



BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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

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Feeder Cleaning Weekend

**Saturday, April 2nd
 9:00a.m. to 5:00p.m.**

Because it is important to protect the health of our birds, we are going to start a new program. Each spring and fall, we will host a bird feeder cleaning and repair day.

We will have a power washer on hand and as many spare parts as we can gather. You can drop off your feeders in the morning and we will give you an estimated time to pick them up later that day. This will depend on the number of participants and the condition of your feeder.

The cost will be \$3.00 per feeder for cleaning and \$5.00 if there are repairs that have to be made. We reserve the right to "proclaim" a feeder unrepairable or uncleanable.

All proceeds will go the Parkville Nature Sanctuary.

"Clean Feeders Help Prevent the Spread of Disease and Illness."

No Tall Tail?

by Mark McKellar

Ever wonder why a Mockingbird's tail is long while a Meadowlark's is short and stubby? Nature is full of wonderful adaptations and birds have more than their fair share. In the bird world, everything is about weight and the ability to fly so you can bet the size and shape of their tail is no larger than they need it to be.

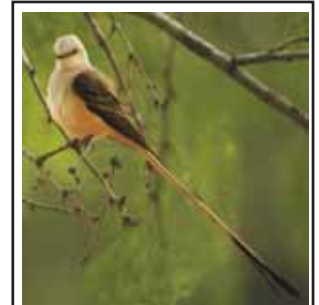
Birds use their tails for many different things but for the most part they are used as either a prop, rudder or brake. If your lifestyle doesn't require you to be highly maneuverable or brace yourself firmly against something, why drag around a long, weighty load. No, I haven't forgotten about peacocks and other showy animals. A very small percentage of species are willing to burden themselves for sake of courtship and mate attraction.

Remember that stubby-tailed Meadowlark I spoke of? This bird lives in wide open grasslands eating insects and seeds. Its lifestyle doesn't require it to zig and zag through dense foliage or turn on a dime to catch fast moving prey, so a short tail works just fine.

The Coopers Hawk on the other hand makes its living zipping through forests catching elusive small birds and mammals. Their long tail is essential for steering and stopping quickly. If you have ever seen one speed through a forest, you know where they get their nickname – Blue Darters.

Perhaps no other family of birds has more special adaptations than woodpeckers. Watching one of these animals on a feeder (or especially a tree) will help divulge other uses for tails. Feathers are extremely strong structures for their relative weight, but woodpeckers have evolved with even stronger, stiffer tail feathers. They use their tails as a "kickstand" or prop. Their two feet get a good grip on the wood but without their tail anchored against the tree they would not be able to generate nearly as much force while drumming.

The next time you are studying a bird, take the time to observe the tail. Can you guess the bird's lifestyle due to its tail size and shape? Do you think it lives in woodlands or open space? Does it chase fast prey or "slow" seeds? Remember, in the bird world, it's all about weight so the size and shape of a bird's tail, like other features, is no accident.



A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher's long tail is essential for catching fast moving, highly maneuverable insects



Downy Woodpecker using his kickstand on an Aspect Peanut Silo



Project Feeder Watch

by Ruth Simmons

Here at the store we get asked many questions; “Where have the cardinals gone?” “We had so many hummingbirds last year, why do we only have two this year?” “Where do the birds go in winter?” Scientists are answering these and many more bird related questions with help from people just like you. If you have 30 minutes per day, two days in a row, just two times per month, then Project Feeder Watch is a great way for you to help birds. You don’t have to be an expert; even beginners are important contributors to the program. The program includes identification guides and on line help as well.

Project Feeder Watch started as the Ontario Feeder Bird Survey in 1976 and has become a joint research project between the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Bird Studies Canada, Audubon, and the Canadian Nature Federation. Each year from November through March, “citizen scientists” like you and I help them track the winter movements and numbers of birds in North America by counting and identifying the birds at our feeders and then sending in the data to Cornell. Our data will help to answer the questions of who, what, where, and when in the bird world. Are there more black-capped chickadees in New York or Missouri this year? Are the birds leaving drought areas for wetter pastures? More importantly, what species have had dangerous declines in population?

