



# BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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

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**Fall Feeder Cleaning**  
*Saturday, Oct 7th*  
*9:00a.m. to 4:00p.m.*

It is that time again, fall feeder 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 and \$5.00 for repairs with this fall's proceeds going to the Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary in Liberty.

**Birds Choice Feeders**  
*feature removable trays in most of their feeders. These make cleaning your feeders on a regular basis much, much easier.*



## *Shooo Bully, Go Away . . .*

by Mark McKellar

Ruth and I were doing one of our Breeding Bird Survey Routes last week and had the chance to watch two Eastern Kingbirds (see page 4) and a male Scissor-tailed Flycatcher “chasing” an adult Coopers Hawk. I use the term chasing lightly here because the hawk wasn’t really flying away from them, he was just passing through their territories and they wanted to make sure he didn’t stick around. The behavior is known as mobbing and it is pretty widespread in the bird world.

Why didn’t the deadly Cooper’s Hawk just snatch one of the kingbirds right out of the air? As a rule, smaller means quicker and more maneuverable. Birds of prey generally catch their victims by surprise. If a smaller bird can see the hawk coming, they are often able to use their quickness to get to cover. In the case of the kingbirds, they simply were keeping clear of the hawks head and talons as they pecked at her.

Why do birds mob other birds. The theory is that they are chasing a potential predator from their territory. Owls and hawks are frequent victims of crows, jays and others while crows and jays are often mobbed by kingbirds, mockingbirds and even smaller species. Other victims include Great Blue Herons, Turkey Vultures and Common Nighthawks. It plays out like a reverse pecking order.

The behavior is not limited to would be avian predators. Small birds will harass snakes, chipmunks and all types of animals that get close to their nests or young.

Does mobbing work? In short the answer is “no.” Repeated studies show that while the bird being harassed does leave that area while being pestered, it will return to the area later. It can be a great aid to birders. It has led me to an owl during daylight hours on many occasions.

If the behavior doesn’t work, why do birds waste their energy doing it? We really do not know for sure. One theory I did come across was that it may be an active teaching tool so that their young will readily recognize a dangerous animal.

For more about the “king” of mobbing, don’t miss the Species Profile on page 4 and the next time you hear group of crows or jays in the woods going “crazy,” try to sneak up and see if it isn’t an owl.



*Red-tailed Hawks are probably the most frequently mobbed bird in our area, possibly the country. photo courtesy of Rick Jordahl*



# A Few of My Favorite Things . . .

by Mark McKellar

I never get tired of talking to people. While I do get to answer certain questions over and over again, it is a rare day that I don't get a question that I have never heard before. The question we all get here probably more than any other is "what is your favorite . . .?" Or, "which feeder do you use?" This is a tough question because I believe in all of the products that I sell. But, if you're interested . . . here are a few of my favorite "things".



- My favorite finch feeder: The BirdQuest 36" Yellow Spiral  
Why? I averaged 20 finches at a time on it from Nov to April.
- My favorite platform feeder: Birds Choice CC4-300PF  
Why? Its easy to clean, easy for all birds to use, easy to see the birds.
- My favorite Tube Feeder? Droll Yankee Executive  
Why? It holds loads of any type of seed and has 12 feeding ports.
- My favorite hopper feeder: Stonewood Mfg. Mini Mag (pic above)  
Why? Its made of recycled milk jugs, drop down tray makes it really easy to clean and overall size make it attractive to cardinals.
- My favorite hockey team: Carolina Hurricanes (Stanley Cup Champs!)  
Why? They play at my Alma Marta's arena (sorry, I had to gloat a little)
- My favorite binoculars: Nikon Premier LXLs  
Why? Absolutely the best optics I have ever seen and I've seen a lot.
- My favorite mid-range binocular: Nikon Monarchs  
Why? Loaded with features, lightweight and great optics for the price.
- My favorite field guide (advanced): National Geographic's  
Why? Still the most comprehensive book on the market.
- My favorite field guide (beginners): Birds of Missouri by Stan Tekiela  
Why? Great photographs, sorted and grouped by color, easy to use.
- My favorite birding spot (local/spring): Weston Bend State Park  
Why? Easy access, loads of birds and plenty of places to look.
- My favorite birding spot (local/fall): Smithville Lake  
Why? Tons of good habitat, rare birds show up annually, easy access.

I know these are only a few of the things I get asked about but it is a start. I'm sure John's list is probably different as is Ruth's. What are your favorites? I'd love to know so "Stop by and let's talk birds!"

## PARLIAMENT OF OWLS

by Rick Jordahl

We often see groups of birds and tend to call them flocks. But there are legitimate and authentic "collective" terms for many species that are available but seldom used. Many of these terms were coined in literature and although not widely used have survived through the years. Most of the terms are very descriptive and it is unfortunate that they have not prospered.



