



BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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Fall Feeder Cleaning
Saturday, Oct. 13th
9:00a.m. to 4:00p.m.

It's that time again! Fall feeder cleaning day is just in time to get ready for the fall feeding season. Once again, we will have a power washer on hand and as many spare parts as we can gather. You can drop off your feeders and we will give you an estimated pick up time.

The cost will be \$3.00 per feeder for cleaning and \$5.00 for repairs with this fall's proceeds going to the Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary. Wild Delight will help offset the cost of the cleaning with a \$6.00 OFF Coupon.



The Heat of Summer

by Mark McKellar

There is little doubt what the topic of conversation around this area was all summer. The summer dealt us one harsh weather hand to deal with. How do birds handle such conditions?

Birds have higher body temperatures than humans (105 degrees on average) so they are not as vulnerable to high temperatures. As a rule, dealing with extreme cold is more difficult for birds. Feathers play a big part in dealing with the heat as well as the cold. Birds will **fluff** up their feathers to create air space for insulation against the heat. They will also turn their lighter colored feathers toward the sun to better reflect the sun's rays and raise their wings to **create shade** for their featherless legs.

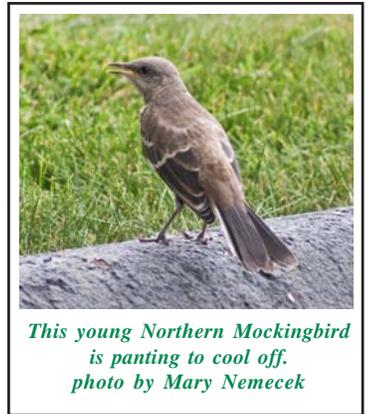
Have seen a bird **panting**? Birds have unique respiratory systems that involves a one way flow through the lungs and air sacs. The incoming air does not mix with the air already in the lungs giving it a greater cooling affect. Turkey Vultures are known for their unique cooling technique. They defecate on their legs!

A pretty obvious way of dealing with the heat is to find a source of **water**. This is the real problem that excessive heat and drought pose for birds. Water sources are lost and birds have to spend more time seeking out this basic need. Providing a clean water source is the single most important thing you can do for birds.

Drought poses more problems than just a lack of water. Insects and plants have to have water to complete their life cycles. Plants produce less seeds, nuts and berries and some insects have greatly decreased hatching success. Food supplies that are typically quite bountiful in the late summer and early autumn seasons will run out much quicker than normal.

The real advantage birds have over other wild species of course is their wings. Birds will **simply leave** and seek out suitable nesting conditions elsewhere. When I lived and birded in western Pennsylvania several years ago, the local guys said in years of drought in the Midwest, they could generally find "our" birds like Dickcissels nesting in "their" area.

One thing is for certain. Wild animals are much "tougher" than most people think. We may never know the full affect that this drought has had on our birds but I know that our customers have done their part in helping many, many birds make it through the Summer of 2012!



*This young Northern Mockingbird is panting to cool off.
 photo by Mary Nemecek*



A Rare Visitor . . .

by Mark McKellar

On the 11th of August, a customer showed me pictures of a white hummingbird that she had visiting her feeders near Lake Waukomis. She had taken the pictures on August 8th but hadn't seen the bird in the last day or so. Like many bird sightings, I thought we had missed our chance at something really cool. Fortunately it didn't end there.



Over the next three weeks we tracked this female albino Ruby-throated Hummingbird via dedicated customers, facebook and some really lucky connections. Not all white animals are albinos, so the first task was to get some high quality pictures and confirm its true identity. Mary Nemecek staked out the first yard it had been reported from and got some excellent shots (featured).

The pink bill and pink legs convinced me that we were dealing with a true albino. But people were concerned about the black that could be seen through the feathers in places. Each feather has a small section near the base that is non-pigmented thus black in color. We typically do not see this in birds unless the wind blows feathers up to expose them. Her white color makes those black areas stand out even more.

I contacted the head of research at Operation Ruby-throat (www.rubythroat.org) in South Carolina. He confirmed my ID and felt that based on the bill length, that it was an immature female. He also confirmed the rareness of this sighting as fewer than 100 have been documented. Cool!

When two other Waukomis residents called with sightings of a white hummingbird we began tracking her movement. We marked her sightings on Google Earth and the result was a straight line among the three houses.

The Missouri Department of Conservation wrote a press release about the bird and sent it out over the "wire". The story was published all over the country including Miami and San Diego, CA. Our little white bird was an overnight sensation.

Perhaps the most amazing part of this story was her big move. She disappeared one Saturday night after a pretty strong weather front moved in from the Southwest. The next day, a person in Cameron, Missouri sent a picture of her to the local newspaper. The reporter there had seen the press release and forwarded the picture back here. Sure enough, the bird in Cameron had the same unique dark markings on the left side of her neck. A week later, a cold front from the north pushed through and she showed up again at Lake Waukomis homes again. What a bird!

