

NORTHERN CARDINAL

Cardinalis cardinalis



Range

Bright red with a pointed head crest and black bib, male cardinals are always a welcome sight at bird feeders. Cardinals are year-round residents in the eastern two-thirds of Texas. They prefer thick underbrush for nesting. Cardinals have been expanding their range northward.



Birds

NORTHERN CARDINAL

Cardinalis cardinalis



Appearance

Length: 9 inches
Wing span: 12 inches
Weight: 1 1/4 ounce

Male northern cardinals are bright red medium sized birds with head crests, black bibs and masks and cone-shaped reddish bills. Females are tannish-brown with reddish wings.

Behavior

Habit: Diurnal granivore
Diet: Seeds, fruit and insects
Breeding Territory: 1 pair per 4 acres

Both sexes in cardinals sing almost year-round. Common calls include "cheer cheer cheer", "whit-chew whit-chew whit-chew" and "purty purty purty". Cardinals are easily attracted to bird feeders, especially those containing sunflower seeds. A cardinal's nest consists of a tightly woven cup of roots, stems and twigs lined with fine grass and hair.

Habitat

Northern cardinals are found throughout the eastern half of the U.S. and most of Mexico. They have recently been expanding their ranges north and southwest.



Cardinals & Man

Cardinals are colorful, tolerant of people, have pleasant calls, and are easily attracted to bird feeders. That has made them a favorite of backyard birdwatchers all over the eastern half of the U.S. Their bright plumage brings color to our yards during the winter when many other species have flown south.

Life Cycle

Sexual maturity: Less than a year

Mating season: Spring and summer.
Cardinals usually nest 2 or 3 times a year

Gestation: Eggs hatch in 12-13 days,
young fledge 9-10 days after that.

No. of young: 2-5 usually 3-4. Eggs are 1 inch long and grayish or bluish-white with brown, purple or gray blotches.

Legend Has It ...

The brightly-colored male inspired the name for this bird, reminding people of cardinals in the Catholic Church who wore bright, red robes. Seven states have chosen the cardinal as their state bird: Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio, Virginia and West Virginia.

Now You Know!

- › Cardinals may form winter flocks of 60-70 birds.
- › Males care for the first **brood** while the females are incubating a second **clutch** in a new nest.
- › Females usually sing after males establish territory but before nesting starts.
- › Females dull colors help camouflage them from predators.
- › Males bright colors help attract a mate.
- › Males are duller in winter.
- › Male cardinals vigorously defend their territory. They have been known to attack their reflections in mirrors, windows and chrome. Sometimes they will even attack small red objects they mistake for other males.
- › Most small birds only live for a year or two. One cardinal was caught almost 16 years after it was initially banded.