



FALL

2007

BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

THE NORTHLAND'S LARGEST SELECTION OF FEEDERS, SEED MIXES & BINOCULARS

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Customer Appreciation Day

Sunday

December 2nd

1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Once again we want to show our appreciation to our wonderful customers by offering a special day of savings.

On Sunday the 2nd, everything in the store, except 50lb. bags of bird seed, will be 15% Off (sorry, we can not combine this with other discounts or coupons).

Aside from the great deals, we will have refreshments and door prizes.



Extended Holiday Hours

December 1st - 24th

Thursdays 9:30 - 7:00

Sundays 1:00 - 5:00

December 24th close at 5:00

Closed 25th

It's Good To Be Brown

by Mark McKellar

A few years ago I wrote an article for the Missouri Conservation magazine about sparrows. I chose to write about the "little brown birds" because I have always felt they never get the respect they deserve. They are the Rodney Dangerfields of the bird world.

The truth is that our native sparrows are a great group of birds that are quite beautiful, but they have a fiercely undeserved bad reputation because of an imposter. The **House Sparrow** (*Passer domesticus*) is over



The Imposter House Sparrow photo by Jim Rathert

abundant, really aggressive and generally a pain to deal with. They were introduced into this country to be the savior of the American farmer, but instead became the scourge of bird feeders coast to coast. Even more insulting for "good" sparrows, these aliens are not even true sparrows. They belong to an old world group of birds known as weavers.

If you can bring yourself to sift through the "little brown birds" at your feeders this fall and winter, you will notice several great birds but . . . how do you tell them apart? My first rule is to separate them into "striped chests" or "plain chests". From there, look at face and head patterns.

We have three native stipe-

ched birds that visit feeders this time of year. The **Song Sparrow** is the most common. It is a long-tailed sparrow with a heavily streaked chest with a dark central spot. The **Fox Sparrow** is a large sparrow that often seen scratching around



Fox Sparrow photo by Jim Rathert

under or very near cover. It is patterned a lot like a Song Sparrow but if you look close, the spots are actually shaped like little arrowheads. In our area, Fox Sparrows are generally reddish in color. The **Lincoln Sparrow** is the smallest of the striped chest sparrow. Their chest usually has a buff colored band with lots of fine stripes or dashes. The head is more grey in color.

If your yard and neighborhood has lots of trees, the most common native sparrow with a stripe-free chest should be the **White-throated Sparrow**. You should notice two major color forms, with both having striped heads alternating dark and either white or tan stripes. Both will have yellow "eyebrow" spots that become more vivid in the spring.

In more open areas, the **American Tree Sparrow** can be really numerous some years, while quite scarce in others. This small rufous-capped bird has a "stick pin" spot in the center of its otherwise plain chest. Its

. . .continued on page 2



CONTINUED FROM COVER, SPARROWS

yellow lower bill is unique as well. Most common in my very open area are the **White-crowned** and **Harris' Sparrows**. These large cousins of the White-throated Sparrow are quite handsome and a treat to have around. The Harris' Sparrow has a restricted range and Kansas City is on the eastern most side of its wintering grounds.



Springtime Harris's Sparrow
Photo by Rick Jordahl

Don't be scared to look at the sparrows in your yard. Don't cheat yourself by being turned off by the imposters, study your sparrows and enjoy the fruits of your labors. If you want more information about our winter sparrows get on-line and go to <http://mdc.mo.gov/nathis/birds/sparrows>. It was written a few years ago but it can still be helpful.

WIN A PAIR OF NIKON BINOCULARS



Monarch 8X36s are super light, ultra sharp, waterproof binoculars. Their click-stop eyecups are very handy and have a close focus of 8.2 ft.

Have you been putting off buying a new set of binoculars?

Now is the time to act on that wish.

Customers who buy any Nikon Binocular or Spotting Scope at our store from now through December 1st may enter a drawing for a Free pair of Monarch 8X36 Binoculars (a \$269.99 Value). This will be limited only to people who have purchased Nikon optics from this store during that period. Your chances of winning will be quite high. This applies to any binocular or spotting scope that we have in stock. You will get one entry for every Nikon optic that you buy during that period. You could buy each of your kids a \$59 pair of Sportstars or \$89 Actions and you could win the Monarchs for yourself. Sweet! Better yet, treat yourself to a pair of Premier LXs and possibly win the Monarchs for your spouse.

