

The Robin File



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2. Robin story (Maltese) *Pitirross b'xortih*
3. Instructions to make a bird table
4. Pictures of a robin trap and a robin at a bird table



Lucky robin

Martin loved October. It was time for the robins to arrive. Summer was over and robins were coming to spend the winter in Malta. Martin loved their bright orange breast and he loved their whistle.

One day Martin heard a robin tick-tick-ticking just outside his window.

"Oho! Here comes one robin," he said, "I must get ready." Martin ran to the garden shed and rummaged about the shelves.

"It's here somewhere," he said, "I used it last year. I'm sure I put it back here." Then Martin let out a yell of joy, as he fished out a cage. "Here it is! Now to set it up."

He ran to his grandma's knitting basket and took a ball of orange wool. He hung the ball of wool in the cage. Now this was a special cage because it was also a trap. Naughty Martin wanted to catch the robin in the trap and keep him in the cage.

When everything was ready Martin went into the garden with the cage.

"Okay, Mister Robin," said Martin, "Let's see if I can catch you."

He put the cage on a low wall and opened the door of the cage. The trap was ready. Martin went to hide behind a bush and waited for the robin to see the orange wool.

You see, robins don't like to share their home with other robins. When they find a nice garden where to stay, they chase away all the other robins who visit the garden. If a robin sees a ball of orange wool he thinks it's another robin and attacks it. That's why Martin put the orange wool in his trap. He wanted a robin to come into the trap and get caught.

"Ha ha!" laughed Martin. "When I catch you I will keep you for myself and then I can play with you every day."

But the robin didn't come. Martin could hear the robin tick-tick-ticking near the garden, but it didn't come.

"Why isn't the robin coming? Why doesn't he attack the orange wool?" he said. Martin went

up to his room and looked out of the window. He saw the robin fly into the neighbour's garden.

"There he is!" said Martin. "What is he doing in Lara's garden?"

Martin saw the robin land on a little wooden tray. The tray was on a stick in the middle of Lara's garden.

"What's that?" Martin wondered. Then he saw Lara at the window. She had a camera in her hand.

"Hey Lara, there's a robin in your garden. Can you see it?"

"Of course I can," said Lara, "I made the robin come to my garden and now I'm taking loads of pictures of him with my camera."

Martin stared at her. "How did you make him come to your garden? I put up a trap to catch him but he is only coming to your garden. Is your trap special?"

"This is NOT a trap, silly," said Lara, "Robins are my friends and I don't want to catch them."

"What's that thing on a stick?" Martin asked.

"That's my bird table. We put it there in autumn and we put food on it for the birds. The birds come to eat the food and I take pictures of them."

"Look!" said Martin, "The robin is back on your bird table. He must be very happy eating all that stuff."

"Of course he's happy," said Lara. "He's happy too because he's free. Robins don't like to live in cages. Robins die in cages."

"Oh no!" said Martin, "So that's why my robin died last year after I caught him."

"Martin, you don't have to catch robins to enjoy them," said Lara. "Why don't you make a bird table in your garden too? Then the robin will visit you too. And we will all be happy."

Martin ran down to his garden and he smashed the cage with a rock. Then he took it to the garden shed, and guess what he did. He used the wood of the cage to make a bird table.

Well done Martin! Well done Lara!

Pitirross b'xortih

Martin kien jieħu gost meta jasal Ottubru. Kien ix-xahar li fih jaslu ħafna pitirrossi biex jgħaddu x-xitwa f'Malta. Martin kienu jogħġbuh is-sider orangjo u t-tisfira tagħhom.

Ġurnata waħda Martin sema' pitirross itektek barra viċin it-tieqa tiegħu.

"Tajjeb, wasal wiehed," qal. "Aħjar nipprepara." Martin ġera sal-kamra tal-ġnien u beda jqalleb fl-imbarazz.

"Suppost hawn qiegħda," qal. "Użajtha s-sena l-oħra u naf li erfajtha hawnhekk." Imbagħad Martin għajjat bil-ferħ x'hin sab dak li kien qed ifittex. Kienet gaġġa żgħira. "Hawn hi! Issa biex narmaha."

Martin ġera sal-qoffa tal-ħjata tan-Nanna u minnha ha kobba suf orangjo. Dendel il-kobba fil-gaġġa. Din ma kinitx gaġġa tas-soltu imma kienet ukoll nassa. L-imqareb Martin ried jaqbad dak il-pitirross fin-nassa u jżommu għalih.

