



# BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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[www.backyardbirdcenterkc.com](http://www.backyardbirdcenterkc.com)

## Nesting Season Surprises



*Liberty customer Linda Williams sent these pictures of one of our flicker nest boxes she purchased a couple of years ago and mounted on the side of her house. A male flicker used it last year for a while but to Linda's surprise, this red phase Eastern Screech Owl recently took up residence. Will they nest? Hopefully!*



*Farley resident, Kim Hawkins (photo) said her bluebirds just kept nesting last year. The mild conditions enabled her resident bluebirds to pull off 4 successful broods of bluebirds. Fantastic!!!*

## How Did Birds Survive This Winter?

by Mark McKellar (a topical article reprinted from 2003)

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? As with most wild animals, 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.

Like us, they often try to find places that are well protected from wind and "cold air". Evergreen trees provide very important **cover** as do artificial or natural cavities. Within these day or night roosting areas you can often find several birds. Bluebirds, wrens and others will **huddle**, bunch or even stack on top of each other to keep warm.

While certain species of birds do add more feathers in winter, all birds can **fluff up**. By fluffing up and creating air space between feathers as well as feathers and skin, it is like putting on an jacket. This is why you will hear me talk about the importance of a heated bird bath. Water is essential to keeping feathers healthy and healthy feathers are essential to keeping warm.



*Fluffed American Goldfinch  
Photo courtesy of Mary Nemecek*

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 a few degrees. Used as a way to conserve oxygen in the blood stream, it is known as **hypothermia** and is used primarily while sleeping.

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



# In Praise of Jelly

by Mark McKellar

I remember the first time I heard about placing jelly out to attract Baltimore Orioles. Like most of you, I thought it sounded crazy. After using this nearly fullproof method for the past 10 years or so, I know that it is not only not crazy but one of the best things you can feed in spring and summer.

What is perhaps most surprising is the number of species that have been reported eating the jelly. While this list is probably not complete, here are birds that our customers have reported at their jelly feeders:

- Baltimore Oriole
- Orchard Oriole
- Gray Catbird
- Summer Tanager
- Scarlet Tanager
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird
- Red-breasted Nuthatch
- Brown Thrasher
- Northern Cardinal
- American Robin
- Tufted Titmouse
- Red-bellied Woodpecker
- Tennessee Warbler
- House Finch



Brown Thrasher by Pat White  
Cray Catbird by Linda Williams  
Summer Tanager by John Bugg

Feeding jelly doesn't come without its perils. Ants love it but can easily be bested with a good Nectar Protector. The true challenge come from raccoons. Placing your feeder on a pole with a raccoon baffle works the best but feeding from a tray attached to a window can be very successful too. If all else fails, you can take your feeder in each night.

Is there a difference in jellies? There are some studies coming out that indicate that the high fructose corn syrup jellies are not as good for the birds as the ones that have lower sugar/higher fruit contents. We have brought in the BirdBerry Jelly from Songbird Essentials as a healthier alternative.



## TWO DAY BINOCULAR BLOW OUT SALE MAY 1ST & 2ND

Are you looking for your first set of good binoculars? Do you want to upgrade to a better pair? There will be no better time to buy good and great binoculars than this sale. I have never done it before and will likely never do it again. All binoculars and spotting scopes will be on sale and we will have several give aways for just for looking but the real DEALS will be on close out models and gently used binoculars. I am talking \$300 to \$500 OFF in some cases. All sales are final and can only accept cash or checks for optics these two days. Deals apply to only supplies on hand and some of those are very limited.

- Nikon Premier LXL 8X42
- Nikon Premier LXL 10X42
- Nikon Premier LXL 8X32
- Nikon Premier LXL 10X32
- Nikon SE 8X32
- Nikon SE 10X42
- Nikon Monarch 8X42
- Nikon Monarch 10X42
- Nikon Monarch 8X36
- Nikon Monarch 10X36
- Vortex Viper 8X42
- Pentax DCF HRc 8X42
- Pentax DCF HRc 10X42



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## Have Binos, Will Travel!

Now this was a good old fashioned winter. November was one of the warmest on record then WHAM! I haven't seen the lakes around here that frozen all winter in a long, long time. My guess is that we lost a lot of Carolina Wrens and Northern Mockingbirds. Lots of species simply moved further south during the worst stretches. The unique birds of the winter were almost all associated with the Christmas Eve storm. During the days that followed that storm, we had reports of a Summer Tanager in Independence, a female Bullock's Oriole and a Black-throated Sparrow in Savannah, and a Black-headed Grosbeak at two different feeders near the store.



