



FALL

2005

# BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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

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## Customer Appreciation Night

**Wednesday**  
**November 30th**  
**5:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.**

Once again we want to show our appreciation to our wonderful customers by offering a special weekend of savings.

On Wednesday evening, everything in the store will be 15% Off (sorry, but while this does include sale merchandise, we can not combine this with other discounts).

Aside from the great deals, we will have refreshments and door prizes.

**Extended Holiday Hours**  
**During December**  
**Thursdays 9:30 - 7:00**  
**Sundays 1:00 - 5:00**  
**December 24th close at 5:00**  
**Closed 25th**

## Magic Seed

by Mark McKellar

Is there really a difference in bird seed? What is the “magic” seed?

First and foremost, there is a difference in bird seed. Differences are found both in the “taste” preferences of birds as well as the quality and nutritional value for wildlife. Many of the commercial bird seed mixes found in grocery and large retail shops are filled with “filler” grains such as milo (the small red seed about the size of a BB), oats, wheat and cracked corn. These grains are all very inexpensive to grow and are dense which make it very easy to get a bag’s weight up to 5 or 10 lbs and keep the price low.

The problem that anyone who has gone down the “cheap seed” road finds out is that most birds (especially the pretty ones) don’t particularly like the grains. The companies are smart enough to throw in a few sunflower seeds and millet to make the bag look better. The “cheap” bird seed is generally quite dirty. Not only are folks buying seed that birds will not eat, they are paying for dirt, stems and even rocks.

Enough ranting about the bad stuff, let’s talk about what birds really like. The Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania did a great study a few years ago on seed preferences. Their goal was to formulate their custom bird seed and only use the seeds that birds of that area liked. Yes, they put out “junk” seeds as well as the “good stuff”. And, yes it followed pretty closely with what all reputable surveys show. Here is what birds want:

1) **Black Oil Sunflower** – it should be present in all feeder stations that don’t mind the hulls that gather under the feeders. For those who do mind, use hulled sunflower kernels (hearts) or chips. Most birds love it.

2) **Safflower** - there are those who will argue with me here, but it is the number one seed of choice for the cardinals, house finches and morning doves in my yard. Squirrels, starlings, grackles and even house sparrows really don’t like it. It is in most good mixes and I have one big tube feeder with a tray dedicated to it.

3) **Peanuts** – no one should be surprised that birds or almost any animal would love peanuts. They are high in oil and fat and convert easily to body heat. Even though it can drive up the cost, most good mixes have some nuts. It is far more economical to feed raw shelled peanuts via wire mesh peanut



*A Downy Woodpecker and Eastern Bluebird take advantage of the high oil content in peanuts on the NEW BirdQuest Spiral Peanut Feeder - \$29.99*

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*. . .continued from cover (Magic Seed)*

feeders. Woodpeckers, nuthatches and many others love them.

4) **Millet** – this seed often gets a bad rap. Many confuse it with milo (remember, #1 on the junk list) and it quite often gets tossed on the ground. Millet is a true favorite of many of the ground feeders like juncos, white-throated sparrows, indigo buntings and doves. It is also a favorite of the less desirable house sparrow. My problem is that I have them anyway so I use millet as a ground throw to both keep my house sparrows out of my good feeders and keep my “good” ground feeders happy.

5) **Nyjer** – also erroneously known as thistle. Nyjer is a specialty seed that is a favorite of the beloved goldfinch. A few other birds like it but for the most part, a feeder filled with nyjer is for the finches. It is grown in far away lands and sterilized before being imported.



*Goldfinches on the Droll Yankee 15” Finch \$24.99*

Mix or don’t mix. I have read that if you do not mix your seeds, you will not have an issue with bird throwing seed to the ground. Wrong. This sounds nice but it doesn’t work that way.

OK. Let’s go over all of this. Black Oil Sunflower is the best overall seed but to attract a diverse mix of birds, a variety of clean, high quality seed is best. Less dirt and grains, more quality seeds equal a greater value to you and your birds.



