



BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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The popular Aspects Mini Hummzinger, normally \$14.99 is on sale this spring for:

\$9.99



Golden-winged Warbler
Photo courtesy of Steve Dillenger

"Warning"

This is truly an issue that you would like to see in full color. Visit our website and download a copy today. Join our e-mail group and I will send you notification when a new issue has been posted.

www.backyardbirdcenterkc.com

Let Warbler Mania Get You

by Mark McKellar

What is a warbler? To some, it may be someone who doesn't know when to stop talking, but if you're a birder, it is a group of small, beautiful birds that you look forward to seeing each spring. They are often referred to as the butterflies of the bird world but to me they are pure pleasure.

Why is this group of birds so enjoyed by birders? Not only are they beautiful, but they are also less common and often challenging to find and identify. During the few weeks that most of the 37 species that occur in Missouri pass through our woodlands, they liven up the trees with colors and sounds that are as unique to spring as daffodils and tulips.

The first "group" to arrive each year are the Yellow-rumped (butter-butts was our college term) and Orange-crowned Warblers. These early arrivers start showing up in March and are merely a tease of what is to come. The Orange-crowned is one of "least showy" of the warblers and the Yellow-rumps will not be showing their breeding colors for another month.

Soon in early April you may find the "nuthatch-acting" Black-and-white Warbler clinging to a tree trunk or a Northern Parula buzzing from high in a sycamore. Now we are getting into the colorful season. Warblers, like other neo-tropical migrants, time their spring migration with insect availability. As our trees begin to bud out, insects attack the new lush growth. After an all night flight, these tiny birds hit the trees at sunrise looking for bugs. Would our trees even have a chance to produce leaves if not for our tiny feathered Orkin Men?

Southern winds during the month of April can bring in new birds each night. Tennessee, Nashville and Yellow Warblers become quite common late in the month, but it is the first two weeks of May that birders really look forward to each year. A good day of bird watching in a prime location like Weston Bend State Park, can easily yield 10 to 20 different species. Among my favorites I look forward to seeing are Magnolia, Golden-winged, Cerulean and Mourning Warblers, but it just isn't spring until I have seen a Blackburnian Warbler. One look and you'll know why a friend of mine used to call them "ol' fire throats".

By mid May, things are starting to wind down, yet warblers are still coming through. In fact it is the best time to see such beauties as the Canada, Blackpoll and highly secretive Connecticut Warblers.

I once read that warblers stay in one place long enough for you to say "Hey, isn't that a . . . , oh shoot". They do move around a lot but the reward is worth the effort. To learn more about warblers check out the events page for opportunities this spring!



Male Blackburnian Warbler.
Photo courtesy of Steve Dillenger



The Perfect Field Guide

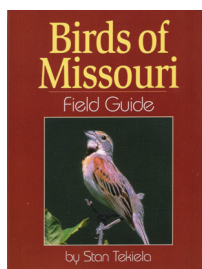
by Mark McKellar, Ruth Simmons and John Burwell

What is the perfect bird field guide? Different people have different needs and preferences so it is all but impossible to say that there is a “perfect” field guide. I thought it would be good to ask the staff here what they thought.

Not surprisingly, the overwhelming winner was *The Sibley Field Guide To Birds*. We all agreed that it is the most thorough field guide we have ever seen and the artwork is fantastic. Not only does Sibley give you multiple drawings of each bird, he is the first artist to draw all birds in flight from above and below. The Eastern version of his field guide is perfect for those who live and bird in the Midwest.

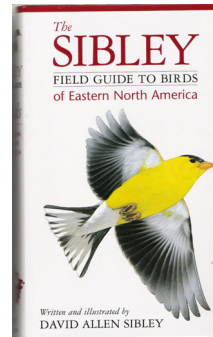
As much as I love David Allen Sibley’s book, I still will not go birding without a copy of National Geographic’s *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. From the first time I saw this book (1985) I knew I had to have one and am currently on my 4th copy. As a serious birder, I like that it covers the rarest of birds that have been seen in North America as well as the common species. I like to travel and this guide is great for any region of the country that I am visiting.

