



WINTER

2009

# BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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

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[www.backyardbirdcenterkc.com](http://www.backyardbirdcenterkc.com)

## Free Stuff

I love giving away free stuff. This past holiday season we gave away several fun things. Two of the coolest prizes were a new pair of Nikon Binoculars and FREE Nut & Berry for a year.

Both winners were regulars and both said the same thing. "I never win anything!"

Barbara Lucci of Parkville



Barbara Lucci, winner of the Nikon Action Binoculars from Wild Delight's Less Mess Bird Seed Promotion

won the binoculars and Eileen Wiengart of Weatherby Lake won the FREE Nut & Berry.

Many thanks to Wild Delight for being such a great company to deal with! And thanks to all who participated.



## The Red Ambassador

by Mark McKellar

What was the first bird you can remember learning? For many of us it was the Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*). The bright red plumage of the male with its tall crest and large orange bill make it one of the most identifiable birds in the world. Primarily a southern species, the "Cardinal Grosbeak", as it was once known, is a resident now in all but a few northwestern states. Milder winters and urbanization has enabled the cardinal to expand its range over the last century. In other words, cardinals have adapted quite well to human disturbance.



Male Northern Cardinal  
Photo courtesy of Rick Jordahl

In their natural habitat, cardinals prefer woodland edges where they can find a wide variety of seed and berry producing plants. One of the grosbeaks, their large bills allow the cardinal to tackle seed coats that many smaller birds struggle with. The male's bright plumage makes them vulnerable to predators. This explains why we see so many cardinals in our backyard right at sunset. When you are bright red, shadows and low light levels are your friend, especially in a bleak or snow covered winter landscape.

Males begin singing their spring songs as early as February in an effort to attract a mate for the season. For most birds, it is the male who does all of the singing, but female cardinals do join in for a duet from time to time and even sing from the nest. Both male and female also defend their nesting territories quite aggressively as is demonstrated by them repeatedly banging into a window or car mirror trying to chase away the rival they see in the reflection.

I have found cardinal nests in many different locations. As a rule, they like a thick small tree or shrub. One fond memory is a pair nesting in a fairly open dogwood just outside a bedroom window a few years ago. The female's drab brown plumage with red highlights is far better suited for blending into the nest duties she incurs. The 3 to 4 eggs she lays take about 12 days to hatch and another 12 days to fledge.

Fixtures in backyards in our area, cardinals are easily attracted to a bird feeder stocked with sunflower and safflower seed. Those who have trouble attracting them generally have very open yards lacking the thicker shrubs they like for escape and nesting cover.

## Wild Delight Cardinal Food



Our Best Selling Blend combines all the cardinal favorites. Sunflower, Safflower, Peanuts, Cherries and Raisins.

10% OFF  
7LB & 15LB BAGS  
(ENDS APRIL 30TH)



# Get That Water Moving

by Mark McKellar

If you want to add to the number of birds using your yard this spring, get your water moving. All birds need water and your resident birds know where to find your bird bath at all times. Migrating birds, on the other hand, are totally lost when they stop in your yard during their long journey. A way to help them find the all important water source is by making your water move and make noise.



*A Granite Bubbler from Avian Aquatics keeps the water moving and makes a great sound.*

or solar powered devices recycle the water with a pump, then the water cascades over a fiberglass “rock” making a great bubbling sound as it strikes the water again. That sound is like a magnet for birds.



*The floating Bird Bath Raft makes water features that are too deep for birds, perfect for them.*

which she created several years ago. Do yourself and your birds a favor, get your water moving.

I hope that you already have a water source available for your birds. If you don't, we have plenty to choose from. Some of the hottest selling items so far this spring have been the bubblers, drippers and waterfalls. These electric

or solar powered devices recycle the water with a pump, then the water cascades over a fiberglass “rock” making a great bubbling sound as it strikes the water again. That sound is like a magnet for birds.

Most of our Neotropical migrants like warblers, tanagers, thrushes and others do not eat seed but they do need water. Ruth can attest to how many species of birds on her yard list have been seen only at her “creek”



*A female cardinal bathing in Ruth's artificial creek. Photo courtesy of Ruth Simmons*

## TIME TO UPGRADE YOUR OPTICS

A couple of yeas ago, I had a chance to offer several good binoculars on sale. I've learned that those opportunities don't happen very often . . . but is one of them. This is especially good timing for many because of the tighter budgets many of us are operating under right now.