*This young male Black-headed Grosbeak visited two of our customer's feeders (a mile or so apart) in late January. It made a brief appearance again at one house in early February.  
Photo by Cindy Rogers*

**The hikes and programs listed below are available to our store customers and fill on a first come first served basis.**  
**PLEASE call the store for more information and to register (816) 746-1113**

### Thursday Morning Bird Hikes

Back by popular demand are the Thursday morning hikes. Ruth, John or myself will lead a morning bird hike at one of our favorite spots. Last year we were greatly affected by rain so please call to register because we may have to adjust location due to weather conditions.

<i>April 15<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>Parkville Nature Sanc.</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>
<i>April 22<sup>nd</sup></i>	<i>Green Hills of Platte</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>
<i>April 29<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>Little Bean Marsh</i>	<i>8:00 - 10:30</i>
<i>May 8<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>Martha Lafite N.S.</i>	<i>8:00 - 11:30</i>
<i>May 13<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>Weston Bend S.P.</i>	<i>8:00 - 11:30</i>
<i>May 20<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>Parkville Nature Sanc.</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>
<i>May 27<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>Amity Nature Park</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>

### In Store Classes

#### Warblers Anyone?

**Wednesday, April 21st**  
**7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.**

Once you are even a little bit hooked on birding as a hobby, it doesn't take long for you to gravitate to the beautiful group of small insect eating birds known as warblers. As April and May are by far our best times to see these beauties as they arrive and/or pass through our area, we will brush up on our warbler ID skills.



*Golden-winged Warbler  
Photo by Steve Dillinger*

### Weekend Bird Hikes

#### English Landing Park & Missouri River Trail

**Sunday, April 25th** **7:00 a.m. to 10:00a.m.**

The Missouri River is a natural migration landmark for migrating birds. We will explore a couple of locations along the "Mighty Mo" for migrant and resident birds. Last

year's hike was cancelled because of lightning but not before we picked up several species including shorebirds and ducks. You never know this time of year!

**Meet at English Landing by the ballfields.**

#### Weston Bend State Park

**Sunday, May 9th**

**7:00 a.m. to noon**

What is your ideal Mother's Day? For many, it includes birding, lots of birding! Join us for a morning of birding at our favorite spring migration spot. We will search for the many warblers, vireos, tanagers, thrushes, flycatchers and more that grace these beautiful woods each spring. If it is slow we may head up to Little Bean Marsh or Lewis & Clark State Park.

**Meet at the park gate @ 7:00 am**

#### Spring Migration in Western Missouri

**Sunday, May 16th**

**7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.**

Last year we had to totally change our planned route for this program due to flooding. We still accumulated a great list of birds. This year we will once again set out to explore some of western Missouri's best birding sites. Space is limited. Please register by May 10th

**\$40 Fee - Transportation (van & fuel) and box lunch.**



*Double-crested Cormorant photo courtesy of Mary Nemecek*



**The Remembird has two directional microphone that easily attaches to your binoculars. This is a hand's free way to capture digital bird songs and field notes. A great gift for the birder in your family! Reg \$249 Now \$225**



## SPECIES PROFILE: Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*)

Story and photos by Rick Jordahl

Sounding its shrill call from treetops and look-outs, you understand why the Blue Jay, *Cyanocitta cristata*, is known as nature's alarm call. Noisy and aggressive, the Blue Jay's reputation may be mixed, but its beauty is undeniable.

Lavender blue to sky blue upper parts, a distinct blue crest and flashy white-tipped tail and wing spots mark this beautiful 11-12 inch winged alarmist. Its face and undersides are white to off-white and the neck is ringed with black.

The ubiquitous Blue Jay is one of our most reliable sightings on outings and frequent visitors to feeders. They are often found near oak trees, forest edges, parks and woodlots. Favorite foods are acorns, and when available at feeders, peanuts.

Blue Jays can grab several food items at once, squeeze them into throat pouches and cache them in hiding places to consume later. They often hold sunflower seeds with their feet to crack open with their stout bill.

Blue Jays make a large variety of calls but their shrill, descending cry is most common. The warning scream, usually made while perched, carries long distances. Blue Jays often mimic neighboring hawks.

Like other corvids, Blue Jays are very curious and highly intelligent. They may watch for a person to put food out and when the person walks away they will swoop down to nab it. They also can be observed with head swiveling while in flight, evaluating the landscape.

Blue Jays are quite territorial and may drive away others for an easy meal at a feeder. They are relatively slow fliers and are easy prey for hawks when flying in open areas. Provided they can avoid that fate, Blue Jays can live an average of 7 to 9 years in the wild.

Migration of the species is not fully understood. Some travel, while others remain in the same place year-round.

Found in most states east of the Rockies, the Blue Jay's range has expanded dramatically in the last 30

years. In areas where they overlap with Steller's Jay, the two species occasionally hybridize.

Blue Jays typically form monogamous pair bonds for life. The male tends to the female while she is brooding 4 to 5 eggs which are incubated for 16 to 18 days.