There are several guides that drew praises from our staff. Ruth is fond of the American Bird Conservancy’s *All The Birds of North America*. She writes “This field guide is one of my favorites. The first half of the guide covers waterbirds and the back half covers the landbirds. The main sections are divided into bird groups such as shorebirds, curved bills, ground walkers, and a poignant section is devoted the extinct birds of North America. There is a great essay about each group of birds on the first pages of their section. The artwork in this guide is excellent and includes wonderful scenes of each bird’s typical habitat. I like to keep *All the Birds* and *Peterson’s East* in my car for impromptu birding. (I happen to know that Mark keeps an *All the Birds* in his truck!) At \$19.95, this is a great guide at a reasonable price.”



Since Ruth and I both wrote about books with drawings, John felt he should comment on a book with photos. Beginning bird watchers generally like books with photographs of birds and the new *Birds of Missouri Field Guide* by Stan Tekiela is terrific. The photographs are of the highest quality and birds are arranged by color. For a beginner, this is very helpful. It is small in size and is only \$12.95.

One thing is for certain, I don’t know of a single birder who only has one field guide. The longer you enjoy this hobby, the more likely you will be to find different things you like about different guides. If you really want to put different books to the test, come on one of our bird hikes. I can guarantee that there will be several different field guides to study.



Last Chance at Some Great Optics

Every so often binocular companies change models and close out others. Right now seems to be a time for that to happen. With change, often comes a chance at great deals and we have a few in the store now. While supplies last, you can get some of the finest optics ever made for good prices. Some examples (as we go to print):

Nikon’s E2

One of my best selling binoculars and wouldn’t you know it, Nikon decides to discontinue them. This will be your last chance to get these binoculars that I have called the greatest value in a high quality binocular we have ever carried. (4) 8X30’s left

Nikon Venturer LX

The finest optics made and my personal birding binoculars. They are being replaced by the newer, lighter (and more expensive) Premier LX. If you really want a great pair of binoculars, this will be your last chance at these “lower” priced models. (3) 10X32s, (1) 8X32 and (1) 8X42 left.



Pentax DCF

The first roof prism binocular to earn a Best Buy rating from BetterViewDesired.com, these fine binoculars have been replaced by a newer more expensive model. (1) 8X42 left

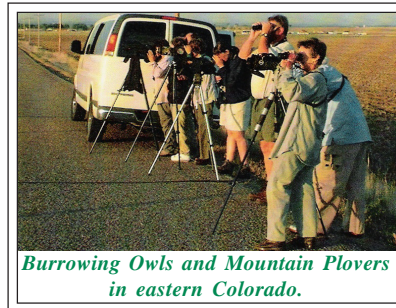
I don’t know how long these will last but with the prime birding season upon us, you will never regret getting the absolute best view of a bird that you possibly can. Don’t cheat yourself.





Have Binos, Will Travel!

The winter birding season started out fast and furious. The Thanksgiving snow, early season arrivals by Red-breasted Nuthatches and Pine Siskens, and record numbers of owls in Minnesota had birders buzzing about the “best winter for birds in years”. What happened? The nuthatches and siskens kept on going south, the snows kind of stopped in January and in the end, it really was just an average “bird” winter. Not to be kept down, our classes were well attended during the cold months and in March, 25 birders from the store were treated to Common Loons in breeding plumage, Bald Eagles attending their nest and seven Short-eared Owls that buzzed around us on our March 20th Smithville Lake Trip.



Burrowing Owls and Mountain Plovers in eastern Colorado.

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

Wonderful Warblers (in store class)

Wednesday, May 4th 7:00p.m. to 8:30p.m.

If you read this issue's cover article, you can tell that I and many other birders, love warblers. If you flip through the warbler section of a field guide quickly, you can get overwhelmed. Come to this class and we will sort through most of the 37 species that occur in Missouri and where to find them.