There is a slight fee of \$15.00 to participate. For your fee you receive the Feederwatch Handbook, an ID poster, a 14-month calendar with Feederwatch photographs, instructions, data forms, and a subscription to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology newsletter. For those of you with computers, you can sign up and send in your data electronically. Not into computers? You can register by phone or mail and then send in your data by regular mail.

For more information or to register:

Website: <http://birds.cornell.edu/pfw>

Call: 800-843-2473 or

Write: Project Feederwatch/GBBC

PO Box 11

Ithaca, New York 14851-0011

Another way to participate is by going to the Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary in Liberty, Missouri. For more information and count dates call the Sanctuary: 781-8598.

Another project that Cornell sponsors is the Great Backyard Bird Count, February 18-21, 2005. This count is four days long, and they ask that you count at least 15 minutes/day for one or more days. Because this count is only done via the Internet it is free. For more information you can visit their website: <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>

One of things I have learned over the years about people who feed birds, is that they want to help. Project feeder watch is an easy way to help birds and learn bird identification at the same time.



Creature Feature: Southern Flying Squirrel

While most of my customers spend a lot of time and effort trying to keep squirrels out of their feeders, there are a few exceptions out there. The Orr family of Parkville brought in this photo recently of a welcome furry visitor.



Southern Flying Squirrel on a Stonewood Mfg. Mini-Magnum

Southern Flying Squirrels are not common in our area but they do occur. If you live in an area with lots of trees, it is worth keeping your eyes open and looking up when you take a moonlit evening stroll. Or, as in the Orr’s case, it is worth checking out your feeders at night. This fine fellow is enjoying a meal of our *Total Cuisine*. We have also had reports of them on peanut feeders.

Small and nocturnal, flying squirrels can’t really fly but the excessive amount of skin that stretches from their forearms to the hind legs acts like a parachute when they launch themselves from a tree. Like all squirrels, they prefer nuts and seeds.

If you would rather get a look at them during the day, here is a trick you can try. The next time you are in a heavily wooded area and come across a tree with a woodpecker hole in it, take a pine cone or stick and scrape up and down on the bark. This gives the tree’s residents the impression that something is climbing the tree and will at least draw a gaze from whoever is inside. I have had a flying squirrel pop out and soar right over my head only to land on another tree 30 feet away and quickly climb out of sight. They don’t always jump so make sure you get your binoculars on the hole quickly and look for eyes.



Have Binos, Will Travel!

This fall really did top off a great year of bird trips for the store. We were able to find a spot sheltered from the wind at Smithville Lake so we could study the large gathering of ducks and gulls. Parkville Nature Sanctuary was loaded with Cedar Waxwings and many good migrants like Purple Finch and a single Rusty Blackbird. Our trip to Squaw Creek produced nice looks at 100 or so Bald Eagles, scads of ducks and geese as well as an immature Tundra Swan.



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

Welcome Back The Nesting Birds (in store class)

Thursday, February 24th 7:00p.m. to 8:30p.m.

Believe it or not, it is time to start thinking about the nesting birds we have in our yards. We will talk about both artificial and natural nesting habitat for wrens, bluebirds, martins and a host of other species. Come with questions about your favorite yard nesters.

Fear Not The Sparrow (ID, that is) (in store class)

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

Sparrows are a wonderful group of birds. They are far, far more than just LBB (little brown birds) and identifying them isn't nearly as hard as most people think. April is the best month for sparrows in our area so lets get prepared.

Spring Smithville Lake Tour

Sunday, March 20th 2:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

This unique look at Smithville Lake will take us all around one of our areas best bird magnet. We will search the main lake for waterfowl, then head north to check on the nesting status of resident Bald Eagles before searching for owls at sunset. This will be an adventure.

Meet at the store at 2:30 or the Litton Center at 3:00.



Identifying Birds In Your Backyard (in store class)

Thursday, April 14th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

This is the spring version of the class we did last fall. This time we will concentrate on the "yard birds" of the spring and summer season. You may be surprised at the variety of warblers, tanagers and others that frequent urban yards each spring.