Enjoy the Blue Jay for its beauty, its intelligence and its important role in the bird world. If they disturb smaller birds at your feeders, do not despair. Remember, many birds may owe their lives to the alarm call sounded by the beautiful and vociferous cyan sentinel.



Blue Jay

## CONSERVATION CORNER: Wings Over Weston

A few issues back I wrote about Important Bird Areas (IBAs). This is a program initiated by BirdLife International in Europe in the 1980s that has now identified over 8,000 sites in 178 countries as areas that are used by birds of "conservation concern". Our closest IBA is the Iatan/Weston Bend River Corridor.

To help raise awareness of this important area, the Burrough's Audubon Society is teaming with Weston Bend State Park, the city of Weston, MDNR, MDC and Audubon Missouri to bring us Wings Over Weston.

This event is free and takes place Saturday May 8th from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the park's Missouri River over-



look and shelter areas.

The event is designed for families and individuals of all ages and occurs on International Migratory Bird Day. Booths and displays will include games and activities as well as live birds from Operation Wildlife. Visitors can learn the basics of bird watching and discover birds of the area on bird hikes for beginners.

Other activities will include a plant sale at the Mother's Day Tent and a chance to make a bird feeder.

If you would like more information, you can contact the park office at (816) 640-5443.



## Time To Ask Mark...

**Q. Why is a cardinal/robin/bluebird banging repeatedly against my windows?**

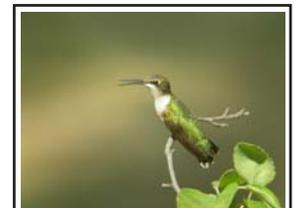
**A.** Each year certain species of birds see their reflection in windows and they just can't live with the potential rival in their territory. Generally it is made possible due to the sun angle on your windows causing a nice mirror effect. If you are lucky, the sun angle changes and the "rival" bird goes away and it doesn't last very long. Remember that the mirror image of themselves and your yard also prevents them from seeing anything inside. Visual deterrents such as rubber snakes and owls must be placed on the outside of the windows. You may find that covering the window for a few weeks with a screen, paper or even spray on frost is your only way to stop the banging. Covering side mirrors on your cars with old socks works well for the same problem there.



*American Robin photo courtesy of Jeff Janney*

**Q. Why can't I get the hummingbirds I see in the spring to stick around for the summer?**

**A.** In the spring it is all about set up territories and finding a suitable place for a nest. If you have birds at your feeders in the spring but not during the early summer it usually means the females didn't find the nesting conditions she wanted in your "yard". Don't feel bad, most of us do not have nesting hummers. The good news is the easiest time to attract them to your yard in the late summer. The more dedicated you are to your flowers and landscaping in the spring will pay dividends later.



*Female Ruby-throated Hummingbird photo courtesy of Pat White*

**Q. Do birds really need bird seed now?**

**A.** If you think about what is happening in the plant world during the spring, you quickly realize this is probably the most important time to provide seed for birds. The natural seeds and berries that birds have been feeding on all winter are gone and freshly growing plants will not be producing any seed for quite a while. When you factor in the number of returning species like Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Indigo Buntings, there is a good reason to feed birds for them and for us.

**Q. I read that you should save up your dryer lint and put it out for the birds for nesting material.**

**A.** No. Do not place dryer lint out for the birds. I know that several publications a few years ago put this out as a way to help birds and Ornithologist have been trying to undo this damage ever since. The fear is that the small dust that is present in lint will be dangerous for the hatchling's lungs. We have many good alternatives here at the store. Nesting material wreaths, bells and cages can be filled over and over again with various refill packs that contain a mixture of strings, feathers, cotton, etc.

### STAFF FAVORITES!



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Photo by Mary Nemecek*



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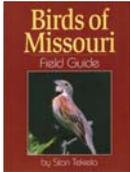
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*The new T5MO from Tilley Endurables*



*The Pole Topper is a great way to protect your seed from the elements while keeping the open tray feel.*

## IN PRAISE OF TRAYS.

In a recent study by the Wild Bird Feeding Institute, they found that the most preferred type of feeder for birds is an open tray. While this initially may surprise some, if you think about it, it does make sense. Open trays provide a large feeding area without limitations on the size of bird that can feed there. They also provide great visibility for birds to keep an eye out for predators. Perhaps their only downside is their lack of protection from rain and snow.



*Adding a tray to a tube feeder creates the open tray affect that is so appealing to birds.*



*Male Rose-breasted Grosbeak photo courtesy of Teresa Havens*

## UPCOMING IMPORTANT BIRD DATES

- Early April - Clean out all nest boxes (wrens, chickadees, titmouse)
- Early April - Hang Hummingbird Feeders (with small amount of nectar)
- Early to Mid-April - Place Oriole Feeders
- Late April - Male House Wrens arrive and set up territories
- 2nd Week of May - Peek Migration for Warblers, etc.