



BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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Spring Cleaning Sidewalk Sale

Saturday May 19th
 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

Every so often you just need to clean out the storage building. We are in the need of space and much of it is needlessly being occupied by old display units and racks. Over the years we have been asked about the availability of some of these items and now's your chance.

Aside from the old display shelves, racks and cabinets, we will also have many close out specials on discontinued items. Great deals on all.



Parasol Hummingbird Feeders are beautiful and practical.

The Other Red Birds

by Mark McKellar

Every so often I get a call from someone who has the other “red bird” at their feeder. There are very few people who do not know what a cardinal looks like, but when a Summer Tanager shows up at their feeder or in their backyard, it quite often causes confusion. The most common local name I have heard used for them is summer redbird.

Tanagers are among the most colorful birds in the world and we are lucky to have two species that live in our area. The more commonly seen of the two is the Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*), found in open woodlands. Adult males are a beautiful all over red bird with a fairly long, thick yellow bill. Females are yellow and young males are often seen in a patchwork plumage



Male Summer Tanager.
 Photo courtesy of Rick Jordahl

as the red comes in to replace their initial yellow feathers. They eat a variety of insects and fruit and can occasionally be seen at a feeder containing fine sunflower chips. Bees and wasps are among their favorite insects. They catch the adults and rub them against limbs to knock the stingers off before swallowing them. Another favorite trick is to rip into a wasp or hornet nest to get to the larvae.

The slightly smaller, more brightly colored and generally harder to find cousin is the Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*). Comparing the red color of the Summer Tanager to the red of the

Scarlet Tanager is not even fair. When you see a



Male Scarlet Tanager.
 Photo courtesy of Steve Dillinger

male Scarlet Tanager in good light, it almost glows. The black wings and tail only accentuate the red even more. Scarlets prefer a more dense forest thus are more easily seen in migration (late April to mid May) when the trees, especially oaks, have not completely leafed out. I've

always thought of their song as a robin with a throat infection. I generally hear and zero in on their “chip churr” call notes before I do their song. In general, the yellow and olive-brown females forage higher in trees than the brightly

colored males. In courtship the males will often droop their wings and extent their necks to “show off” more of their brilliant red backs for the females above.

Both tanagers are summer residents in our area and are prime examples of birds that are rewards for getting out and actively looking for birds. If you are lucky enough to have a Summer Tanager stop by your yard, count yourself very lucky. If you want to see one or both of these beauties this spring, join us on one of the hikes listed on Page 3!



Maximize Your Birding Time

by Mark McKellar

Once you're into this "birding thing", it is only natural to want to see as many different birds as you can. When you combine this desire with the limited number of peak migration days and busy work schedules, you can easily see where the concept of "Big Days" comes from.

While most of us don't go out in the spring to set a new species sighting record for a single day, it is fun to challenge ourselves year after year to see if we can beat our personal best. One of the best parts for me is the planning of big days. Where should we go? What time should we put ourselves at our warbler spots? What areas have the best shorebird habitat this year?

I have said it many times, there is nothing like the feeling of accomplishment that you get when you study an area and its birds, make out a plan and when you get there, you find the birds you where looking for! Big days in your neighborhood, county or region are no different.



Wetland sites are key for adding shorebirds. Photo by Rick Jordahl

Most birds are somewhat habitat specific and to maximize a day of birding, you need to visit many different habitat types. In our area this means a visit to some type of grassland (hawks, kingbirds, sparrows, meadowlarks), wetland (ducks, shorebirds, herons, egrets, kingfishers), mature woodlands (woodpeckers, thrushes, warblers, cuckoos), woodland edges (tanagers, flycatchers, sparrows,

gros-beaks, buntings, orioles) and an open water area (gulls, terns, ducks, loons, grebes)



Grassland sites are great for hawks, sparrows, meadowlarks, kingbirds and others. Photo by Rick Jordahl

How do you fit it all in? Start early and finish late.