*Aspects’ New Fancy Swirl-Tray \$13.49*

### BETTER BIRD SEED PRICING THIS FALL

*The great growing conditions this fall have led to a good harvest in certain types of seed and I’m glad to pass along these savings to our customers. I hope this change even more but for now:*

50 lb. Black Oil Sunflower	\$13.99
50 lb. Fine Sunflower Chips	\$34.99
50 lb. Whole Sunflower Hearts	\$42.99
50 lb. Safflower	\$29.99
50 lb. Nyjer	\$39.99

### Cats and Birds

By Rick Jordahl

Not necessarily. If we love our cats as much as we love our birds, we will decide to keep our cats indoors.

It is best for the cat and best for our feathered friends! Because of their predatory instinct, cats are one of the biggest threats to the birds we love to see at our feeders. Cats kill thousands of birds each year when allowed to prowl outdoors. When roaming free, even well-fed house cats cannot resist killing birds.

Another important reason to keep cats indoors is for their own safety. Your cats’ nine lives can disappear quickly when they are hit by a car, contract a deadly virus or fall victim to a neighbor’s dog that is not cat-friendly. As responsible pet owners, make sure your pet is spayed or neutered. And keep the cat indoors. Get some new cat toys, cat-nip or perhaps a new bird feeder outsider their favorite window! You can entertain your cat right in the house and they will love you for it!

Birds are subject to many cruel facts of life including declining habitat, harsh weather, pollution and wild predators. Don’t add to their problems by letting your cat roam outdoors.

## IT’S TIME TO START THINKING ABOUT UNFROZEN WATER

Mention this ad for 10% off any

❖ **Heated Birdbath or** ❖  
**Birdbath De-Icer in Stock.**

*(Expires December 15, 2005)*



*The Heated BAIH from Erva attaches easily to your deck railing. Clamp On Mount \$54.99 Screw On Mount \$51.99 Ground Level \$54.99*



*The Farm Innovator P-418 Floating Pond De-Icer works for larger water features. \$48.99*



*Kozy Bird Spa Crescent Shaped De-Icers fit around statuary pieces. \$54.99*



*The Heated Kozy Bird Spa is made of tough impact plastic. It cleans up easily and has a 3 year warranty. Deck Mount \$89.99 With Pedestal \$124.99 Pedestal only \$39.99*



## Have Binos, Will Travel!

The summer birding season was terrific. It started with a very good migration season that extended into a mild nesting season. During the late summer hikes we had good fall warbler movement as well as great looks at Yellow-billed Cuckoos and numerous Indigo Buntings. The highlight of the season for me, was our trip to Duluth, Minnesota. The terrific weather and brilliant fall color topped off a great birding weekend. The definite stars were the raptors. Hawk Ridge Sanctuary is a true "Hot Spot" for birding in the fall. This marked the first time in my life that I was able to watch a Golden Eagle and a Bald Eagle soaring together. What a chance of a lifetime to study the flight profiles of those magnificent birds. Then there were the hundreds of Sharp-shinned Hawks, four Northern Goshawks, numerous Merlins, a gorgeous dark phased Rough-legged Hawk among the many Red-tailed Hawks and American Kestrels. Wow! What an experience.



*Minnesota Hawk Watching group with our adopted friend, a female Northern Goshawk*

❖ **The hikes and programs listed below fill on a first come first serve basis.** ❖  
**PLEASE call the store to register (816) 746-1113**

### Smithville Lake Waterbird Watching

**Sunday, November 6<sup>th</sup> 8:00a.m. – 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 out 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.**

### Identifying Birds In Your Backyard (in store class)

**Wednesday, November 16th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.**

Back by popular demand! Are you tired of not knowing the names of the birds you are seeing at your feeders? Do you get frustrated trying to figure out if it is a House Finch or a Purple Finch? Join us for an evening of Backyard Bird ID and we will solve some of the most common frustrations that new birders struggle with.

### Parkville Nature Sanctuary's Autumn Birds

**Thursday, November 17th 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.**

Join us for a beautiful autumn hike. We will search for

winter arrivals and resident birds that should be forming their winter forage flocks. This will be a great hike for beginning bird watchers. The terrain is somewhat hilly but not strenuous. Meet us at the store for a 9:00 a.m. departure or at the Sanctuary parking lot at 9:15.