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Do you facebook? For us, it has been a wonderful thing. It is my quickest and easiest way to update you on things that are happening here at the store. Look us up!

Have you signed up for our monthly e-mails and not been getting them? The problem may be with your spam filter. Check you junk mail folder and be sure to label us as a safe sender.





Have Binos, Will Travel!

Spring migration could only be described as “unusual”. For the most part it was a big disappointment for most birders but a few lucky birders seemed to have a good morning or two. My spring was greatly reduced due to my second surgery within three months. My gall bladder went bad in late March and had to come out which kept me out of the field for most of April. Even our spring “hot spot” Weston Bend State Park was very slow. Unlike any other spring I have seen here in Missouri, the best birding reports I heard came from people’s back or small city parks. The Summer heat certainly took the fun out of field birding.

The hikes and programs listed below are available to our store customers
(not organized groups, they can be arranged separately)
 ❖ **space is limited and fill on a first come first serve basis.** ❖
PLEASE call the store to register (816) 746-1113

Thursday Morning Bird Hikes

While Fall migration is less dependable than Spring, it is still a great time to get and see birds. (Most) Thursday mornings during September and October, Ruth, John or I will lead a morning bird hike at one of our favorite spots. Hopefully, one or all will fit in with your busy schedule. Call for meeting spot.

| | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Oct 11th</i> | <i>Martha Lafite N.S.</i> | <i>8:00 - 9:30</i> |
| <i>Oct 18st</i> | <i>Parkville Nature Sanc.</i> | <i>8:00 - 9:30</i> |
| <i>Oct 25th</i> | <i>Wyandotte Co. Lake</i> | <i>8:00 - 9:30</i> |
| <i>Nov 8th</i> | <i>Smithville Lake</i> | <i>8:00 - 9:30</i> |
| <i>Nov 15st</i> | <i>Amity Woods Sanctuary</i> | <i>8:00 - 9:30</i> |

In Store Classes

Hawk Gawking

Wednesday, Nov 17th *7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.*

During late Fall and early Winter hawk number increase dramatically in our area. Northern species move south to escape their snow covered lands and western species move out into the plains for better hunting. We will cover the raptors that we see here each year and tips that can help you become a better hawk gawker.



Red-tailed Hawk
 Photo by Richard Gooch

San Diego Co Revisited

Wednesday, Nov. 28th
7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Last fall, a group of us took a McBirder Adventure to one of the birdiest counties in America. We will retrace our steps via photos and tales of this adventure from 40 miles out in the Pacific Ocean through the mountains,



Once again we had scattered nesting reports of Mississippi Kite from around the city. These are great birds that we should on the lookout for each year now.
 photo courtesy of Mary Nemecek

grasslands and deserts all the way to the Salton Sea.

Fall Feeder Cleaning
Saturday, Oct. 13th 9:00a.m. to 4:00p.m.

Smithville Lake

Sunday, Nov. 4th *1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.*

Weather depending, this can be a great time at the lake. We will search the lake for loons, grebes and other waterfowl. The surrounding woods and fields can be great for early winter arrivals. This time of year has yielded Jaegers, Kittiwakes, Snow Buntings and other great birds.



Trumpeter Swans begin showing up in our area in mid to late November.
 photo courtesy of Pat White

Meet at the Litton Center at 1:00. Cost \$3 per person.

Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge

Sunday, Nov. 25th *7:00 a.m. to 2 p.m.*

Join us on our annual trip to see the eagles! Depending on when cold weather drives the Snow Geese south, we could see many species of waterfowl, hawk and of course, eagles. The past couple of years, we have seen Sandhill Cranes and over 70 swans. Pack plenty of snacks and your favorite warm beverage because it is always a few degrees colder up north.

Meet at the store at 7:00 or the refuge at 9:00. Cost \$5 per person.



Species Profile: Chipping Sparrow

Article and pictures by Ruth Simmons

In the spring, I see the Chipping Sparrows eating the dandelion seeds in my yard. As summer progresses, I hear their trill (like a high-pitched sewing machine at full speed) just about everywhere I go. They are one of the most common summer sparrows and adapt well to the midwest heat. Chipping sparrows can absorb enough moisture from dry seed to survive for three weeks without any additional water; a very handy adaptation considering our present drought conditions!

Chipping Sparrows are one of the Little Brown Birds that can be so confusing to identify in the backyard. Start by asking yourself some questions: is the bird here in winter or summer, does it have a streaked or plain breast, does it have facial markings, what about stripes or a cap on top of its head? Answering these



Chipping Sparrows are our most common native urban nesting sparrow.

questions will greatly narrow down your sparrow choices.

The Chipping Sparrow are seen from late March though September. It has a plain grey breast and belly, a white supercillium (eye brow), a black eye line, and a rufous (rusty red) cap. It also has two white wing bars and a black bill.

Chipping Sparrows must be very conscious of their looks; they molt their head and throat feathers five to six times a year! The rest of their body feathers are molted twice a year. During the fall when they are sporting their non-breeding plumage, they can easily be confused with the Clay-colored Sparrow.

