



BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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

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We have a newly restocked supply of Wild Republic singing birds:

\$7.49

Hatching Times

- Am. Goldfinch ~11 days
- House Wren ~12 days
- Northern Cardinal ~13 days
- Killdeer ~26 days
- Canada Goose ~28 days
- Barred Owl ~30 days

Most of the information for this article was taken from one of my favorite books:

The Birder's Handbook
 by Erhlich, Dobkin & Wheye
\$20.00



Cerulean Warbler
 Photo courtesy of Steve Dillinger

Are They Done Yet?

by Mark McKellar

Eggs are fascinating structures and the variety of shapes and colors have intrigued people for years. One of the most commonly asked questions this time of year is “How long does it take for an egg to hatch?” As you can easily guess, the answer is highly variable and depends of many factors including the size and life-style of the bird.

One major factor that dictates the length of incubation time is the life-style a bird leads. Ground “living” birds like Northern Bobwhites and Killdeer are known as **precocial** birds. To survive the many perils that these hatchlings face, they have to be ready to “hit the ground running”, literally. Precocial young hatch fully covered with down feathers, have strong leg muscles, good eyesight and hearing. The price that these birds pay for this advanced development is a longer amount of time in the egg. The 24 days a Bobwhite requires to hatch her young means she has to remain in the vulnerable position of a ground nest longer than her “tree dwelling” cousins.

Most of our most common birds take a very different approach. **Altricial** birds incubate their eggs for a relatively short period of time (12 to 14 days is common), but their young are naked, blind and defenseless at hatching. While hatchlings grow quickly, a high degree of parental care is required for their young’s ensured survival.

Most of our songbirds adhere to **synchronous** hatching times. They don’t start incubating eggs until they have all been laid to ensure that they all hatch close together. Purple Martins on the other hand are among those who have **asynchronous** hatching. Their eggs hatch over a period of several days. While this would seem to give the first young to hatch a huge advantage over the others, this doesn’t always hold true. For birds like martins who’s food source of flying insects can be drastically affected by weather, the first young may not make it if food is scarce. A crucial insect hatch may not occur until the first couple of young have starved.

Like so many aspects of a bird’s life, eggs and nesting is a fascinating subject. The ultimate goal is to make sure their genes are passed along. You can bet that the size of the eggs, the number of eggs laid, the number of nests per season and all factors are genetically imprinted in birds to ensure success.



Yellow Warbler's Nest with egg.
 Photo courtesy of Linda Williams



Eastern Kingbird's Nest with Altricial hatchling.
 Photo courtesy of Linda Williams



Keep It Moving, Keep It Moving!

by Mark McKellar

Birds are attracted to water, especially moving water. At no time of the year is this more true than during migration. Birds that are “out of their element” count on cues to find the things they need the most. The sound of moving water is like a beacon to these birds in need.

Moving water can be provided in several different ways. If you already have a bird bath of some type, the simplest way to get the water moving is by adding either a “bubbler” or a “dripper.” **Bubblers** do not add fresh water to a system, they simply recirculate the water that you have. Bubblers are generally made to look like a rock and have a pump to pull the water up so that it can cascade down over itself. They do require electricity to operate.



Granite Bubbler from Avian Aquatics - \$34.99

A **dripper** does not require electricity, but does require a connection to a water supply. Drippers, as the name implies, provide a steady dripping source of water. We do have one recirculating model that does not require a water source but most do. Some customers are scared off of drippers when we tell them they have to be hooked up to a water source but they really are very simple to operate. They come with a Y-connector that fits on an outside faucet. They also come with 50 feet of hose and a control valve. The amount of water that is “dripping” can be finely adjusted.



Dripper from Avian Aquatics - \$44.99

Another favorite water mover is the **mister**. Misters are similar in many ways to drippers but instead of dripping water, it emits a fine spray of water into the air. Misters with a base can be used in a bird bath. Those without bases can be set up to spray into a birdbath or snaked into a bush or tree and allowed to spray into the vegetation. Birds will sit in or fly through the spray or catch water droplets as they fall from the leaves. This is a great way to water plants.



Rock-base Mister by Avian Aquatics - \$49.99

If you don't have a water feature or are looking to add one, you can set up a system with pumps, waterfalls and/or cascades built in. Molded plastic and fiberglass models can be placed on decks and patios or landscaped into your garden. We sell larger “pond” and multi-pooled stream kits that can be constructed with far less effort than one might imagine.



As you already know, we have had a dry winter, a dry spring and all forecast are for a hot, dry summer as well. Water will soon be in critical demand by birds and other wildlife.

New Binoculars In Sock

Contrary to belief, I do admit that there are other companies that make good binoculars out there. I am constantly on the lookout for optics that I can proudly endorse and exceptional deals that I can pass along to my customers. This spring I have added a few pieces to our optical line.

