



BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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

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Feeder Cleaning Weekend

Saturday, April 1st
9:00a.m. to 5:00p.m.

No Foolin! Because it is important to protect the health of our birds, we will host a bird feeder cleaning and repair day on April Fools Day.

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 we will give you an estimated time to pick them up later that day. This will depend on the number of participants and the condition of your feeder.

The cost will be \$3.00 per feeder for cleaning and \$5.00 if there are repairs that have to be made. We reserve the right to "proclaim" a feeder unrepairable or uncleanable.

All proceeds will go the Parkville Nature Sanctuary.

***"Clean Feeders Help
Prevent the Spread of
Disease and Illness."***

Mild Is The Word

by Mark McKellar

I know I'm weird but I love cold weather. Growing up in eastern North Carolina (where it rarely snows) I would watch shows with snow in them and get jealous. Now that I live where it is supposed to snow at least a couple of times each winter, years like this one "bum me out". It saves us on our heating bills but what kind of affect does it have on birds and other wildlife?

There is a great difference between warm stretches of weather and what we are experiencing this year. The weather patterns since mid December are being felt over much of the lower 2/3 of our nation and it has affected bird movement on a large scale. In our region, bird feeder stations have been even further affected by the mild temperatures by what many have described as a bumper crop of natural foods (berries, seeds, acorns, walnuts, etc.).

It goes without saying, but bird movement patterns are greatly affected by weather. The reason we go to Squaw Creek for our eagle watching trip in late November each year is because in a typical winter, the refuge is frozen over before Christmas. They currently have open water, lots of waterfowl and over 100 eagles still hanging around.

Food needs are also altered by weather conditions. Why eat as much seed when you can get juicy bugs. My cousins in North and South Carolina who have been feeding birds for many years say they've never seen anything like this year. They have had absolutely no birds at their feeders yet. I filled my mom's feeders in early November when I was out there, only to find that not a single seed appeared to be missing when we went back at Christmas. She did tell me that this past week she has seen a few birds starting to come in.

Our customers are reporting a mix of feeder conditions. Some folks have tons of goldfinches but few other birds. Some have precious few birds at all.

Will it change? Typically, when we have a year of abundant natural food, feeders are slow early in the fall and gradually pick up and are busiest in the late winter/early spring. Will that be the case this year? No one knows for sure, but until then, enjoy the lower heating bills.



*Milder conditions reduce the need for northern bird like this junco to come this far south.
Photo courtesy of Steve Dillinger*



*Even southern birds like this Red-shouldered Hawk have shown up in our area this mild winter.
Photo courtesy of Rick Jordahl*



Digiscoping

by Rick Jordahl

At last, the new Nikon P1 digital camera/field scope system is here! I recently entered the new and exciting digiscoping arena and it is a fun and challenging hobby that has great rewards!

As an amateur photographer and avid birder I've wanted to capture some of those great images we have all seen through our binoculars! Digiscoping offers us a great and affordable way to do just that!

The system features the new Nikon P1- 8 megapixel camera and a mounting device that attaches quickly and easily to the Nikon ED-82 field scope. The system is easy to assemble and the outstanding Nikon optics (camera and field scope) are capable of superb results! Ask Mark for all the details.

It provides all the tools for great, sharp digital photographs of those once-in-lifetime sightings we have all had! Nikon has put it all together. And it is now available! Simple, right?

Well...let me tell you! First off, digiscoping requires patience! No one is going to produce National Geographic quality images the first time out. For one thing, birds move!

The system, as with all field scopes, requires a tripod, which can be cumbersome at times. And for us beginners, it takes a few seconds (or more!) to find the bird in the scope and to focus.

Now, you're all set to click the system's cable shutter release, and, of course, the bird flies off! Sometimes you

don't even get the system set up before that Cooper's Hawk is off on a mission! But, do not become discouraged. And start on those birds that sit awhile. The red-headed woodpecker and white-breasted nuthatch, my first shots with the system, were not camera-shy birds.



This Red-headed Woodpecker was photographed at Wyandotte Co. Park at a distance of about 40 yards.