X'hin lesta Martin mar fil-ġnien bil-gaġġa.

"Owkej, Sur Pitirross," qal Martin. "Ejja naraw jirnexxilix naqbdex."

Poġġa l-gaġġa fuq ċint baxx u fethilha l-bieba. Issa n-nassa kienet lesta. Martin mar jistaħba wara arbuxxell u qagħad jistenna l-pitirross biex jara l-kobba suf orangjo.

Biex tkunu tafu, il-pitirrossi ma jhobbux jaqsmu d-dar tagħhom ma' pitirrossi oħrajn. Meta jsibu ġnien fejn joqogħu, jagħmluh tagħhom u jibdw ikeċċu kull pitirross ieħor li jersaq. Jekk pitirross jara ballun suf orangjo, kultant jaħsbu pitirross ieħor u jattakkah. Għalhekk Martin poġġa dik il-kobba fil-gaġġa, biex il-pitirross jidhol għaliha u jinqabad fin-nassa.

"Ha ħa!" daħaq Martin. "Issa la naqbdex inżommok għaliha, u nkun nista' nilgħab miegħek kuljum."

Imma l-pitirross baqa' ma ġiex. Martin kompli jismgħu jtektek viċin tal-ġnien, imma baqa' ma tfaċċax.

"Għaliex mhux qed jiġi? Għalfejn mhux jattakka l-kobba?" beda jgħid Martin. It-tifel tela' jiġri jittawwal mit-tieqa tal-kamra tiegħu. Ra l-pitirross itir fil-ġnien tal-ġirien tagħhom.

"Hemm arah!" qal eċitat. "X'qed jagħmel fil-ġnien ta' Lara?"

Martin ra l-pitirross ipoġġi fuq tavla żgħira tal-injam. Din kienet imwaħħla fuq lasta f'nofs il-ġnien.

"Dik x'inh, tgħid?" qal Martin. Dak il-ħin ra l-ħabiba tiegħu Lara fit-tieqa tagħha. F'idha kellha kamera.

"Hej Lara, hemm pitirross fil-ġnien tagħkom. Qed tarah?"

"U żgur li qed narah," wiegħbet Lara. "Dak jien ħajjartu jiġi u issa qed noħodlu ħafna ritratti bil-kamera tiegħi."

Martin skanta lejha. "X'għamilt biex ħajjartu jiġi fil-ġnien tagħkom? Jien armajt nassa biex naqbd u imma qed jiġi biss fil-ġnien tagħkom. Għamiltu xi nassa speċjali?"

"U x'nassa nassa, ta' rasek!" qaltu Lara. "Jien il-pitirrossi ħbieb tiegħi u ma naqbadhomx."

"Dik il-ħaġa fuq lasta x'inh?" staqsieha Martin.

"Dik *bird table*. Aħna narmawha fil-ħarifa u fuqha nferrxu xi ikel għall-ġhasafar. L-ġhasfar jiġu jieklu u jien noħdilhom ir-ritratti."

"Ara!" qal Martin, "Il-pitirross reġa' niżillek fuq il-*bird table*. Min jaf x'inhu kuntent jibla' dak l-ikel. Għalhekk ma resaqx lejn il-ġnien tagħna!"

"U żgur li kuntent," wiegħbet Lara. "Kuntent ukoll għax ħieles. Il-pitirrossi ma jhobbux jgħixu fil-gaġġa. Fil-gaġġa imutu."

"X'waħdadin!" qal Martin, "mela għalhekk il-pitirross tas-sena l-oħra mietli wara li qbadtu."

"Martin, il-pitirrossi mhemmx għalfejn taqbadhom biex tgawdihom," qaltu Lara. "Għaliex ma tarmalux *bird table* int ukoll fil-ġnien tagħkom. Imbagħad il-pitirrossi jżurukom ukoll. U kulhadd ikun kuntent."

Martin niżel jiġri fil-ġnien, qabad il-gaġġa u kissirha b'gebla. Imbagħad ħadha fil-kamra tal-ġnien u aqgħu x'għamel. L-injam tal-gaġġa użah biex jagħmlu *bird table*.

Prosit Martin! Prosit Lara!

A robin trap



Ray Galea

Nassa tal-pitirrossi

A robin on a bird table



Victor Falzon

Pitirross fuq bird table

Make a Bird Table

Bird tables come in many shapes and sizes. Some look like cottages, others like gothic cathedrals! But the simplest are by far the best, because while we may be finicky about detail, birds aren't. A bird table is basically a standing tray. Here's how to make a simple but successful bird table.

