



# BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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**Feeder Cleaning II**  
**Saturday, Sept. 24th**  
**9:00a.m. to 4:00p.m.**

Our first feeder cleaning weekend in April was highly successful. By day's end we had cleaned and/or repaired 60 feeders. Below is a picture of Parkville Nature Sanctuary Director

Jim Reed accepting our check from the proceeds of the day's work.



This time, cleaning day is just in time to get ready for the fall feeder season. Once again we will have a power washer on hand and as many spare parts as we can gather. You can drop off your feeders and we will give you an estimated pick up time.

The cost will be \$3.00 per feeder for cleaning with this fall's proceeds will go to the Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary in Liberty.

## Meet the Flockers

by Mark McKellar

Birds of a feather, flock together. Late summer and fall is the time that we really begin to notice large groups of birds (flocks). I know that I was taught at a young age, that the birds are gathering up to head south. The truth is that birds "flock" for many reason and each has its advantages.

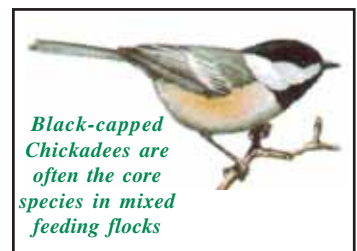
Obviously, there is strength in numbers. The more eyes you have searching for food and predators, the better. If one finds food, hopefully there will be enough for everyone. If a predator comes along, there should be enough "bodies" to increase you chance of survival.

Have you ever watched a large flock move "as one big unit?" The larger you look, the less appealing you will be to a predator. They can also confuse predators by suddenly splitting into several smaller groups and darting off in different directions. The disadvantage is that the more visible you are, the more attention you draw to yourself.

The flocks that get the least favorable press are the giant blackbird flocks of fall and winter. If you have ever been unfortunate enough to have one of these mass of feathers roost in a patch of trees near you, you know what I mean. The behavior is fascinating, but the noise and the mess are horrific. I've seen old movies of thousands and thousands of grackle, red-winged blackbirds, cowbirds and others being killed in a split second in the name of "animal control." This occurred regularly back in the 50s and 60s with much of it happening right here in the Midwest.

Waterfowl species like the Canada Goose are famous for flocking. I like to watch a group of geese as they graze. The next time you get the chance to watch them, try to keep count of how many heads are up and how many are down eating at the same time. Hopefully everyone will get a chance to eat as well as watch for predators.

Not all flocks are comprised of the same species of birds. It is common, especially a little later in fall, to find mixed foraging flocks. These feeding flocks can contain a dozen or so species but generally center around a specific group of birds (usually chickadees). Chickadees are known to be very good at finding food. Let's follow them!



*Black-capped Chickadees are often the core species in mixed feeding flocks*

The name of the game is survival. Whether it is for migrating, feeding, mate attraction or just sleeping at night, you can bet that the flockers have it all figured out.



# Listing

by Mark McKellar

Do you keep a Life List? Do you know what a life list is? While many people who love birds aren't familiar with the term life list, they often, unknowingly, have one. A life list is simply a list of birds (or any particular "thing") that you have seen or heard before. The list can be as simple or complex as one wants it to be.

One list can't be that hard to keep up with – right? Which list do you mean? The term life list generally refers to all of the birds you have ever seen – anywhere. For many people this soon turns into a "Yard List", a "Missouri List", a "Lower 48 States List" a "North America List" and a "World List". I have read about people who even have a list for birds they have seen in zoos, on television and even in magazines.

Are there rules for keeping a life list? Yes and no. If you are the type of person who wants to truly compare your list with others, you should abide by a set of listing standards established and kept by the American Birding Association. If your list is purely a personal thing, list as you want. For goodness sakes, I know someone who put a bird on her life list just because the dream she had about it was so real!

I didn't start keeping a life list when I first got hooked on birding but I sure wish I had. Like many people, I started by placing a simple checkmark beside the picture in my field guide. Soon I realized I should probably write in the date and place. The reality of this flawed system set in when my backpack containing my binoculars, field guide and "life list" was stolen. Once I got "serious" about "the list" I ordered the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's *Birder's Life List and Diary*. I sifted through all of my scraps of paper, notes from Ornithology class field trips, etc and started from scratch. Since that day, I have guarded that book carefully. While today I am using *The Birder's Diary* life list software program, I still keep that old book up to date and in a fire safe box at home.