Before my first outing I also opted for a 1 gigabyte memory card, which allows for lots of shots that can be

used or discarded later. I also picked up an extra battery for the camera. As with many electronic devices, the Nikon P1 (a highly complex camera) is power-hungry.

The batteries re-charge quickly with the system's re-charger which is included. But, you will be happy that you started your outing with two batteries!

After a month, I still am reading the User's Guide and am trying to understand the many settings and possibilities with the camera! This is a learning process! A home-computing system is also a must! The camera requires an SD memory-card and, fortunately, my printer has an SD-port which was a very lucky thing and provided an easy way to download images to my computer. (Although the P1 is wireless-enabled, I have not used that feature as yet).

The beauty of the system is that both camera and field scope can be used independently. As a beginning birder, I did not own a field scope which was high on my want-list. Plus, I love cameras. So both the field scope and the latest, portable Nikon P1, which fits easily in your pocket, were things that I could use! The easy-to-use attachment device brings the system together for great digiscoping results!

I plan on years of great bird viewing with the Nikon ED-82 field-scope and lots of great photos from the versatile Nikon P1 camera. And, I also plan on getting some great shots of birds when the two are hooked up for the Nikon digiscoping experience.

It's a challenge but one that can pay great rewards in enjoying bird photography!



This male Belted Kingfisher was Digiscoped from at least 75 yards away.



Trumpeter Swan at Squaw Creek NWR taken at a distance of 30 yards



Have Binos, Will Travel!

The fall birding season was a mixed bag. There were surprising few flocks of Cedar Waxwings but other fall migrants did show. We had a handful of Common Loons and a Bald Eagle on our Smithville Lake Trip but it was the close flyby of an Osprey that gave us the biggest thrill. On our annual trip to Squaw Creek we counted only about 25 Bald Eagles but the refuge was loaded with ducks and geese of many species. I have to assume that the mild weather patterns were the major contributing factor to the low number of eagles.



❖ **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

Beginning Birdwatching (in store class)

Wednesday, February 22nd 7:00p.m. to 8:30p.m.

Don't put it off any longer. You know you love birds and have been thinking about signing up for a class like this for years. We will cover the basics of birdwatching, bird identification and where and when to search for birds in our area. As I always say, "the only bad question is the one that doesn't get asked."



*Nikon Premier
LX 8X42*

Birding Tools For The 21st Century

Wednesday, March 15th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Birding can be as simple as a pair of binoculars and a book but today's world is full of great gadgets that can enhance your birding pleasure. Join Rick Jordahl and I as we explore the latest in birding gear that are really helpful and just plain fun. From Digiscoping (page 2) to computer software, PDA's to simple field equipment.

Spring Smithville Lake Tour

Sunday, March 12th 2:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

This unique look at Smithville Lake will take us all around one of our areas best bird magnet. We will search the main lake for waterfowl, then head north to check on the nesting status of resident Bald Eagles before searching for owls at sunset. This will be an adventure.

Meet at the store at 2:30 or the Litton Center at 3:00.

Martha Lafite Spring Hike

Saturday, April 22nd 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

This wonderful nature sanctuary offers a diversity of habitats to explore. We will be looking for early spring arrival in the prairie, along Rush Creek and throughout the mixed woodlands.

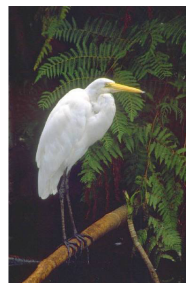
Meet at the store at the Nature Center at 8:00 a.m.

Little Bean Marsh Conservation Area

Wednesday, April 12th 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

We will head north a little ways for a morning of waterbirds and more. Depending on the amount of rain we get this spring, we could find lots of shorebirds and more. If conditions are dry, we will concentrate on the woodland areas for spring migrants

Meet at the store at 8:00 a.m.



Parkville Nature Sanctuary's Early Spring Birds

Saturday, April 29nd 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

This is the time of year you really want to be out. Spring migration should be going well by now. Meet us at the store at 9:00am or at the Sanctuary parking lot at 9:15.

