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# BACKYARD BIRD CENTER



# NEWS

Winter 2004

BOARDWALK SQUARE • 6212 NW BARRY RD (816) 746-1113

## *How Do Birds Survive Winter?* by Mark McKellar

It is easy to understand why people rush out and buy bird seed when it snows. How can something so small and fragile possibly survive such brutally cold conditions?

Birds, like humans and other mammals, are **homeothermic** (warm blooded). This means that as long as birds can find a suitable food source, their bodies can convert that food into energy (i.e. body heat).

Cold temperatures are survivable by most birds, it is the covering of the food source that is the main problem. Ground feeders and waterfowl know that their food sources are going to be covered up quickly, but arboreal (tree dwelling) species like evening grosbeaks and crossbills can ride out the same "cold" conditions that juncos and snow geese had to abandon.

Given food availability, how do these tiny, fragile creatures endure sub-zero temperatures? Like us, they often try to find places that are well protected from wind and "cold air". Evergreen trees provide very important **cover** as do artificial or natural cavities. Bluebirds, wrens and others will **huddle** or even stack on top of each other to keep warm.

While birds can't put on an extra set of feathers in cold conditions, they can fluff up. Let's not forget what the source of insulation is for a down jacket. By **fluffing up** and creating air space between feathers as well as feath-

ers and skin, it is like putting on an extra jacket. This is why you will hear me talk about the importance of a heated bird bath. Water is essential to keeping feathers healthy and healthy feathers keep birds warm.



When conditions get worse, shivering can help. **Shivering** is a body's way of generating a little extra heat.

Perhaps the most amazing adaptation birds have for dealing with the cold is their ability to lower their body temperatures, heart rate and general body functions. **Hypothermia** conserves oxygen in the blood stream and is used primarily while sleeping. Hypothermia generally refers to lowering the body temperature a few degrees.

Hummingbirds and a few other species can drop their body temperatures drastically. This condition is known as **torpor**. For species, like hummingbirds, with extremely high metabolic rates, this is the only way they do not "starve to death" while sleeping. Hypothermia and torpor do not come without hazards. A bird in torpor can't take off and fly if danger approaches, in fact, it can take up to an hour for a bird to regain full muscle control.

Even though temperatures have been mild for much of this winter season, as all Missourians know, that can change quickly. Don't forget that the food and water you are providing is important to birds, especially when it's brutal.

### www.backyardbirdcenterkc.com Is Up and Running

Yes, we are finally on the world wide web. With a lot of help from McKim Touhey Studios, the web site launched the first of December. We are still making adjustments and adding material and would love to have your input.

Your input does count. We are adding a couple of specific items that came directly from customer contact. It is also a great way to let me know what kind of programs you would like to see me offer, trip locations you would like to visit, merchandise you would like to see me carry, etc.

The online newsletter has had some trouble. It all stems from certain folks not being able to read some of the fonts we use. We hope we have solved these translation problems.

Instead of sending the newsletter out to everyone via e-mail, we are going to send an e-mail letting you know the new newsletter is available for downloading with a link and estimated download times.

I hope you enjoy the site and again, please let us know what you think.

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



# News From Birdwatch America by Mark McKellar

*“Lots of new products are on the way!”*

Each January, I try to attend the largest trade show in our industry - Birdwatch America. This year the show was 25% larger than ever before and I was really impressed with some of the new products.

Some new things from one of my favorite vendors, **Erva** (poles and hooks), include new pole toppers shaped like squirrels, cardinals and sunflowers. Also coming from them is a new hanging bird bath and two new pole staking systems.

Rubicon (of recycled milk carton fame) has a new covered ground feeder.

I am bringing in a couple of new lines of feeders that impressed me. The line from **T.H. Hoff** are beautiful yet functional and the **Country Classic** feeders are more traditional.

For the kids, we are getting Audubon Birds from **Wild Republic**. The cuddly birds sing authentic bird songs when squeezed.



Buy an Identiflyer and get a coupon for 1/2 off your next song card. (ends May 31st 2004)

Fun for all ages is the **Songbird Identiflyer**. We have carried them for years but they continue to release new song cards and this year the Identiflyer is available in BLUE as well as green.

