



SPRING

BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

2004

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

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**INTERNATIONAL
MIGRATORY BIRD DAY
Saturday, May 8th**

Few days mean as much to me as the 2nd Saturday in May each year. I know it is always the day before Mother's Day, but for me it is like Christmas morning when I was a child.

IMBD is a chance for myself and people like me to give back to birds a little. Those of us who enjoy birds to the extent that we can effectively identify them by sight and/or sound set out this day each year to count them. In essence, bird watchers and scientists take a 'snapshot' of bird populations all over the country (and some international locations).

The goal isn't to be able to say there are 7,235 American robins in Clay County, but rather to help gauge population trends. Which species are declining? Are there any birds that are expanding their range? Are bird migration patterns changing? How?

There just are not enough biologists out there to be able to cover the whole country. Throw in the fact that many of them do not know birds all that well and the need for help from citizen scientists is even greater. Take a few minutes on May 8th and try to identify what birds you see in your yard. Have a field guide with you because this is peak migration and you should see a few new birds.

How To Attract A Mate (Avian Style)

by Mark McKellar

What was your secret for attracting members of the opposite sex? Perhaps you have/had a favorite cologne or perfume that just drives the "ladies or gents" crazy. Could it have been a "can't miss" pick up line? Maybe it was a new suit or dress that brought out the blue in your eyes? I know, I know it was the way you sang your love's favorite songs.

In the bird world, there are many methods of attracting a mate. Since the sense of smell is poorly refined in birds, perfumes (or pheromones) are not used by birds. Life in the bird world is oriented around sight and sound.

Let's start with visual attraction. A fresh, bright set of new feathers is in order for the mate attraction season. Nowhere is this more evident than with the American goldfinch. A bright yellow bird in a dull winter landscape is easy pickings for a hawk or house cat, but in the colorful spring and summer, bright yellow is not only attractive, it blends in with the vegetation.

Why aren't the females bright and colorful? Don't they have to attract a mate as well? Unlike the human world, females are faced with the very dangerous task of sitting exposed on a nest of eggs for a couple of weeks. If she were brightly colored, she would attract attention, thus danger to herself and her young.

Ever wonder why the birds start singing so early in the morning? Song is another important trait for attracting a mate. Singing is just not good enough for woodpeckers. While they belt out their own songs with the other birds, they will find a nice hollow log that resonates sound very well when they drum. Down spouts on houses make great loud sounds for them, especially at 6 a.m.

While I was never much of a dancer, members of the grouse group, especially the greater prairie chicken certainly are. Much like the disco era, male prairie chickens gather on open short grass areas in early mornings each spring in an effort to dance their way into a female chicken's heart.

Perhaps my favorite mate attraction method goes to the loggerhead shrike. Shrikes are robin-sized birds that kill their prey by first stunning them with a whack of their bill then impaling them on thorns. A male will often leave all or parts of mice, frogs, large grasshoppers and even small birds hanging from thorns on a single bush. One theory is this his way of proving that he is a good provider.

Singing, dancing, sharp clothes – it does kind of sound like the making of a good movie. Choosing the right "mate" is incredibly important for birds as well as any animal. Your goal is to survive and perpetuate the species. The wrong choice doesn't mean marriage counseling or divorce court, it often is life or death.



Some birds, like the snowy egret, grow decorative plum feathers during the mating season.



John's Favorite Product(s)

Sometimes to really appreciate a new product you have to go through the frustration of dealing with the problem for which it was created. This is why I really like the Nectar Protector.

For years I have put oil and Vaseline on my hummingbird feeder hangers attempting to control ant problems. I have also made makeshift water vessels but with limited success.

The Nectar Protector from Songbird Essential does it right. The plastic cup has a stem through the center for easy attachment to a hanger, while your feeder safely hangs from the bottom. The size of the cup is large enough that I have seen chickadees and titmice drinking water from the edge. Also, evaporation is not a problem like it is with some of the built-in water moats, which are typically so small that they dry up in a day or two rendering them ineffective.