During April and May , the time we tend to use our binoculars the most, several of our top selling Nikon Binoculars and Pentax Spotting Scopes will be sale priced.



*Nikon Sportstar 8X25 - a great starter, very compact binocular that normally sell for \$49.99 Sale Priced at \$39.99*

*Nikon Action 8X40 (Clamshell) - our best selling binoculars which normally sell for \$69.99 Sale Priced at \$52.99*



*Nikon Travelite 9X25 - our best selling compact binoculars which normally sell for \$119.99 Sale Priced at \$96.99*

*Nikon Superior E 8X32 - voted the Best Birding Binocular in the world by www.betterviewdesired.com for the past 10+ years. Amazing clarity and color, wide field of view, just incredible optics for the price. They have been \$699.99 for years, I have 3 pair available for \$560.00.*



*Pentax PF-80EDA with 20X60 Zoom Eyepiece - it only takes one look through this scope to see why it has been rated as the Reference Standard for large spotting scopes by www.betterviewdesired.com since its release. Most of its competitors cost twice, even 3 times as much money for equal results. They have been \$1,099.99 for years, I have 3 available for \$999.99.*

## GREAT GIFTS FOR MOM, GRANDMA, TEACHERS OR BEST FRIENDS

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



**I don't know about you, but I am not a great gift shopper. That is why I left this year's gift selections at Birdwatch America to Joyce. Come in to see all the fresh things she/we have brought in lately!**



## Have Binos, Will Travel!

What happened to the winter? December started out like we were going to be in for a real old fashioned hard winter, then . . . poof! I thought the large number of birds sticking around this winter was due to the huge surplus of natural food that resulted from our wet summer. Perhaps the real reason was that birds are better at long range winter forecasting than our weathermen. The number of robins that wintered here were noticed by almost everyone and many really good birds visited our area. But, for the most part, winter birding had to be classified as pretty boring.



*This beautiful female Snowy Owl spent most of this winter near Breckenridge, MO  
Photo by Mary Nemecek*

**The hikes and programs listed below are available to our store customers**  
(organized groups, can be arranged separately)  
**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

Every spring we suggest that you to get out as much as possible during the migration period. This spring we are going to try to help you out with that charge. Every Thursday morning during April and May, Ruth, John or myself will lead a morning bird hike at one of our favorite spots. Hopefully, one or all will fit in with your busy schedule.

<i>April 2<sup>nd</sup></i>	<i>Wyandotte Co. Park</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>
<i>April 9<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>Amity Nature Park</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>
<i>April 16<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>Parkville Nature Sanc.</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>
<i>April 23<sup>rd</sup></i>	<i>Little Bean Marsh</i>	<i>8:00 - 10:30</i>
<i>April 30<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>English Landing Park</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>
<i>May 7<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>Weston Bend S.P.</i>	<i>8:00 - 11:30</i>
<i>May 14<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>Martha Lafite N.S.</i>	<i>8:00 - 10:30</i>
<i>May 21<sup>st</sup></i>	<i>Parkville Nature Sanc.</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>
<i>May 28<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>Amity Nature Park</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>

### In Store Classes

#### Gearing Up For Spring Migration

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

The old saying "If you don't use it, you lose it" really does apply to bird identification. Think of this class as a review for the Spring migration "test". The birds in your yard can change daily during April and May so we will review the birds you are most likely to see as they pass through (or stick around).

#### 10+ Bird Songs You Should Know

**Wednesday, May 20th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.**

Bird songs brighten our day. So many wish that they knew which birds were singing the songs that they hear when they step outside each morning. Join us as we learn many of the common backyard bird songs of our area.

### Weekend Bird Hikes

#### Watkin's Mill State Park

**Sunday, April 26th**

**7:00 a.m. to noon**

It has been a couple of years since we birded Watkin's Mill during spring migration. It is a phenomenal place. The woodlands around the lake provide excellent habitat for resident and migrating birds. We will be checking our favorite spots for warblers, thrushes, tanagers, orioles and lots more.

