

BACKYARD BIRD CENTER



NEWS

SUMMER
2003

BOARDWALK SQUARE • 6232 NW BARRY RD (816) 746-1113

SOUNDS OF SUMMER by Mark McKellar

Do you have a sound that says “summer” to you? For some it may be the sound of hamburgers sizzling on an outdoor grill - to me, it is the low, sad “coo-oo, oo, oo, oo” of the mourning dove. Though they sing much of the year, when I hear a mourning dove I can’t help but get a mental image of hot, humid, lazy summer afternoons. You know the type don’t you? The ones that you find yourself hoping for a thunderstorm to help cool things off a bit but always just makes it feel like a sauna!

Another of my favorite sounds of summer is the nasal “pee-er” that I hear each time I am in a large parking lot (grocery store, Boardwalk Square, etc.) at night. Few people know that this sound is actually a unique bird known as a common nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*). No, they are not members of the hawk family. Nighthawks belong to a group of birds known officially as nightjars though some call them frogmouths or goatsuckers. Whip-poor-wills are perhaps our most well know nightjar. These amazing birds fly around with their “whole face” open and consume huge volumes of nighttime insects.

Some sounds of summer are not as welcome. Two birds famous for singing throughout many summer nights are the American robin and the northern mockingbird. On any given summer evening, one or both of these songsters may find

a perching spot near a outside light and belt out their happy serenade all night long. For a light sleeper, like my wife, 4 a.m. is not when she wants to hear a bird singing (no matter how pretty the song).

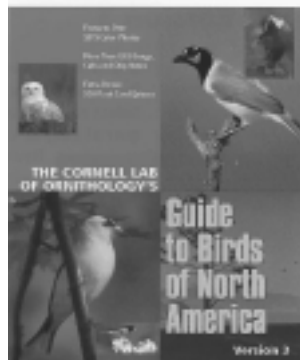


The Northern cardinal has an impressive song list at his disposal.

Birds use songs and calls to communicate with each other. Many birds like herons have very primitive vocal capabilities and thus their voices are very harsh squawks, others like the northern cardinals and indigo buntings have elaborate vocabularies. Most of the birds we associate

with bird feeding stations have these advanced vocal abilities and are often referred to quite simply as “songbirds”.

It has always amazed me how songs and sounds can stimulate thoughts, feelings and memories. I guess it is of little surprise that bird sounds factor heavily into that category for me. How about you?



The computer program *Guide to Birds of North America* is one of the great ways of learning bird songs.

We are on the MOVE!

Mid-August will bring a change that many of you have been hearing about for the past few months. We will be moving our store to a new, larger location.

Don't worry about having to look hard for us. We are just moving **across the parking lot** to the old Ragamuffins space. Still not sure which space that is? We look across at it from our current location, it is just to the west of the Noggin Noodle toy store.

Why the move? If you have been in the store during the last few months, you know that we have been busting at the seams. You have also probably run into the issue of us being out of your favorite bag of bird seed at some time or another. Our new space will be 500 square feet larger with much of that being a back room (and a back door!).

We are very excited and hope you will all come by and see us in our new digs. Be on the lookout for a special mailer when we have an exact moving date.

Chimney Swifts by Ruth Simmons

“... appear like a cigar with wings.”

During spring and summer, Chimney swifts can be seen high in the sky constantly chattering as they forage for insects. They fly so high and so fast that sometimes you can only hear them not see them. When you do get a look at them, they appear like a cigar with wings. Chimney swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*) are about 5 inches long from head to tail, have bow shaped wings, and are a “sooty” black color over all their body. Their flight song is a loud continuous chatter. They fly constantly from sunrise to sunset snatching insects in midair.

Before the arrival of European settlers, chimney swifts nested in large hollow trees east of the Mississippi River. Over the years these trees have been cut down, but the building of chimneys created new nesting sites for the swifts. This has allowed them to move farther west to the foot of the Rocky Mountains. They arrive in our area mid April and leave around the end of September. Their nests are half-cup shaped and are formed on the walls of the chimney using twigs. The swift's sticky saliva holds the nest together and to the wall of the chimney. The nest is small, sticking out from the wall only two to three inches. Chimney swifts usually lay 4-5 eggs and they hatch in 19-21 days and then fledge at 28-30 days. If the nestling falls from the nest and is uninjured, it has the ability to climb back up to its home.

