



BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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

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Many Thanks!

There are so many things that go through your mind when you are lying in a hospital bed. As cliché as it may sound, I just kept thinking about how lucky I was to have the family and friends that surrounded me.

For those who do not know, my appendix ruptured on December 14th and I spent the next 4 weeks in and out of the hospital. For someone who had never been in the hospital before, it was a new experience.

The outpouring of support I received was great. The cards, e-mails, texts, flowers and verbal messages through the store meant so much to me. They really helped me deal with everything.

I can't say enough about Ruth, John, Joyce, Galen and everyone who helped them at the store. With Melanie taking care of me and the kids (through the holidays no less), they kept the Backyard Bird Center going during our most important season. Thank you all again!

Mark

Snowy Owls Among Us!!

by Mary Nemecek & Linda Williams

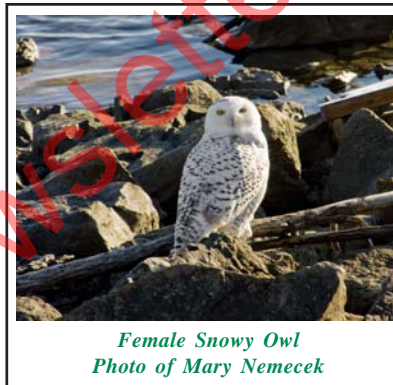
In late November of 2011 a buzz started across the Northern and Central United States- Snowy Owls started showing up early and in large numbers. The owls were big news and covered on local news, national news and NPR just to name a few. People everywhere were flocking to see the owls. There have been over 30 reports across Missouri and locally Smithville Lake peaked with 5 owls on December 23.

The weekend of January 7th, volunteers set up their scopes at Smithville Lake Eagle Days and in two days over 3000 people viewed these magnificent white birds from the north. Everyone was asking, "why are they here?"

The short answer is, they are here looking for food. Snowy Owls live in the Arctic. On the Arctic tundra, the diet of Snowy Owls primarily consists of lemmings, small rodents indigenous to the area. Snowy Owls will eat around 5 or more lemmings a day - over 1500 a year! Approximately every 3 to 5 years, the lemming population will "crash" to a level where many owls, primarily juveniles and females, are forced south to look for food. Missouri may get an owl or two during these years, but the numbers this year are unprecedented. This

southward movement by the owls outside of their normal range is called an 'irruption.'

Most arrive starving and weary from their journey and many will not make it back home. One owl collected at the downtown airport weighed less



Female Snowy Owl
Photo of Mary Nemecek

than 2lbs. That is less than 50% of their normal body weight. Life here is very different for them than on the tundra. Possibly, the most significant, is traffic. Many Snowy Owls have been victims of collisions.

If you have the chance to see a Snowy

Owl, enjoy it! This is a rare and exciting opportunity to view a beautiful bird from the northernmost areas of the world! Remember though, the owls have seen more Polar Bears than people prior to their irruption south. Make sure you are watching them from a good distance. Anytime someone gets too close (closer than 100-150 feet) they are risking interfering with the owl's hunting. This can be life or death for these starving animals. Snowy Owls hunt by sitting, often on the ground, and waiting for their prey. They have excellent eyesight and hearing and, unlike other owls, are active during daylight hours. Approaching an owl too closely can stress the bird and cause it to expend energy that may turn the odds of survival against it.



Has It Really Been 10 Years?

by Mark McKellar

They say time flies when you are having fun. That certainly is the case when we are talking about the past 10 years around here. March 1st 2002 was the first day that Melanie and I turned the key on the front door of the Backyard Bird Center as owners. So many things have changed over that time but many of the really important factors have not.

Ruth pointed out that she actually worked before that March 1st day because she helped us do the inventory before we signed the official paperwork. Not to be outdone, John was actually working for the previous owners when I first approached them about buying the business. Joyce joined the crew in 2006 and brought a fresh new perspective to the store, especially the "gift side".

The time that these three wonderful people have worked at the store only tell part of our history. I have known the three of them a combined 54 years! Ruth was one of my first friends I made in Missouri when we moved here in 1992. Joyce was a volunteer Naturalist at Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary when I took over as Director in 1994 and John's son Jessie did his Eagle Scout Project there in 1996. Friendship is a wonderful thing and as a small business owner, there is no greater feeling that knowing I can be gone (as with my illness) and know that the shop is in great hands.

Notable events over the past 10 years include the move across the parking lot in 100+ degree heat, bird feeder cleaning days, truckload sales that had to be brought inside, customer appreciation days, many bird hikes and store programs. We have loved them all.

We have made so many wonderful friends over the years and we know that customer loyalty is the real reason we are able to continue to growing each year.

Thank you all and we look forward to serving you for the next 10 year.

Mark & Melanie

BINOCULARS ARE COMING BACK!

After a months of having a very low inventory of binoculars, new stock is starting to arrive. I am excited to bring in Alpen Binoculars. Alpen offers a great value line of waterproof binoculars that complement Nikon's outstanding optics.

