



# BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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

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**Fall Feeder Cleaning**  
*Saturday, Sept. 15th*  
*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.

*Haw Creek Valley Garden Creations are hand-made, very high quality copper garden decorations. Mention this ad and take 10% Off through September 15th.*



## What a Spring

by Mark McKellar

One Monday morning this spring it started. John and I had to laugh as we heard one another repeatedly say “Those are called Rose-breasted Grosbeaks” each time we answered the phone. I wish I had kept a count of how many folks called in but I know it was dozens. It didn't stop with grosbeaks, record numbers of calls came in about orioles, indigo buntings, catbirds and others. What caused this huge influx of birds to feeders? In a word, stress.

What we are now calling the Easter Freeze of 07, dramatically affected our natural world. We could easily see the affect the freeze had on our flowers, shrubs and trees but how about the birds. Rose-breasted Grosbeaks are known to visit feeders for short periods of time during the spring, but they heavily rely on tree buds and insects for food during migration. Given the damage that 18 Degrees does to freshly emerging tree buds, sunflower and safflower were the only sources of dependable food available to them. Customers were reporting 5, 10, 15, even 18 grosbeaks at one time at their feeder stations.

I doubt there were any birds that were not affected by “the freeze,” but those who had arrived early in the spring seemed to be hit the hardest. We had reports of dead Purple Martins, only a fraction of the number of bluebirds nesting in the first cycle as did last year, and hummingbird numbers were much lower.

Baltimore Orioles were another bird in tremendous numbers at feeders this year. With the lack of fruit being produced by trees and shrubs, orioles found themselves sharing the grape jelly with House Finches, woodpeckers, catbirds and even cardinals.

The big question has to be, what will the long term affects of the Easter Freeze be? The absolute saving grace for us had to be the wet spring. Had the freeze been followed by additional stress like a long dry period, I'm afraid things could have been much worse for our plants and insects. There is no doubt that certain plants (how many dandelions have you seen this year?) will not produce seeds or fruit this year and this could affect our bird's fall feeding patterns. Generally, bird feeders are quite slow during September and October because of the abundance of natural food. This year could be quite different.



*Male Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were common sights this spring at feeders. photo courtesy of Rick Jordahl*



## A Home Near Shopping!

story and photo by Rick Jordahl

On a recent trip to the Metro North Mall recycling center, I was surprised to see a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*) sitting on a speed limit sign very near one of the Mall's entrances. I pulled over and parked to watch for a while as he fluttered around chasing (and catching) flying insects.



Graceful and beautiful, the Scissortail is a wonderful sight with its deeply forked tail, up to 8" in length, scissoring as they dive, bob and weave in pursuit of the particular insect they are after.

While the Scissortail is a fairly common bird, it's definitely not one you see every day and always a great sighting. After observing a few minutes, I discovered that there was a pair nesting in a tree very near where I stopped to watch. Yup, these two 'upper middle class' Scissortails chose to raise their family about 150 feet from the entrance to Macy's department store, right in the mall parking lot!

Most of the time I was there, the female was sitting on the nest - a gangly affair of twigs, sticks and fuzz balls with shoe laces dangling two feet below. Come to find out, the Scissortail often uses many human products in its nest, such as string, cloth, paper, carpet fuzz, and even cigarette filters.

The next morning I returned to the Mall with my Nikon digiscope system hoping to get a photo of Oklahoma's State Bird and was lucky to catch the male pictured here.

Readily identifiable by its elegant long tail and famous zigzagging and somersaulting "sky dance," the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher is a magnificent sight anywhere. It can be found perched on prairie fence lines, in isolated trees or even on road signs near the mall. They consume a great number of grasshoppers and other insects which makes them popular with farmers and ranchers.

The head, neck and back are pale gray, and the breast is white. Wings are black with gray highlights and a patch of scarlet can be seen under the shoulder. Also, look for the salmon-pink undersides. The bird's range, which may be gradually expanding, is limited to south central states including Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas as well as western Missouri and Arkansas.

As I left, I saw the male dodging cars that came zipping by while he was flying after his bugs. I wish the best for my "Shopping Mall" birds and hope the whole family makes it out safely. Good luck to them!

