



# BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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

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**Bird Creek Pond Kits**  
*by Avian Aquatics*



I talk about it so often. Water is incredibly important to birds and all wildlife. This water feature is in Ruth's backyard in the heart of Lee's Summit and is a virtual bird magnet.

You've probably seen the various bird baths and small water features we have on display in the store, but probably didn't know we carry the larger pond kits like the one in Ruth's yard.

From multi-tiered Cascades to single large pools, we can order in just about any size you need. Just give us a call or stop by for more information.

## **The Teenage Years**

by Mark McKellar

The summer months don't give us the greatest diversity of birds at our feeders but it can be very entertaining none the less. My favorite part of summer feeding is when the adults bring in their young ones.

Someone in my past once said that fledgling birds reminded them of poorly dressed teenagers (kind of ragged or out of sorts). I connected with that analogy and have used it ever since. Aside from being a cute way of looking at young birds, there is a lot of reality in it.

When you consider how quickly birds grow, they make "dog years" seem slow. Fourteen days from hatching to taking their first flight is about average for most of our songbirds. Throw in that they are about the same size as the adults within just a couple of weeks and your talking about an incredible growth rate. This means that when you see these "fuzzy" looking, open-mouthed, birds shadowing their parents at your feeders, they are pretty much "teenagers" in bird years.

I love watching bluebirds bring their young into a mealworm feeder. Even when the young are perfectly capable of picking up the mealworm themselves, they sit there and beg and beg and beg. Eventually they get the picture and get off the couch for their own bag of potato chips (oops, I mean mealworms).

Have you had the chance to watch these "teenagers" fly very much? The tail feathers are among the last to develop for young birds and that's their rudder. No tail, no steering. Many times I have seen these young whipper snappers come crashing into a bush just hoping a branch will jump out there for them to land on (no parallel parking at this age).

The teenage years can be a tough time for everyone. The name of the game is survival. Don't worry about the shaggy hair, learn to eat the right foods and, for goodness sakes, be careful behind the "wheel" and we can all survive the "teenage" period.



*- Aspect Vista Dome -  
Works great for teenagers  
learning to eat mealworms.*



## Hummingbird Feeder Care

by Mark McKellar

There is a great deal of misunderstanding about hummingbird and oriole feeders. I think a lot of it has to do with the fill it and leave it nature of most other types of feeders. I have customers who have confessed to filling their hummingbird feeders in April and leaving them for months. They couldn't understand why they hadn't seen any hummingbirds. Have you ever left Kool Aid in the refrigerator too long? Would you drink it with mold floating around in it? Help your hummers out by:



*Female Ruby-throated Hummingbird  
Courtesy of BYBC Customer Don Husey*

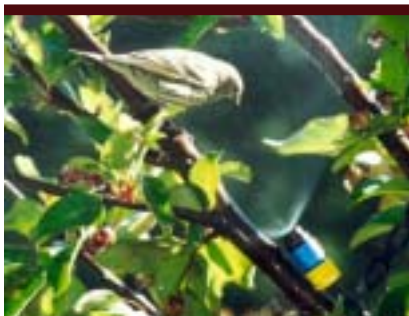
- 1) **Keeping your feeder clean...** If the nectar in your feeder is cloudy looking or especially if it has black spots forming on the glass or plastic, it has gone bad. When temperatures reach the mid-80's this can happen in just a couple of days. If your feeder is in full sun, the nectar can go bad in a day. If your feeder allows you to run it through the dishwasher, great, if it doesn't a good set of brushes (my favorite are the ones from Songbird Essentials) will help greatly. Unless your feeder requires that you fill it full to prevent it from leaking, I would only fill it about 1/4-1/2 full until the activity level picks up.
- 2) **Keeping ants out of your feeder...** Not everyone has problems with ants in their nectar feeders (but most do). If you didn't see John's article last month about the Nectar Protectors, they really work great, with a simple, inexpensive design that uses water to keep ants from ever making it to your feeder.
- 3) **Keeping bees away...** Bees are far more challenging to deal with than ants and just get worse as the summer wears on. Some believe that yellow on a hummingbird feeder attracts bees. My favorite solution available now comes with a couple of models of feeders. The Droll Yankee Hummingbird Feeders and the Aspects Ultra include a great little device that fits over the inside openings of the feeder. Hummers can push their bills through them to drink but the bees can not.

