



SUMMER



2015

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BACKYARD BIRD CENTER News

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*Aspect's Quick-Clean Bases make
feeder cleaning so easy.*

Bird Feeder Cleaning Day *Saturday, Oct. 17th* *9:00a.m. to 4:00p.m.*

It's hard to believe that this is our 10th Bird Feeder Cleaning! Clean feeders mean healthier birds. 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 in the morning and pick up later in the day.

Please make sure you dump all old seed out before bringing in your feeders.

The cost will be \$3.00 per feeder for cleaning and \$5.00 for repairs with this fall's proceeds going to the Platte Land Trust

Once again, Wild Delight will be supporting our efforts by giving customers a \$3 OFF Wild Delight coupon for every feeder they bring in for cleaning.



The Eyes Have It

by Mark McKellar

Did Hawkeye Pierce really have the eyesight of a hawk? We know that birds have great vision just by their ability not to run into things in flight, but does great vision come without cost?

While it doesn't look like it from outward appearance, birds have large eyes. When you see a bird skeleton, you quickly notice how large the eyes really are. Couple that with the fact that eyes are filled with a heavy fluid, large eyes come at a high cost for an animal that flies.

Experts believe that the eyes are the primary reason birds had to sacrifice teeth. Teeth are very heavy and two heavy biological features in the same part of the body are not conducive with the light weight needed for flight. Teeth and the heavy muscles needed to operate them were replaced over time with a lightweight bill and a food-grinding organ known as a gizzard that is more centrally located.

Large eyes have a larger retina for a larger image. Larger eyes also have more rods and cones. Cones are necessary for seeing color. Human eyes have three color receptors while birds have four. We now know that the fourth receptor is for Ultra-violet. This led us to the realization a few years ago that birds like kestrels can actually see urine trails of voles and



*Red-tailed Hawk
photo by Richard Gooch*

mice.

Another sacrifice birds make for these larger eyes is that they have little to no ability to move their eyes in their sockets. They have to move their heads to change their view. They also have little to no binocular vision, making focusing on objects more difficult.

How strong are their eyes? It really isn't a question of strength. We now know that it is a question of clarity. Songbirds are known to have twice as many cones per square millimeter than humans, raptors have something like 5 times the number. While we would see a black speck in the sky, the hawk would see a clearly defined bird (a small bird, but clearly a bird).

So, the great baseball player Ted Williams was a pilot in WWII. I have heard that his vision was so good that he always flew the point in formation because he could see enemy planes coming long before anyone else could. Now he was a true "hawkeye".

Our Truckload Sale will be in Late November. Watch For A Post Card!!



Forever Our #1 Homebuilder!

By Mark McKellar

A main stay in our store since the beginning has been the bird houses and feeders made by our friend Walt Morris. The company name associated with them has been Mor-bilt but most people just know them as Walt's feeders. For us, he has always defined the statement "Made in the U.S.A."

While we still will have some of Walt's feeders and houses in the store, Walt has let me know that he is retiring. We recently had a small retirement dinner where we presented Walt with a Golden Hammer (we both wished it could have been real gold) and shared many stories from the past.

Walt tells us that it started back in 1991 when he saw a design for a bluebird house in the *Conservationist* magazine and decided to build a few. He took one into the original store owned by Dale Buhl and asked if he thought he could sell any. The line grew to include many different bird feeders, houses and specialty items. He has built displays for the store including, along with John Burwell, our "faux" deck.

I said at our gathering that I wished I had some idea as to how many young bluebirds, wrens, chickadees, etc. have fledged from Walt's boxes over the years. Not to mention the many birds who have fed from his feeders on a cold, snowy day. We are going to miss Walt's products but we understand the need to slow down just a little bit. After all, we were just something to keep him busy in his real retirement. Thank you Walt!



WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT GROUP BIRD HIKES?

Group hikes are fun; you meet new people, visit new places and find new birds! But it is not the sit on the deck with coffee in my pajamas kind of birding. Here's what you should know.

What to bring: binoculars, field guides, water, and snacks. Don't worry if you don't have all or even any of these items, we are usually a pretty nice group of people and are happy to share.

