



FALL

2011

# BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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**Remember the Galileo Thermometers? These unique gift items are back with a couple of new versions for the garden and home. Prices range from \$12.99 - \$39.99.**



**Extended Holiday Hours**  
*December 1st - 24th*  
*Mon - Fri 9:30 - 6:00*  
*\*\*Thursdays 9:30 - 7:00*  
*Saturdays 9:00 - 5:00*  
*Sundays Noon - 4:00*  
*December 24th close at 3:00*  
*Closed Christmas Day*



## How Do Birds Survive in Winter?

by Mark McKellar

It is easy to understand why people rush out and buy bird seed when it snows. How can something so small and fragile possibly survive such brutally cold conditions? Not surprising, many of their survival techniques are the same as ours.

First and foremost we have to remember that birds, like humans and other mammals, are **homoeothermic** (warm blooded). This means that as long as birds can find a suitable food source, their bodies can convert that food into energy (i.e. body heat).

You've probably heard me talk about birds that winter here from up north. Cold temperatures are survivable by most birds, it is the covering of the food source that is the main problem. Ground feeders and waterfowl know that their food sources are going to be covered up quickly but arboreal (tree dwelling) species like evening grosbeaks and crossbills can ride out the same "cold" conditions that juncos and snow geese abandon.

Given food availability, how do these tiny, fragile creatures endure below -20 degrees? Like us, they often try to find places that are well protected from wind and "cold air".

Evergreens provide very important **shelter** as do artificial and natural cavities. Within these day or night roosting areas you can often find several birds. Bluebirds, wrens and others are known to **huddle**, bunch or even stack on top of each other to keep warm.

While birds can't put on an extra set of feathers in cold conditions, they can fluff up. Let us not forget what the source of insulation is for a down jacket. By **fluffing** up and creating air space between feathers as well as feathers and skin, it is like putting on an extra jacket. This is why you will hear me talk about



*American Goldfinch "fluffing" for insulation against the elements photo by Mary Nemecek*

the importance of a heated bird bath. Water is essential to keeping feathers healthy and healthy feathers are essential to keeping warm.

When conditions get even worse, shivering can help. **Shivering** is our (and a bird's) body's way of generating a little extra heat.

Perhaps the most amazing adaptation birds have for dealing with the cold is their ability to lower their body temperatures, heart rate and general body functions. **Hypothermia** conserves oxygen in the blood stream and is used primarily while sleeping.

Hummingbirds and a few other species can drop their body temperatures drastically. This condition is known



## A VERY BIRDIE MOVIE

By Mary Nemecek

Birders - the term might conjure up an image of someone not young, wearing a funny hat, popping up from behind a bush with binoculars raised to eye level. In all honesty that image might not be far off. The real question is - would you go to a movie about birders?

On October 14, just such a movie was released. With top billing going to comedy elites, Steve Martin, Jack Black and Owen Wilson, *The Big Year* told the story of a contest to see more birds in North America in a single year than anyone else has ever seen. Based on the book of similar title, this movie release has long been awaited by birders. They were not disappointed.

Each of the three characters, while not true to the personalities of the real life men their character is based on, had personality traits that were easy to relate to. Who wouldn't love the credit card maxing Brad Harris played by Jack Black? Or the polite businessman, Stu Preissler, played by Steve Martin, who just wants to retire and bird? Or the uppity, seemingly deceitful Kenny Bostick, played by Owen Wilson, who will seem to stop at nothing to win?

The movie does a great job of giving the context of doing 'A Big Year' and of the money and passion it takes to attempt it. The current record is held by Sandy Komito. Achieved in 1998, while in his late 60's Sandy spent about \$10,000 a month and traveled over 270,000 miles to beat his old record of 721 and two other birders, Al Levantin and Greg Miller, seeing a total of 744 birds in one year. This remains the current record.

While recent Big Year pursuits are not so crowded in competition, John Vanderpoel is currently looking to beat Komito's record. On November 6, he was at 729 birds and had reached 700 birds faster in a year than anyone previously. While we didn't know it at the time, the McBirders had the pleasure of standing shoulder to shoulder with John on the pelagic we took in San Diego. He keeps a blog if you would like to follow along at [www.bigyear2011.com](http://www.bigyear2011.com). In the meantime, treat yourself to an enjoyable movie by seeing 'The Big Year.'