### What are the keys to attracting hummingbirds in late summer? I always default to habitat.

- 1) **Do you have plenty of blooming flowers?** My personal favorites this time of year are Cardinal Flower or Red Lobelia. Trumpet Creeper, Purple Coneflower, Bergamot, and many others are always great to have around.
- 2) **Do you have a source of water?** Don't be surprised to see these little winged gems zipping back and forth through your sprinkler. The very best set up is a Mister. These little hoses spew a fine mist that is just right for hummingbirds. It attaches to your outdoor faucet and can be snaked up into a shrub for watering a patch of vegetation while providing water for the birds.
- 3) **Do you have enough feeders out?** This is the season of plenty. All of the adults, the babies and even migrating birds will be looking for food. Most of our dedicated hummingbird people put out extra feeders this time of year and take care to place them far apart. This keeps one bird from being able to dominate your feeder station. Good landscaping will help this as well.

There is no reason to research why hummingbirds are among America's favorite birds. They are amazingly fragile creatures that give us hours of entertainment and we owe it to them to be good stewards.

**DON'T FORGET THE SIMPLE RULE: Clean Food, Clean Water & Shelter.**



## DO YOUR BIRDS HAVE A SOURCE FOR WATER?

**Water is critical for birds!**

Mention this ad for 20% off any mister or dripper in stock.

*(Expires October 15, 2004)*



## ***Have Binocs, Will Travel!***

I have asked many of my birding friends and all agree. This was the absolute worst spring migration season we have seen – period! Don't get me wrong, we had some very nice hikes during the season and the weather was generally quite nice (just don't ask those who came to Weston Bend that rainy Thursday morning) but the birds were just not there. To add to the confusion, I had just led a group of birders to the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas in April and had a magnificent trip. Not only did we see loads of the great "Texas Specialties" like Green Kingfishers and White-collared Seedeaters, we had loads of migrants (orioles, warblers, hummingbirds). I thought for sure that would translate into a good migration season "back home". By the way, if you would like to see a complete trip list (a whopping 220 species) and write up with pictures for our Texas outing, you can call us or download it from our web site.



**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 🌿

### **Weston Bend State Park, Weston MO**

***Sunday, September 5<sup>th</sup> · 8:00–11:00am***

Fall migration is never as dependable as the spring but it is a great time to be outside. The great diversity of habitat at Weston Bend make it a great location for a bird hike at any time of the year.

***Meet us at the store at 7:30 or at the main gate at 8:00.***

### **Beginning Bird Watching**

***Wednesday, September 15<sup>th</sup> · 7:00–8:30pm***

Why do more than 30 million Americans "watch birds"? Why do I keep getting requests to do this program? People love birds. We will cover the basics of the hobby and hopefully get you excited enough to "take it up a notch". Join us the next morning at Parkville Nature Sanctuary to test your newly learned skills.

### **Parkville Nature Sanctuary, Parkville MO**

***Thursday, September 16<sup>th</sup> · 8:30–11:00am***

As summer winds down, we will be searching for birds who are passing through as well as those who just haven't left yet. Last year I saw an adult female Red-shafted Flicker hanging around here about this time. This makes for a good follow up to the Beginning Bird Watching Class on the 15th.

### **Choosing the Right Binocular**

***Saturday, September 25<sup>th</sup> · 9:00–9:30am***

Have you been considering treating yourself to a new pair of binoculars? This will be a brief class to cover the basics of binocular functions and features.

### **Blue River Glade, Kansas City MO**

***Saturday, October 2<sup>nd</sup> · 9:00am–Noon***

I love to explore new spots. While this area isn't new to me, I would guess that it is for you. Buried in the heart of Swope Park, this area is one of the most ecologically unique spots in our area. We will explore the natural beauty of this area, birds and all. Please Note: There is a significant uphill climb to get to the area, after that the walking is a nice dirt trail.

***Meet at the store at 8:00 or at the new Lakeside Nature Center Building at 8:45.***

### **Owls and Stars**

***Saturday, October 9<sup>th</sup> · 7:00–9:30pm***

Join us for an evening out under the stars. Astronomer Fisk Miles will join us for an evening of owling and star gazing. We will meet at the store at 7:00 and discuss owls and stars before heading out to a dark location. I will call the owls and Fisk will point out the stars and constellations.