On this page is a list of birds that we have been keeping for the shopping center itself. Even this "urban parking lot" has had a Bald Eagle and a Tennessee Warbler. Do yourself a favor, break out a notepad or other medium and start writing down the birds you know you have seen in your yard, then add new birds as they come along. It can be addictive.



## BOARDWALK BIRD LIST

Over the past three years or so we have been keeping a crude list for the "shopping center". Our criteria is that the bird has to be either in or above the boundaries of the shopping center.

- Double-crested Cormorant
- Great Blue Heron
- Snow Goose
- Canada Goose
- Turkey Vulture
- Bald Eagle
- Red-tailed Hawk
- American Kestrel
- Killdeer
- Ring-billed Gull
- Herring Gull
- Rock Pigeon
- Mourning Dove
- Common Nighthawk
- Chimney Swift
- Western Kingbird
- Eastern Kingbird
- Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
- American Crow
- Purple Martin
- Tree Swallow
- Northern Rough-winged Swallow
- Barn Swallow
- American Robin
- Northern Mockingbird
- European Starling
- Tennessee Warbler
- Chipping Sparrow
- Savannah Sparrow
- Red-winged Blackbird
- Common Grackle
- House Finch
- American Goldfinch
- House Sparrow



## 500 FREE BAGS OF BIRD SEED



No, that isn't a misprint. As I write this, we are soon to give away our 500th FREE bag of bird seed. It should happen sometime in early August, which is very close to the three year anniversary of our starting this program. Your still not participating? All Wild Delight products are Buy 10 get the 11th FREE (same seed, same size bag). The seed is the cleanest you'll ever find and we keep the "cards" here so you don't have to keep up with them.



## Have Binos, Will Travel!

After having two subpar birding springs in a row, we were due to have a good one. For those who joined us on some of our spring outings, you know that we had a very good migration season. The birds at Weston Bend and Watkin's Mill were exceptional. Though rain shortened, Weston produced 61 species (14 different warblers) and Watkin's Mill greeted us with perfect weather, 71 species (17 different warblers) and stunning looks at Bay-breasted Warbler, Philadelphia Vireo and two very close Scarlet Tanagers. As always, spring re-energizes us as birders and reminds us of why we love this hobby so much.



*A Wonderful Day of Birding at  
Watkin's Mill State Park*

**The hikes and programs listed below are available to our store customers**  
(not organized groups, they can be arranged separately)  
**space is limited and fill on a first come first serve basis.**  
**PLEASE call the store to register (816) 746-1113**

### **Beginning Bird Watching Family Edition (in store)**

**Wednesday, August 10<sup>th</sup> 7:00p.m. to 8:30p.m.**

By popular demand, we are going to gear this class for all ages. Bird watching is a great family activity. We will cover the basics of bird identification and lots more.

### **Parkville Nature Sanctuary Hike**

**Thursday, August 11th 8:30 a.m. to 10.00 a.m.**

A great hike to combine with the program on the 10th. We should see lots of young birds and early neotropical migrants will be on the move. This can be a good time of year to see hawks on the move.

**Meet at the store at 8:00 or at the Parking lot at 8:20.**

### **Get Ready For Winter Bird's Quiz (in store)**

**Wednesday, September 14<sup>th</sup> 7:00p.m. to 8:30p.m.**

Yes. Quiz. It has been suggested that the only way for someone to truly learn to identify birds is to be quizzed on them. I will set up a fun "quiz" with bonus birds and all. No one will see your "score" if you don't want them to and I will give prizes to all who attend.

### **Weston Bend State Park Fall Hike**

**Sunday, Sept. 18th 8:00 a.m. to noon**

Best known for its annual spring migration. We will visit this great location during the peak of fall migration. Bring a snack and your best binoculars.

**Meet at the store at 7:30 or at the Park Gate at 8:00.**



*Cedar Waxwings  
are common on  
late summer hikes  
photo courtesy of  
Steve Dillinger*

### **The Rain In Spain . . . (in store class)**

**Monday, Sept 26th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.**

By popular demand, Ruth will catch us all up on her recent trip to Spain (and Ireland & England). She spent most of her time in Valencia and has many splendid pictures from that part of the world. And, of course, teach us about the birdlife of the region.

