



BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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

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Customer Appreciation

**From 5:00 p.m.
 November 18th until
 5:00p.m. on the 20th**

Once again we want to show our appreciation to our wonderful customer base by offering a special weekend of savings.

On Thursday evening, everything in the store will be 15% Off (sorry but while this does include sale merchandise, we can not combine this with other discounts).

Aside from the great deals, we will have refreshments, door prizes and return of the "Stump Mark" Contest. Bring in a picture of a bird that Mark can not identify and win a prize.

Friday and Saturday will not have the 15% Discount but there will be great deals and refreshments available.

**Extended Holiday Hours
 During December
 Thursdays 9:30 - 8:00
 Sundays 1:00 - 5:00
 December 24th close at 5:00
 Closed 25th & 26th**

Hawk Gawking

by Mark McKellar

One of the coolest sights for me as a young lad was seeing a hawk perched on a pole or wire as we drove along a country road. I guess you can say I have been a Hawk Gawker my whole life.

Just because hawks are often highly visible, doesn't mean that they are easy to identify. I always hear beginning bird watchers swear off sparrows, shorebirds and gulls. "I will tackle those ID's after I have been at it a while longer." Try your hand at identifying hawks in flight on a busy day. I would advise taking on the sparrows first.

Luckily, the vast majority of large hawks you see are Red-tailed Hawks, small ones are generally American Kestrels and really big ones are Bald Eagles. During the short spring and fall migration seasons, the crow-sized Broad-winged Hawk can be numerous.

Most red-taileds are brown backed with a white chest and dark or broken belly band. That being said, they can range in color from almost all white to almost all black. To further confuse matters, young birds don't have the famous red tail. One good thing is that the only other hawk of their size that occurs here with any regularity is the Rough-legged Hawk. It is only here in winter and only in small numbers.

There are three smaller "hawks" that we see in winter. The most visible is actually a falcon. The colorful American Kestrel is quite commonly seen hovering along our roadsides and will occasionally take a bird from our feeder station. The hawks that are much better known for doing this are the Sharp-shinned and Coopers' Hawks. One old time name for these speedsters are blue darters.

Fall and early winter are the best times for viewing hawks in our area. I highly recommend a leisurely drive through the country (where it is safe to slow down and hopefully stop) to study our winter raptors. You can proudly proclaim yourself a Hawk Gawker too.



Immature Red-tailed Hawks are quite common in our area during late fall and early winter.



Feeder Station Stewardship

by Mark McKellar

Are your birds safe in your yard? By placing a feeder or bird bath in our yard, we take on a certain degree of responsibility to protect them as well. In other words, we don't want our yard to be "death traps." We can minimize the threats that birds face in our yards with just a small amount of effort.

Predators:

Just like lions around the water holes in the Serengeti, hawks and cats will hunt areas where they know prey will frequent. Feeder placement is often the simplest solution to this issue. By placing your feeders and baths close to escape cover (trees and shrubs), birds can generally elude the occasional hawk. If you know you have cats in the neighborhood, you will need to try and keep as much seed off the ground as possible (seed trays, platform feeders) and make sure your feeders are several feet away from low vegetation that cats can use for an ambush.

Tip: If you don't have good close escape cover, consider building a temporary brush pile during the winter season.

Disease:

Anytime that a lot of animals are close together, the threat of disease is greater. Keep your feeders clean. Once per month your feeders and baths should be washed. It is especially important to treat the ports and perches with either a mild bleach (10%) or a 50/50 white vinegar and water solution.

Tip: If you see a bird that is acting sick at your feeders, don't wait, give them a good cleaning then.

While not a disease per se, keeping your seed free of mold is important for a bird's health. Keep your seed dry with hoods if possible and always rotate your seed to ensure freshness.

Tip: For the health of the birds and your lawn, don't forget to rake up the hulls and wasted seed from under your feeders every so often.

Window Strikes:

Whether you feed birds or not, you have probably had birds crash into your windows. Fatalities are more likely when the birds are flying fast enough upon collision to break their necks. Studies suggest that by placing feeders within 10 ft of windows the birds don't have enough distance to build up a deadly impact speed. Window decals, like the new products from Window Alert, placed on the outside of your windows can help the birds see the clear window.

Tip: Dirty windows tend to be safer than sparkling clean ones. (Ruth's favorite busy housewife tip!!)

Feeding birds is a great hobby and we get countless hours of enjoyment out of it each year. Be a good friend to your birds and make your feeder station the clean, safe refuge they deserve.

DON'T FORGET THE SIMPLE RULE: Clean Food, Clean Water & Shelter.



Songbird Essentials has the right brush for feeder cleaning needs.