WHO KNOWS HOW MANY WE WILL SELL. 20, 10, 2?

LOWER PRICE

Just in time for the holidays, the ultimate mobile field guide, Handheld Birds, has come down in price. All software tends to come down in price after companies have recouped their development costs. Not only is the program cheaper, it contains over 1,600 bird images and 650+ range maps from the National Geographic Field Guide to Birds and over 4 hours of premium quality bird songs from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The sophisticated search criteria can sort birds by many individual or combined categories



256MB SD Card w/ Software was \$249.99

\$99.99

256MB SD Card w/Software and Palm Tungsten E2 PDA was \$499.99

\$399.99

www.handheldbirds.com

Have You Visited www.backyardbirdcenterkc.com?

Online Shopping is Coming!

Are you on our e-mail list? Sign up today for monthly bird news, feeding tips and field trip reminders.



SUET SEASON IS BACK



C&S Seed Treat

79¢

Expires 2/1/08



Have Binocs, Will Travel!

The fall birding season is always interesting. It begins in August when shorebirds (generally birds who were unable to find a mate) start moving south. Warblers and other songbirds really pick up in September and hawks filter in with their numbers peaking in December. Most of our true fall birding is concentrated around area lakes. Kansas City is well positioned for waterfowl migration. The numbers of gulls can be impressive as well as the number of different species. Ducks, grebes and loons filter in with each cold front and Ospreys and eagles can be seen with relative ease this time of year.



*A cold day at Lake Jacomo
Photo by Ruth Simmons*

❖ The hikes and programs listed below fill on a first come first serve basis. ❖
PLEASE call the store to register (816) 746-1113

Smithville Lake Waterbird Watching

Sunday, November 4th 9:00a.m. – noon

Truly one of my must do trips each year. Though dependent on weather patterns, the lake can be loaded with birds this time of year. We will search out the many ducks and geese for loons, grebes and other waterfowl. Don't worry about the long distance viewing, we will have plenty of spotting scopes for everyone to get "close up" views of distant birds.

Meet us at the Litton Center at 8:00.

Identifying Little Brown Birds (in store class)

Tuesday, November 6th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Are you ready to finally learn the real truth about sparrows and their cousins? Join us as we break down the "little brown birds" into more easily identifiable terms. By the end of the evening you will hopefully be able to add several new birds to your yard list that have probably been there each winter.

Burr Oak Woods' Sparrows Hike

Sunday, November 11th 9:00a.m. – noon

Combining the cover article and this issue's Conservation Corner, we will visit Burr Oak Woods for some fall birding. The big attraction this day will be sparrows. We will be off trail for most of this hike. Wear shoes and pants that will be good in high grassy areas.

Meet us at the Burr Oak Woods front gate at 9:00.

Identifying Birds In Your Backyard (in store class)

Tuesday, November 13th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Back by popular demand! Are you tired of not knowing the names of the birds you are seeing at your feeders? Do you get frustrated trying to figure out if it is a House Finch or a Purple Finch? Join us for an evening of Backyard Bird ID and we will solve some of the most common frustrations that new birders struggle with.

Parkville Nature Sanctuary's Autumn Birds

Thursday, November 15th 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Join us for a beautiful autumn hike. We will search for winter arrivals and resident birds that should be forming their winter forage flocks. This will be a great hike for beginning bird watchers.

Meet us at the store at 8:30 or the Sanctuary at 9:00.

Eagles of Squaw Creek NWR

Sunday, November 25th 7:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

I always say, "why sit around eating leftover turkey when you can soar with the eagles." This day is sure to be filled with beautiful sights. Some years we see hundreds of eagles and thousands of ducks and geese. Dress warmly and bring a snack.

Meet at the store at 7:30 or the Visitor Center at 9.