### **Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary**

**Thursday, September 22nd 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m..**

A real transition time for birds. We should see both early winter arrivals as well as many birds that are on their way south. The shrubby prairie edges at MLTNS can be great for fall warblers and sparrows.

**Meet at the nature center at 8:00 (call for directions)**

### **Landscaping For Birds**

**Sunday, October 2nd 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m..**

Another program by popular demand. We will visit one of my very favorite back yards.

Joanne Holman of Plattsburg has been landscaping with native vegetation for years and birds are one of the major benefactors of her hard work. Join us for an afternoon of learning "food, water & shelter" so your yard will be a bird magnet.

**Meet at the store at 2:00 or call for directions.**



*Butterfly Weed is a  
beautiful native  
wildflower photo  
courtesy of RickJordahl*

### **Hawk Watching and More in Minnesota**

**October 8th, 9th & 10th - Call for More Information and Pricing**

Hawk Ridge in Duluth Minnesota is a wonderful place to observe hawks as they head south. We will check out Lake Superior for ducks, loons and other waterfowl as well as surrounding woods for Black-backed Woodpeckers and Spruce Grouse. If we are lucky, some early winter arrivals will be in.



## SPECIES PROFILE: Common Nighthawk

by Ruth Simmons

When I was little I read the Peter Cottontail books and in one, Peter was terrified by a bird that swooped down and made a booming noise right over his head. At first he thought it was a hawk trying to eat him. Later he learned that he didn't need to be afraid, because the bird was not a real hawk, it was a nighthawk. This was my first introduction to the Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*). The name Nighthawk is misleading because they are not related to hawks, but are close cousins to Whip-or-wills.

Their nasal *peent* call is commonly heard on late spring and summer evenings over well lit (insect rich) areas. I love to watch the way they flit through the sky then suddenly change direction to catch an insect in their wide, gaping mouth. They consume large quantities of flying insects including mosquitos.

Nighthawks will also dive straight for the ground and then pull out at the last second. The air rushing

through their feathers creates the booming sound that gave Peter Cottontail such a fright. This is done by the males as part of their courtship.

Their eggs are laid on leaves on the forest floor, in sand, abandoned robin's nests or in the gravel of flat roofs in the city. Common Nighthawks are summer residents of most of the United States and Canada. During the winter they range throughout South America to Argentina.

Nighthawks are pretty easy to pick out while in the sky; they are larger (9.5 inches) birds with long, pointy wings that have a wide, white bar near the tip. It also helps that they are constantly calling, "peent ... peent ... peent." Their black, grey, brown, and tan mottled feathers easily blend in with a pile of leaves or the bark of a tree making them nearly impossible to find while at rest.

On your next evening run to the grocery store, listen for the "peent" and then watch the skies for the hawk that's not really a hawk!



Common Nighthawks from *The Sibley Guide to Birds* from Knopf Press

## CONSERVATION CORNER: Parkville Nature Sanctuary

I'm not real sure why it has taken me this long to write about this little gem of a place. So few people know about the Parkville Nature Sanctuary it is truly a shame. My association with the sanctuary started way back when I was at Martha Lafite. My friend and volunteer naturalist, Jim Reed, told me that he had become involved with this piece of property in Parkville and they were installing hiking trails and signage with intentions of it becoming a nature sanctuary.

The sanctuary is located behind the Parkville town hall on 9 Hwy (basically it is below the Riss Lake Dam). Formerly a farm for producing food for Park College students, today the Parkville Nature Sanctuary encompasses 115 acres thanks, in part, to the 1997 acquisition of 69 acres of forested hillside from Park University by the Missouri Department of Conservation.

A tireless volunteer corp has installed miles of hiking trails, a great board-walk over a rich wetland area and they also lead hikes for organized groups and the public. The area is teeming with wildlife and on any given day you are likely to see white-tailed deer, wild turkey, wood ducks and numerous other birds. If it is wildflowers you are seeking, a walk through the diverse woods and wetland area will prove productive for you much of the year.

Like all private, nonprofit organizations, Parkville Nature Sanctuary can use your help. For information about joining their friends support group, contact their Director, Jim Reed at 741-0820. You can also learn more from their website, get more precise directions and download a great map to their trails. ([www.parkvillemo.com/nature/](http://www.parkvillemo.com/nature/)).