*New Line:
Alpen Magnaview
Waterproof Binoculars
A great value
10X42\$99.99*



*NewLine:
Alpen Shasta Ridge
Waterproof Binoculars
8X42 \$169.99
10X42 \$179.99*

*Just Arrived: The NEW Nikon Monarch 5
with Dielectric Multi-layered,
Coated Prisms
8X42 \$309.99
10X42 \$329.99*



*Close Out while supplies last:
Nikon Premier LXL 8X32
One of the greatest birding
binocular I have ever used!
Was \$949 . . . Now \$749.99*

SPRING IS FILLED WITH GIFT GIVING OPPORTUNITIES WE HAVE GREAT GIFTS FOR MOMS, TEACHERS AND GRADUATES

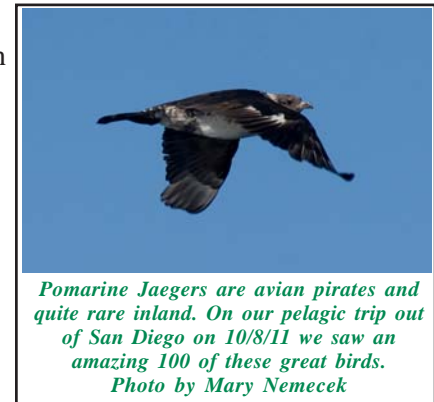
We Always Stock A Variety of Unique Nature Oriented Gift Items at All Price Levels.





Have Binos, Will Travel!

After two good snowy winters, I guess we have to call this one “the winter that wasn’t”. That is why it was so ironic that the most unprecedented Snowy Owl invasion in history occurred this year (see cover). For most birders, what makes a season special is the number of rare birds are found in the area. This winter for the most part was quite calm. Our traveling birders made a trip to San Diego California this fall and had a great trip. I got 11 lifers! That is a really good trip for me. Most of my birds were pelagic species like shearwaters, storm-petrels and the incredible Red-billed Tropicbird. What a great place to go birding.



*Pomarine Jaegers are avian pirates and quite rare inland. On our pelagic trip out of San Diego on 10/8/11 we saw an amazing 100 of these great birds.
Photo by Mary Nemecek*

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 5th</i>	<i>Smithville Lake</i>	<i>8:00 - 10:30</i>
<i>April 12th</i>	<i>English Landing Park</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>
<i>April 19th</i>	<i>Little Bean Marsh</i>	<i>8:00 - 10:30</i>
<i>April 26th</i>	<i>Parkville Nature Sanc.</i>	<i>8:00 - 10:30</i>
<i>May 3rd</i>	<i>Burr Oak Woods</i>	<i>8:00 - 11:30</i>
<i>May 10th</i>	<i>Weston Bend S.P.</i>	<i>8:00 - 11:30</i>
<i>May 17th</i>	<i>Martha Lafite N.S.</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>
<i>May 24th</i>	<i>Amity Nature Park</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>
<i>May 31st</i>	<i>Parkville Nature Sanc.</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>

In Store Classes

Warblers Anyone?

Wednesday, April 18th 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.



The new 6th Edition National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds has arrived and is awesome. I remember the first time I saw this guide (1986). I had to have it. The only way to get it at the time was to join the Society. I did, and I have had every edition since.

Weekend Bird Hikes

Waterfowl, Warblers and Shorebirds Oh My!

Squaw Creek NWR Sunday, May 6th 6:00 a.m. to 6:00p.m.

Everyone tends to think of Squaw Creek as a fall and winter hotspot because of the geese and eagles. That is a well earned reputation, but it is also a spectacular spring migration. If water levels are good, there can be a hundred thousand shorebirds present and the trees loaded with migrants. We should accumulate an impressive list of birds Space is limited. Please register by April 25th **\$50 Fee includes Transportation (van & fuel), a box lunch and lots of fun.**



*Female phalaropes are prettier than the males. Wilson't Phalaropes are fairly common spring migrants in western Missouri
Photo by Rick Jordahl*

Weston Bend State Park

Sunday, May 13th 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.

Meet at the park gate @ 7:00 am



*Scarlet Tanagers are regular nesters at Weston Bend State Park.
Photo by Rick Jordahl*



SPECIES PROFILE: Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*)

Story by Mark McKellar

If you know me as a birder, you surely know that I love our native sparrows. These great birds just don't get any respect due to an imposter, the troublesome House Sparrow. Of the many native sparrows, none are more significant to our area than the Harris's Sparrow.

Our largest sparrow, Harris's breed exclusively in Canada and winter in the very heart of the heartland. This limited wintering range has always made this bird very special to our local birders. So much so that the Burrough's Audubon Society adopted it as their mascot bird.

Like many species, the Harris's Sparrow looks very different in its breeding plumage than when they first arrive in the fall. The very white chest and belly are the same as is the brown mottled back, but the face and chest vary a lot. In the fall their faces are brown with limited black on the head, face and down the chest. From mid-April on, the black deepens and fills in, while the facial feathers molt to a

beautiful light grey. They are very attractive birds.

The most likely place to find Harris's Sparrow in the fall and winter is in a pile of brush on the edge or in a field. They are birds of open country but love the security the brush provides. I quite often find them mixed in with White-crowned and American Tree Sparrows.