... continued from cover as **Torpor**. For species, like hummingbirds, with extremely high metabolic rates, this is the only way they do not "starve to death" while sleeping. Hypothermia and Torpor do not come without hazards. A bird in Torpor can't take off and fly if danger approaches, in fact, it can take a bird an hour or so to regain full muscle control.

What does this winter have in store for us? As all Missourian know, there really is no way to know for sure. Don't forget that the food and water you are providing is important to birds, especially during the brutal stretches.

## Bird Seed Craze

So what in the world has happened to bird seed prices?

Several factors are to blame. Primarily, we are faced with a situation where fewer farmers are growing sunflower because the price of corn and soybeans are so high.

Factor in the severe drought that hit Kansas and Oklahoma, that leaves the Dakotas to supply pretty much the whole country.

Oh yeah! You know those high corn and soybean prices? They cause the large users of cooking oils to buy sunflowers for their oil which drives up prices even further.

The good news is that safflower, nyjer and millet have remain at "normal" prices. You can still feed birds without having to resorting to the "cheap stuff".

## TILLEY HATS FOR ANY SEASON



*Our best seller, the Summer weight LTM6 feature the widest brim, a unique airflow design and the strap system for keeping in on in any wind condition.*

**Get a FREE \$10 Gift Certificate with the Purchase of any Tilley Hat this Holiday Season (Nov. 25th - Dec. 24th) Gift Certificates must be used on a future visit.**



*If you have never looked at Tilley's winter hats, you should. The hats are a wool blend with fold down earflaps and a forehead warmer. Awesome!*



*The new TWC4 Outback hat is my new Fall hat. It travels well and protected me from the sun 30 miles out in the Pacific Ocean.*



## Have Binos, Will Travel!

We had a very pleasant late summer/early fall migration this year. Hummingbirds were plentiful as were other southward bound migrants. The summer floods took their toll on many of our favorite spots along the Missouri River but they are rebounding nicely. Reports from Squaw Creek are that many duck and shorebird species have been using the refuge over the last couple of weeks and tons of White Pelicans have just shown up. Our first of the fall Junco contest (Facebook) ended on October 4th and was won by Lisa Owens.

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



*American Kestrels are most commonly seen hovering over highway medians in late fall and early winter.  
Photo by Mary Nemecek*

### Identifying Birds In Your Backyard (in store class)

**Thursday, January 19th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.**

The winter edition of this popular class. We will cover basic backyard birds of winter but concentrate on the tricky ID challenges like House Finch vs Purple Finch, Downy vs Hairy Woodpecker, Cooper's vs Sharp-shinned Hawk. Join us for an evening of Backyard Bird ID and we will solve some of the most common frustrations that new birders struggle with.

### Birds of San Diego County (in store class)

**Thursday, January 26th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.**

The first week of this past October, the McBirder's Birders ventured to San Diego County for some Southern California birding. We had a great trip tallying 194 species. Join us for a "slide show" of our trip and pick up some pointers for your next trip to one of the birdiest counties in America.

### Mid-Winter Birds of NW Missouri

**Sunday, February 12th 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.**

We never know what type of weather the winter has in store for us, but it generally brings in some of our northern feathered friends. We will search area hotspots for hawks, eagles, Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspurs, Short-eared Owls and any other goodies.

**Meet at the store at 1:00 p.m. Cost: \$3 per person**



*These Lapland Longspurs nest in the treeless landscapes of the far north. We most often find them in good sized flocks visiting gravel roads in open farm lands when there is snow covering the fields.  
Park Photo by Rick Jordahl*

*"We abuse land because we see it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."  
- Aldo Leopold*

## 10th Anniversary Weekend!!! Saturday & Sunday, March 3rd & 4th

### Birding Across State Lines

**Sunday, March 25th 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.**

Birds do not recognize political boundaries and neither should birders. We will spend the afternoon exploring a couple of Kansas lakes that have turned up really good birds in the past. We will start at Wyandotte County Lake then head down to Shawnee Mission Park Lake in search of the elusive "Jayhawk".

