



BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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

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Still Our One and Only Location

It happened the other day. A customer asked why a certain feeder was \$10 cheaper here than it was at our other store. Oops! That is simple, we don't have another store.

I know there are other stores around the city that are similar to ours but the Backyard Bird Center in the Boardwalk Square Shopping Center is our one and only location.

I am not writing this for any other reason than to clear up any confusion that may be out there. We are very proud of what we have built here over the last several years and one day (when the kids are older) we may open another location but for now there is only one spot where we invite you to "Come by and talk birds".

The Incredible Egg

by Mark McKellar

There are many things in life we take for granted. Before I started studying birds, eggs certainly fell into that category. Eggs were for either eating, dying and hunting or occasionally throwing. These wonders of nature are incredibly strong, diverse in shape and color and enable birds to nest successfully from the driest deserts to the coldest conditions on the planet.

An egg's shape is a function of strength with the functionality of a specific species needs. There are four basic shapes of egg. The majority of eggs are similar in shape to the classic chicken egg while others are quite unique. The classic or elliptical shape enables eggs to fit together nicely so the parent can incubate all of them evenly.

Larger birds like eagles lay eggs that are pretty much round and birds like gulls and seabirds that nest on cliffs lay eggs that are strongly pear shaped. Think about that if you will. If you lay your eggs on a flat rock inches from a 300 ft drop, don't you think an egg that rolls in a circle if bumped is a good idea. Perhaps the egg shape that caught my attention the most were the football shaped eggs of grebes and cormorants. One theory is this shape is good for unstable nest like the floating nests of grebes.

We all know there are white, tan and blue eggs but the variation in spots, squiggly lines and blotches on many eggs is truly fascinating. The spots and lines are produced by glands in the oviducts. As the eggs pass through, pigments from the glands are "squeezed" onto the eggs. The movement of eggs within the ducts dictates the location and shape of their spots and lines.

If you have ever looked for a Killdeer's eggs in a gravel driveway, you know that concealment is a

primary function of color for most birds but there are other functions. For birds like seabirds that nest in huge colonies, it is believed that females learn their unique color pattern to locate them.

It may not surprise you to know that small

birds lay small eggs, but did you know that small birds lay proportionately much larger eggs than larger birds? If you really want to be impressed, look up the famed Australian bird the Kiwi. The eggs they lay are about half the size of their body. Ouch!

The next time you go to crack open an egg for your favorite recipe, think about your favorite birds and try to guess how their eggs are shaped and colored.



Yellow Warbler Nest.
Photo courtesy of Linda Williams



Winning the Ant Wars

by Ruth Simmons

Don't you hate it when you go out to your hummingbird or oriole feeder and find it full of ants? Most of the ants are dead and the nectar has spoiled and smells bad. Then back in the house, you always end up with a couple of live ants crawling around the sink as you try to clean the feeders.

There is a simple solution to this problem: water. Just like the castles of knights and kings, a moat is just what you need to stop the invading ants. Whether it is nectar, jelly, or fruit that needs protection, an ant moat will do the trick.

Some manufacturers, like Aspects and Birds Choice, are making their feeders with small, built in ant moats. If you already have a feeder that is moat-less, you can buy ant moats that hang between your hook and the feeder. Just fill the moat with water and the ants are stopped. You have to keep an eye on the smaller, built in moats, as the water evaporates quickly. If the moat goes dry, the ants will take advantage of the situation and get to the sweet treats.

Ant moats have worked magic on all my sweet feeders, but I could not put them on my window hummingbird feeders. Aspects has come up with a wonderful new window feeder with a moat. The nectar bowl sits in the center of the moat where the ants can't get to. This item is still in production and not in stores yet. They tell us it will be ready for the end of summer migration. Until then, your best bet is to use a HangUp from BirdsChoice that suction cups to the window. You can then use a Nectar Protector with your favorite feeder. Whichever sweet feeder you have, an ant moat will work for you.