**Call for meeting places and times**

#### Weston Bend State Park

**Sunday, May 10th**

**7:00 a.m. to noon**

Will this be an early migration or a late one? We never know. Weston is consistently a great spot for spring migration. We will search for the many warblers, vireos, tanagers, thrushes, flycatchers and more that grace these beautiful woods each spring. If it is slow we may head up to Little Bean Marsh or Lewis & Clark State Park.

**Meet at the park gate @ 7:00 am**

#### Spring Migration in Western Missouri

**Saturday, May 2nd**

**6:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.**

We will put in a full day of birding at some of western Missouri's best birding sites. We will explore wetlands, grasslands and woodlands and should accumulate an impressive list of birds by day's end. We will look



*Dickcissel  
Photo by Paul Reuhle*

for birds that are tougher to find like Blue Grosbeak, Bell's Vireo, Black-billed Cuckoo, Henslow's Sparrow, Bewick's Wren and Painted Bunting. Space is limited.  
**\$30 Fee - Transportation (van & fuel) and box lunch.**





## *SPECIES PROFILE: Red-headed Woodpecker (Melanerpes erythrocephalus)*

Story and photos by Rick Jordahl

This popular woodpecker is a favorite of many birders. The distinct coloration along with the bird's favored habitat make the Red-headed Woodpecker unmistakable and a common sighting on bird-watching excursions in our area.

Often found singly in wooded areas, this showy woodpecker can be easily identified by its definitive red head and neck, black upper back and tail, white breast and large white patch on its lower back. The adult male and female are similar in coloration. Juveniles can be more difficult to identify due to their mottled brown head but the white patch on the back usually is present.

Beginning birders or non-birders may mistakenly identify the Red-bellied Woodpecker as a Red-headed. Although their range overlaps somewhat, the two birds have distinctly different field marks. While Red-bellied Woodpeckers have some bright red on their head and on the back of their neck, Red-headed Woodpeckers have a much deeper red hood that covers their entire head and neck. The barred back and wings of the Red-bellied should eliminate any confusion.

The Red-headed Woodpecker is omnivorous.

It eats insects, seeds, fruits and nuts and is known to store food. The bird flies to catch insects in the air or on the ground. It often stores insects and seeds in cracks and under bark. Grasshoppers are regularly stored alive by being wedged tightly into crevices.

The Red-headed Woodpecker is protective of its territory and not friendly to neighboring birds. In addition to attacking other birds to keep them away, the Red-headed Woodpecker is known to remove eggs from nests of neighboring birds and even to destroy neighboring nests.

The breeding range covers much of the eastern half of the United States. Red-headed Woodpeckers may use cavities excavated by other woodpeckers or force some species to abandon active cavities - a practice that makes them unpopular with those working

with endangered species like the Red-cockaded Woodpecker in the southeast. A pair may re-use the cavity several years in a row. An average of 4-7 eggs are laid and incubated by both parents for 12-14 days.

Depending on food supply and weather severity, Red-headed Woodpeckers may be seen in our area year-round. Unfortunately, Red-headed Woodpecker populations have declined severely due to increased nest site competition from European starlings and from removal of dead trees.



*Red-headed Woodpecker (top)  
Red-bellied Woodpecker (bottom)*

## *CONSERVATION CORNER: Weston Bend State Park (complex)*

I know if you are a regular reader, you know I talk about birding at Weston Bend a lot. I don't think I have ever explained how important that area is for our birds. When you look at the Missouri river from Kansas City to St. Joseph, the land is quite open and flat. If you can imagine yourself a small bird flying from Central America to Northern Canada each spring, your life depends on places that you can take time to safely find lots of food and clean water. By far the most lush tract of forest along your important travelway is the area on both sides of the river near Weston/Leavenworth. The combined areas of land protected by Ft. Leavenworth and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources is beautiful. Weston Bend is a fairly young park. It was established in 1980 and protects 1,180 acres of habitat and has several wonderful trails and an overlook platform that shouldn't be missed. Located on 45 Hwy just south of Weston, I recommend visiting this and many other of our fine state parks often.