Smithville Lake

Sunday, January 6th 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

If you are keeping an annual lifelist, this will be a great chance to kickoff the new year. We will search the lakes for eagles, loons and anything rare the winter winds may have blown in. We will look for Short-eared Owls. Dress warmly and bring a thermos of something hot to drink.

Meet at the Litton Center at 2:00 p.m.



*Common Loon
Photo by Rick Jordahl*

*The Common Loon
picture above was taken
with the Nikon
Digisoping Outfit
Nikon 82mm Fieldscope
with a 30X Eyepiece*





SPECIES PROFILE: Black-capped Chickadee (The Energizer Birdie)

by John Burwell

I've always marveled at the bundle of energy we call the Black-capped Chickadee. Named for its famed chick-a-dee-dee-dee call, the Latin translation for the scientific name, *Parus atricapillus*, means a titmouse with black hair on its head.

I'm not the only one who admires their boundless energy, chickadees are often the center of winter feeding flocks. These little guys are masters of food discovery and are often the first species to find a newly placed bird feeder. Combine their knack for finding food with a very vocal life-style and you can see why woodpeckers, titmice, kinglets and even bluebirds will join in with a group of chickadees on a cold winter day.

It is a good thing that they are so efficient at finding food. Their small size is more vulnerable to heat loss, thus they must work harder to stay alive in cold weather. Scientists estimate that on sub zero temperature days, chickadees must spend 20 times more effort searching for food than in springtime just to survive long cold nights.

Chickadees are indiscriminating cavity nesters. They will nest in just about any vacant hole that they can get into. I had one nest down in an old metal fence post. Unfortunately, it rained and flooded the nest out. We do have boxes with holes cut to chickadee size but they will quite often use bluebird boxes.

There are seven species of chickadees in North America, with two occurring here in Missouri. Here in the northern half of the state we have the Black-capped Chickadee with its two note "see-saw" song. In the southern part of the state, they have the similar looking Carolina Chickadee who's song is a drawn out "care-o-line-a". In central Missouri where the two nesting territories meet, hybrids are quite common.

Attracting chickadees is no problem. They will eat a wide variety of seeds, but peanuts and sunflowers are their favorites. These little energizer birdies need all the calories they can get.



Black-capped Chickadee
photo by Pat White

CONSERVATION CORNER:

Burr Oak Woods Conservation Nature Center

I got an unusual birthday invitation the other day. A building, not a person, is turning 25. In November of 1991 I came for a job interview with the Missouri Department of Conservation at that building. I was the Assistant Nature Center Manager at the Burr Oak Woods Nature Center in Blue Springs for just over 2 years and loved it.

If you haven't been to Burr Oak, you truly are missing out. The nature center houses live animals, wonderful exhibits, an auditorium, classrooms and a fantastic bird feeder station. The greatest feature to me is the 1,100 acres of land that they have protected. Many miles of hiking trails traverse the property and take you through various habitats like old and young forest, prairies and glades.

You have probably heard me praise our beloved conservation department before, but this wonderful property and nature center in Blue Springs is a prime example of benefits we as citizens of Missouri enjoy because of MDC. The next time you find yourself "south of the river", do yourself a favor and stop in and visit Burr Oak Woods and wish them a happy birthday.



ECO-FRIENDLY GIFT BAGS

New for the holidays, or any gift giving occasion, Tree Free Gift Bags are great values. There are four sizes of bags and each bag comes with a beautiful Tree Free card, matching envelope and tissue paper. Bags feature a convenient card pocket.

Wine and cub
sized bags are
\$2.95 each

Vogue and Large
sized bags are
\$3.95 each



Over 300,000 trees will be cut down to make greeting cards this holiday season. (eartheasy.com)
Tree Free Cards and Bags are made from an earth-friendly alternative!!!



Time To Ask Mark...

Q. Where do our hummingbirds go in winter?

A. South, way south. Most Ruby-throated Hummingbirds spend the winter in southern Mexico and Central America. There are always those who wander but according to banders, they are impressive at “sticking” to the same routes each year. We also know that while most other hummingbirds migrate over land, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds make their daring nighttime flight across the Gulf of Mexico in the spring and fall.