As with the last couple

of years at the show, Anti-Squirrel is huge again. A really neat product from **BirdQuest** is a baffle that will hold most any hanging feeder. The baffle is armed with 3 D-cell batteries and when a squirrel gets on the feeder the motor spins them off. Sounds familiar, but there is no recharging and it works with an existing feeder. The video footage looked impressive.

I have been searching for hand-carved, life-sized sculptures of birds at affordable prices for years. **Hummingbird Studies** has finally answered the call. I am bringing in several pieces and will try to resist taking them all home.



Perhaps the coolest new product (especially if you are a techi) is the line of cameras from **NatureCam**. The tiny video cameras can be placed in nest boxes, on a bird feeder, even submerged in a pond. The cable can be run to your television, VCR or computer for hours of entertainment. These James Bond sized cameras run between \$100 and \$149.

I am excited about the new products we are bringing in and I hope you will be too. Stop and see us soon.

## Ruth's Favorite New Product



I am very near sighted and have worn glasses since I was eight years old. Each time I got a new prescription, I would look at the trees across the street and enjoy being able to see each individual leaf again. Not a mass of green, but each leaf as it moved in the breeze. That is what I enjoy about my new binos; I can see not only a bird with feathers, but each feather and its texture as well.

When I see a bird, I have to know what it is, so being able to see every possible field mark is very important. Are the legs pinkish or greenish, how long is the beak compared to the head, in the upper beak a different color from the lower beak? These are all questions that my binos answer correctly.

When I decided to buy a new pair, I brought my old pair into the store and compared all the binoculars to them and decided that I liked the **Nikon Venturer LX** the best. They are smaller than my old pair and therefore easier to carry and pack. They have truer color and brighter resolution, are waterproof and fog-proof, and have a no-fault repair program. If the binoculars break for any reason, you can get them repaired for \$10.00 plus tax and shipping and handling. I love them and would recommend them to any serious birder.

### Close-out Specials Mean Great Deals For You

# 25% OFF

- > All Heath Purple Martin Houses
- > All Calendars
- > All Hookery Poles
- > All Creative Copper Feeders
- > Select Country Nests Houses and Feeders



## Have Binoculars Will Travel!!!

A few years ago we saw ~240 bald eagle on our annual excursion to Squaw Creek NWR. This year's trip made that number look small. On the tally board at the center, the assessment for eagles was "too many to count". I know we saw over 300! Throw in tens of thousands of mallards, and a continuous stream of snow geese and you could say we saw loads of birds.



Most of the programs below are a few weeks away but we want you to get them on the calendar early. Of special note is our trip to South Texas. If you are "hooked", or think you may be getting there, this is a trip you should really consider. This trip will expose you to dozens of new birds (many that can be seen nowhere else in the United States) and there are no steep hills or "extreme" conditions.

Late fall and winter are times that we tend not to "get out" as much as other times of the year but check out the new Wednesday evening class schedule.

### The hikes 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.

#### Wednesday Night Programs

The following are programs geared at expanding your "bird world". All programs are free but you need to pre-register by calling (816)746-1113.

#### Mark's Top Ten Favorite Local Birding Spots Free Wednesday, March 17th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Can't decide where to go search for birds this spring? Join us this night for Mark's countdown of his favorite local hotspots. If you have the time, these spots can definitely produce lifers.

#### Beginning Bird Watching Free Wednesday, April 7th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Hopefully you will have finished your taxes by then. Join us for an introduction to bird watching. Why do more than 30 million American "watch birds"? We will cover the basics of the hobby and hopefully get you excited enough to "take it up a notch".

#### Spring Migration Primer Free Wednesday, April 14th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

One of the first things that people do when they start birding is to keep track of what birds they have seen. Are you at that stage yet? Have you started your list but would like to get it better organized. Join us for the "rules" and some of the most popular methods available to track your birds.

#### Friday, March 12th 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

##### Owl Prowl, Parkville, MO

We will meet at the store and talk about owls and all of their wonderful adaptations for a nocturnal lifestyle. We have several species of owls that winter in our area and we will load up and drive to an owl hot spot and "talk" to some owls.