As with many birds, the numbers of chimney swifts have been declining since the 1980's. More and more trees are being cut down, new construction uses metal lined chimneys, and many homeowners “cap” their chimneys. Metal lined chimneys are too slick to be suitable nest sites and should be capped to prevent any animal from becoming trapped in them. Masonry chimneys make great nest sites with a little care from the homeowner. Take the cap off the top, have the chimney cleaned in March, close the damper, and then sit back and enjoy the aerial show! If you have the desire, space, and money you can also put up your own chimney swift tower. The materials cost about \$300.00, so this is not a project to be taken lightly.

If you would like more information on chimney swifts, towers, or the North American Chimney Swift Nest Project you can visit www.concentric.net/~Dwa



The author's chimney swift tower at her residence in Lee's Summit, MO

What's the Buzz About West Nile Virus

Over the past couple of years, you have probably heard a lot about the West Nile Virus. What are the facts?

In the past year or so, the information about WNV has changed frequently. It reminds me a lot of the Lyme Disease scare when it first hit the media.

The truth is that we are learning more and more every day and that your chances of getting sick from WNV are still very low. We know that its effects on birds can be very significant but is it a real threat to bird population?

While crows and jay species are known to be the most vulnerable, the disease has been documented in many species. In the Detroit area, there has been a dramatic decline in chickadee numbers in the last year and WNV is the prime suspect. Birds that do not

have a strong resistance to this disease are dying and those who do are surviving and passing along



this natural immunity to their offspring. We may see a short term decline in a species but they should rebound.

Call me an optimist, but the way I read the data, the threat to humans is still very low and all indications are that they will have a vaccine (for humans) available in the near future. Until then, use a good repellent and make sure that there are no unwanted sources of standing water (old tires, etc) on your property. Bird bath water should either be kept moving or cleaned out every few days.



ERVA's 1" Pole Systems are like Erector Sets for Adults



Good For \$10.00 OFF any ERVA Pole/Head/Stake Combo!

(Not good with any other off, must be used by September 1st)

Have Binocs Will Travel!!!

Spring Highlights—We had several great hikes this spring. From a very rainy morning in Parkville to a picture-perfect day at Watkin Mills State Park, dozens of folks enjoyed this spring migration with us. Those who braved the rain at Parkville were treated to many birds including a Louisiana waterthrush, a Lincoln’s sparrow and a blue-grey gnatcatcher. Weston Bend folks were treated to several great birds. Highlights would have to be the barred owl, scarlet tanager and yellow-throated vireos that we able to view, not only with our binoculars, but through the spotting scopes as well! Watkin Mills birders got great looks at American redstarts, great-crested flycatchers and the resident prairie warbler. Our overnight adventure to Central Kansas was really fun. We tallied 105 species with the highlight being a pair of western grebes doing their mating dance for us. I have wanted to see this since I first saw this on Wild Kingdom when I was six years old. The most often heard quote of the season had to be, “Where have these birds been all my life?”.



The late summer/fall season for birds is quite different from the spring. Certain birds make an amazingly quick return through here. Many shorebirds will already be heading south by the time you read this. Other birds like indigo buntings will stick around quite late. Bird hikes in this season are rarely as “spectacular” as spring hikes. The key reason is that while birds are coming through here in large groups during a short period of time in the spring, they are far more spread out over the fall season in their return. Another factor is plumage. In the spring we are generally seeing adults in their sharpest “dress” while in the fall we are seeing lots of “drab” youngsters and winter plumage adults.

The hikes listed below are available to store customers and fill on a first come first serve basis.

*****Please call the store to register (816)746-1113*****

(trips may have to change and we need to be able to contact you).

Creating a Backyard Sanctuary

Thursday, August 14th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Free
Liberty Mid-Con Library, Liberty, MO

We will cover the major components needed to make your backyard more “wildlife” friendly. To register, please call 816-781-9420.

Beginning Bird Watching

Thursday, August 28th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Free
Lone Jack Mid-Con Library, Lone Jack, MO

Join us for a broad scale introduction to America’s #1 hobby. From choosing the best binoculars and field guide for you, to when and where to go bird watching in our area. To register please call 816-697-2528.

Creating a Backyard Sanctuary

Tuesday, September 9th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Free
Antioch Mid-Con Library, Antioch, MO

Same as above. To register, please call 816-454-1306.

Beginning Bird Watching

Tuesday, October 14th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Free
Colbern Rd Mid-Con Library, Lee’s Summit, MO

Same as above. To registration please call 816-525-9924.