A pod of pelicans  
photo by Rick Jordahl

- A murder of crows**
- A host of sparrows**
- A bouquet of pheasants**
- A scold of jays**
- A murmuration of starlings (a cloud is also available and sometimes more descriptive)**
- A flight of swallows**
- A gulp of cormorants**
- An exaltation of larks**
- A rafter of turkeys**
- A congregation of plovers**
- A cast of hawks**
- A siege of herons**
- A descent of woodpeckers**
- A tidings of magpies**
- A raft or bunch of ducks (on water)**
- A skein, team or string of ducks (in flight)**
- A charm of goldfinches**

Any suggestions for a group of birders? A nest? A flock? A sighting?

## 10% OFF OF ANY OF MARK'S FAVORITES



**Stop by and say you read this and take 10% off items on Mark's Favorites' List above.**





## Have Binos, Will Travel!

Birders love Spring. This spring was so late that I was beginning to wonder if we were going to miss it all together. Yellow-rumped Warblers are generally gone by the first week or so of May, this year we had several linger through the middle of the month. Our field trips this spring were filled with wonderfully cool weather and lots of beautiful birds. Some of the more memorable moments included the beautiful Hooded Warbler in the spotting scope at Weston Bend State Park, the Wood Ducks and Little Blue Heron at Little Bean Marsh and hundreds of Baltimore Orioles around the lake at Watkin's Mill State Park.



*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 (in store)**

*Wednesday, September 13<sup>th</sup> 7:00p.m. to 8:30p.m.*

It is never too late to get started at birdwatching. It is America's #1 hobby and enjoyed by millions. We will cover the basics of bird identification and lots more.

### **Parkville Nature Sanctuary Hike**

*Thursday, September 14<sup>th</sup> 8:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.*

A great hike to combine with the program on the 13th. We should see lots of resident birds and early neotropical migrants will be on the move. This can be a good time of year to see hawks as well.

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



*Yellow-rumped Warblers  
are common fall migrants  
photo by Rick Jordahl*

### **Smithville Lake**

*Sunday, October 1<sup>st</sup> 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.*

Weather depending, This can be a great time at Smithville Lake. We will spend time searching the Lake for waterfowl and the grassy area and woodland edges for early winter migrants.

*Meet at the Litton Center at 8:00.*

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

*Thursday, Oct. 5<sup>th</sup> 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.*

### **Fall Feeder Cleaning**

*Saturday, Oct 7<sup>th</sup> 9:00a.m. to 4:00p.m.*

### **Come In London! (in store class)**

*Wednesday, Oct. 11<sup>th</sup> 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.*

Not to be outdone by Ruth's program last year on her birding time in Spain, Mark will share his birding tales from this summer's trip to England. Whether your planning a future trip or you just want to see some pretty pictures, we'll have fun.

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

*Sunday, October 15<sup>th</sup> 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)*

### **Schlagle Library/Wyandotte County Park**

*Saturday, October 21<sup>st</sup>  
10:00 a.m. to noon*

This park is a terrific location that just doesn't get the attention it deserves. Rick Jordahl and I will start with a program about common birds of the park and feeder station, then take a hike through the beautiful fall woodland. *Please call Schlagle Library (913) 299-2384 for reservations and directions.*



*Blue Jays are common  
sights at fall feeders  
courtesy of RickJordahl*

### **Autumn Migration in Coastal North Carolina**

*4 Days in Mid-November - Call for More Information and Pricing*

Autumn is a great time to visit coastal North Carolina. The food, weather and birding are fantastic. We will search the coastal areas for Northern Gannets, Purple Sandpipers, Brant and loads of waterfowl. We will also visit local woodlands to track down Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Brown-headed Nuthatches and more.



## Species Profile: Eastern Kingbird (Intruders Not Tolerated!)

by Rick Jordahl

From the family of Tyrant flycatchers comes one of our most common and easily observed songbirds of suburban and rural settings. Aptly classified *Tyrannus tyrannus*, the aggressive and pugnacious Eastern Kingbird vigorously defends its nest and territory and regularly confronts other birds or intruders regardless of their size.

With a dark head and back, white underside and throat as well as a distinct and unique white band across the tip of the tail, the Eastern Kingbird is readily identifiable. Males and females are very similar in appearance. Its call is a series of sharp or trilled buzzing or rasping notes.

Preferring open fields with nearby small stands of trees or shrubs the Eastern Kingbird is commonly seen on wires, dead limbs and fences watching for and pursuing flying insects which it often catches in midair before returning to its favored

perch.

The Eastern Kingbird is common throughout the country except for California and the Southwest. Its cousin, the Western Kingbird, is gray above with a yellow belly.



*Eastern Kingbirds look like their tails have been dipped in white paint.  
Photo by author*

Eastern Kingbirds build a cup-shaped nest and usually have two to five eggs. Fortunately for them, they possess a keen ability to destroy eggs deposited by the brood parasite Brown-headed Cowbird. They feed almost exclusively on insects in the summer but consume fruit while wintering in South America.