**Meet at the store at 1:00 p.m. Cost: \$3 per person**



*The stunning Little Blue Heron are always a treat to find.  
Photo by Mary Nemecek*

## PROTECT YOUR BIRD SEED INVESTMENT WITH A TOPPER



*Pole Toppers from Birds Choice, are made from recycled milk jugs and works great with Erva 1" diameter poles.*



*Aspects' Tube Tops have a lifetime warranty, fit a variety of tube feeders and pay for themselves quickly.*



# *SPECIES PROFILE: Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (Sphyrapicus varius)*

By Mark McKellar

Did you ever watch the Beverly Hillbillies? I loved that show as a kid. One of the more memorable characters for me was Mr. Drysdale's Secretary, Jane Hathaway. Every so often she would be clad in her "birdwatching" attire and in search of the elusive Yellow-bellied Sapsucker!

That would be a rare bird in Beverly Hills California, but luckily for us, we get to see them every winter in our area. I have had a female coming to my peanut feeder for that last three winters.

Though the name doesn't say it, they are woodpeckers. They are among a group of birds who are known for drilling rows of small holes into living trees so that the sap "oozes" to the surface. The sapsucker and other birds will lick the sap for the sugar energy but they will feast on the insects that are attracted to it. I have seen Ruby-throated Hummingbirds licking the sap in the early spring. Contrary to popular belief, the sapsucker holes



*Male Yellow-bellied Sapsucker*  
Photo by Kim Hawkins

cause little if any harm to the tree.

Yellow-bellieds are about the size of a Hairy Woodpecker, but can easily be distinguished from other woodpeckers by the long white slash down their wings. The white can occasionally be hard to see but once the bird moves around a bit, it generally reveals itself.

Males are easily told from females as they have red throats while the ladies have white throats. Juvenile birds look like the adults but are far more mottled.

During the winter the yellow belly is quite "dull". Just before they leave or pass through in the spring you can see adults that have molted into their breeding plumage.

Did you know that group of sapsuckers is collectively known as a "slurp" of sapsuckers? Keep your peanut and suet feeders filled this winter and watch for the white wing slash of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker to show up in your yard.

## CONSERVATION

### *CORNER: Missouri State Parks*

When was the last time you visited a Missouri State Park? Did you know Missouri frequently ranks in the top 4 state park systems nationwide?

Missouri has 85 state parks and historic sites and the Roger Pryor Pioneer Backcountry totaling over 200,000 acres and 840 miles of trails. Missouri state parks also maintain 3,700 camp sites, 194 cabins, almost 2,000 picnic sites and hosts over 17 million visitors every year.

In northern Platte County, Weston Bend State Park is a target location for many birders, especially during migration. It is a great area to catch warblers moving through in the spring and fall. Another great bird often seen there is the Pileated Woodpecker. The park has 8 hiking trails and a 3 mile paved trail for hiking/biking. It offers spectacular overviews of the Missouri River and also hosts a camping area.

In recent times, with the downturn in the economy and the removal of all state park funding from the general fund, the 1/10 of one percent tax passed in 1984, cannot stretch far enough. The parks estimate needing \$200 million in infrastructure and capital improvements. Many conservation groups across Missouri are appealing to Missouri lawmakers to make solving this problem a priority. You may see more on the issue as various groups across our state try to persuade lawmakers to issue bonds for a state building fund and allocate 10% of the revenues to state parks.