Nectar Protectors come in clear or red (the added color never hurts) and are a great solution to an "ant-sized" problem.



Another annoying problem has always been keeping the seed in certain feeders dry. Aspects came out with their Tube Top and Tube Top II last year and they handle the problem with flying colors. Both fit on the top of feeders by threading the feeder hanger through the middle of the Tube Top. The Tube Top fits perfectly on Aspects "small" tube feeders, while the Tube Top II works on both large and small ones. While they may not fit as snug as with their own feeders, the tube tops work great with most major brands of tube feeder.

The regular Tube Top can be an effective squirrel deterrent if it is coupled with a small enough feeder, while the Tube Top II serves as one with almost any feeder.

Ants, rain and squirrels can pose headaches for anyone. Give these produces a try—they worked for me.

❁ SUNDAY MAY 9TH IS MOTHER'S DAY ❁ THE ULTIMATE MOTHER'S DAY SHOP



Looking For Ideas?

We have loads of NEW items great for mom!

- Beautiful Par-a-sol Hummingbird Feeders
- DT Gardens' Copper Bird Baths
- Wild Wings' Stained Glass Pieces
- Richard Lamson & Hummingbird Studio's Bird Carvings
- Various Garden Statuaries, Rain Gauges and Pot Huggers
- Wind Wonders' Copper Wind Sculpture



TAKE \$5 OFF YOUR MOTHER'S DAY SHOPPING DAY ORDER OF \$25 OR MORE
(Expires Sunday, May 31st, 5pm)



Have Binocs Will Travel!

Winter is always the slowest of the field birding trips and this year was no exception. Most memorable this season had to be the Owl Prowl. I want to thank the Cooper family for hosting us. While it took several minutes for the first Barred Owl to call back, after that things got interesting. Shortly a second barred joined in and eventually a third joined the chorus. The night was bright, the temperatures were mild and the owls were loud!



**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 •

Name That Tune

Wednesday, May 5th • 7:00pm–8:00pm

It is amazing how much the bird world opens up when you learn a few of their songs. Learn a lot of them and you are the envy of all your bird buddies. Join us for an evening of song as we learn to identify the more common birds of our area by their voice. To reinforce what you learn, join us in the field the next morning for a hike.

Burr Oak Woods Nature Center Blue Spring MO

Thursday, May 6th • 8:30am–11:00am

We will venture south of the river to one of the best warbler spots I know. Burr Oak is where I first cut my teeth on Missouri birding and still love to visit there each spring. Wildflowers should be quite showy this time of year as well.

*We will meet at the front gate at 8:30 a.m.
Call the store for directions.*

Spring Migration Special

Thursday, May 13th • 7:30am–Noon

Weston Bend State Park, Weston MO
Don't miss our annual outing to this "can't miss" migration site. On last year's walk we had loads of beautiful birds including Cerulean Warbler, Scarlet Tanagers and Yellow-throated Vireos.

*We will leave from the store at 7:00a.m.
or you can meet us at the bicycle trail
parking lot at 7:30a.m. It is worth using
a couple of hours of vacation time for.*



After Work Hike

Wednesday, May 19th • 6:30pm–8:00pm

Parkville Nature Sanctuary, Parkville MO
We will take to the trails in search of any late migrants as well as area nesters. This should be a pleasant spring stroll. We may even get to "talk" to some owls closer to sunset.

Meet me at the store at 6:00p.m. or at Sanctuary parking lot at 6:30p.m.

Nesters

Saturday, May 22nd • 8:30am–10:30pm

Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary, Liberty MO
Most of the migrants will have passed on through, so this hike will be looking for the "breeding birds" of our area. We will find what birds are nesting in the forests, fields and stream corridor. Please meet at the Nature Center parking lot. Call us if you need directions.