Parkville Nature Sanctuary's Early Spring Birds

Saturday, April 16th 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

Celebrate Tax Day being over by getting out with us for a bird hike. We will be looking for the early Spring migrants that should be on the move by then. Meet us at the store at 9:00am or at the Sanctuary parking lot at 9:15.

Eastern Missouri Bird Tour

April 23rd through April 28th

This is a bird tour that I have been asked many times to do. We will load up a van or two and hit the road in search of as many Missouri birds as possible. This will truly be a road trip so be ready to ride as we will target prime areas for warblers, waterfowl, shorebirds and much more. If you've been looking for the chance pad your Missouri bird list with some of the "hard to find" birds, this is the trip for you.

Call 816-746-1113 for more information and pricing.

THE BEST KEEPS GETTING BETTER



The Nikon Venturer LX is now the Nikon Premier LX. With the name change also comes a 20% Reduction in weight and the use of their lead and arsenic free Eco-Glass. They are hands down the finest binoculars I have ever seen and are now much lighter to carry.

We have a full line of binoculars and scopes, starting at \$16

**TAKE
\$50 OFF**

**ANY PREMIER LX
(EXPIRES MAR. 31ST)**



SPECIES PROFILE: Nuthatches

by John Burwell

I was filling my feeder when out of the corner of my eye I caught a flash of blue. The nuthatch was back again. This time picking up pieces of peanuts. I couldn't help but be amazed at his unique ability of walking along the limb upside down. With its long toes and strong claws, he appears to defy gravity.

In the distance, I could hear his repetitious nasal "Yank" call. It sounds a bit like laughter.

The male sports a dark black cap on a slate blue back. His white belly matches the spots on each side of his short tale.

He offers food to his mate as an act of pair bonding. Spring is coming and courting begins again. Last year he dropped chunks of bark into the knot hole to prepare the nest cavity. Ant bodies were smeared all around the entrance. This helps to make the nest hole less appealing to squirrels in search of their own nest cavity. Who wants to live with ants climbing all over the place? Grasses, rootlets



White-breasted Nuthatch on an Anti-Starling Suet Feeder from Second Nature

and fur will support five to eight lightly spotted white eggs. A two week incubation period begins after the final egg is laid. Upon hatching, the mate feeding ends and many trips back to the nest with insects and larva are made by both parents.

The surrounding area of mixed mature hardwoods with scattered standing dead trees is ideal habitat for these birds. Mostly an insect eater, suet, seeds and nuts have to do in winter. Pairs may spend 7 to 10 years in the same area.

Recently a customer called about a smaller nuthatch with a black eye stripe and reddish breast. Could this be the female? What she described was a Red-breasted Nuthatch. Not present every winter, red-breasteds will wander out of Canada and northern United States in years of poor pine seed production. Their slimmer bills work great for extracting seeds from pinecones while their larger, white-breasted cousin uses its heavier bill to crack seeds and nuts, thus the name Nuthatch.



Red-breasted Nuthatch eating black-oil sunflower seeds.

CONSERVATION CORNER: Cornell Lab of Ornithology

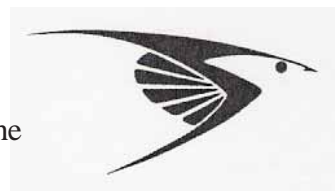
In the world of Ornithology, Cornell University is known as the "Bird School," with good reason. Cornell has produced some of the greatest Ornithologists of our time and is the academic institution that leads citizen science efforts in collecting wild bird information. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a nonprofit membership institution whose mission is to interpret and conserve the earth's biological diversity through research, education and citizen science focused on birds.

Cornell Lab annually compiles the data for Project FeederWatch and the Great Backyard Bird Count (see Ruth's article on page 2). These efforts provide biologists with invaluable information about bird populations, migration trends and to some extent, the effects feeder stations are having on certain species.

Another Cornell "claim to fame" is their collection of bird song recordings. Many of the bird song tapes and CD's on the market today utilize Cornell's song library.

If you want to learn a lot more about birds, the Cornell Lab offers a fantastic learn at your own pace home course on bird biology. It comes with a ton of information and quizzes as well as a "diploma" when you've finished.