They do visit feeders and in some years they can be quite common. This winter was so mild, they were quite a treat for people to see. I still expect them to be seen this spring before they take off north again.

They prefer millet seed spread along the ground near brushy



Spring Harris's Sparrow - by Rick Jordahl, Winter photo by Mary Nemecek

cover. A favorite "natural" spring food for them are dandelions. Watch for them feeding on the seed heads.

Don't fall into the trap of thinking that all sparrows are the same. Throw down some of our Ground Throw Mix and study the variety of sparrows that come to feed. Keep your eyes open for our largest member!

CONSERVATION CORNER: KCWildlands

There is little left of the native flora that covered Kansas City 200 years ago. In 2000, Larry Rizzo and Mark McKellar recognized that the city was in danger of losing all remnants of the forests and prairies that had defined Missouri plant life for thousands of years. Along with a small group of volunteers, they identified a few of our most precious and salvageable areas and formed KC WildLands. The goal was to restore and protect these treasures for all to enjoy.

The areas that fall under KC WildLands care are rich in diversity of species and native flora and fauna. Mead's Milkweed is a Federally Threatened Species. This tallgrass prairie herb once bloomed across Missouri and Kansas under the hooves of roaming bison. Due to habitat loss and mismanagement, there is very little Mead's Milkweed left in the wild. Two Kansas City WildLands still host this species- Kill Creek Park and The Prairie Center. In the Northland, Hidden Valley is home to the rare Goldie's fern, a Missouri species of concern.

KC WildLands relies heavily on the help of local citizens for support, both financial and with restoration and maintenance of the sites. They have scheduled workdays throughout the year. The next work day is May 12. If you would like to help, contact Linda Lehrbaum, at 816-561-1061, ext. 116 or linda@bridgingthegap.org. For a list of all KC WildLand sites or more information go to www.kcwildlands.org.



Jerry Smith Farm Park photo by Dylan Lehrbaum



Time To Ask Mark...

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

A. I know this is not new for many of you, but it is easily the most frequently asked question each spring. It is also the same reason the woodpeckers drum on your downspouts and/or flashing around your fireplace. Plain and simple it is "love". The birds banging into your window repeatedly are seeing their reflection and think it is an intruder in their territory. He or she is doing its best to run this freeloader off. The only guaranteed solution is to cover the window on the outside for the next few weeks (nesting season).



Q. Should I pick up a baby bird?

A. This depends. If you are picking the bird up to place it back into a nest or putting it up on a limb so that a dog or cat can't get to it - YES. Birds have terrible senses of smell and do not care about human scent. If you are picking it up to take it to somewhere else, the answer is NO. Most baby birds that are on the ground are very close to being on their own and they generally need only a few more bugs or worms from the adults to make it. Too often people pick them up and take them to a vet or nature center while mom and dad birds are going nuts looking for their baby. Let nature take its course.

Q. Do birds really need bird seed now?

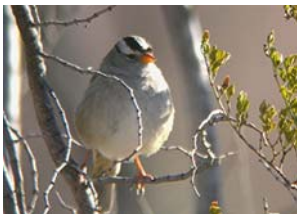
A. If you think about what is happening in the plant world during the spring, you quickly realize this is probably the most important time to provide seed for birds. The natural seeds and berries that birds have been feeding on all winter are gone and freshly growing plants will not be producing any 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. What is the proper sugar to water ratio for hummingbirds?

A. Another of our more common spring questions, the ration is 4 parts water to 1 part sugar. There are many people out there that will use 3 to 1 and even 2 to 1. According to the North American Hummingbird Society who has sponsored numerous studies on the topic, 4 to 1 is the best ratio for the birds. The issue in most cases is water. The stronger the sugar mix, the more water the hummingbirds have to take in to break it down. This means more time traveling to and from dependable water sources and wasted energy for the birds.



MARK'S GROUND THROW MIX



White-crowned Sparrow
Photo by Rick Jordahl

Mention this and we will take \$1 OFF one bag of Ground Throw Mix 20lb or larger through May.

Some of my favorite Birds prefer to feed on the ground, so I thought I should do more to promote taking care of them. Because White Proso Millet is the favorite of most ground feeders (native sparrows, juncos, towhees and even Indigo Buntings), it makes up the bulk of the mix. To address our larger ground feeders (cardinals, Morning Dove), the remainder of the mix consists of Black Oil Sunflower, Safflower, Striped Sunflower and a very small amount of Cracked Corn. There are no filler seeds like milo, buckwheat or oats. Give it a try.

WILD DELIGHT
PRE-FILLED FINCH
SOCK FEEDER
25% OFF
IN APRIL

American Goldfinch photo courtesy of Paul Ruehle

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MORE STONE AGE OWLS ARE ON THE WAY

These owls are a HOOT! We brought these StoneAge boulder owls in a year ago now and they have been extremely popular. From our big boys to the tiniest members of the family, customers have loved creating their own family groups for the garden or mantle. We have just re-ordered for the third time so come in and check out the new stock. Remember, no two are alike.



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 - Peak Migration for Warblers, etc.**