So here is the plan. Sometime during the 2nd week of May, start out before dawn in a good wooded area and listen for owls, whip-poor-wills and nighthawks. Before dawn breaks, be at one of your grassland sites. Listening as they generally will sing off and on all night. Your choice of woodland sites is often most critical to your success. Be at the woodland edge areas as dawn breaks and bird this area well before heading deeper into the mature woods. Next, head for your wetland area and hope that many ducks are still lingering. The afternoon can be spent searching for birds you have missed. Don't forget to bird while in towns for species that can be missed "out in the country" like Chimney Swifts and House Finches. Late in the day you will visit the open water site like Smithville Lake. For the last part of the day, it would be wise to be in an area with both woodlands and wetlands. This will give you one last shot at songbirds and, perhaps, rails.

It isn't for everyone but it sure is fun. If this concept is exciting to you, sign up for the "Big Day" trip (see page 3) on Monday May 14th. We will start early and bird "almost" all day. How many species can we tally? 100? 125? 150? Who knows?

Big Day Supplies

As my friend John Burwell always says "The right tool for the right job". This is so true for birding. If you want to maximize your birding pleasure, you need the proper equipment.

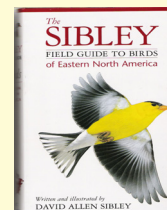
Binoculars

Birding magazine recently conducted a review to find the top mid-range binocular on the market. The **Nikon Monarch 8X42s** won the competition besting binoculars that were over \$100 more. **\$309.99**



Field Guide(s)

Not all field guides are created equal and it is essential to have one that you like and is easy for you to use. It isn't just a sales pitch when I say that it is rare for a birder to have only one or two field guides with them on a day of birding. **\$20 to \$30**



Record Keeping

You will need a system for recording your birds. Some use a microcassette player, other little pieces of paper. I would suggest an ABA Field Checklist (59cents) or the ultimate field checklist, field guide and bird song ID system all rolled up into one - Handheld Birds for your Palm device. **\$199.99 or \$449.99 w/Palm Pilot**



Spotting Scope

Spotting scopes are essential to identifying birds at a distance. Shorebirds, ducks, hawks and others can be quite shy so you are generally viewing in them from a far. **\$499.99 to \$1399.99**





Have Binos, Will Travel!

This winter was clearly two seasons wrapped into one. The late fall and December were very mild and many birds were slow to move into the area. Winter truly began in mid January as the snow and the temperatures began to fall. Very little in the way of field birding was done but the feeders were hoping. We had loads of call from customers with bluebirds at their heated birdbaths and goldfinches were moving around in huge flocks. One snowy Saturday in January we had phone call after phone call from people with 15 and 20 cardinals at their feeders at once. This was a great example of binos not having to travel to see great birds.



❖ **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 directions, meeting locations and to register (816) 746-1113

Parkville Nature Sanctuary **Parkville, MO**
Thursday, May 3rd **6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.**

Join us for an “after work” stroll through the sanctuary. While not as active as morning, birds do increase their singing and foraging activity in the evening.

Watkins’ Mill State Park **Kearney, MO**
Sunday, May 6th **7:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.**

Last year we had a truly spectacular hike at Watkins Mill State Park featuring more Baltimore Orioles than I have seen in one day - ever. 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.

MLT Nature Sanctuary **Liberty, MO**
Thursday, May 10th **8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.**

I have always found that the varied habitats at Martha Lafite make it a great place to see lots of different birds during migration. We will explore many of my favorite old “hot spots”.

Weston Bend/Little Bean Marsh/Squaw Creek
Monday, May 14th **6:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.**

Get a taste of Big Day birding (page 2). This should be very close to peak migration so we will put ourselves in some of the best spots around. You can bird with us all or part of the day. If you have walkie talkies, bring them along. Bring a sack lunch, snacks, your Tilley Hat. **This one will be worth taking a day off from work.**



Identifying Backyard Birds (in store class)
Wednesday, May 16th **7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.**

Get a taste of Big Day birding (page 2). This should be very close to peak migration so we will put ourselves in some of the best spots around. Bring a sack lunch.

