred to as robins throughout the world and attempts to introduce the European robin in various places; how the robin got its scientific name and category; literary and folklore associations of robins with death; literary discussions of the robin’s song and its association with seasons; the robin and the national psyche, especially in Britain; the robin’s red coloring and its association with holidays like Easter, and especially in Britain, Christmas; and contemporary interactions of robins and humans. Throughout each chapter, Wilson also weaves in information about robins’ appearance and behavior.

While exploring these themes, Wilson moves freely in time. When discussing the robin’s name, for example, she moves briskly from Norman England to the eighteenth century. The author also moves freely in space. For example, Wilson considers Mi’kmaq legends from North America, Italian poetry, and Nyoongar stories from Australia in quick succession when discussing the robin’s red color.

*Robin* is part of the Animal series by Reaktion Books, edited by Jonathan Burr. The series website explains that the individual volumes “explore their subjects in art, literature, mythology and reli-
gion, as well as its evolution, species, behavior and habitat.” Wilson covers these topics and finds references to robins from a wide array of mostly British sources, including poetry, travel narratives, children’s literature, cookbooks, packaging, newspapers, and mascots. For example, Frances Hodgson Burnett’s 1911 novel *The Secret Garden*, which has a robin as a central character, appears in multiple chapters. William Wordsworth’s affection for robins is addressed in multiple places as well and Wilson includes full poems and excerpts. There is also a thorough discussion of examples of Cock Robin in folklore, art, and taxidermy. There is some natural history included, but neither David Lack’s nor J. P. Burkitt’s field research is considered in depth.

Early in the book, Wilson uses references from travel narratives and letters to explain why so many birds throughout the world are referred to as robins, even if they are not technically part of the same *Erithacus* genus (which includes only the European robin.) Her brief discussion of the Acclimatization Societies across the British Empire provides a glimpse of how the European robin was released in locations from Detroit to New Zealand. Since this book emphasizes the European robin, the cultural impact of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in the United States is mentioned, but not explored. Interestingly, Carson’s text is not considered in the chapter on the robin’s associations with seasons. Instead, American pop music references and the tendency of the American robin to become drunk in the spring as it feeds on fermenting berries is highlighted in the chapter on song and seasons.

In her chapter considering the national psyche, Wilson highlights the bird’s curiosity and “brutish” territoriality (p. 106). She cites ornithologist George W. Temperley’s experience hand-feeding two European robins by standing at the edge of their respective territories to show both robins’ inquisitiveness and sensitivity to boundaries. Wilson also uses multiple quotes from William Thompson’s *The Natural History of Ireland* (1849), which included three volumes on birds. Thompson described a robin that killed other robins attempting to nest in the same greenhouse. Wilson even includes a Google search to highlight the common experience of European robins attacking their reflections in windows. Wilson puts these examples in conversation with the recent election of the robin as Britain’s national bird to give readers a sense of the fierceness that can be overlooked when considering the small, friendly-seeming bird.

In the chapter on future directions, especially in environments shared with humans, Wilson describes impacts of light and sound pollution as well as glass buildings on robin welfare and behavior. She also explores bird hunting using nets and bird lime, explaining that the European robin has become a mascot for bird protection due to its recognizability and positive attitudes toward the species.

Neither the book nor individual chapters have an overarching historical argument, but they do introduce a wide variety of facts and sources, particularly from Victorian England, to give the reader a sense of the robin in the human imagination, in the garden, and increasingly in urban spaces.