Audubon Equinox HP

These feature packed binoculars can compete optically with glasses costing twice as much. A much welcome value binocular. **\$249.99**



Pentax Papilio 6.5X21

These incredible little binoculars are known as the ultimate butterflying bino. Their ultra close focus of 18 inches is unequalled and they pack a really wide field of view for birding. **\$149.99**



Pentax DCF HS 8X36

A great price for a water resistant roof prism binocular. A wide field of view and strong lightweight frames make these a great startup binocular. **A great value at \$199.99**



Pentax 20-60X65mm Spotting Scope

A smaller version of our best selling spotting scope. This smaller scope is lighter to carry but still features the large eyepiece that gives this line of scopes their ultrabright reputation. **Body, Eyepiece and Case \$799.99**





Have Binos, Will Travel!

Winter is the time that we schedule the smallest number of outdoor programs for the obvious reasons. This winter we could have been out almost everyday and birded comfortably. The birding was indeed different this year. We had large numbers of robins, bluebirds and raptors all winter, while many ducks just never made it this far south. Our March trip to Smithville Lake was once again the highlight of the season. Five beautiful Common Loons could easily be seen with our spotting scopes, an immature Bald Eagle swooped down and got a fish right in front of us and the Short-eared Owls came out just at sunset.



Hawkwatching in Duluth Minnesota

The hikes and programs listed below are available to our store customers and fill on a first come first serve basis.

PLEASE call the store for more information and to register (816) 746-1113

Swope Park Warbler Walk **Kansas City, MO**

Thursday, May 4th 7:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

Swope Park is one of the largest city parks in the country and it can be loaded with birds during spring migration. We will meet at Lakeside Nature Center and explore some potential migration hot spots and still have time to get in a nearly full day at work.

Watkins' Mill State Park **Kearney, MO**

Sunday, May 7th 7:00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m.

Last year we had a truly spectacular Hike at Watkins Mill State Park. The large tracks of timber can be loaded with warblers and other migrants. Join us for a beautiful hike around the lake at the absolute best time of the year. Bring a sack lunch.

Call for meeting spot and directions.



Prairie Warbler photo courtesy of Steve Dillinger

Weston Bend/Little Bean Marsh **Weston, MO**

Thursday, May 11th 7:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

This should be very close to peak migration so we will explore a couple of the best spots around. We'll start at my favorite spot, Weston Bend, then head up to Little

Bean around noon. With a little luck, we should top 100 species for the day. Bring a sack lunch.

Meet at the store at 7:00 or at the Park Gate at 7:20.

Cooley Lake **Missouri City, MO**

Thursday, May 18th 7:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

Depending on water conditions, Cooley Lake Conservation Area can be a great little wetland area. Shorebirds, ducks, rails, terns and a host of resident songbirds should be joined by some late migrants.

Call for meeting spot and directions.



Belted Kingfisher photo courtesy of Rick Jordahl

Dunn Ranch **Eagleville, MO**

Sunday, May 21st 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m..

With migration almost over, we turn our attention to the nesting birds of our area. The day will be a wonderful study in the residents of the tallgrass prairie. We will have a chance to study Meadowlarks, Bobolinks, Upland Sandpipers, Loggerhead Shrikes and search for less common residents like Black-billed Cuckoo and Sedge Wren. Bring snacks and water. We will stop for lunch

Call for meeting spots and directions.

MOTHER'S DAY IS MAY 14TH - ARE YOU READY?



We have been called the Ultimate Mother's Day Shop many times. Whether it is a pretty or a practical, we have plenty to choose from. If you still can't decide, here is a hint: We quite often here the comment "I wish they would have gotten me a Gift Certificate from this place".





SPECIES PROFILE: Indigo Bunting

by Ruth Simmons

Some birds just take your breath away! The Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*) is a bird that definitely takes my breath away. If you see the male in the shadows, he's just a little black bird, but if you see him singing in the top of the tree in the sunshine, he's a brilliant, metallic blue. The Indigo Bunting is a small bird, 5.5 inches in length with an 8 inch wingspan, weighing in at 0.5 ounces. The female is brown with a lighter brown breast. Her wings and tail have streaks of blue.

During courtship, the male will sing in flight and will spread his wings and dance in circles around the female. Once copulation is over the male has very little to do with parental care giving. The female Indigo chooses the site, builds the nest, broods the eggs and feeds the young by herself. The nests are usually built in dense shrubs for protection from predators. Most nests will have three to four eggs that will hatch after 12 – 13 days. The young are ready to fledge in

about ten days.

It is surprising to people when they learn how truly common Indigo Buntings are in our area. They are a classic bird of the forest edge and brushy clearings, both habitats are bountiful in Missouri. The way to get a feel for how widespread these little blue birds are, is to learn their song. The up and down lively three or four paired notes can be heard loud and clear when you are in their habitat.

Indigo Buntings eat mostly insects, with seeds and fruit for variety. In the spring many of our customers have had them stop at their feeders. Sunflower chips and millet, on the ground or in a feeder, are good seeds for attracting buntings during migration. They usually won't be at your feeders for more than a few days, but while they are, it is breathtaking!!