### Eagles of Squaw Creek NWR

**Sunday, November 27th 7:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.**

I always say, "why sit around eating leftover turkey when you can soar with the eagles." This day is sure to be filled with beautiful sights. Last year we saw over 300 eagles and thousands of ducks and geese. Dress warmly and bring a snack.

**Meet at the store at 7:30 or the Visitor Center at 9.**

### Wyandotte County Lake

**Sunday, December 4th**

**9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.**

We will search the lake for arriving winter ducks and other waterfowl as well as the brushy areas for sparrows and their friends. This could be a cold day, dress for conditions.

**Meet at the store at 8:30 a.m.**



*Cooper's Hawk photo courtesy Steve Horton*



## NOW THIS IS COOOOOL!

*If you have a birder in your family that isn't intimidated by simple gadgets, this is got to be the coolest gift idea that I have seen in years. This software program for your PDA is really complete. It has the entire National Geographic Field Guide in it plus over 4 hours of bird song from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, a Listing program and an Identification program. We will carry both the program cards and a bundle special with the Palm Tungsten E2. Due out the first of the year, call or stop by for a special pre-order offer that includes a free carrying case and strap.*



## SPECIES PROFILE: Downy & Hairy Woodpeckers

by Ruth Simmons

The most common woodpecker at my feeders is the Downy Woodpecker, *Picoides pubescens*. I love the way they hitch up and down and around the trees and feeders! Downys love sunflower seed (especially in the chip form), peanuts, and suet.

They are the smallest of the our woodpeckers measuring in at about 6.5 inches from tail to beak. The male's bright red spot at the back of his head is the lone splash of color in the otherwise black and white bird.

But, if you look in your field guide you will see that the Downy has a nearly identical but larger and less common cousin, the Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*). While neither bird is particularly hairy or downy looking, they are named for the very fine, hair-like feathers that surround their beaks. This helps to protect their nostrils while chipping away at tree bark.

When you see the birds together on the same feeder or tree, it looks as if the Hairy is the parent and the



Downy (top) on Aspects' Peanut Silo \$24.99  
Hairy (bottom) on a Country Classic Upsidedown Suet Feeder - \$16.99

Downy is the baby bird! This is the perfect time to look for the subtle differences between the two species. There are differences at both ends of these cousins, so you should be able to make an ID no matter which end of the bird you can see! First, the beak: compare the length of the bill to the profile of the head. The beak of the Downy will be about half the length of the head's "thickness", but the beak of the Hairy will be equal to the head length. Males have another form of ID; look at the red spot at the nape of the neck. The Downy will have a solid red spot, but the Hairy's spot will be divided by a black line. Lastly, Downys have dots, dots on their outer white tail feathers while Hairys do not. Now there are always individuals that don't conform to the rules, but for the most part, these are excellent field marks to help with your ID skills. Remember: Downys have dots!!!

### CONSERVATION CORNER:

#### Amity Woods Nature Park

Little known to many of you, the 48 acre Amity Woods Nature Park is a newly dedicated Kansas City Parks and Recreation piece of property just a couple of mile from the store. The property became available through a land swap with a developer. The acreage is designated to become a nature area with hiking trails and signage. The strategic plan they have in place for the property is impressive.

On December 4th, the group will be joining forces with the Southern Platte County Athletic Association in hosting a 8K, 5K and fun run to raise money to help both groups meet their missions. Amity Woods will use the money to start installing trails on the property. You can call me for more information.

If you are the adventurous type that doesn't mind hiking without trails, the park is located on Amity Road just south of Hwy 152. The city installed a parking lot this year so get out and enjoy.

## WHITE MOUNTAIN PUZZLES

Nothing helps a stretch of cold, nasty weather pass quicker than a puzzle. A great family activity that not only encourages teamwork but with these White Mountain Puzzles you can learn bird identification as well. We have a good selection of 1,000 piece and 550 piece puzzles available.