Prairie Chickens

March ?? Call for Exact Date and Times

The mating dance of the Greater Prairie Chicken is truly one of the greatest spectacles of nature and are blessed to have it occur right here in Missouri. We will witness this wonderful event and explore The Nature Conservancy's Dunn Ranch property (3000+ acres of tallgrass prairie) for early spring arrivals and lingering winter residents..

PALM SOFTWARE ON THE WAY

DUE TO ARRIVE IN MARCH



Come any of the bird hikes this spring and see how handy a device this little jewel really is. Basically the *National Geographic Field Guide* with sound, an ID program and listing software. The SD Card & software will be \$249.99 Bundled with a Palm Tungsten E2 - \$499.99



SPECIES PROFILE: Eastern Bluebird

by Ruth Simmons

I had seen Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) before, but not in my yard, so when I looked out my window and saw a male and female in our Redbud tree, I was really excited. I called my children over so that they could see the state bird of Missouri and New York.

Bluebirds can be found in our area year round. The male bluebird is brilliant blue on his back with a rust colored chest and a white belly. The female is much grayer and paler than the male. Like other members of the thrush family, they eat primarily insects during the summer and fruits and berries during the winter.

Historically, bluebirds used to be as common in backyards as robins. Many factors including habitat destruction, harsh winters and the introduction of House Sparrows and European Starlings to North America, caused their numbers to drop alarmingly.

Concerned bluebird lovers started putting out nest boxes in hopes of providing alternative nesting sites and it worked; bluebird numbers are on the rise. If your yard is more open and you don't put insecticide on your lawn you



Male Eastern Bluebird
visiting a deck railing.
Photo Courtesy of
Suzanne King

should try putting out a bluebird box. Remember, be a good landlord and kick out the sparrow or starlings. Other native birds like wrens or tree swallows that might nest in the box should not be disturbed and are in fact protected by law.

In our area, the search for nesting sites begins in March, so have your boxes up by the end of February. Bluebirds can

nest up to three times each summer, but they may not use the same box for each nesting.

Don't forget to provide food and water. This is especially true in winter, when most natural forms of water are frozen over and the only water that is available is a heated birdbath. Our customers have had success feeding mealworms especially during the nesting season with hungry little ones. Sunflower chips, suet, and raisins that have been soaked in water have also been successful.

CONSERVATION CORNER: *North American Bluebird Society*

Formed by Lawrence Zeleny in 1978, this nonprofit group is largely credited with "bringing back the bluebird". By creating and distributing a set of standards for bluebird nesting needs, this organization got the information needed to be good bluebird stewards into the hands of concerned citizens in this country.

Today the group consists of a network of over 45 Bluebird

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.

Societies across the continent that has fledged literally millions of baby bluebirds.

Many other songbirds benefit from their work as well. Do the bluebirds and yourself a favor, visit their website at www.nabluebirdsociety.org and get involved.

BLUEBIRD SEASON SUPPLIES Mealworms & More



Our Best Sellers

- MOR-Bilt Windowview Bluebird Box - \$29.99
- Aspects' Vista Dome Mealworm Feeder - \$29.99
(pictured at the bottom of page 5)
- Stokes' Bluebird Book - \$12.95
- Timberline 500 Count Mealworm - \$7.99
- C&S Bluebird Nuggets - \$3.49
- ERVA Sunburst Hole Protector - \$2.79 (not shown)
- Richard Lamson Bluebird Statue - \$39.99



Time To Ask Mark...

Q. I love chickadees. What is the best food and feeder for them?

A. Chickadees are probably the boldest little birds I know. They will eat a wide variety of seeds and are best known for zipping in grabbing a seed and darting off to eat it. A successful combination I have found at my house is the *Clinger's Only Feeder* from **Songbird Essentials** and a bag of *Woodpecker, Nuthatch & Chickadee Food* from **Wild Delight**.