Male Indigo Bunting photo courtesy of US Fish & Wildlife Service & Dave Menke

CONSERVATION CORNER: Lakeside Nature Center

If you have ever called us in search of assistance with an injured or orphaned animal, I know you will recognize the name Lakeside Nature Center. Located on Gregory Blvd in Swope Park, Lakeside Nature Center is a Kansas City Parks & Recreation facility with a legendary reputation.

While Lakeside has a fantastic staff, it is perhaps their corp of super dedicated volunteers that make their success in animal rehabilitation possible. When you call

Lakeside, you will generally get a recording but one of their many volunteers will call you back quickly with the best advice they can give you.

Their wonderful Nature Center is still relatively new and features many live animals. They have several raptors whose injuries are such that they can not be returned to the wild on display. These animals are now used in educational programs.

To learn more about Lakeside, volunteer opportunities or how to help them, visit www.lakesidenaturecenter.org.

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.

BIRD HOUSE KITS

After much searching, Bluebird and House Wren Do-It-Yourself Kits are finally here.



Great Family Projects!
Wren (\$7.99)
Bluebirds (\$19.99)



Time To Ask Mark...

Q. Is it OK to lower my martin house and clean out sparrows' nests while the martins have eggs?

A. Yes. In fact it is encouraged. It has been proven that martins are more successful if you continue to keep sparrows out during their nesting. This is only possible if you have a pole or box that can easily be lowered and raised. Special care should be given to returning the box to the same position it was facing. A sharpie marker works well to give you an alignment guide at the junction of pole sections.



*Young Purple Martins
photo courtesy of Jim Andrews*

Q. Should I add anything to my hummingbird nectar to make it better?

A. I am always conservative when it comes to this topic. Birds get less than 15% of their daily diets from your bird feeders. Hummingbirds are constantly eating from flowers and grabbing an insect here and there. They will get diversity in their diet from nature's offering, your feeders are a great source of quick energy, so stick with a mixture of 4 parts water to 1 part sugar. Never use honey and don't add the red food color (hummingbirds see the feeder, not the nectar so they have no idea what color it is anyway).



*Female Hummingbird on a
Holland Hill Window
Feeder.*

Q. Where are my goldfinches that I had all winter?

A. I'm one of those who had good numbers of goldfinches all winter only to see them disappear the first of April. You can bet that the answer lies in natural food availability. I have been out birding a little lately and have seen lots of goldfinches hanging out high up in oak trees feeding on catkins. Birds have to take advantage of natural food when it is available and during this time of year, oaks are in full "bloom". Don't take in the nyjer yet, they will be back soon and should hang around the feeders well into June.

Q. Why can't I get bluebirds to nest in my yard?

A. There are lots of possible answers to this question, but one that we recently spoke with a customer about was the use of "chemicals" in her yard. She appeared to be doing everything right but did admit that they had a lawn service. She admitted that they treated for grubs and worms to keep the moles out. Bluebirds like most birds require access to lots of insects to raise their hungry young. Resist the use of any pesticides if you want to make your yard truly bird friendly.



*Male Bluebird
photo courtesy of
Suzanne King*

THANK YOU FOR YOUR LOYALTY



In March, Jim Eschenheimer of Wild Delight dropped by the store with a surprise. The Backyard Bird Center was named their Independent Retailer of the Year. Wow! Jim tells me that we were selected from over 1,000 stores nationwide. We want to thank Jim, Wild Delight, our staff and most of all our customers.

FREE TOTAL CUISINE!

Total Cuisine is an easy choice for our customers who don't want hulls gathering on the ground or sunflowers growing under their feeders. It is a vitamin fortified blend of pure food that attracts a great variety of birds. During the months of May & June, mention this ad and get a 5lb bag of Total Cuisine (a \$8.99 value) FREE when you buy a 20lb bag.



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TILLEYS MAKE GREAT GIFTS FOR MOM OR DAD

Tilley Hats have become the fastest selling new line of products we have ever brought into the store. When you try one of these hats on, you immediately see why they are so popular. 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 Lost/Stolen 50% replacement warranty. Tilleys are loved by golfers, gardeners, boaters and birdwatchers alike. **Summer is coming - protect your loved ones.**



HEY DUDES, LET'S PARTY!

Does this scene look familiar? It will not be long before adult raccoons teach their young that your bird feeders are a wonderful, easy source of food. **ERVA's Raccoon Baffle** is a great way to end this problem. It comes in a 4X4 version as well as one that fits a round poles up to 1 & 5/8 inches and works against squirrels and raccoons. When mounted as instructed, I have never seen it fail.

*"Hey Mom, I thought you said there were sunflower seeds up here".
photo courtesy of Carrie Van Zandt*



The Lighthouse Feeder from Looker holds 5 quarts of seed and features a solar powered light. \$69.99.

UPCOMING IMPORTANT BIRD DATES

- Late April/Early May - Indigo Buntings & others visit feeders
- May 13th - International Migratory Bird Day (peak migration)
- June - Time for bluebird's 2nd nesting
- Late July - Shorebirds from the north start showing up in wetlands
- August - Bluebirds will often attempt 3rd nest