Beginning Bird Watching

Tuesday, October 21th 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Free
Riverside Mid-Con Library, Riverside, MO

Same as above. To register please call 816-436-4385.

Thursday, September 18th & 25th 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Free
Parkville Nature Center, Parkville, MO

Fall is a beautiful time to outside. Join us on a casual walk through the Sanctuary as we look for early fall migrants. We will meet at Nature Center parking lot at 8 a.m.

Saturday, September 27th 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Free
Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary, Liberty, MO

The open areas of Martha Lafite can be very good for a diverse mix of migrating sparrows and other songbirds. The paved trail makes for easy hiking for all ages.

Fall Color & Bird Hike

Saturday, October 18th 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Free
Weston Bend State Park, Weston, MO Limit: 20

Join us for a hike sure to be filled with lots of fall color and great birds. The terrain is somewhat hilly but not strenuous. Meet us at the store for a 7:30 a.m. departure or at the Bicycle Trail Parking Lot at 8:00.

Loon, Grebes and Other Waterfowl

Saturday, October 25th 8:00 a.m. to noon Free
Smithville Lake, Smithville, MO Limit 25

Smithville Lake is my favorite spot to be the last week or so of October. The lake is a natural attraction for loons, grebes, ducks, geese and gulls that are in the peak part of their migration at that time. Spotting scopes are essential and we will have plenty. We will depart from the store at 8 am or meet at the Litton Center Parking Lot at 8:45 am.

Species Profile: Red-bellied Woodpecker by Mark McKellar



"Red-bellied woodpeckers can be easily attracted to your yard with a peanut or suet cake feeder."

One of the most "misnamed" birds of all time has to be the red-bellied woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*). Some call it the ladder-backed woodpecker, but the majority of bird enthusiasts start out calling this bird the red-headed woodpecker.

Who can really blame them? The red-bellied's head is mostly red and it is a lot more common at feeders than its truly red-headed cousin. If you have seen a red-headed woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*), you know that its head is completely red, while the red-bellied's is only red across the top of the head from the bill to the base of the neck. Perhaps red-naped woodpecker would be more appropriate.

Believe it or not, the bird does have a red belly. Of course this is quite hard to

see on a bird that spends most of its life clinging to the side of a tree.

Woodpeckers are fascinating animals with many adaptations for their lifestyle. Have you ever noticed their feet? Most birds have three toes facing forward and one toe that points backwards which makes for a good grip while sitting on a limb. Instead of three toes forward, woodpeckers are able to greatly vary the position of one of those three. Generally, it is oriented backwards for extra gripping power. This combined with its very stiff, kickstand-like tail enable the birds to get great leverage for hammering.

You can tell the difference between male and female red-bellieds. Like other woodpeckers, the difference is not dramatic. The red on the head of the fe-

male is broken at the crown by a patch of grey. When explaining this to a garden club once, I had the response "that makes sense, women always grey before men". Now remember, I didn't say that!

Red-bellieds are easily attracted to your feeders. While they like sunflower seeds and fine chips, your best bet is to use peanuts and/or suet cakes. The next time you see one, look closer and see if you can spy that secretive red belly.

Conservation Corner

No name is more associated with birds and bird conservation than Audubon. The National Audubon Society was founded at the turn of the century by a group of bird watchers who were concerned by the unregulated killing of birds. Their primary focus centered on the killing of herons and egrets who were killed at the peak of their nesting season for their decorative plum feathers. These feathers were used to decorate ladies hats so popular during that era.

The group got their name from the great artist and naturalist John James Audubon who is often referred to as the artistic father of American Ornithology. Audubon spent much of the early 1800's exploring, collecting and painting the birds of eastern North America.

For nearly 100 years, the NAS has been deeply involved with bird conservation as both an activist group and a source of expert bird education. Those of you who know me, know that there was a period of time when I, like many bird enthusiasts, was not at all happy with Audubon. Just like any business or non-profit organization, leadership dictates the direction of an organization. During the late eighties and early nineties, Audubon lost touch with its constituency and suffered the consequences.

I am very happy to know that Audubon is "back". Audubon's mission is to conserve and restore ecosystems focusing on birds and other wildlife. They are among other things, the North American implementers of the IBA (Important Bird

Areas) program. Probably their most well known program is the Christmas Bird Count. This past year marked the 100th anniversary of this annual citizen science based event. In short, Audubon is about connecting people to nature.

