



A beautiful robin nests in our own Shelley-Anne Salisbury's garden, awaiting a photo-opportunity and subsequent Suburb News publication

The 'Christmas' Robin

MARIE-CHRISTINE O'CALLAGHAN

If you receive Christmas cards, the chances are that at least one of them will feature a small bird with a brown back, a white belly and a red breast. Robins became Britain's bird of Christmas because in Victorian times postmen wore red tunics and were known as robins. These 'robins' delivered Christmas cards so the artists who designed these cards started drawing the little brown and red bird delivering letters and the robin became a symbol of the festive season.

Robins don't just appear at Christmas they are frequent visitors

to our gardens and gardeners will often find a robin checking their progress. The little bird seems very comfortable around humans and will even take its favourite food, mealworms from an outstretched hand. Their behaviour make them look very friendly but that is a misconception. Robins are highly territorial and will defend an area because it has good food and water.

The patch of coloured feathers on their breast helps them to do so. Both adult males and females have an orange breast and the bigger the patch of colour, the better the bird is at surviving and fighting. The colour acts as a warning to stay away and also helps

choose a mate. The mated pair will defend its territory with surprising ferocity driving off intruders and singing loudly. The pair will only stay together for the breeding season but individual robins will continue to sing during winter as they do not migrate.

British robins are a subspecies: *Erithacus Rubella Melophilus*, which roughly translates as the song-loving red robin. This very British bird is well loved by the British who gave it a human name 'Robin' a contraction and diminutive of Robert. And, besides, the 'red' on robins is a welcome flash of colour on a winter's day, truly the most magical colour in nature.

Sumo a (large) puppy cat

STEVEN ALTMANN-RICHER

Avid readers might recollect our gorgeous lop-eared bunny rabbit Sausage lovingly featured by Judith Samson in the Winter 2019 edition of the Suburb News.

We sadly lost Sausage peacefully in mid-2020 and decided that she could never be replaced by another bunny. So we used our lockdown time to scour the internet for inspiration for our next fluffy family member.

Enter 'Sumo' – our gorgeous ragdoll kitten!

Now, we had originally wanted a dog – a big fluffy one like a Bernese Mountain Dog or a Samoyed. And a dog is still definitely on the agenda for the future. But as young(ish) professionals who both work long hours – albeit mostly at home right now – walking a dog doesn't fit in with our current lifestyle.

With a dog ruled out, a cat was then the obvious place to turn to but, the fact is, we have never been 'cat people'.

When we mentioned cats to our respective parents, we got short shrift. The response was "cats are selfish and unfriendly; dogs are nice." We relied on our parents to feed and look after Sausage when we went on holiday so having them like our next pet was important.

We looked at all alternatives to a cat, including considering animals that could double as lawnmowers – goats, cows and alpacas. But we decided the HGS Trust will need to allow fences

before these animals can be let loose in our garden.

Just when we started to despair and come full circle back to perhaps a pair of bunnies, we came across 'puppy cats'. This term was new to us, but believe it or not there are certain breeds of cat which have the personality of a dog. They love attention, follow you around, greet you at the door and even play fetch. This seemed perfect – a dog-like creature you don't have to walk!

Through August-September 2020, we must have spoken to literally every cat breeder in the country to learn about puppy cats and quickly knew that a ragdoll was right for us. With the country having gone pet crazy during lockdown, we eventually managed to find a ragdoll kitten at a fully-approved breeder in Scarborough. We luckily collected Sumo a few days before Yorkshire went into Tier 3 lockdown at that time.

Sumo – named because he will be a big boy – won us over instantly. He is the most loving, friendly, fluffy and fun pet anyone could wish for. All he wants is to be with us – whether we're asleep in bed or sitting on the loo!

We know he isn't a dog, but he also doesn't behave like a cat – he even plays football with us now! We think of him as his own unique species – some sort of magical creature.

Our mission has now become to convince our parents that Sumo is as special as Sausage was, and there's no doubt that he is slowly winning them over, even if they won't quite fully admit it yet.

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CORRECTION AND APOLOGY REGARDING ISSUE 147

There is a mistake in the article on Northway Gardens by Brian Ingram. He refers to the florist in Market Place as Amber Day Flowers it is Amber Rose Flowers.

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