The Nectar Protector from Songbird Essentials and an Aspects Hummzinger Mini

Father's Day Ideas

Are you someone who regrets the gift you got your husband or dad on Father's Day when you see the look on his face? Come on ladies, we are not that hard to buy for. If the men in your life are into outdoor activities, here are few tips from the staff. (Gents, feel free to cut this out and leave it where she can't miss it).

Binoculars

A really good pair of binoculars will last you for years.

Whether it is for birding, ball games, hunting or just to take along on vacations,



Nikon has the price ranges and features to meet anyone's needs. Nikon Monarchs (pictured) are ultra light for hiking, waterproof and feature great lenses. **\$75 to \$999**

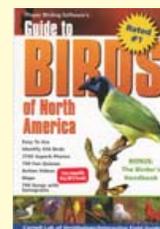
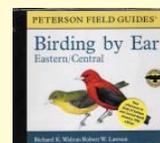
Tilley Hat

Does your dad spent much of his time outdoors? With Skin Cancer on the rise, UV protection is more important than ever. Tilley hats are the only hats endorsed by the Mayo Clinic for skin cancer protection. They float, are washable and have a lifetime warranty to never to wear out. **\$55 to \$85**



Multi Media

Is your dad the type that has a healthy thirst for knowledge? Luckily, we never stop learning and we have loads of books, CDs, DVDs and software programs to help him expand his knowledge about birds. **\$15 to \$99.**



YOU ASKED, WE GOT THEM IN

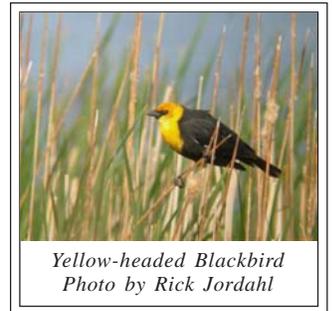
We have had repeated requests for larger, deeper sounding Windchimes. They have arrived. Come by and see our new selection of Woodstock Windchimes. As a dedicated newsletter reader, mention this add and we will take 10% off any chime in stock! Offer good through the month of July.





Have Binos, Will Travel!

Winter birding was terrific this winter. I'm speaking almost entirely from a backyard view. The numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches, Pine Siskens, Purple Finches and even Red Crossbills were impressive. Field birding was pretty good but not spectacular. Perhaps the most impressive number I heard all winter was the estimated 1.4 million Snow Geese counted at Squaw Creek late in the season. Wow! As is typical for this season we didn't really get out in the field until very late winter but the birding was good. In March, Smithville Lake treated us to three Common Loons in full breeding plumage, a single White Pelican with his bill keel showing and Bald Eagles.



*Yellow-headed Blackbird
Photo by Rick Jordahl*

❖ **The hikes and programs listed below are available to our store customers and fill on a first come first serve basis.** ❖

PLEASE call the store for directions, meeting locations and to register (816) 746-1113

Parkville Nature Sanctuary **Parkville, MO**
Saturday, June 14th **8:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.**

With migration over, we will search the sanctuary for nesting birds and their young.

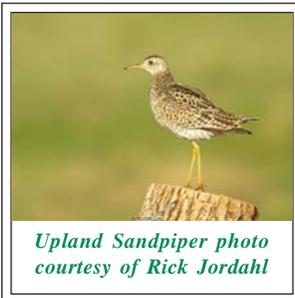
Birds of a New Mexico Adventure (in store class)
Thursday, July 10th **7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.**

Join us for a trip down memory lane with a slide show of the birds seen on last winter's birding trip to New Mexico. 15 of us explored the New Mexico mountains and deserts and tallied over 120 species and loads of fun.



*Gambel's Quail photo
courtesy of Rick Jordahl*

Dunn Ranch Preserve **Parkville, MO**
Saturday, July 12th **6:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.**



*Upland Sandpiper photo
courtesy of Rick Jordahl*

The nesting birds of a true tallgrass prairie. We will explore the wonderous 3,300 acre Dunn Ranch Preserve at the most beautiful time of the year. Wildflowers should be spectacular and the resident birds plentiful. Bobolinks, Upland Sandpipers, Sedge Wrens, Vesper's Sparrow and

possibly an elusive Black-billed Cuckoo are possible.