What to wear: dress for the weather and try to wear subdued colors. We try to blend in so that the birds are less likely to be frightened off. You will need layers for winter birding and sunscreen and bug spray for summer. Also keep in mind that lakeside temperatures can feel 10-20 degrees cooler than what the thermometer says. Wear sturdy, water repellant shoes for walking, not all trails are paved or dry.

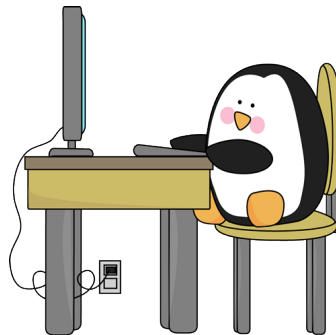
How to behave: use your library voices and if someone mentions that they are hearing or listening for a bird, stop talking and help them listen. Pay attention to those around you, if they have raised their binoculars or their camera try not to step in front of them. You don't want to be responsible for someone missing their life look at a bird or ruining a photo. When sharing a scope, if you have seen a bird before, let those who have never seen it have first look through the scope.

I know that much of this is just common courtesy but as so often in the real world, people can get caught up in the moment. We all want to have fun!

WWW.BACKYARDBIRDCENTER.COM IS HERE!!

I know you have read it before, but it has finally been completed. The renovation of our website has really, really happened.

Please take a few minutes and visit www.backyardbirdcenter.com. We are very proud of the look and functionality. We will be adding content constantly and are committed to keeping the calendar of events up to date. The Products page is only partially complete and we will continue to add content there.



Join the bird news update crowd at backyardbirdcenter.com and/or on:

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Have Binos, Will Travel!

This past spring migration season, like many, had some really good birding days and some highly average ones as well. What could have been a great day at Weston Bend ended up being an endurance test to try and outlast the rain. One of our best days occurred on the last hike of the spring at Amity Woods. Cerulean Warblers are so hard to find most years, it had to rank as one of the better birds of the spring as was the very late Blackburnian Warbler at Amity Woods. Smithville Lake, as always, entertained us with a variety of waterfowl until late in migration. It is always a pleasure seeing the Common Loons in their wonderful breeding plumage as they move through in spring.



*Cliff Swallow photo by
Mary Nemecek*

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 out 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. Please call to register and for the exact meeting spot.

<i>Sept 3rd</i>	<i>Parkville N.S.</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>
<i>Sept 10th</i>	<i>Weston Bend S.P.</i>	<i>8:00 - 10:30</i>
<i>Sept 17th</i>	<i>Smithville Lake</i>	<i>8:00 - 10:30</i>
<i>Sept 24th</i>	<i>Martha Lafite N.S.</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>
<i>Oct 1st</i>	<i>Sorry No Hike</i>	
<i>Oct 8th</i>	<i>Amity Woods Sanc.</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>
<i>Oct 15st</i>	<i>Cooley Lake Con. Area</i>	<i>8:00 - 10:30</i>
<i>Oct 22nd</i>	<i>Wyandotte Co. Lake</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>
<i>Oct 29th</i>	<i>Smithville Lake</i>	<i>8:00 - 10:30</i>

Squaw Creek Shorebirds

Sunday, Sept. 13th 7:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Fall migration can be tricky but we will make a run to Squaw Creek in hopes that shorebird conditions are favorable and several species are still around. Depending on conditions, we may explore other areas as well. We will head back to the store around 1 p.m.

Meet at the store at 7 or the refuge at 8:45. Cost \$5

2nd Annual Fall Native Plant Sale

Saturday, Sept. 12th 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Last year's native plant sale was so popular, we had to bring it back. We will once again host the sale for Burrough's Audubon Society. Fall is a great time to plant natives. The warm soil and cooler air temperatures give plants a boost in root growth. Native plants improve bird and insect habitat in your yard!

Bird Feeder Cleaning Day

Saturday, Oct. 17th 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Smithville Lake

Sunday, Nov. 1st

1:00 p.m. to 4:00 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.