550 Piece Designs:  
Cardinals & Friends  
Northern Tranquility  
(Loon Family)

**\$11.99**



1,000 Piece Designs:  
Birds of the Backyard  
Endangered Species  
State Birds & Flowers  
Butterflies  
Wildflowers  
Wild Ducks  
Forest Friends

**\$14.99**



## Time To Ask Mark...

### Q. Is there anything new in the battle against squirrels?

A. Foiling squirrels continues to be at the forefront of feeder design. I still feel the best way is a well positioned pole system with a quality baffle. It does seem that the issue of too many trees to prevent the air attack is becoming more common. If that is your case then you should consider a squirrel proof feeder. While we have several good models, the Squirrel Buster Plus from Brome (see picture) has become one of our best sellers.



*The Squirrel Buster Plus has quickly become a best seller in our squirrel-proof line. \$64.99*

### Q. Where have all of my birds been?

A. September and October are always the slowest months at feeders. This is the season of nature's bounty. Some years are better than others. The moisture and other factors this year must have been perfect because the amount of natural food out there is staggering. I have never seen so many acorns, walnuts, berries and seeds as I have this fall. Generally November 1st has always been my "unofficial" start of the feeder season and reports of increased feeder activity have been coming in this week. Finally!

### Q. Is there a difference in suets?

A. There are a couple of big differences in suet. First is the difference between summer and winter formulas. The no melt formulas for summer are doughier and have less fat in them. The other difference is (as always) quality. Cheap suet cakes are generally filled with "fillers", usually a cheap bag of bird seed. The birds that feed on suet cakes do it for the suet, not the millet seed in the cake. Better suet cakes cost a little more but contain only the basic ingredients that the birds want. My choices for the best winter cakes #1 Pure Suets, #2 Woodpecker Treat & #3 Peanut Treat.



*Woodpecker Treat from C&S is high quality suet.-\$2.29*

### Q. I have been hearing a lot about the Bird Flu. Should I stop feeding birds?

A. No. I have been trying to keep up with the latest on the Bird Flu and have found good information on the Cornell Web site among others. There is absolutely no record of the flu strain being passed from wild birds to humans. In fact all cases to date have been linked to people who work closely with the poultry industry. I also understand the wild birds it has been recorded in are mainly waterfowl and shorebirds (perhaps because of run off into wetlands from infected poultry operations. This extremely rare flu is really being hyped by the media.

## IDEAL HOLIDAY GIFTS FOR THE NATURE LOVER



*Gallery Stained Glass Hook.- \$14.99*



*Mad Bluebird Mugs, trays, vase, flags, memo pads and more - various*



*Richard Lamson Mini Bluebird Pair.- \$24.99*



*Wild Republic Singing Birds.-\$6.99*



*Great Starter Binoculars PowerView 4X20*



*Peterson's Bird By Ear CD.- \$30.00*

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### “THIS IS THE BEST HAT I’VE EVER OWNED”

We hear it over and over again. These hats are everything their reputation proclaims them to be. “I’ve worn mine birding, working in the yard, to ball games and I love it. Their UPF rating of 50 is the highest sun protection rating given and as a skin cancer victim, I appreciate that. I also love the fact that it floats and I can throw it in the washing machine or flatten it in my suitcase when I travel and it still looks as good as new. What can I say, it’s a Tilley” (Mark McKellar)

### THE VERY BEST BINOCULARS

On our recent birding trip to Minnesota, we spotted a duck way out in Lake Superior. I raised my **Nikon Premier 10X42 LXs** up to my eyes and said “It’s a Redhead”. More than one voice came from the back of the van “How did you know that?” I could see the details of the bird well enough to know beyond a shadow of a doubt what it was. There were lots of really good binoculars in the van but when we passed around the Premiers, everyone agreed they were noticeably better. Come in a compare them to yours.



### NEW AUDUBON SINGING BIRDS

- Turkey
- Killdeer
- Barn Swallow
- Common Yellowthroat
- American Kestrel
- Golden-winged Warbler

#### COLLECTORS’ SPECIAL RETURNS

*Buy any 6 birds from the same store and receive a Limited Edition Snowy Owl FREE (Expires December 31, 2005)*