Parkville Nature Sanctuary **Parkville, MO**
Thursday, May 17th **8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.**

With migration winding down, we will be looking for some the late stragglers and nesting birds. This the best time of year for things like Canada & Mourning Warbler, Alder Flycatcher and Black-billed Cuckoos to be moving through.

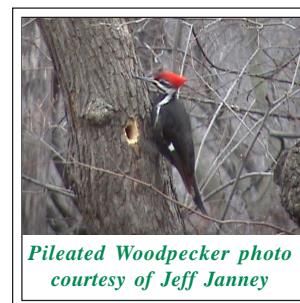


Weston Bend State Park **Weston, MO**
Sunday, May 20th **8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.**

One of the best places to be for the late migration period. We will look for both the nesting regulars as well as noted late migrants like Connecticut Warbler, Veery and Yellow-bellied Flycatcher.

Blue River Parkway **Kansas City, MO**
Thursday, June 7th **8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.**

Ruth will take us through one of her study sites in search of nesting birds of the Blue River. We will learn the difference between a riparian corridor and an upland site and which birds, like the Pileated Woodpecker, favor.





SPECIES PROFILE: Gray Catbird (*The Bird's MEEEEOW*)

by John Burwell

The Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*) is entertaining to watch as it works its way through the tangled web of brush and vines. Usually found in damp areas, it is picking through leaf litter for insects and berries.

Upon discovering me, his search is interrupted and he lets out his distress call; a sharp "MEEEEOW" from which he gets his name. Flicking his tail nervously as he hops about, I can see the rusty colored feathers under his tail. His black cap, tail and eye contrast nicely with the slate gray body, he is the only eastern bird of this coloring. Now another "MEEEEOW" and he flies out of the brush, across the yard to the top of another tangle.

He throws his head back and sings a beautiful melodious song borrowing notes from other local birds, rambling on never repeating the same series. Then it dips back down in the brush, continuing its search for food. The only neo-tropic



Gray Catbird photo courtesy of Linda Williams

member of the mimidae family (mimics), catbirds generally return to our area in mid to late April.

A catbird's low nest (2 to 10 feet above the ground) is an easy target for cowbirds. Luckily, catbirds have evolved to recognize cowbird eggs and generally pierce them and eject them from their nest. One theory is that the catbirds dark blue-green eggs make spotting the light spotted cowbird eggs easy.

While catbirds will visit your oriole feeder for a taste of grape jelly, the key to attracting catbirds to your yard is the presence of tangled underbrush and vines. These areas are far too often cleared out of the urban landscape. If you have left a "wild" patch, you may also enjoy the catbird's "MEEEEOW" in your yard.

CONSERVATION CORNER: *Grow Native*

The extreme cold this spring has killed or damaged many plants in our area and this is a golden opportunity to replace some of the "foreign" vegetation in your yard with good Missouri natives. The Missouri Department of Conservation and the Missouri Department of Agriculture have joined forces to promote the planting of native plants in a program known as "Grow Native".

To access the information, you can visit www.grownative.org or visit a local

MDC office (Burr Oak Woods in Blue Springs, Liberty location in the UMB bank building or the Discovery Center near the plaza). The program has a wealth information about plants, landscaping and sources for the products needed. They also have workshops in different parts of the state.

Landscaping with native plants just makes sense. They require less care because they are acclimated to our climate and soil types. Wildlife benefits because they have evolved with the seeds, nuts and fruit that native's produce and polinators are adapted to the flowering bodies.

Visit www.grownative.org today.

Don't Forget Your Conservation Discount

We give 10% discounts on all items except bird seed 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 can not be combined with other specials or coupons.

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Miniature nest cam

Infrared lights for day & night viewing that will not disturb 100 ft of cable

The Red Robin (\$119.99)

Miniature color camera

Weatherproof housing

Microphone

60 ft of cable



Time To Ask Mark...