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

Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge

Sunday, Nov. 29th

7:00 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Join us on our annual trip to see the eagles! We should see many species of waterfowl, hawks and of course, eagles. Last year we saw Sandhill Cranes and over 100 swans. Pack plenty of snacks and your favorite warm beverage. We will take a lunch/restroom break at McDonalds.

Meet at the store at 7:00 or the refuge at 8:45. Cost \$5



So you want to have Eagle (or Falcon) Eyes? Now is the time to come in and take a look at our line of binoculars



American Kestrel

Nikon Mornarch 5

8 X 42

photo by Jim Gorski



Species Profile: Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)

Article by Mark McKellar; photo by Brian Vorhees

Very few non-feeder species of birds are more recognized than the Great Blue Heron. Whether in flight or standing majestically along the shore of a body of water, everyone knows of this huge bird.

While they may know of this bird, it still amazes me how many people don't know its correct name. I can not emphasize this enough - it is not a CRANE! While cranes are tall birds, they are in a completely different family of birds. Cranes are very social and are generally seen in groups, while herons are solitary in nature.

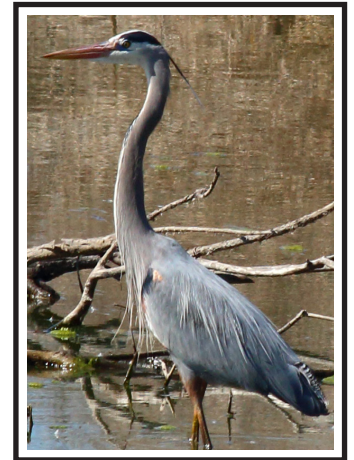
While they are solitary in their foraging, they are community nesters. We know of several "rookeries" in our area where Great Blue Heron nests can be seen in a large stand of trees. The number of nests can vary but there are usually at least a dozen. One we check on every spring before the leaves fill out is on the Leavenworth side of the Missouri River. It can be seen from the platform overlook at Weston Bend State Park.

Great blues grab your attention when you see

them in flight. I can't help but blurt out "Pterodactyl" when I see one slowly fly past. Their broad wings, coiled neck and legs trailing out behind them make for a truly unmistakable profile. The crooked neck is a clear separator from cranes as well who fly with their necks straight out.

These herons are amazing predators. They strike with such speed and accuracy, few frogs, snakes, fish, crayfish, small mammals or water birds stand a chance against them. I have seen them swallow fish much larger than I would have thought they could ever fit down their skinny throats.

You can look for these beautiful birds most of the year as they tend to only leave during the harshest part of winter and quickly return as soon as there is open water to hunt.



CONSERVATION CORNER: Platte Land Trust

I want to apologize for taking so long to write an article about the Platte Land Trust. I serve on the advisory board for this volunteer organization. The truth is that I did write a Conservation Corner once but the newsletter never got printed.

The Platte Land Trust is an all-volunteer organization with a mission of protecting land and natural resources for wildlife, farming, forests, historical importance, and parks and trails for the benefit of communities.

The PLT has been involved with many strong efforts over the years but none more important than a couple of projects going on right now. They recently launched an education effort to promote native landscaping and conservation minded yard management. The brochure is called *Partner with Nature* and is loaded with great information.

A living illustration of information from the brochure can be seen on the north side of Hwy 45 as you cross over Riss Lake. PLT led a partnership effort with the MO Master Naturalists, Platte Co. Parks & Rec. and the City of Parkville to plant two awesome Butterfly Gardens for people and pollinators to enjoy.

In June they led an effort to save an absolutely beautiful piece of remnant prairie very close to Kansas City. This piece of prairie has had the attention of the conservation community for many years but the sale of this property came about too quickly for larger organizations to get a purchase deal together. The Platte Land Trust was able to put together a deal with other conservation groups and saved the prairie from what would most assuredly been converted to crop land or a residential home site.

If you would like to get involved with this fine organization, visit their website (www.plattelandtrust.com) or pick up one of their brochures at the store. They will also be on hand at this year's bird feeder cleaning day on October 17th in which all money raised will go to support their work.





Time To Ask Mark...