*Cerulean Warblers nest at Weston Bend State Park
photo courtesy of Steve Dillenger*

Parkville Nature Sanctuary Warbler Walk

Thursday, May 5th 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.

Lets get out and practice what we learned the night before. Warblers and other spring migrants will be near their peak numbers by this day and we should have a great morning. If you need to leave a little early to make it to work I understand.

Meet at the store at 7:00 or at the Parking lot at 7:20.

Weston Bend State Park Spring Hike

Thursday, May 12th 7:00 a.m. to noon

My one true “can’t miss” spring migration birding location. Even in years that are not that good for spring migration (like last year), Weston Bend always produces good birds. Bring a snack and your best binoculars.

Meet at the store at 7:00 or at the Park Gate at 7:20.

Birding Vacation Hotspots (in store class)

Thursday, May 26th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Looking for a vacation spot to visit this summer that has great birds? Mark will take you on a tour around the nation to a few of his favorite summer birding “hot spots.” If you already have plans for the summer, feel free to call ahead so we can talk about that area as well.

Watkins Mill State Park

Kearney, MO

Sunday, May 15th 7:00 a.m. to noon.

Watkins Mill State Park has a very large track of timber that can be spectacular for warbler and other migrants. Join us for a beautiful hike around the lake at the absolute best time of the year. If time permits, we may visit the Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary in Liberty as well.

We should tally quite a list for the day.

Call for meeting spots and directions.

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Erva Pole systems are the best, most versatile way to present your feeders for birds. From now through June, receive a finial pole topper FREE when you purchase any pole, head and anchor combination.





SPECIES PROFILE: *Rose-breasted Grosbeak*

by Mark McKellar

There is a pretty famous story in the bird world about a concerned citizen in Texas who called the authorities to report that someone in her neighborhood was shooting her birds. Upon further investigation, the birds she was concerned about did not have blood on their chest feathers at all, they were Rose-breasted Grosbeaks.

Male Rose-breasted Grosbeaks are a stunning black and white bird with a brilliant red "V" shaped patch of red on its chest. The females and young birds resemble a large sparrow or female purple finch in color but their very large bills quickly clue you in on their true identity.

Primarily a bird of oak woodlands, they seem to prefer the woodland edge or areas of scattered large trees. In spring, I see them quite often feeding on tree buds but they also eat insects, fruit and seeds. They nest twice a year and the male will often select the nest site and share incubation duties. They will occasionally sing their "hurried robin-like" song while sitting on the nest.



Male and Female
Rose-breasted
Grosbeaks eating fine
sunflower chips



"Rosies" are often one of the true rewards for those who continue to feed birds through May. Your best chance of attracting them to your feeders is by having sunflower seed out during the period of their initial return from their wintering grounds (late April to early May). Rose-breasted will generally visit feeders for a few days, but once they have moved out onto their nesting territories they rarely come back to the feeder.

When you are out this spring keep your eyes and ears peeled for these great birds. Most often for me it is the sharp metallic "ink" (Sibley says like sneakers on a hardwood floor) call note that alerts me to these birds. Once I get my binoculars on them, it is hard to put them back down again. When you see a "Rosie" for the first time, you will understand why so many people say "where has that bird been all my life"?

CONSERVATION CORNER: *Bird-A-Thons*

As you've probably heard me say before, one of the ways biologists monitor bird populations is through bird counts conducted by amateur and professional ornithologist. Many conservation groups utilize these surveys as fund raisers. How do they work? Groups will gather pledges for each species of bird seen on their count day. Money that they raise supports their conservation efforts.

The KU Museum of Natural History generally conducts a bird-a-thon each spring to raise money for their research efforts in South America. Burroughs' Audubon collects pledges for their local education work and the Missouri Audubon chapter conducts theirs to support bird conservation work here in Missouri.