Q. What affect will the April “Freeze” have on our birds?

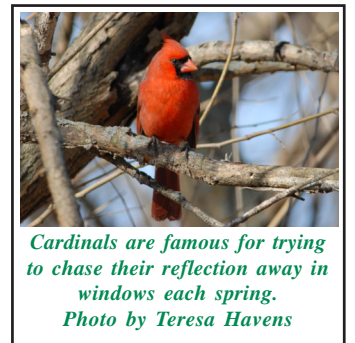
A. This is a very complex question but I think their will be significant issues for our birds later in the year. We fear that we lost some of our early arriving birds like Purple Martins and hummingbirds due to the reduced availability of insects and flowering plants but to what extent we do not know. What concerns to me more is what is going to happen to the vegetation and insect populations. Most plant experts are saying we are going have to wait and see but I’m affraid that the berries and seed crop for the fall have already been greatly compromised. Fall is a critical time for birds as they are either in migration or preparing for winter. Let’s hope it isn’t as bad as we fear right now.



*Will we have fewer Purple Martins this year due to the recent cold snap?
Photo by Jim Andrews*

Q. The male cardinal has started banging at my window again. Is there anything new to keep him from waking us up at sunrise?

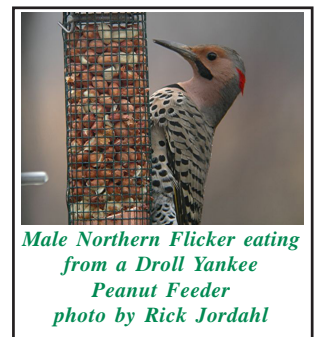
A. Each year certain species of birds see their reflections in windows. Generally it doesn’t last very long but in some cases it can go on for weeks. Remember that the birds are getting a mirror image of themselves and your yard so they can’t see anything inside. Visual distractions have to be placed on the outside of the windows. One that we have had really good luck with lately is *The Diving Hawk* by BirdsChoice. This is more than a sticker shaped like a hawk. This is a unique 3 dimensional hawk that suction cups to a window. It worked on a male cardinal that had been hitting a window for over a year!



*Cardinals are famous for trying to chase their reflection away in windows each spring.
Photo by Teresa Havens*

Q. If I cut back feeding during the summer, what feeders should I leave out?

A. Most customers who cut back during the summer leave out a finch feeder, a peanut feeder and safflower. Finches do not nest until July and will remain quite active at feeders late into the summer. Nyjer seed doesn’t germinate and it doesn’t encourage grackle and other summer “undesirables”. Peanut feeders are another favorite because they are waste free and require little maintenance. Their design alone make them less desirable to grackle as well. The best choice for your general feeder is safflower. Safflower can germinate but only sparsely and Mourning Dove tend to vacuum the seed up nicely. Once again, its greatest appeal is that the grackle and squirrels do not like it and starlings are not crazy about it either.



*Male Northern Flicker eating from a Droll Yankee Peanut Feeder
photo by Rick Jordahl*

SPRING SPECIALS

BirdsChoice

Three spring favorites for everyone are hummingbirds, orioles and bluebirds. Here are three spring specials to brighten your backyard.



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THE ORIOLEFEST
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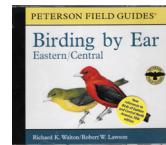
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MOTHER'S DAY IS MAY 13TH AND FATHER'S DAY IS JUNE 17TH



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*Tree Swallows are beautiful birds that will use
bluebird boxes placed in open area.
Photo Courtesy of Richard Gooch*

UPCOMING IMPORTANT BIRD DATES

- Late April/Early May - Indigo Buntings & others visit feeders
- May 12th - International Migratory Bird Day (peak migration)
- June - Time for Eastern Bluebird's 2nd nesting
- Late July - Shorebirds from the north start showing up in wetlands
- August - Bluebirds will often attempt a 3rd nest
- Mid-August - Hummingbird numbers start to peek.