You need

- 1 rectangular piece of wood or board about 30x20cm and about 1–2cm thick. This will be your table top.
- 4 narrow (1cm²) wooden strips, each a bit shorter than the edges of the board.
- 1 broomstick, about 150cm long. (Fig. 1)

How?

- Nail, screw or glue the strips around the edge of the board, leaving a gap at each end (Fig. 2). These strips will keep food from rolling off the table at the slightest breeze, while the gaps will let rainwater drain away. Birds also find them great to perch on.
- Treat the board with wood preservative if you can. This will extend the life of your bird table. Let it dry out well before use. **Don't paint or varnish**, as these chemicals will flake and mix with the food.
- Taper one end of the broomstick to a point, keeping the other end flat. Immerse about 30cm of the tapered end in wood preservative and leave overnight. This will protect the wood from soil damp.
- Screw or nail the flat end of the broomstick to the table top. This may work itself loose in time, so if you can manage, stick a small block of wood to the underside of the board and bore a round hole (Fig. 3) in which the broomstick can fit snugly.
- To keep snails from your bird table, cut off the conical top part of a plastic water bottle and wedge it halfway up the broomstick, wide side facing down (Fig. 4).
- That's basically it. Stick the pointy end of the broomstick in the soil and make sure it is vertical and steady - it may need some firm hammering with a mallet.

Where?

Set up your bird table in a well-lit spot in your garden, preferably where the bird table can be observed from inside the house. Make very sure not to place it where a cat might ambush it – place it at least 2m from the nearest tree, shrub or low wall. If you don't have a soil patch, stand the bird table in a bucket of soil or sand.

What food?

Pile your bird table with food scraps. Try different foods, e.g. cake, *pastizzi*, crushed peanuts (unsalted), sesame seeds, raisins, biscuits, chopped cooked bacon rind, cooked rice, halved fruits (e.g. figs, prickly pears, pomegranates) etc. Avoid bread or crackers which are too dry.

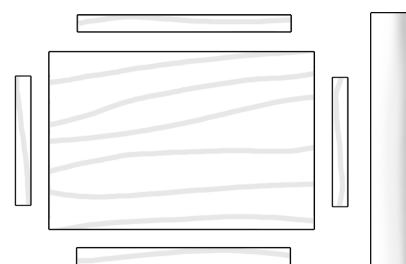


Fig. 1

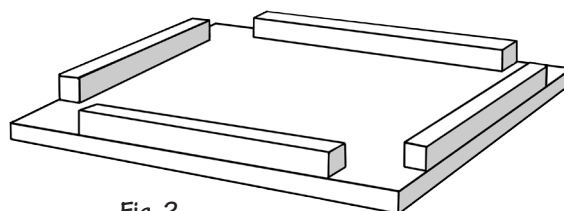


Fig. 2

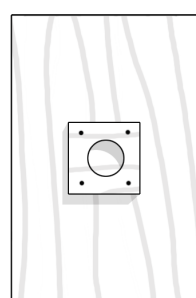


Fig. 3

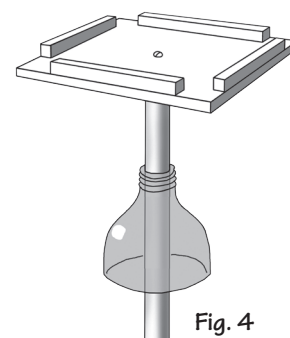


Fig. 4

Scrape the table top clean from time to time: if you try out food that sticks to your table top, scrape it off later.

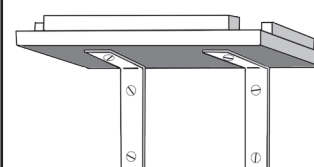
When?

Winter is the season when birds get hungriest, so it is a good habit to start stacking your bird table around November. Come spring, stop putting out food and let the birds revert to their natural food – insects, grubs, worms, berries – which by then should be in good supply again, and vital for a healthy nesting family.

What birds will visit?

Robins, Spanish Sparrows, Sardinian Warblers and Black Redstarts should visit your winter table, maybe **Stonechats** and **Blackcaps**. It also depends on where you live, how far from the countryside, what sort of garden you have, etc. Good luck.

Shelve it!



You can also hang a bird table on a wall, using shelving brackets. Again, place it well away from where a cat might ambush.

Resist the temptation to give the bird table a roof. Birds are suspicious of enclosed structures and will take longer to get used to your bird table.