CLEANING FEEDERS JUST GOT EASIER



*Duncraft's New Easy Clean Bases
A twist and pull is all it takes to
remove the base for easy cleaning.*

**Mention this ad for 10% off any
Duncraft Dura-Lite Feeder
with Easy Clean Bases
in stock.**

(Expires December 15, 2004)



Have Binos, Will Travel!

If you read this section of the summer newsletter, you know how disappointing the spring migration season was. The same certainly can not be said for the late summer and early fall. We had some terrific hikes. We were fortunate enough to encounter many migrants at the Parkville Nature Sanctuary, Weston Bend and Blue River Glade hikes. The action at times was “fast and furious” and it often tested our skills. Winter visitors are already showing up in good numbers so I would expect this to be a great season as well.



The hikes and programs listed below are available to our store customers

(not organized groups, they can be arranged separately)

and fill on a first come first serve basis.

PLEASE call the store to register (816) 746-1113

Smithville Lake Waterbird Watching

Saturday, October 30th 8:00a.m. – noon

Truly one of my must do trips each year. Though dependent on weather patterns, the lake can be loaded with birds this time of year. We will search out the many ducks and geese for loons, grebes and other waterfowl. Don't worry about the long distance viewing, we will have plenty of spotting scopes for everyone to get “close up” views of distant birds.

Meet us at the store at 7:30 or at the Litton Center at 8:00.

Identifying Birds In Your Backyard (in store class)

Wednesday, November 10th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Are you tired of not knowing the names of the birds you are seeing at your feeders? Do you get frustrated trying to figure out if it is a House Finch or a Purple Finch? Join us for an evening of Backyard Bird ID and we will solve some of the most common frustrations that new birders struggle with.

Parkville Nature Sanctuary's Autumn Birds

Saturday, November 13th 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Join us for a beautiful autumn hike. We will search for winter arrivals and resident birds that should be forming their winter forage flocks. This will be a great hike for beginning bird watchers. The terrain is somewhat hilly but not strenuous. Meet us at the store for a 9:00 a.m. departure or at the Sanctuary parking lot at 9:15.

Identifying Ducks, Geese and Other Waterfowl

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

To prepare for Squaw Creek (or if you just want to identify the birds on your pond or lake) we will explore the world of waterfowl. We will learn to distinguish the differences in the major groups of water birds so that you can say with confidence “M R DUCKS”.

Eagles of Squaw Creek NWR

Sunday, November 28th 7:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

I always say, “why sit around eating leftover turkey when you can soar with the eagles.” This day is sure to be filled with beautiful sights. Last year we saw over 300 eagles and thousands of ducks and geese. Dress warmly and bring a sack lunch.

Meet at the store at 7:30 or at the Visitor Center at 9:00.

Hawk Gawking (in store class)

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

Just because a bird is big, doesn't mean it is easy to identify. We will spend the evening discussing Missouri's birds of prey, their haunts and habits and rules of thumb when identifying hawks, eagles and falcons.



Bald Eagles have become increasingly common in our area, especially in winter.



NEED EAGLE EYES?

The Pentax PF-80ED is the #1 Rated Full-sized Spotting Scope on the market (BetterViewDesired.com) and costs hundreds less than the closest competitors.

DON'T MISS THE

\$50

**MAIL IN REBATE
(EXPIRES DEC. 31ST)**



SPECIES PROFILE: Cedar Waxwings

by Mark McKellar

“I was going to go out and gather some dogwood berries off my tree but a flock of those Yankee Robins came in and stripped it bare.” “What kind of bird?” I replied. It didn’t take long to figure out he was talking about Cedar Waxwings.

About the size of a robin, waxwings are most often misidentified as female cardinals. They are primarily tan and grey in color with a black mask and a tail that looks like someone dipped it in yellow paint. While most of its appearance differs greatly from our cardinal, it is their crest that most people key in on.

Waxwings are a unique group of birds. They are, in a nutshell, seed distribution “machines.” Their digestive tracts are very inefficient thus requiring them to eat large amounts of their favorite food – fruit. These berries (and their internal seeds) pass quickly through waxwings and end up on the ground quite a distance from their origin. Just what the plant needs to ensure survival and distribution.

Their gluttonous eating habits sometimes get them in trouble. They have been known to eat so much at one time,

that they become too heavy to fly. They have to wait for the ineffective digestive tract to do its job and lighten their load before take off. Couple that fact with their occasional encounter with fermented berries, and you can see why waxwings have gained the title “drunk” of the bird world.