*Weston Bend Birders at the  
Missouri River Overlook  
Photo by Rick Jordahl*



## Time To Ask Mark...

**Q. Why didn't the robins fly south this winter?**

**A.** The truth is that we always have some robins winter here each year. I do have to admit that this year's numbers were far larger than I have ever seen. Most folks don't notice them because they are not hopping around in their yards pulling up worms. Robins instead stick to woodlands and woodland edges during the winter. They sift through the leaf litter in search of hibernating insects and fallen fruit. They are most often seen up in trees feeding on berries. Berries and open water are the key factors for their survival each winter and this year we had both. Our wet summer really helped the robins, waxwings and bluebirds survive our short rollercoaster winter season.



**Q. The plastic Purple Martin house I had last year has fallen apart but the pole is still good. What can I do?**

**A.** You can't imagine the number of times we have heard this question. I am sorry, but a plastic bird house is just not going to hold up well with our sun, wind, hail and other conditions. I know they are cheap but you really do get what you pay for. I have customers that have had the lightweight aluminum boxes that we sell for close to 30 years. With a drill, a nut & bolt and a little effort, you can make a good box work with just about any pole (even triangular ones).



**Q. I am hearing a lot of birds singing right now. Who sings, the males or females?**

**A.** While some female birds sing occasionally, you can bet it is the males you are hearing sing at almost anytime. Males sing to attract their mates and proclaim their territory to other males. Cardinal females are known to regularly sing duets with males.

**Q. I see lots of finch mixes in stores. What do the goldfinches like the best?**

**A.** Being a small bird, finches obviously do better with small seeds. In the wild they eat a lot of native grass and wildflower seeds. Two of their favorites are thistle and sunflower. In commercial bird seed mixes we try to address their needs as well as their "taste". From a nutritional standpoint, sunflower seed is the best that we can offer them. Since Black Oil Sunflower seed will not fit through finch feeders we offer Fine Sunflower Chips. From a "taste" stand point, there is no denying that goldfinches love Nyjer seed (it is not thistle). Nyjer is also great because squirrels and most other birds do not like it. Another seed that finches will eat is millet. I really don't like finch mixes with millet in them because they tend to attract House Sparrows to finch feeders and that is never good. What is the best then? I like our Black Tie mix that is a two-way combination of Fine Sunflower Chips and Nyjer.

### SO YOU WANT TO FEED A LOT OF FINCHES!



**STAFF CHOICES**  
(ASK FOR 10% OFF THESE TILL MAY 31ST)

*The Copper 3-tube feeder from Songbird Essentials.*



*The 36" Spiral Finch from BirdQuest Products (available in yellow, green and copper)*



### Please Keep Your Cats Indoors . . . Especially During Migration Season

Cats love birds and can be entertained for hours by feeders and bird baths but as these photos illustrate, it should be done from indoors!



*Cat TV at it's Best! photos courtesy of Sindee Primm*

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*Kettle Moraine Wren/  
Chickadee Nest Box.*

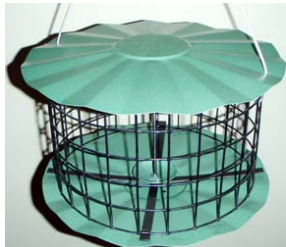
## INTRODUCING - KETTLE MORAINE

We are always on the lookout for unique, well built companies that make their products in the USA. We hooked up with Kettle Moraine at this year's Birdwatch America Show and were very impressed. Based out of Wisconsin, this small company makes quality products with a twist and a wave for fun. We hope you like them as much as we do.

*Kettle Moraine Wave Feeders Come in  
both Nyjer and Sunflower models.*



## TIRED OF STARLINGS AND GRACKLE EATING YOUR SEED CAKES?



*Keep Starling off of your  
Mr. Bird Seed Cylanders*

Last year we brought in Mr. Bird Seed Cakes as a clean economical way to feed your birds. They have been very, very popular. The one problem, as is true with almost any type of feeding, is blackbirds. Starlings and Common Grackle can dominate the blocks just like they do suet. Our deck arm and pole system company, Erva, has produced a feeder that solves the blackbird problem. Birds Downy Woodpecker size and smaller move in and out of the cage with ease while larger birds cannot.



## UPCOMING IMPORTANT BIRD DATES

**March 10th - Average Arrival Date For Adult Male Martins  
(females and young males will filter in through April)**

**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**

**2nd Week of May - Peek Migration for Warblers, etc.**



*House Wren on a Mor-Bilt Wren House  
photo courtesy of Mary Nemecek*