Like so many of the our Little Brown Birds, Chipping Sparrow just don't get the respect they deserve. Watch for them in and around your feeders in the early Spring, Summer and showing their fledgling you free food source just before they leave in the fall.

CONSERVATION CORNER: The Boy Scouts of America

I am sure a few of you looked at the group for this month and thought I had lost my head. The Boy Scouts are not a conservation organization! Or are they?

Through my lenses, they are clearly a conservation group. They were without a doubt, the most influential organization in my youth that provided me with the direction and inspiration for my lifelong career path.

Scouting taught me to treat all living things with respect, to clean up after myself and to "leave no trace" in the natural world after a camping or hiking trip. Working on merit badges like Environmental Science, Forestry, Fish and Wildlife Management and Oceanography opened my eyes to a whole new land ethic that is so important to all who work in the natural world.

Badges like Mammal Study and Reptile Study helped build a respect for the diversity of life that exists in our natural world. Camping on a bitter cold night or hiking on a blistering hot day helped to foster a new respect for what wild animal have to live with each and every day.

Did I grasp all this at the time it was happening? Not really. When you are 12, 13, 14 years old, you're mind tends not to think that deep, but you are constantly learning. That is what scouting is all about. Building those foundations that help us to make good sound decisions when we are faced with them later in life.



For many young men, like myself, Scouting was my only true exposure to the natural world. I loved television shows about nature and I spent a lot of time in the wooded lots around my neighborhood, but it just isn't the same as having guided instruction.

Do yourself a favor, get involved with scouting. I know you may not have a child or grandchild involved, but you can always buy a box of popcorn, or some trash bags and there are many volunteer opportunities available to help and possibly mold a young person's life!



Time To Ask Mark...

Q. I have so many trees in my yard that baffles really don't help against the squirrels. What can I do?

A. First, I am jealous of all the trees. You have great habitat for the birds and shouldn't have to worry about furry creatures. One of the best performing products we have gotten in lately is Flaming Squirrel from Cole's. Nothing is 100% effective for everybody, but this product has received extremely high reviews from our customers. It is a habenero oil that you mix in with your seed. Birds are not affected but most mammals can't take the heat.



Cole's Flaming Squirrel reminds me a bit of the old Shake'n Bake with a kick!

Q. Can I use raw (turbinado) sugar for my hummingbird nectar?

A. I know the hummers are pretty much gone now but I thought I should address this. According to hummingbird "experts", it is not good to use raw sugar. I understand this is a growing trend among many for human consumption but the fear is that there are more impurities in the raw sugar that could be harmful to the hummingbirds.

Q. Do you think we will see Snowy Owls again this winter?

A. That was an incredibly rare event that is highly unlikely to repeat itself for many years. But this does bring up a great point. We never know what the change in seasons will bring into our area. We are getting early word of some winter invaders already. Record numbers of Red Crossbills have been reported moving southward, Pine Siskins have been seen in our area and I have already had a Red-breasted Nuthatch visit my peanut feeder. What does it all mean? Generally, these birds moving into the midwest and even southern states during the winter means a pine crop failure in their northern haunts. Other species to look for in these types of "red" winters are Purple Finches and Common Redpolls.



This beautiful male Common Redpoll showed up with a flock of goldfinches a few winters ago at a finch feeder in midtown KC. Photo by Fiske Miles.

Q. What are bird seed prices looking like for this fall?

A. The word from my suppliers right now is that safflower is pretty much out of the field and being cleaned right now. We should see a price drop (how much I do not know) in the coming weeks. The sunflower crop from the Dakotas should be coming out soon and reportedly looks pretty good. If the oil crushers don't buy it all because of the poor corn and soybean crops, we should see a price drop there as well. The one crop that we have been warned about going up in price is millet. The area where this is grown was hit extremely hard by the drought.

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This could be a good year for Purple Finches. With a little study, the males can be distinguished from male House Finches fairly easily. Photo by Mary Nemecek



Offers Expire October 31st 2012

They Are Back!

Galileo Thermometers were a huge hit last holiday season so we have brought them back. We have a full range of sizes and styles in stock just in time for the holidays.



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*Did You Know?
Chickadees are so efficient at finding
food, they are often followed by
several other species in the fall and
winter months.
Photo courtesy of Mary Nemecek*



BE PREPARED

We never know what winter will send our way but odds are we will not have a repeat of last year. Unfrozen water is so critical for birds and I would suggest breaking out your heated bird bath or de-icer soon and give it a test run before temperatures start to fall. The bluebirds in this photo by JD Spicher were coming to our top selling heated bird bath the Kozy Bird Spa from Allied Precision.

REMEMBER, WE CAN KEEP SQUIRRELS OUT OF YOUR FEEDERS
Baffles, Squirrel-proof Feeders, Unfavored Seed and Hot Stuff Mixers OH MY!