In my opinion, things really started to change for Audubon when they moved their offices out to the individual states. This approach gives real power to those who work on the local level. Here in Missouri, we are fortunate to have a very strong Audubon program.



This Missouri office works cooperatively with the Missouri Department of Conservation to house the state's Director of Bird Conservation. It is also working with partners in the Joplin area build a new nature center and to protect the unique chert glade ecosystem found there. They are also taking a leadership role in a protection effort of some critical bottomland habitat in the Leavenworth bottoms area.

Don't forget that I give a 10% discount to members of the following conservation groups:

The Nature Conservancy (www.nature.org)

The Audubon Society (www.audubon.org)(includes National, Missouri, Burroughs or Midland Empire)

The American Bird Conservancy (www.abcbirds.org)

The Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary (www.naturesanctuary.com)

These discounts can not be combined with other sales. Please have your membership cards available.

Time to Ask Mark . . .

Q. Last August I thought I had a rufus hummingbird at my feeder. Could it have been one?

A. Yes. Though rare, we know that a small population of rufous hummingbirds over winter in Florida. Many of those birds pass through our area each fall. One of my customers gave me a great description of an adult male rufous that visited his feeder for a day late last August. Keep your eyes open, take notes if you see something different and don't hesitate to call me.



Q. Why were my goldfinch numbers down this year?

A. While there were some who had good goldfinch numbers this year, for most of us, our numbers were noticeably down. My best guess is that last year's drought is to blame. You have probably heard me say that birds get less than 15% of their daily diets from bird feeders. That means there has to be a lot of natural seed out there. In extreme drought conditions, I would expect an extremely seed dependent species like the goldfinch to move around quite a bit to find the food it needs. Will they return? That is a hard one . . .

Q. This is the first year I have had Baltimore Orioles. I had them eating suet and even saw them on my peanut feeder. Is that normal?

A. This year was anything but what I would consider "normal" for orioles. It started early with record numbers of birds being reported by feeder watchers all over our area. I couldn't keep oriole feeders in stock. Next came all of the unusual reports like orioles on peanut feeders and even eating safflower. The bulk of the reports have orioles eating their "favorites" (nectar, oranges and grape jelly) but with as many individual birds as we have around this year you can expect to see some of the "unexpected".



Duncraft specializes in cage feeders and make a couple of models that are effective against starlings and grackle.

Q. I have had the worst problems with common grackles this summer. What can I do?

A. This has been a terrible season for grackles. Unfortunately, grackles are very agile and much smaller than squirrels. We have found that most counter-weight feeders are not effective against avian pests like grackles and starlings. The only way that I know to truly keep these pests at bay are with a good cage feeder. Not all cage feeders will do the trick. The cage needs to be far enough away from the food so these birds can't reach it with their necks stretched.

Q. When can I expect to see my "normal" birds return to my feeders?

A. Late summer and early fall is generally when nature's bounty is at its height and native birds have to take advantage of that food supply. Migrants like hummingbirds and orioles are very busy preparing for their flight in August and early September. Numbers of year-round residents like chickadees and cardinals will increase because they are more concerned with raising their final broods than maintaining strong territorial boundaries and winter arrivals like juncos and white-throated sparrows will start to arrive as early as late September.



All non heated
birdbaths **20%**
off through
August 15th.



Late Summer Deals

Looking for a new hummingbird feeder to help take care of the fledglings and migrants that are so bountiful in August and early September? Use this ad to get **\$5 off** any single blown glass hummingbird feeders in stock through August 15th

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**Thanks to all those who have sent in their e-mail addresses.
We are even closer to doing a test run with our sample group.
If you would like to receive this newsletter via e-mail, send us
your e-mail address (mcbirder@swbell.net).
We will not share it, I promise!**



Best of the BEST!

Ultra clear, truest color . . .

The Nikon Venturer 8X32 pictured was recently rated the #1 overall Best Birding Binocular by the independent optic reviewer BetterViewDesired.com. Actually it shares the honor with Nikon's Superior E 8X32. The main difference is that the Venturer is waterproof but the Superior E is lighter. Come by and try one or both out and I will give you a free gift from Nikon.

The Wild Bill Zaps' EM

My favorite of the Anti-Squirrel feeders has to be the Wild Bill. With a nine volt battery installed, the Wild Bill gives squirrels and raccoons a gentle "pop" to remind them this is not the place for them to eat! To me, the true advantage it has over many of the others is that it has 8 feeding ports and the tray so many birds can feed at once.