### Don't Forget Your Conservation Discount

We give 10% discounts to those who show proof of current membership in the following conservation groups:

- The Nature Conservancy* ([www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org))
- National Audubon Society* ([www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org)) (including state and/or local chapters)
- American Bird Conservancy* ([www.abcbirds.org](http://www.abcbirds.org))
- Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary* ([www.naturesanctuary.com](http://www.naturesanctuary.com))

Discount applies to regular price and clearance merchandise but can not be combined with other specials or coupons.



## Time To Ask Mark...

### Q. How do I attract Gray Catbirds?

A. A lot of people noticed that I recently wrote that catbirds are attracted to grape jelly. Like a lot of birds, placing a particular kind of food out isn't always enough. Habitat, habitat, habitat. Catbirds are fond of thick, shrubby areas. You will have far greater luck attracting a lot of birds if you leave part of your yard "wild." I chuckle when people talk about clearing out all of the "snakey" looking places. It doesn't have to be a jungle, but leaving an area of natural ground cover and a shrub layer is very important to wildlife. Gray Catbirds, Eastern Towhees, Brown Thrashers, Wrens and many of the native sparrows are especially attracted to these areas.

### Q. Would it do me any good to put up a Purple Martin house this late?

A. You would not get any nesting activity this late, but many theorize that as martins gather to migrate south in the fall, they are scouting out potential nesting sites for next year. If you do, be careful to keep sparrows from setting up nest.



Coates WatersEdge 14 Martin Box  
photo courtesy of Jim Andrews

### Q. Some of the bird names in my field guide are wrong. Who decides on bird names and why do they change them?

A. This can be frustrating, especially if your field guide is an older one. A group of experts known as the American Ornithologist Union (AOU) sets the "standard" names for birds. Researchers submit recommendations for changing names, lumping bird species together (the orioles a few years ago), splitting species apart (the orioles more recently), etc. The AOU then rules on those recommendations. In the past many name changes were associated with aligning more accurately "our names" with other birds on the planet. A good example was the changing of our Sparrow Hawk to American Kestrel because the European species have had the more accurate names far longer. While it can be confusing, in the end the system works.

### Q. Should I store my birdseed inside or outside?

A. I am a firm believer in storing my seed outside in aluminum cans with a good bungy cord holding the lid on. Late summer is the time we see the worst of the insects in bird seed. Sunflower, corn, peanuts and any grain product are naturally vulnerable to meal (or pantry) moths. The prime hatching time for the small white caterpillars is in late summer. They will find a tight hiding spot, "silk up" and soon emerge as a moth. The absolute best way to prevent this is to keep your seed in the freezer. The alternative method is to, at least during late summer, buy smaller quantities and keep it outside. If you do have problems with the moths, the pheromone traps by Spring Star work very well. I keep them out at the store and our house at all times.



## NEWSLETTER READERS ONLY



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## TILLEYS AREN'T JUST FOR SUMMER

While the summer weight LTM5&6 have been the hottest selling Tilley's. My favorite hat for the fall season is the T4. It is a medium weight hat with all of the same features and guarantees. All Tilley's have a UPF rating of 50 (the highest rating given) and are the only hat endorsed by the Mayo Clinic for skin cancer prevention. They are guaranteed for LIFE not to wear out, washable, water resistant and have a 2 Year Lost/Stolen 50% replacement warranty. Tilley's are loved by golfers, gardeners, boaters and birdwatchers alike.

## AUGUST IS OUR BEST HUMMINGBIRD MONTH!

Each year I want to make sure that you know how good August is for hummingbirds. Far too many people get disappointed in not having them during the heart of the summer and take their feeders down. During August we have all of our adults, their young and by mid-August we start seeing migrants from our northern neighbors. Keep the nectar fresh and separate your feeders a little to accommodate them all.

*Hummingbirds are generally more cooperative at the feeder during the "fall" migration season.*



*We have a new shipment of hand-carved birds from Hummingbird Studios in stock.*

## GREAT BIRD CONSERVAITON WEBSITES

[www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org)  
[www.nature.org/missouri](http://www.nature.org/missouri)  
[www.naturesanctuary.com](http://www.naturesanctuary.com)  
[www.abcbirds.org](http://www.abcbirds.org)  
[www.ivorybill.org](http://www.ivorybill.org)