#### Saturday, April 17th 8:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.

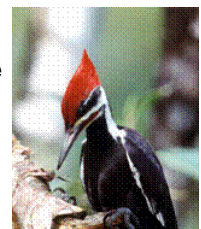
##### Parkville Nature Sanctuary, Parkville MO

This should be a beautiful stroll in the spring woodlands. Early spring migrants (warblers, kinglets, gnatcatchers) should be here and this will be a great warm up for migration that peaks in early May. You can meet me at the store at 8:30 a.m. or at Sanctuary parking lot at 8:45 a.m.

#### Thursday, May 6th 8:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

##### Burr Oak Woods Nature Center, Blue Springs, MO

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.



### Lower Rio Grand Valley - Saturday April 24th through Wednesday April 28th, 2004

Ah, the valley. Known to most as a great place for "snowbirds" to spend their winters, it is truly one of the "must go" locations if you are a birder. While a birding trip around here may gain you a handful of lifers, your first trip to the lower valley will likely get you 50 or so lifers. If you're not familiar with south Texas specialties, open up a field guide and take a look at **Green Jay, Great Kiskadee, Ringed Kingfisher, Plain Chachalaca, White-tailed Hawk and Buff-bellied Hummingbirds** (just to name a few). We will have a pre-trip meeting at the store to review the birds we expect to see.

The trip will begin with a group departure from the Harlingen, TX Airport and visit such famous birding sites as Laguna Atascosa NWR, Santa Ana NWR and Falcon Dam State Park.

I am currently working on the best deals possible for lodging and transportation, please call (816) 746-1113 for an exact price and to reserve your spot(s) today.

## Species Profile: Carolina Wren by John Burwell

Birds have many fascinating traits that make them unique. Some have outstanding plumages, interesting courtship displays, nesting habits, and rearing techniques. One of the most beautiful things that we enjoy about many birds is their song. This issue's profile is on one of our most vocal songsters, the Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*).

Its song, "tea kettle, tea kettle, tea kettle, tea" can be heard year round. The Carolina wren is 5.5" to 6" in length, a rich rusty brown above and a warm buff below, with a white throat and eyebrow with a slightly curved bill. It prefers open woodland with brushy undergrowth.

Nesting sites are varied and range from brush

piles, root tangles undercut by streams, nest boxes, mailboxes, etc. I had one nest in a flowerpot in my shed. They went under the door for access. The nest is a cup built of bark strips, leaves, grass, and other fine material.



Photo courtesy of Kathy Lewis

Males can have from 27 to 41 different song types, singing each one repeatedly. They often match songs with other Carolina Wrens in neighboring ter-

ritories. Occasionally pairs will duet back and forth adding to your confusion or enjoyment.

These birds can be attracted to suet, mealworms, sunflower chips, and cracked corn. Proximity to water can also help attract them.

Chiefly a southern species, these birds are vulnerable to harsh winters, especially lots of ice. Luckily for us, Carolina wrens are resilient and with enough suitable habitat, they can rebound. The January ice storm of 2002 really knocked their numbers down yet just in a couple of nesting seasons we are once again enjoying their cheerful, "chirpity, chirpity, chirpity, chirp."

### Why That Feeder?

"I have this new feeder and I haven't seen a bird on it yet". What makes that statement more confusing is when the next customer that comes in and raves about the same feeder the first customer was talking about.

Why do birds choose one feeder over another? I really don't think anyone knows for sure but a few things can make a difference.

- 1) Placement - is the "new" feeder in a desirable location (close to cover).
- 2) Newness - it will often take birds a while work up its nerve to use a new feeder.
- 3) Ease of use - some feeders take a little effort to figure out how to use them. If there are easier feeders available and not much stress, they may choose the easiest source.
- 4) Fresh Food - always make sure the seed is fresh and free of mold.

All of the feeders that I carry have been successful for someone in the field but as I learned long ago, you never say always. Mark

## Conservation Corner - Kansas City Wildlands

Ever have the urge to get out and get your hands dirty while helping out animals? A few years ago, Larry Rizzo (Missouri Department of Conservation Biologist) and I co-founded a group that provides such opportunities

Kansas City Wildlands is a volunteer-based, nonprofit group that identifies quality remnant native habitat in our area, makes management recommendations and leads restoration efforts to help bring it "back". Their tag line is that they provide CPR (Conserve, Protect and Restore) to quality wild spaces.