Clinger's Only \$12.99
5lb Bag of Woodpecker, Nuthatch & Chickadee Food \$7.99

Q. Why has my peanut feeder been so slow this winter?

A. The mild conditions combined with a huge acorn and walnut crop this year have really impacted the activity of most peanut feeders. As "natural" nut supplies diminish you should see an increase in activity at your peanut feeders.

Q. Isn't it about time for the blackbirds to show up? What can I do to battle them?

A. While many of the Common Grackle and Red-winged Blackbirds never left this winter (see cover), larger hordes will return in late February or so. The two most proven methods are feeding safflower seed or using caged feeders. The cages do need to be far enough away from the tube to keep them from reaching in. Duncraft and Vari-Craft both make good ones.



Duncraft's Squirrel Selective works great against blackbirds too. \$64.99

Q. What is the latest on the Ivory-billed Woodpecker?

A. A couple of weeks ago, John and I got to meet Bobby Harrison who was one of the first to see the bird in Arkansas. His story was captivating. This year's search is underway with much the same results. Individuals have caught glimpses of "a bird" but no concrete photos or videos yet. I am sure you have read that there are doubters out there who want better physical proof. Hopefully that will happen soon.

Q. I don't always remember to fill my bird bath as often as I should. Are there any alternatives?

A. I really like the new recirculating, self-filling and mostly self-cleaning BirdSpa from Quiba. It has a biological pre-filter for beneficial nitrifying bacteria to colonize and naturally breakdown bird waste and other organic contaminants. It really is a cool new devise. The bubbling action attracts birds as well as keeps mosquitos from being able to lay their eggs in the water. The self-refilling feature doesn't have to be hooked up but really works well and makes for very low maintenance.



ASPECTS FEEDER SPECIALS FOR NEWSLETTER FAITHFULS



Free Trays!!!

Purchase any Aspects' Small or Medium sized Finch or Multi Seed Feeder and get an 8" matching tray for **FREE** (\$8.99 value)

Purchase any Aspects' Large or Big Tube sized Multi Feeder and get a matching Big Foot Tray **FREE** (\$14.99 value)

FREE 500 Count Mealworm with the purchase of an Aspects' Vista Dome Feeder - \$29.99. (\$7.99 value)



Spring Hummingbird Specials

Aspects' Hummzinger Mini
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Aspects' Hummzinger Excel
\$22.99 Now **\$14.99**

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DO YOU HAVE YOUR TILLEY YET?



Do you Tilley? When Alex Tilley says he started an international phenomenon by accident, he isn't kidding. All he wanted was a good hat for his boating hobby. When he couldn't find anything he liked, he made his own. Today, Tilley hats have reached almost cult status. They have a UPF rating of 50 (the highest rating given) and are the only hat endorsed by the Mayo Clinic for skin cancer prevention. They are guaranteed for LIFE not to wear out, washable, water resistant and have a 2 Year Loss/Stolen 50% replacement warranty. Tilleys are loved by golfers, gardeners, boaters and birdwatchers alike. **Birding/Gardening season is coming - protect yourself.**

HELP WITH SPARROWS

Though I do not think it is currently being printed, my old Winter Sparrows brochure can be accessed on the web at:

www.conservation.state.mo.us/nathis/birds/sparrows.



Orioles will be back before you know it. The Oriole-Fest from Birds Choice is our best selling oriole feeder. Mention this ad when you buy one and get a FREE 10oz box of oriole nectar. Limit 1 per feeder.



Purple Martin Season is fast approaching. This female (and young) was using one of our Coates W-12 setups over at Weatherby Lake.

Photo courtesy of Jim Andrews

UPCOMING IMPORTANT BIRD DATES

February 17th - 20th -Great Backyard Bird Count

<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc> for more info

February 21st or so - Clean Out & Place Bluebird Boxes

March 1st - Open 1 Martin House Door

March 10th - Average Arrival Date For Adult Male Martins

April 1st - Clean out all nest boxes (wrens, chickadees, titmouse)

April 5th - Hang Hummingbird Feeders (with small amount of nectar)

April 15th - Place Oriole Feeders

Late April - Male House Wrens arrive and set up territories