Q. Could I have seen a Red-breasted Nuthatch already?

A. Yes. We have been seeing really good numbers of Red-breasteds since early September. We haven’t had a good winter invasion of these little guys in a few years so this is exciting. They love lots of different seed but peanuts and sunflower chips are their favorites. Keep your eyes open for other invaders. Since lots of nuthatches generally means the pine seed crop didn’t do well up north this year, we may see Red Crossbills, Purple Finches and even White-winged Crossbills if we are lucky. Call us if you have a “red” invasion at your house.

Q. I’ve seen a hawk hanging around my feeder. Is that why I have fewer birds right now?

A. It really is a good question. Birds do decrease their activity at feeder stations in the fall and early winter each year and we generally attribute this to the boom in natural food that occurs then. Hawks may play a larger role than I have really ever given them credit. The fall and early winter period is also the time that hawks are migrating into our area. Sharp-shinned Hawks in particular can be here in impressive numbers and can’t resist a visit to a target rich environment like a bird feeder station. Birds are smart animals and learn quickly to avoid hawks. The best thing that you can do to protect your birds is to make sure they have escape cover.

Q. I live in an apartment and my feeders can’t make a big mess. What seed do you recommend?

A. There are several options for you. Hull-less seeds like sunflower hearts, chips and peanuts are great. “They are like boneless, skinless chicken”, as Ruth likes to say. Wild Delight’s Total Cuisine is a waste-free mix that gives you seed diversity without any mess. They also have several low waste mixes including the new Less Mess Cardinal Food featured in the enclosed flyer.



Red-breasted Nuthatches are smaller than the common White-breasted. Photo by Mark McKellar



Sharp-shinned Hawk Photo by Anetika Roller.

IDEAL HOLIDAY GIFTS FOR THE NATURE LOVER

Many Unique Bird Feeders



Lots of Socks \$9.99



Garden Statuary



Incredibly accurate, hand-carved Red-winged Blackbird - \$124.99

Staff Recommendation

Joyce says the Bird Nest Spy Cam is the coolest Mother’s Day present she has ever gotten. “We set it up on a phoebe nest under our deck and watched them for hours”.



Eastern Bluebird Nest



Eastern Phoebe photo by Paul Ruehle

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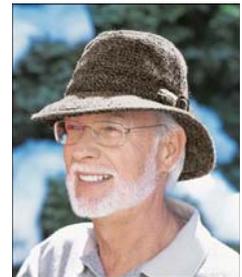
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YOU ASKED FOR THEM: WINTER TILLEYS



OK, OK, I don't know why I've waited two years to bring these in but winter Tilley's are here. These wool hats feature all of the wonderful guarantees and quality as the other Tilley's, plus keep your head warm in winter. There are Tuckaway Earflaps and Forehead Warmers for really cold days and a hidden tether for windy conditions. They make great gifts for the holiday season.



THAYERS BIRDING SOFTWARE V3.9

The best Birding Software on the market just got better. If you have been to one of my classes, you have seen Thayer's Birding Software in action. It is truly a fantastic product. We now have the latest version (3.9) in stock. It still features 925 species of birds, maps, songs, an ID wizard, hundreds of fun quizzes and every page of The Birder's Handbook but now you can export pictures and songs to your iPod, MP3 player or PDA. Stop by the store for a demonstration or visit their website at www.thayerbirding.com.



PROJECT FEEDER WATCH



*Dark-eyed Juncos are a dependable Feeder Watch Bird
Photo by Steve Dillinger*

Join us for the 21st season of Project FeederWatch. Thousands of Citizen Scientists across the U.S. and Canada put out their feeders, count the birds in their yards, and then turn over the data to Cornell scientists each year. You need to be able to count for at least 15 minutes, two consecutive days, and twice a month (November - April). If you only want to count once a month or you can't feed birds at your house, consider volunteering at the Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary in Liberty (816-781-8598). For more information on Project FeederWatch visit www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw or call 800-843-BIRD (2473). There is a \$15.00 fee to pay for materials.