NIKON ACTION

It isn't often that you see the price of something that is really a good seller to begin with go down. Just after the first of the year, Nikon announced price reductions on their entire line of Action binoculars. If you have spoken with me about binoculars in the past, the first pair I have probably shown you were the Actions. They are a great entry-level binocular and they are now even more affordable.

My #1 Seller, the Action 8X42 was \$129.99, now it is just \$99.99.

Mention this ad and take an additional \$5 off on any Action Binocular



SPECIES PROFILE: Great Crested Flycatcher

by Ruth Simmons

One of my favorite activities is to sit on my back deck early in the morning during spring migration to see what is going through the yard. I can watch the feeders and the recirculating creek while keeping an ear open for the calls of migrants in the treetops. Every year or so I hear: WEEEEEP!! WEEEEEP!! What is that? It's the call of the Great Crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*), one of the larger flycatchers, approximately the size of a Cardinal. Males and females look alike with bright yellow on the belly and a cinnamon colored tail. Great Crested Flycatchers can also raise a bushy crest, but it is not as noticeable as the crests of Cardinals and Blue Jays.

As their name implies, these birds fly out from a perch and catch their prey on the wing, flying back to the perch to eat. While they eat mostly true flies, other flying insects, and small fruits, Great Crested Flycatchers have been known to eat larger prey items such as dragonflies, hummingbirds, and small

lizards. They are commonly found in hardwood forests, woodlands, and groves in the eastern half of the United States and the southern edge of eastern Canada. They winter in Mexico and into Central and South America. There is also a population that winters in the southern-most tip of Florida.

Being a woodland species, it may not surprise you that GCFLs nest in cavities like bluebirds and woodpeckers. And just like bluebirds and woodpeckers, you can entice Great Cresteds to nest in your yard by putting up a nest box (and yes, we do carry a GCFL box at the store!). Mom builds the nest by herself and probably sits on the eggs by herself as well. Males do develop a "brood patch" which is a bare patch below the breast for maximum heat transfer to the eggs, but we don't know if the males ever incubate or brood. It seems to be up to mom to care for the nest. Another interesting nesting habit is that this species is noted for placing snakeskins in their nests.



Great Crested Flycatchers have been known to eat larger prey items such as dragonflies, hummingbirds, and small lizards.

They will often nest in "boxes" that are not your basic nest box. One time Mark went out to start his gas grill, for the first grilled burgers of the summer and a Great Crested flew out of the grill, leaving a nest full of hungry babies! No burgers that night for Mark's family, nest and babies were left to wait for mom or dad's return and dinner.

Great Cresteds will never rival Robins or Carolina Wrens for their singing abilities, but they do make at least twelve distinct vocalizations. Their song suggests a red-headed woodpecker but they're best known for the loud WEEP WEEP call. They will be migrating into the area soon and that means that they may show up in your yard even if you don't have a lot of trees. Just listen for the WEEP WEEP!

CONSERVATION CORNER: American Bird Conservancy

During my stint as Director of the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania, I had the good fortune to make friends with a guy who was just starting up a new bird conservation group. George Fenwick had been the national director of science for The Nature Conservancy but grew tired of being part of a huge organization. George wanted to see if he could create a small but effective organization dedicated to bird conservation.

One of the biggest problems that comes with being small in the nonprofit world is that others often get credit for your work. The American Bird Conservancy has done many good things for birds, including taking the lead on getting bird killing pesticides taken off the market in this country as well as in South America. Unfortunately, when people hear of good things being done for birds, they automatically think of the Audubon Society.

ABC had done work on tower kills, forest fragmentation, Important Bird Areas and others but one of my favorite programs of theirs is called "Cats Indoors". If you have heard me talk about house cats before, you know I cite this program often. It is not an anti-cat program. In fact it is very much a pro-cat program who's goal is to educate cat owners about the importance of keeping their pets indoors.

ABC is very much about bringing groups together to resolve problems. They do this in a very efficient and effective way and I applaud their efforts. Please visit their website at www.abcbirds.org or come by the store and pick up a free copy of their most recent magazine. Consider supporting them. They need it as well as the birds.