### **Smithville Lake, Smithville MO**

***Saturday, October 30<sup>th</sup> · 8:00am–Noon***

Truly one of my must do trips each year. Though dependent on weather patterns, the lake can be loaded with birds this time of year. We will search among the many ducks and geese for loons, grebes and other waterfowl. Don't worry about the long distance viewing, we will have plenty of spotting scopes for everyone to get "close up" views of distant birds.

***Meet us at the store at 7:30 or at the Litton Center at 8:00.***



## **SPECIES PROFILE: Late Summer Hummers**

by Ruth Simmons

This is the question that has been asked more this spring and summer than any other. Most of you have been waiting and watching your feeders to no avail. Some have had no hummers whatsoever, and some have seen one or two birds for just a day or two, then they disappear. Of course, there are the fortunate few (and you know who you are) that have loads of hummingbirds at their feeders and come in and buy eight boxes of nectar mix at a time!

We really don't know why this is happening. Is it because of the cool, rainy spring? Did some catastrophe occur during migration? Or are the birds being picky this year? We just don't know. What we do know is that our best chance to see our little friends is still ahead of us. In this part of Missouri, the best time to see hummers is actually at the end of summer, between the end of July and the last week of September. This is when we still have our resident adults, their young that have fledged, and some early migrants from farther north. If you aren't familiar with the color patterns of the male, female and juvenile you might think that you have three different species of hummingbird in your yard. The males are bright green with a black gorget that shines brilliant red in sunlight. The females are the same as the males except that they are white throated. Juveniles are a grayish-green, and possibly have black spots or rows of black spots that flash red on their throats.

The first time that I saw a hummer in my yard was at the end of summer. We had friends over after church and we were keeping an eye out for an oriole to show up at the oriole feeder. I noticed that there was a small dark speck hovering in and out at the feeder. When I looked with my binos, I had my first Ruby-throated hummingbird in my yard. I ran out and bought a hummingbird feeder and soon I had two or three, even on my deck.



*Male Ruby-throated Hummingbird  
Courtesy of BYBC Customer  
Bob Halford*

Don't give up hope! Not only is this a good time to see Ruby-throated hummingbirds, you should keep an eye out for migrants from the west. Look for a hummer that looks like a shiny copper penny, with or without an orange gorget. A Rufous hummingbird is the most common vagrant that goes through our area, but Anna's, Calliopes, and Green Violet Ears have been documented in Missouri. If you see one, you might want to snap a picture and don't hesitate to let us know! Vagrants are more noticeable later in the season, in October after most of the resident Ruby-throats have left. Leaving your feeder out past October into November will NOT keep hummingbirds from migrating, in fact you may be helping a late-hatching youngster build up enough stored energy for the trip south!

## **CONSERVATION CORNER: Cats Indoors! The Campaign For Safer Birds & Cats**

One of the most difficult topics I have always tackled head on with my customers is cats. I think HOUSE cats are wonderful pets and their ability to catch mice is legendary, but what is often overlooked by so many is the impact they have on bird populations.

The group I wrote about in the last Conservation Corner started a program a few years ago called Cats Indoors. This is not an anti-cat campaign at all. In fact, it is a pro-cat program designed to educate cat owners of the importance of keeping cats indoors for their own health.

Scientists estimate that cats kill hundreds of millions of songbirds a year. Cardinals, song sparrows, juncos and mourning doves are among the most commonly killed species but the incredibly long list of victims includes rare and endangered birds as well.

As for the health of your pet, consider how many cats are killed by automobiles each year or how many are attacked by dogs, foxes, bobcats or owls or how many are shot or abused by humans. If you throw in the number of parasites, diseases and poisons that outdoor cats face each day, you can see why life in a house is much, much safer.

Don't be fooled into thinking that your cat is too fat or too old to catch birds. A study on house cat predation done several years ago at Emporia State University, revealed startling results. All cats (over 50) involved in the study were well fed, family-loved house cats. By the end of the study, all cats had killed birds and the number one killer was a, de-clawed male cat.

Much of this information comes from a terrific brochure that the American Bird Conservancy, the American Humane Association and The Humane Society of the U.S. produced. If you have any questions or would like further information about this very important topic, you can visit their web site [www.abcbirds.org](http://www.abcbirds.org) and follow the links to Cats Indoors or you can stop by the store and pick up a copy of the brochure.