Depart from Store at 6:00 a.m. return ~ 2:00 p.m.
We will carpool, help with gas cost is appreciated.

Owl Prowl at Martha Lafite **Liberty, MO**
Saturday, July 19th **7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.**

This will be a fun filled evening of Owlmania. We will have a live owl on hand and you will have a chance to

disect an owl pellet. We will head out at dusk and try to call a couple of owls in close. Please call Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary (781-8598) for cost and to sign up for this program.

Traveling Birders-San Diego Adventure (in store)
Wednesday, July 30th **7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.**

What is the "birdiest" county in America? San Diego county holds that title. We will recap the birds and places of this region seen on a recent visit there. Who knows, it could be a preview for a group trip in the future.

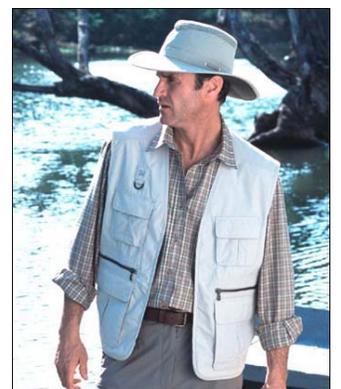
TILLEY VEST



Whether you are a dedicated birder, photographer or just a traveler, the Different Drummer Maverick Vest from Tilley is for you. Designed with eleven pockets, ranging from an inside cell-phone pocket to a huge one big enough for an SLR camera, full-sized binoculars or a light

sweater. Other than hand-warming pockets, all the exterior ones are secured by Velcro® or zippers. The zippered ones are 9 inches deep! The front pockets have expansion pleats so you can carry more stuff.

*As an introductory offer,
mention this add and we will
take \$10 off any vest in stock!
Offer good through
the month of July.*





SPECIES PROFILE: Orchard Oriole

by Rick Jordahl

Early in one's birding career, "mystery birds" are often encountered. What is it? A warbler? A tanager? Some kind of new species never before encountered?

While it's highly unlikely any of us will ever discover a new species, we occasionally come across an individual bird that makes us say, "what have we here?" In such situations, it's important to remember to get as good a look as possible making mental notes of relative size, coloring, wing bars, bill shape and habitat in which the bird is found — before reaching for your field guide. I was even lucky enough to get a photo. Still, the identification eluded me.

That's when it helps to have friends who are veteran birders. "That's a first summer Orchard Oriole," came the response. Sure enough, the yellowish color, black throat patch and whitish wing bars all added up.

Our smallest oriole, the Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*) is a member of the icterid family which includes all blackbirds, meadowlarks and grackles. Although not as flashy or numerous as its cousin the Baltimore Oriole, the smaller Orchard Oriole, at 6-7 inches, is always a summer treat to see and hear.

You'll find this summer visitor around shade trees in parks and rural gardens and open country with scattered trees, often near lakes and streams. Yes, even in old orchards. The Orchard Oriole seems to prefer habitats with sparse human populations such as parks and pastures. The accompanying photo was taken at Little Bean Marsh Conservation Area.



Orchard Oriole photo courtesy of author

The adult male has a rusty or chestnut colored body and a black head and back, a short, sharp bill and

white wing bars. The female is all olive-yellowish and also has white wing bars. Female Baltimore Orioles are sometimes confused with female Orchard Orioles but the latter is usually more olive overall. Don't let the immature male fool you however, like he did this birder.

They eat insects, fruits, small seeds and nectar. For nesting, they prefer cottonwood trees, willows and red cedar. Their nest, a carefully woven pouch of fibers and grass, is generally suspended from the forked branch of a tree or bush. Unfortunately, Orchard Oriole nests are commonly parasitized by cowbirds.