Today, the group is housed at Bridging The Gap and can be found on the web at [www.kcwildlands.org](http://www.kcwildlands.org). From removing cedar trees from a patch of prairie in Shawnee Mission to cutting out the horrible Amur Honeysuckle from a glade in Swope Park, they conduct many work days each year. Most are geared for the general public but they also work with companies who want to have an employee volunteer work day.

So many of us want to help with conservation more but our budgets don't allow it. This group provides us a chance to use our time and desires to help wildlife. For more information on KCWildlands, visit their website and/or contact Linda Lehrbaum at (816) 561-1061 ext.116.

Don't forget that I give a 10% discount to those who provide proof of membership to the following conservation groups:

- The Nature Conservancy ([www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org))**
- The Audubon Society ([www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org))**  
(includes National, Missouri, Burroughs or Midland Empire)
- The American Bird Conservancy ([www.abcbirds.org](http://www.abcbirds.org))**
- The Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary ([www.naturesanctuary.com](http://www.naturesanctuary.com))**

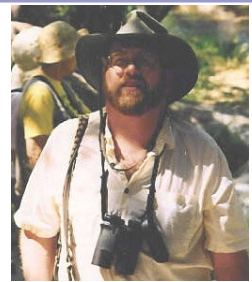
(Discounts apply to regular priced merchandise and clearance items and can not be combined with other sales).



## Time to Ask Mark . . .

### Q. Where are all of the birds this winter?

A. It has been a slow year for bird feeders for a lot of people (not everyone). The leading theory is that the combination of mild weather and over abundant food (just look at any cedar tree) has most of our birds eating their natural foods. The only time my feeders have been busy (except for house sparrows), has been during two stretches of really cold temperatures and snow. I have had several people say that their titmice are conspicuously missing. This is something that I want to follow up on with Cornell's feeder watch numbers.



### Q. When is the best time to try feeding mealworms?

A. I don't know that there is really a bad time, but most of my customers feed mealworms in the early spring and summer when the bluebirds are starting to nest. This is a time when all birds are being "stressed" by the rigors of nesting and can use a little help. We have several good feeders that work for mealworms. I prefer ones like Aspect's Vista Dome that can be used as a traditional feeder during times that you aren't feeding the mealworms.



Photo courtesy of Suzanne King

### Q. What was the flicker you had pictured in the last issue eating?

A. The flicker was eating a mixture of peanut butter and cornmeal. Pictured at the right are a brown creeper and downy woodpecker at the same feeder. This is a great formula that you can customize yourself. I like to add a few raisins, others will add lard and bird seed. My Carolina wrens and mockingbirds love it as well.



Photo courtesy of Steve Dillinger

### Q. How can birds walk around or stand in the icy cold water?

A. It is amazingly simple. The blood vessels in the legs and feet of birds are very close together. As the warm blood is being pumped from the heart to the legs and feet, it literally warms the cold blood that is coming back up to the heart. This keeps the birds from "dying of cold shock". As long as the bird is able to find food and convert that food to "heat" energy, it can survive in extremely cold conditions. *For more about winter survival, see this issue's cover article.*

## To Help Meet Mid-Winter's Highest Needs . . .



Take **\$5 OFF** either a  
Farm Innovator  
C-50 Bird Bath De-Icer  
or a

40 lb. Bag of Wild Delight Fruit & Berry

(Limit 1 coupon per customer, expires 3/1/04)



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### **Nikon Fieldscope III**

**Nothing brings in the birds closer than a spotting scope. The Fieldscope III Set comes with the scope, zoom eyepiece, tripod and window mount.**



**Bring this newsletter in to receive a FREE martin decoy when you purchase any martin house or gourd set. (Expires 4/1/04)**

### *Upcoming Important Dates*

- February 15th - Place/clean Bluebird Boxes
- March 1st - Open 1 Martin House Door
- March 10th - Average arrival date for adult male Purple Martins (often called the scouts)
- April 1st - Clean all other nest boxes
- April 5th - Place Hummingbird Feeders
- April 15th - Place Oriole Feeders



**Get a jump on the Nectar Season. Buy ten boxes of flavor nectar and get an 11th box FREE. (offer expires 4/1/04)**