## Time To Ask Mark...

### **Q. I get so frustrated by the grackles flinging all of the bird seed out of my feeders. Why do they do this and how can I stop it?**

**A.** I am a victim of this myself. The leading thought here is that they are sifting through to find what they really want. Given this, Cornell Lab of Ornithology is very big in recommending that you do not use seed mixes. Have one feeder for Sunflower, one feeder for Safflower, so forth and so on. Keep in mind that I have had customers say their attempts at this have failed as well, so... In my own little experiment this summer, I placed two different seed mixes in a divided Arundale Sky Café feeder. On the side that had Wild Delight Cardinal Food, the grackles didn't give it a look. The side with Wild Delight Gourmet, the Grackles had it eaten or flung onto the ground in a day. The real difference is Millet. This reinforces my contention that, to avoid problems with House Sparrows and Common Grackles, stay away from mixes that contain a lot of Millet in your feeders. I have a lot of House Sparrows in my neighborhood so there is no avoiding them so I use Wild Delight Feast as a ground throw only. As for feeders that work against Grackles, the only ones I know that work for sure are the cage feeders.



### **Q. The bees are running off my orioles and hummingbirds, what can I do?**

**A.** Bees and wasps can pose a problem for nectar feeders, especially in late summer. Bee colonies grow in size all summer, so by August they can really be numerous around flowering plants and nectar feeders. I have many customers who say their landscaping keeps the bees busy enough that they just don't bother their feeders, while others have major issues. Because bees are an extremely important part of our natural world, I would recommend the new Nectar-Guard technology in the new Droll Yankee and Aspect Ultra feeders. It works great against bees and most ants. The problem can still exist because some sugar water can drip onto the feeder as the bird pulls its bill out of the feeder. In extreme cases, especially for those who are extremely allergic to bee stings, you can create your own bee trap. There are commercial Yellow Jacket Traps available but an empty two liter bottle with a small amount of sugar water in the bottom and petroleum jelly smeared all around the inside of the neck works great. I did read about one family that put out a decoy feeder with a 1:3 sugar to water solution to draw the bees away from the normal 1:4 solution feeders. This feeder should be put well away from other feeders. It seemed to work for this family, and might be worth a try. Let us know how it works for you.

## LOYAL CUSTOMER COUPON

### **Don't Forget the Wild Delight Frequent Buyer Club!**

All Wild Delight products qualify for their Frequent Buyer Program. Buy 10 bags of the same seed and bag size and get your 11<sup>th</sup> bag FREE.

Wild Delight Best Sellers:

- #1) 20lb Black Oil Sunflower
- #2) 20lb Safflower
- #3) 10lb Shelled Peanuts
- #4) 35lb Cardinal Food
- #5) 40lb Feast
- #6) 20lb Total Cuisine



**TAKE \$1.00 OFF  
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(Expires October 30, 2004)*

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## DO YOU NEED ANOTHER REASON TO BUY NIKONS?

Aside from having the very best optics on the market, they have the best warranty as well. How about a lifetime No Fault Repair or Replace Policy? If a problem is not covered by the 25 year Limited Warranty, Nikon will repair or replace them for \$10 (plus shipping, of course). And as No Fault implies, it doesn't matter what happened. If you need personal testimony, just ask Ruth the next time you are in the store.



## I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW!

We now have Nikon's New Optics Maintenance Kits in stock. I am so glad to see this product. I've used it on my binoculars and camera already and really like it.

## COUNTRY CLASSICS FEEDER

This large platform feeder from Country Classics is easily one of my favorites. Not only does it feature a nice, easy to fill hopper, it also has the best trays on the market. All three trays pop out for easy cleaning and are made of a heavy gauge steel. Large and small birds alike will feed from it and the open nature makes it easy to see them all. Place this feeder on a 74" Erva Pole with a flat top plate and you have a great center piece for your bird feeding station.



## SONGBIRD IDENTIFLYER'S BEST SELLERS

- #1) Eastern Yard Birds
- #2) Forest Edge
- #3) Forest
- #4) Fabulous Frogs
- #5) Birds of the Night

### SEPTEMBER SPECIAL

*Buy any 2 Song Cards and get your 3rd of equal or lesser value at Half Price.  
(Expires September 30, 2004)*