The song is a loud jumble of lively and rich whistling, usually with a *zhееer* at or near the end. The distinctive song generally starts with two or three high-pitched notes.

Orchard Orioles range east of the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean. Fairly common but declining overall, the Orchard Oriole is a rather late spring migrant. See them while you can. They head back south quickly and may return to their wintering grounds in Central America, Colombia and Venezuela as early as late July or August.

CONSERVATION CORNER: Volunteering for Conservation

With the rising cost of living, nonprofit groups like the Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary, Kansas City Wildlands, Parkville Nature Sanctuary and others suffer greatly. Understandably, people cut back on their giving. Most of the people still want to support these wonderful causes and generally do so with their time when they can't with their money. Nonprofit groups are almost always minimally staffed and they are overworked. It is through volunteers that they survive.

If you want to work with children, the volunteer naturalist program might be a perfect fit. Do you have good phone skills? How about data entry? If you want to get your hands dirty, I know MLTNS has a Land and Resource

workday the first Saturday of every month and always need hands, backs and equipment. Kansas City WildLands has field workdays several Saturdays a year. Check these folks out and consider lending a helping hand now and then. It is a great message to teach our kids.



Helping with Summer Camp photo by Diane Kixmiller

- Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary (www.naturesanctuary.com)
- Kansas City WildLands (www.kcwildlands.org)
- Lakeside Nature Center (www.lakesidenaturecenter.org)
- Parkville Nature Sanctuary (www.parkvillemo.com/nature)



Time To Ask Mark...

Q. Where did my goldfinches go this spring?

A. Goldfinches are resident birds that come and go from feeders primarily with wild food availability. In the early spring, one of the first wild seeds available are the dandelions. Soon to follow are the oaks, maples and other trees. Last year most of that food crop was killed by the “Easter Freeze” so goldfinches were plentiful at the feeders right through spring. Don’t fear, they will be back on and off through till July when they start nesting.



*Early Spring Male
American Goldfinch.
Photo by Teresa Havens*

Q. How do I keep the birds from building a nest on my porch light?

A. Each spring we deal with the issue of birds building nest were they are just not wanted. Two things to remember; once birds have laid their eggs, you can’t touch their nest (except European Starlings and House Sparrows) and birds are best discouraged with visual deterrents. While not guaranteed, a toy snake draped across or tacked up close to the area where they are trying to build is enough to get them to abandon that nest site. We also have Scare Tape that can be suspended in the area and some have had luck with hanging old CDs from the ceiling. They will find a new place to nest.

Q. Is there anything I can place out that will help the hummingbirds with their nesting?

A. Hummingbirds build their nest primarily from spider webs, moss and plant down. Songbird Station now has a new nesting helper that contains materials they can use as nest liner.

Q. Has everyone been seeing lots of different birds at their oriole feeders this year?



*Cedar Waxwings eating berries
from a dish photo
courtesy of Diana*

A. Definitely. We have had loads of reports this spring of “never seen before” birds feeding on oranges and especially jelly. Aside from the Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, we have had the semi regular Grey Catbirds, Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, House Finches, Northern Cardinals, Cedar Waxwings, and Northern Mockingbirds. We’ve had reports of American Goldfinch, Scarlet Tanagers, Summer Tanager, Western Tanager (very rare in MO) and Tennessee Warblers feeding as well. Call or e-mail us if you have any species that we can add to the list.



*Summer Tanager photo
courtesy of Rick Jordahl*

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YOUR YARD AND GARDEN



*Indigo Buntings are not seen at feeders during the summer as frequently as they are in spring.
Photo Courtesy of Arlene Russell*

UPCOMING IMPORTANT BIRD DATES

- June - Time for Eastern Bluebird and House Wren 2nd nesting**
- Late July - Shorebirds from the north start showing up in wetlands**
- Late July/Early August - Young Hummingbirds start visiting feeders**
- August - Bluebirds will often attempt a 3rd nest**
- Mid-August - Hummingbird numbers start to peak.**