Cornell's contributions to conservation are generally overlooked. The education value of the bird recordings and project feeder watch has been huge. The more informed people are about the natural world, the more concerned they are about its health. To get more information about Cornell, Project Feeder Watch and all of their efforts, please visit www.birds.cornell.edu or stop by the store and pick up one of their brochures.



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)
- National Audubon Society (www.audubon.org) (including state and/or local chapters)
- American Bird Conservancy (www.abcbirds.org)
- Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary (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. I hear the cage feeders are great at keeping out squirrels and starlings. Is there a way to easily make a cage feeder out of one of my tube feeders I already have?

A. Yes. Duncraft makes a great little cage called the Creat-A-Haven. Most flat top tube feeders that are 18 inches or less will slide inside it.

Q. I have seen a hawk hanging around my backyard. What kind is it and what can I do to protect my birds.

A. If you read last issue's Hawk Gawking article, you know that there are a few species of hawks that live here in winter, but the most common "bird feeder" hawks are the Coopers and Sharp-shinned Hawks. I always struggle with telling people to do anything to discourage hawks because they have to eat too, but . . . First, make sure your feeders are close to some type of escape cover (trees, bushes, etc.). If this isn't convenient for viewing your feeders, consider building a temporary brush pile. This year's Christmas tree works great. While it is rare for a raptor to "stay" at a feeder station for an extended period, you can try bringing in your feeders for a couple of days to get them to move on.

Q. I have so many house finches at my feeders, my goldfinches can't seem to get a turn at the feeders. What can I do?

A. There are two things that I have found effective. Since House Finches do not like to hang upside down to feed, the feeders from Perky-Pet that have the ports beneath the perches are effective. I have also found that House Finches heavily prefer Safflower, so if I have Safflower available they leave the Nyjer and *Black Tie Mix* for my goldfinches.

Q. I love Blue Jays. What do should I be feeding them?

A. I like Blue Jays too. They have a wide diet but love acorns in the wild. At my feeders, I treat them to peanuts in the shell. I love watching them cart them off one or two at a time. The ones they don't eat, they will store away for later. Do they ever find them all? Probably not.



Male House Finch
Photo Courtesy of
Fiske Miles

Nutty Deal

Treat the Blue Jays and the squirrels, if you like.

Wild Delight

Inshell Peanuts

5lb Bag = \$6.99

(Limit 2 Expires 2/28/05)



BLUEBIRD SEASON SPECIAL

Free Metal Portal Guard

It isn't hard to see why the Mor-Bilt Window-view Bluebird Box is our best seller. The window-view door provides easy viewing of eggs and young, without the fear of the little guys jumping out. The clean out door makes cleaning out after each nesting simple.



Through April 15th, mention this ad and get a FREE Songbird Essential Portal Guard with the purchase of any Mor-Bilt Window-view Bluebird Box.



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WE NOW HAVE TILLEYS

Do you Tilley? When Alex Tilley says he started an international phenomenon by accident, he isn't kidding. All he wanted was a good hat for his boating hobby. When he couldn't find anything he liked, he made his own. Today, Tilley hats have reached almost cult status. They 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 Loss/Stolen 50% replacement warranty. Tilleys are loved by golfers, gardeners, boaters and birdwatchers alike. **Summer is coming - protect yourself.**

TOLD YA!

I've always said that the best way to attract bluebirds in winter is with unfrozen water. This picture was taken by our customers Chuck & Karen de la Durantaye on Christmas Day. They've always loved their birdbath de-icer, but these guys sure add color to a cold winter day.

No its not too late to get a de-icer for this winter season!



A winter flock of Eastern Bluebirds at Missouri birdbath equipped with a de-icer



We now have the highly acclaimed Lone Star Purple Martin Houses in stock!

UPCOMING IMPORTANT BIRD DATES

February 15th or so - Clean Out & Place Bluebird Boxes

March 1st - Open 1 Martin House Door

March 10th - Average Arrival Date For Adult Male Martins

April 1st - Clean out all nest boxes (wrens, chickadees, titmouse)

April 5th - Hang Hummingbird Feeders (with small amount of nectar)

April 15th - Place Oriole Feeders

Late April - Male House Wrens arrive and set up territories