Q. When is it safe to clean out my bird houses for the season?

A. Many birds only nest once each summer but most of our residents attempt multiple nestings. It is always a good idea to clean out bluebird and wren houses after each nesting if you houses are designed to do this easily. Once young birds leave their nest, they do not return. Cleaning out the nest is a good way to prevent passing one set of problems along to new residents. Bluebirds will not use the same nesting materials and will simply build a new nest on top of the old. If the old nest had an issue with lice or mites, those problems will make it hard on the new hatchlings. The exact date for fall cleaning is tough. Since many species will attempt a nest very late in the season if conditions are favorable, I would put off your "winterizing" until October or so if you can.



House Wren
photo by Mary Nemecek

Q. I've seen big flocks of what look like big dark bats flying around parking lots in the late summer. What are they?

A. My guess is that you are seeing Common Nighthawks. These great insect eating birds are most active at night in areas with lots of lights (thus lots of flying insects). They have a very bat-like flight and gather up into groups during fall migration. They are easily found in most large parking lots around dusk throughout the summer months. Learn their song then watch the sky for their unique silhouette.



Common Nighthawks
from Sibley's
Guide to Birds

Q. I get Poison Ivy but I've heard it is a good plant for birds. Should I cut it out of the woods behind my house?

A. You have heard correctly, Poison Ivy is an excellent plant for birds and other wildlife. It is an important food source for many migrating species in the fall. I have seen several species of warblers feeding on the little white berries. If it isn't in an area where you are likely to come in contact with it, learn to identify it and simply avoid it.

Q. Where do our hummingbirds go when they leave in the fall?

A. The simple answer to this is south. While that may seem like I'm being a bit corny, it isn't that far from being the truth. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds have a rather large known wintering range. Banding data shows that individuals may winter in the far southern tips of the U.S. all the way to far southern Central America. According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, just over half of the world's population winters in Mexico.

WILD DELIGHT SPECIAL #1

**Take \$6 OFF a 15lb
Wild Delight
Cardinal Food®**



*Cardinal Food is a premium mix of
Cardinal favorites: Black Oil Sun-
flower, Safflower, Striped Sunflower,
Peanuts, Dried Cherries & Dried
Raisins - No Fillers
It really appeals to a wide variety of
birds, not just cardinals*

Offers September 1 - October 31, 2015



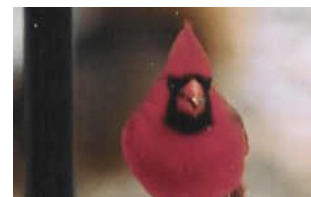
photo by Jim Braddock



WILD DELIGHT SPECIAL #2

**Pails will be back in October.
Normally \$24.99, sale price:**

\$19.99



Offers September 1 - October 31, 2015

BACKYARD BIRD CENTER
BOARDWALK SQUARE
6212 NW BARRY ROAD
KANSAS CITY, MO 64154
(816) 746-1113

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Did you know?

Great Blue Herons like other herons and egrets have grooves in the top of their bills along each side extending from their eyes. This aids them in their aim when spearing prey at incredible speed. You can check more about the heron on page 4 inside and more about bird vision in the cover article!



*Great Blue Heron
photo by Pat White*

THE NECTAR AID SELF MEASURING PITCHER IS THE COOLEST ITEM I'VE SEEN IN YEARS



Each year we go to see many new items enter the bird feeding market. Some are pretty good, most are gone within a year or so and some are really, really good. This year, I think the Nectar Aid pitcher is one of those products that is really, really good. You can only imagine how many times a day we get asked about the proper hummingbird and oriole nectar mixtures. This product takes all the guess work out and saves on clean up too. Just insert the paddle into the proper slot on the pitcher (H for hummers, O for orioles), fill the small section with sugar and the large section with hot water to the same level you as sugar. Remove the paddle and stir. Fill you feeder, snap the lid on and put the rest into the fridge till you next refill. I love mine! (It's even microwave and dishwasher safe)

DON'T MISS US AT PAWS IN THE PARK SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19TH



We will be at English Landing Park on Saturday September the 19th from 9 a.m till noon.

We will be answering questions about birds, bird feeding and giving away samples of the food I choose to feed our dogs, Earthborn Dog Food.

This event benefits Parkville Animal Wellness