The Eastern Kingbird is recorded on most of my outing lists and I enjoy watching them make their rounds as they deftly catch flying insects or harass other birds, and do whatever is necessary to “clear the area”!

## CONSERVATION CORNER: Bluegrass in the Tallgrass

This section of the newsletter is always reserved for a group or subject that deals with bird conservation. This issue I thought I would feature an event where the whole family can go out and learn about our native prairies, listen to some great music and help promote conservation education all at the same time.

If you have read this newsletter for any length of time, you know that I dearly love the Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary in Liberty. Years ago we did an event called Bluegrass in the Tallgrass. This fall they are reviving this fun event with lots of fun activities for the whole family as well as some great music “out in the prairie”.

### 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.

Mark your calendars for Saturday September 30th. Activities begin at 3:00 pm with the music starting at 7:00. Food vendors will be on hand.

Martha Lafite is 100% supported by donations and this event is a fundraiser for them. Contact them at (816) 781-8598 for more information and directions or visit their website at [www.naturesanctuary.com](http://www.naturesanctuary.com).



*The Century Gazebo feeder from Looker has a nice large hopper and hinged roof for easy filling*



## Time To Ask Mark...

**Q. Have there been more Indigo Buntings than usual around this summer?**

**A.** There really have been. We always get calls about the little bright blue birds at peoples' feeders in the spring but hardly ever during the rest of the summer. This year we have received lots of calls about indigos at peoples' feeders all summer long. What is even more surprising to me is that most of the reports have been of them feeding with goldfinches at nyjer feeders. In the spring we primarily see them eating millet, sunflower or sunflower chips. Who knows, perhaps this the start of a new wonderfully beautiful bird enhancing our summer feeding stations.



**Q. As hot and dry as this summer season has been, do you think bluebirds will try to nest three times like they normally do?**

**A.** This is a good question. I would bet that they will. They may not lay as many eggs as normal but I would think they will still attempt a third nest. Weather conditions change so quickly here in the Midwest and a couple of days of cooler weather and rain can change nesting conditions drastically.

**Q. How do I keep the ants and bees out of my hummingbird feeders?**

**A.** These are two of the most frequently asked questions each summer. Ants are easy. We sell the fantastic little Nectar Protector from Songbird Essentials. This device, when filled with water, keeps the ants from ever getting to your nectar feeders. It is simple, inexpensive and truly does the job. Bees on the other hand are a very difficult task indeed. Most anything we do to discourage bees will affect the hummingbirds. A suggestion we came across recently had to do with the saucer type hummingbird feeders like the Aspects' Hummzinger and Droll Yankee. It has been recommended not to fill those types of feeder past half full. The hummingbird's long tongue can easily reach the nectar but bees have trouble with it. The anti-bee tips that come with certain feeders have been effective for many customers while others have found them disappointing.



*Erva SB2D Raccoon & Squirrel Baffle*

**Q. Is there anything I can do to keep the raccoons out of my feeders?**

**A.** This is a battle we fight constantly and reports are that raccoon numbers are very high this year. There are several things to try. If you are feeding from your deck, you pretty much have to take you feeders in at night. With any luck, you can get them to move along. If you are feeding from a pole system in your yard the solution is to add a raccoon baffle to your setup. This is not to be confused with a squirrel baffle. Squirrel baffles are too small to keep adult raccoons out. If they are bothering your suet feeders, give C&S's Hot Pepper Delight a try. The birds don't mind but furry animals find it a little too hot to handle.

## SQUIRREL DELIMAS / SQUIRREL SOLUTIONS



**Take 10% OFF Squirrel Baffles and Squirrel - Proof Feeders**



Many customers have luck keeping the squirrels out of their feeders by providing them with their own food. Here is your perfect chance to give that a try.

**8lb. Bag Squirrel Food**

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*All Offers Expire September 30th 2006*

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## WIN "THE REAL SKIN GAME" WITH A TILLEY HAT

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## LAST YEAR WE HAD HUMMERS INTO OCTOBER!

Are your hummingbird feeders out and clean? During August we have all of our adults, their young and by mid-August we start seeing migrants from our northern neighbors. In the past you could count on most of the birds to be gone by mid-September, but not anymore. You can safely leave your feeders out into October and expect to get activity. Keep the nectar fresh and separate your feeders a little to accommodate them all.



*Aspects' Hummzinger  
Excel is a top seller.*



## *Narcoleptic Squirrel???*

*Customer Pat White caught this Gray Squirrel napping on her nut block feeder. Pat says that he ate for a while then stretched out, closed his eyes and hung there for several minutes. What a life.*

## **Important Dates**

**Late August** - Hummingbird Numbers Peak  
**Late August/Early September** - watch for large flocks of migrating martins and swallows.  
**Early October** - last of migrating hummingbirds generally have passed through.  
**Early to Mid-October** - Watch for early winter arrivals such as juncos and kinglets.