Time To Ask Mark...

Q. Last spring I had a cardinal repeatedly banging into one of my windows. What is that all about and will he return? (Yes, you read this in last spring's newsletter)

A. Simply stated, he is in love. For as smart as birds are, there are two things they do not know – one is their own voice and the other is their own reflection. The bird is seeing his own reflection and is trying to chase the rival bird out of his territory. Both male and female birds do this with the more famous species being cardinals, robins and mockingbirds but it is a behavior documented in many others. I have pictures of a Northern Parula (warbler) on our car side mirror, determined to get rid of his rival. My favorite stories are those of roadrunners and quail banging away at people's hubcaps. The good news is that it generally only lasts for a short while. The bad news is that, short of covering your windows from the outside with screen or even paper, there is little that can be done. The birds rarely hurt themselves.



Here is proof that robins and cardinals are not the only birds who try to chase away their reflection. This Northern Parula (warbler) was attacking the side mirror of our rental car in Maine several years ago.

Q. I found a baby bird in my yard. What should I do?

A. The very best thing that you can do is let nature take its course. If you know where the nest is, gently pick the bird up and place it back in the nest. If the bird seems healthy and is hopping away from you, it is probably not going to stay in the nest anyway and should be left alone. A few more bugs from mom and it will be on its way. If it is helpless and you can't find the nest, you can try to construct a nest out of a strawberry basket and place it up in the nearest tree or shrub. If these do not work, you can call Lakeside Nature Center in Swope Park. They have an answering machine that is checked every hour or so and someone will call you back with more helpful information.

Q. Where do Hummingbirds nest?

A. I have found several hummingbird nests over the years and most have been associated with water. One reason the Ozarks have so many hummingbirds is the presence of so many creeks and streams. The nest is made from spider webs and lichens and is generally pretty low in a tree. The ones that I have found always have another limb just above the nest for added rain protection. It is possible to get hummingbirds to nest on an artificial structure. We started carrying Hummingbird Nest Structures last year.

Q. I never got orioles to come to my feeder last year. What can I do different?

A. If you tried the oranges, grape jelly and nectar last year to no avail, you can try adding streamers of orange ribbon or yarn to the bottom of your feeder. Your goal is to catch the oriole's eye. Once they start coming, you should be in good shape.



VARI-CRAFT FEEDERS

Truly one of the most durable feeders on the market, Vari-crafts are built to last. I have one of the six port multi-seed feeders that I bought 6 years ago and it still looks new. From their traditional finch and multi-seed feeders to their innovative Squirrel-proof bouncer, Vari-Crafts has been an industry leader for years.

My personal favorite is the AV-1M pictured here. Not only does it hold a whopping 3 gallons of bird seed, the cage is far enough from the ports to keep out grackle, starlings and red-winged blackbirds. They even mounted the bottom tray upside down to make it easy to clean. It comes either with a pole or without.

During the month of May, use this ad to take \$5 off any single Vari-Crafts Bird or Squirrel Feeder.

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THINKING ABOUT OFFERING MEALWORMS FOR YOUR BLUEBIRDS?

Aspects Vista Dome makes a great Bluebird Feeder. The open, clear view design allows the bluebirds to see the moving mealworms from a great distance. The large hood provides excellent rain protection and in the "non mealworm" season, it works great for sunflower or better yet, Boardwalk Blend.

Good For One 100 count Mealworm with the purchase of an Aspect Vista Dome

ARE THEY STUFFED?

You wouldn't believe how many times we have been asked that since we started stocking these beautiful hand-carved, hand-painted individual pieces from Hummingbird Studios. As we went to press, we still had this Indigo Bunting in stock as well as several others. If you have a favorite bird that you would like us to order in, you can go to their website www.hummingbirdstudiousa.com, and look at their selection. From tiny hummingbirds to life-sized sharp-shinned hawks, you really do have to see them to appreciate them.