## SUET SEASON IS HERE

*Cold weather brings woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches and others to suet feeders.*



**Pine Tree Farms  
Bird Tweet High  
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**79¢**

**Peanut Butter Suet cakes are a premium cake that contain on Beef Fat, Chopped Peanuts and Peanut Butter. No fillers**



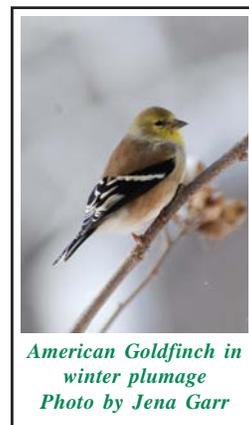
**Always popular during the Holidays, Seed Wreaths are back again.**



## Time To Ask Mark...

### Q. Where do the yellow finches go in the fall?

**A.** American Goldfinches never leave our area. In the late summer early fall season, they primarily retreat to weedy fields to feast on Mother's Nature's bounty. Seeds from many weeds such as Giant Ragweed are just too plentiful to resist. By late November, those seeds are starting to drop to the ground and become harder to find, thus the return of the finches (in their winter plumage) to our feeders. Our number of our goldfinches can grow heavily in the winter as birds from Iowa, Minnesota and points even further north come here to overwinter.



*American Goldfinch in winter plumage  
Photo by Jena Garr*

### Q. I never see more than a couple of chickadees at my feeder. Does that mean that is all I have living in the area?

**A.** Absolutely not. You have probably heard me say that birds get about 15% of their daily diets from bird feeders. Now there has been a neat study published on Cornell Lab of Ornithology's website. The study involved tagging Black-capped, Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, White-breasted Nuthatches, American Goldfinches and House Finches with tiny tags that set off sensor attached to feeders throughout a neighborhood. Some of the findings were impressive. One found that some birds took up to 203 seeds in one day. Another, that a single Titmouse regularly visited 3 different feeders over a half-mile area. The study is call RFID Bird Tracking and you can read more about it at <http://www.allaboutbirds.org/page.aspx?pid=2147>

### Q. What the heck is going on with bird seed prices this fall?

**A.** See the article on page 2. Believe me, no one is more frustrated than those of us who depend on bird seed sales to make a living.

### Q. What is the secret to keeping squirrels and raccoons out of my suet?

**A.** Luckily, squirrels don't tend to take to suet as often as they do sunflower but we do get the occasional report. The real problem tends to be with the "night shift". Many people simply take their suet feeders in at night. While this very effective, it only takes forgetting it once that leads to a trip down to the edge of the woods to retrieve the feeder. The simplest solution that I have found is Hot Pepper Suet. No, it doesn't hurt the birds and they will eat it just as well as many of the other formulas. Mammals have very different taste systems from birds and are quite sensitive to the peppers. They will leave it alone. Some do like to rotate the Hot Pepper with their favorite cake. If you do want to do this, remember to wear gloves while handling the pepper cakes.



*Hot Pepper Suet Cakes from C&S are great at deterring the pesky squirrels and raccoons*

## STOCKING STUFFERS & TEACHER GIFTS



*We have a wide selection of styles and sizes of stained glass from Joan Baker Designs*



*Sienna Sky Earrings make great stocking stuffers.*



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*StoneAge Creation boulder owls are unique and as cute as you can imagine. Sizes from 2" to 18"*



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## ABSOLUTELY ADORABLE, YET FUNCTIONAL

When we brought this snowman feeder in last year, we knew they were cute but had never seen them in “action”. Wow! They did not disappoint. Customers who purchased them gave them rave reviews as a bird feeder. Goldfinches are the main species, but chickadees, titmice and woodpeckers have been seen using it regularly. It makes a great gift for grandparents, babysitters, teachers or any bird lover in your life.

## NEED A WINDCHIME RESTRUNG?

One of the reason’s good windchimes sound as great as they do, is because of the stings they are strung with. The problem of course, is that strings wear out over time. If you have a windchime that needs to be restrung you can contact Ruth here at the store and let her get you an estimate for the restringing.



*This young Black-headed Grosbeak was a quite rare addition to one of our customer’s feeder watch list!  
Photo by Cindy Rogers*

## PROJECT FEEDER WATCH

Join us for the 25<sup>th</sup> season of Project FeederWatch. Last year 115,000 Checklists from Citizen Scientists across the U.S. and Canada were submitted to Cornell. It’s not too late to get involved. Counts go from November through 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](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw) or call 800-843-BIRD (2473). There is a \$15.00 fee to pay for materials.