How can you attract Cedar Waxwings to your back yard? In a word - landscaping. Planting native trees and shrubs that produce bountiful amounts of berries can be irresistible to waxwings. If you can live with vines like wild grape, woodbine and poison ivy, let them bare fruit each fall. While landscaping may not be an option for everyone, unfrozen water generally is. A bird bath with a de-icer is often your best bet for attracting “Yankee Robins”.

*Cedar Waxwing
Courtesy of BYBC
Customer Steve Dillenger*



CONSERVATION CORNER: Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC)

If you have ever heard me speak publicly, chances are pretty good that I have made reference to how fortunate we are to have the Missouri Department of Conservation. During my senior year at NC State, my major professor asked me if I had sent off a resume to MDC yet. I answered, No, why should I?

It is widely known that MDC is one of the finest conservation organizations in the nation. Why? Because the people of this state had the foresight to vote in a funding source that couldn’t be touched or controlled by the state legislature. Especially having lived and worked in two other states that “barely” fund their state wildlife agencies, I can honestly say that we, our children and our grandchildren are fortunate.

I don’t know if you read the recent article in the Kansas City Star about MDC or not, but I can assure you that most attacks on this organizations are based solely on politics. Like most biased articles, it gave many “half quotes” and almost no commentary from supporters. Instead it quoted many employees from other poorly funded states who probably said “ I wish we had the funding source to provide our magazine free to our residents”. Rather than “We have to charge for our magazine.”

While our lives are “unknowingly” affected by MDC’s good work almost daily, far too few people do not take “direct” advantage of their many services. Definitely take pride in the fact that we have a much better chance of seeing a Bald Eagle, River Otter or Peregrine Falcon in our state on any given day because of their efforts. But don’t stop there, take a hike at Maple Woods Conservation Area in Gladstone, enroll your children in a nature program at Burr Oak Woods in Blue Springs, stop by their Liberty office and pick up a free brochure on building a butterfly garden. Folks, the services this group provides to you, me and the natural resources of this state are the envy of much of the country.





Time To Ask Mark...

Q. I heard that this could be a severe winter. What can I do to help the birds?

A. I know you probably get tired of hearing me say this, but unfrozen water is absolutely the most important thing you can provide for your birds. Good news here is that my favorite heated bird bath is available once again. After having a terrible material shortage last year, the Kozy Bird Spa is back and better than ever. Check out the article on page 2 for more ways to “protect” your birds.

The Kozy Bird Spa is made of tough impact plastic yet looks great. It comes with a deck mounting bracket or you can add a pedestal. It has a five year warranty.

Q. I love Snowy Owls but have never seen one. Do we ever get them here in Missouri?

A. Yes. Though infrequent, we do have Snowy Owls show up here, especially in northern Missouri. A few years ago we had one spend most of the winter just off I-35 (exit 61, north of Cameron). A few years before that, one spent the entire winter just north of Liberty. I will make a point to send out an e-mail if one shows up this winter.

Q. My parents have been feeding birds for years and seem to have everything. Is there a “new” feeder you would recommend?

A. Though not really new, peanut feeders seem to be the one “type” of feeder that many folks don’t have yet. The peanut feeders are awesome for several reasons. They really attract “good” birds like chickadees, titmice and nuthatches while discouraging “not-so-good” birds like house sparrows. The group of birds they seem to be most appealing to are the woodpeckers. I have several customers who call them their woodpecker insurance. They claim that since they put up their peanut feeder, woodpeckers have left their house alone.

Q. I saw the Shade Grown Coffee display in your store the other day. Do birds eat coffee?

A. No. The display is about the importance of shade grown coffee plantations for many of our birds. Baltimore Orioles, many warbler species, Painted Buntings and a host of other birds who nest here find the food and shelter they need during the winter months in these shade grown coffee plantations. I know I have written about it before but it is worth repeating. Mass production coffee plantations clear cut the rainforest and plant acres of coffee trees. Shade grown plantations simple plant the coffee plants among the trees. It takes longer for the beans to ripen but they are very strong so your bag of coffee goes further. Give it a try and help the birds.

SUET SEASON SPECIAL

Woodpeckers and Other Birds Love Suet

Suet is the internal body cavity fat of a cow. Most popular formulas include some type of fruit or nuts mixed in with it. Formulas with the name Treat are the “traditional” mixes while the Delight formulas have higher melting points which make them better for year round feeding.

Best Selling Suet Cakes:

- #1) Peanut Delight
- #2) High Energy
- #3) Woodpecker Delight
- #4) Hot Pepper Delight
- #5) Peanut Treat
- #6) Pure Suet



Bottom Access Suet Feeders will dramatically cut down on your losses to Starlings.



C&S HIGH ENERGY

.79 each

(Expires January 31, 2005)