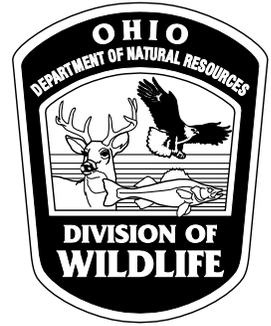


Ohio Division of Wildlife
Life History Notes
Cardinal

Scientific Name: *Cardinalis cardinalis*



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Introduction

The cardinal is the state bird of Ohio. It is well known around the state for its rich, distinctive call. The cardinal's song is usually a repetition of short whistled phrases with some notes run together; for instance: "What-cheer-cheer-cheer," or "Who-it, who-it, who-it," or "Birdy, birdy, birdy." There is also a sharp, short "clink" sound the bird makes as a call note. Cardinals can unusually be found singing near the top of the tallest tree in their territory.

Cardinals are very common throughout our state. They are equally at home in cities and suburbs as they are in rural areas. They are also a frequent visitor to backyard bird feeders.

Cardinals have expanded their range northward, east of the Plains Region, across the U.S. into southern Ontario, Canada in the past century. Cardinals were found in the southern and central parts of the state prior to settlement, expanding into northern Ohio during the 1830s.

Description

The male cardinal is an unmistakable brilliant red with black facial markings and a crested head. Females also have a head crest, but overall are duller in coloration. Female cardinals are a grayish, brown-red with true red only on their wings, tail, and crest. The red bill is also a distinguishing characteristic. As with many other species of birds, this muted appearance makes the female cardinal less conspicuous to predators when nesting.

Habitat and Habits

Cardinals prefer a mixed habitat of woodlands, brush, and forest edges. They eat a variety of seeds that their thick, cone-shaped beak is well adapted to handling.

Cardinals do not migrate, but individuals may wander over a widespread area. As with most wildlife species, cardinals have a very short life span. Most cardinals live only one year or less; a two- or three-year-old bird is a rarity. Two to three broods of young in a year help offset the loss of older birds in the population.

Reproduction and Care of the Young

In Ohio, cardinals begin nest building in April. Females construct the nest, usually in a dense bush or thick brush pile. The nest is a loosely built structure of leaves, twigs, grasses, and strips of bark. Nests are generally less than eight feet off the ground.

The cardinal is monogamous, meaning that the male and female form a bond and work together to rear their young. Generally, three or four bluish-white eggs with fine reddish brown freckles are produced per clutch. Females take sole responsibility for incubating the eggs. The male brings food to his mate while she incubates and he also feeds the young after hatching as the female is often incubating another clutch of eggs. After leaving the nest, the fledglings are cared for by the male for about three weeks. Young cardinals can fly at nine to ten days of age.



Management Plans

The Ohio Division of Wildlife doesn't manage habitat specifically for cardinals. However, cardinals are found throughout the state and at many of our state wildlife areas where suitable habitat exists. The management activities that occur on these areas and elsewhere around the state are designed to benefit cardinals and a host of other wildlife species.

Viewing Opportunities

Cardinals are found throughout Ohio. The best place to see them may be in your own backyard. Woodland and forest areas are also probable sites for finding cardinals. Although cardinals can be found at most all of Ohio's officially designated "Watchable Wildlife" areas, three are noted as very good places to watch for them: Springville Marsh State Nature Preserve in northwest Ohio, Crooked Run Nature Preserve and Gilmore Ponds Interpretive Preserve in southwest Ohio.

Do Something Wild!

The Division of Wildlife manages for wildlife diversity in the state. We attempt to create and/or conserve the habitat that will support as wide a diversity of wildlife as possible. The Division has a special program to manage and research non-game species that is supported by the generous citizens of the state of Ohio. With money either donated through the state income tax checkoff, by the purchase of wildlife license plates, or direct contributions to the Endangered Species Special Account, the Division is able to purchase critical habitat that is essential to sustaining many species of wildlife and to implement special efforts like the reintroduction of the osprey and the trumpeter swan to the state.

Contributions to our Wildlife Diversity Program are accepted throughout the year. To make a donation, please send a check to: Endangered Species Special Account, Ohio Division of Wildlife, 2045 Morse Road, Bldg. G, Columbus, Ohio 43229-6693. All contributions, whether made on your income tax return or directly, are tax deductible.



At a Glance

Mating: Monogamous

Peak Breeding Activity: April and May; overall breeding season extends through September

Incubation: 12-13 days

Clutch Size: 3 or 4 eggs

Young Fledge: In about 10 days

Number of Broods per Year: 2 or 3

Adult Weight: 2-3 ounces

Adult Length: About 8 inches
(including the tail)

Life Expectancy: 1 year or less

Migration Patterns: Year-round resident

Typical Foods: Mostly seeds, some insects

Native to Ohio: Yes