Don't Forget Your Conservation Discount

We give 10% discounts to those who show proof of current membership in the following conservation groups:

The Nature Conservancy (www.nature.org)
National Audubon Society (www.audubon.org)
(including state and/or local chapters)
American Bird Conservancy (www.abcbirds.org)
Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary
(www.naturesanctuary.com)

Discount applies to regular price and clearance merchandise but can not be combined with other specials or coupons.

As a person who loves birds, I know that I have an obligation to support conservation efforts to ensure their further survival. This year I will be joining the Missouri Chapter's Bird-a-thon Team on May 6th to help them tally as many species of birds in one day as possible. If you would like to pledge support (\$1, \$5 per species or any amount you can) please contact me via e-mail (mark@backyardbirdcenterkc.com) or phone (746-1113) or call Ken Buchholz (314-368-7639).

How many species will we see? Last year the team had a really terrible weather day and still got 135 species. With good weather, we could get closer to 150. I hope you will consider supporting our bird-a-thon. It is the work done by these fine groups that will ensure that our grandchildren will enjoy many of the same birds tomorrow that we do today.





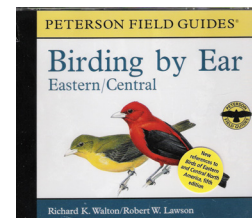
Time To Ask Mark...

Q. Do you ever hear from Dale of the old Dale's For The Birds store?

A. Yes. Many people ask about Dale and I am glad to report that his enjoying his retirement in sunny Arizona. We recently traded a couple of e-mails and he wanted me to send his best wishes to everyone. He was happy to know the store was still "going" and was tickled to know that people are still asking about him.

Q. What is your favorite bird song CD?

A. There are many good ones on the market today. The only one I had access to when I was learning was Roger Tory Peterson's Bird Songs East. It is still a great resource. If you really want to learn bird songs "on your own" the best CD's available are the Birding By Ear I & II. Perhaps the fastest bird song learner I know, Doug Willis, greatly credits these discs with his rapid learning - especially the warblers.



Q. I know that orioles like grape jelly. What other birds can I expect to see feeding from it?

A. Just a few of the birds that our customers regularly report visiting jelly are: Orchard Orioles (burnt orange and black cousins of the Baltimore), House Finches, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Downy Woodpeckers and far less commonly Summer Tanagers, Northern Mockingbird and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. I suspect the longer we offer the jelly as a food source, the longer this list will become. Let me know if you have seen others and please send action photos!



Q. How many times do birds nest during a year?

A. Larger birds such as hawks and owls will only nest once per year but many smaller birds in our region will nest two to three times. Morning Doves on the other hand will nest up to six or seven times. Make sure you clean out your nest boxes after each nesting.

Q. How often should I change my hummingbird nectar?

A. If your nectar feeder (hummingbird or oriole) is in the shade and temperatures are consistently below 75, you can get by with changing your nectar once every 5 days or so. When the temperatures rise to the 80 degree and higher average and especially if your feeder is in direct sunlight for most of the day, change it every other day or more.

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SPRING IS THE BEST TIME!

May is absolutely the very best month to see such infrequent visitors like Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Indigo Buntings, Summer Tanagers and Blue Grosbeaks. It is even possible to see really rare visitors like Lazuli Buntings and, as with one of our customers a few years ago, a male Western Tanager!

*A mixed flock of Baltimore Orioles and
Rose-breasted Grosbeaks feeding on
sunflowers and oranges - must be May!*



*The HummerWand from Holland Hill
makes hand feeding hummingbirds simple*

copyright holland hill design 2004

UPCOMING IMPORTANT BIRD DATES

Late April/Early May - Indigo Buntings & others visit feeders

May 14th - International Migratory Bird Day (peak migration)

June - Time for bluebird's 2nd nesting

Late July - Shorebirds from the north start showing up in wetlands

August - Bluebirds will often attempt 3rd nest

Mid August - Hummingbird numbers start to peek.