## 50 STATE BIRDS, BUT NOT 50 SPECIES

- Alabama — Northern Flicker
- Alaska — Willow Ptarmigan
- Arizona — Cactus Wren
- Arkansas — Northern Mockingbird
- California — California Quail
- Colorado — Lark Bunting
- Connecticut — American Robin
- Delaware — Blue Hen Chicken
- Florida — Northern Mockingbird
- Georgia — Brown Thrasher
- Hawaii — Nene (Hawaiian Goose)
- Idaho — Mountain Bluebird
- Illinois — Northern Cardinal
- Indiana — Northern Cardinal
- Iowa — American Goldfinch
- Kansas — Western Meadowlark
- Kentucky — Northern Cardinal
- Louisiana — Brown Pelican
- Maine — Black-capped Chickadee
- Maryland — Baltimore Oriole
- Massachusetts — Black-capped Chickadee
- Michigan — American Robin
- Minnesota — Common Loon
- Mississippi — Northern Mockingbird
- Missouri — Eastern Bluebird
- Montana — Western Meadowlark
- Nebraska — Western Meadowlark
- Nevada — Mountain Bluebird
- New Hampshire — Purple Finch
- New Jersey — American Goldfinch
- New Mexico — Greater Roadrunner
- New York — Eastern Bluebird
- North Carolina — Northern Cardinal
- North Dakota — Western Meadowlark
- Ohio — Northern Cardinal
- Oklahoma — Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
- Oregon — Western Meadowlark
- Pennsylvania — Ruffed Grouse
- Rhode Island — Rhode Island Red (chicken)
- South Carolina — Carolina Wren
- South Dakota — Ring-necked Pheasant
- Tennessee — Northern Mockingbird
- Texas — Northern Mockingbird
- Utah — California Gull
- Vermont — Hermit Thrush
- Virginia — Northern Cardinal
- Washington — American Goldfinch
- West Virginia — Northern Cardinal
- Wisconsin — American Robin
- Wyoming — Western Meadowlark

## VORTEX OPTICS - GREAT VALUES



**We now stock several models of Vortex Binoculars. These glasses are loaded with great features and an outstanding warranty. Give' em a look.**





## Have Binos, Will Travel!

As a dozen of us sat in our cars waiting for the thunderstorm to pass, I told Rick that this was “the day” for spring migration that we did not want to miss. Unfortunately, the storm outlasted us and the Watkin’s Mill hike on May 6th had to be scratched. I heard from other birders who were out later that day, that it was spectacular. Some times that is just how it goes. While rain washed out more than one hike this spring, the birding was still very good. The Blue-winged Warbler and Scarlet Tanagers at Weston Bend were both very memorable, and those who took the time to head out to Martha Lafite were rewarded with great looks at an uncommon Lazuli Bunting.



*An incredible weekend of birding in NE Minnesota a couple of years ago. We saw over 300 Sharp-shinned Hawks in one day. Impressive.*

**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**

### Backyard Bird Basics (in store)

**Wednesday, August 29<sup>th</sup> 7:00p.m. to 8:30p.m.**

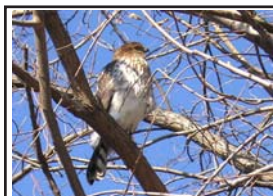
By popular demand, we are going to gear this class for all ages. Bird watching is a great family activity. We will cover the basics of bird identification and lots more.

### Parkville Nature Sanctuary Hike

**Thursday, August 30<sup>th</sup> 8:30 a.m. to 10.00 a.m.**

A great hike to combine with the program on the 29th. We should see lots of young birds and early neotropic migrants will be on the move. This can be a good time of year to see hawks.

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



*Immature Sharp-shinned Hawk @ Parkville N.S. photo by Rick Jordahl*

### Adult Lecture Series - Birding Basics

#### Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary

**Saturday, September 1<sup>st</sup> 10:00 a.m. to noon**

MLTNS is launching a new adult series of programs and I will be doing this class and trail hike. We will cover the basics of birds, bird ID and birding equipment, then head out onto the trail. All registration needs to be made through the Sanctuary (781-8598).

### Weston Bend State Park Fall Hike

**Sunday, Sept. 16<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.**

### Identifying Birds of Prey (in store)

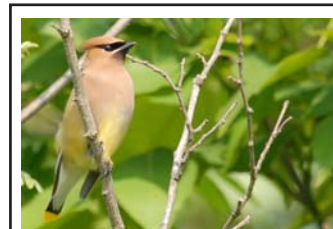
**Wednesday, September 19<sup>th</sup> 7:00p.m. to 8:30p.m.**

One of the biggest misconceptions in the birding world is that because hawks are “big” they are easy to identify. We will learn the more common hawks of our area and keys to identifying birds of prey at the time of year when many of them are moving into or through our area.

### Wyandotte County Park

**Sunday, September 30<sup>th</sup> 8:00 a.m. 11:00a.m.**

This park is a terrific location that just doesn’t get the attention it deserves. We will bird the lake and woodlands.



*Look for Cedar Waxwings photo courtesy of Teresa Havens*

### Smithville Lake

**Sunday, October 14<sup>th</sup> 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.**

Weather depending, this can be a great time at the lake. We will search the lake for waterfowl and the various other habitats for early winter arrivals.

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

### Fall Feeder Cleaning

**Saturday, Sept. 15<sup>th</sup> 9:00a.m. to 4:00p.m.**

### Hawk Watching and More in Minnesota

**October 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> - Call for More Information and Pricing**

Back by popular demand. We went to Hawk Ridge in Duluth, Minnesota two years ago and had an incredible time. We were lucky enough to observe hundreds of hawks on their southward journey. 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 the weather patterns are favorable, there could be some early winter specialties present.



## Species Profile: Turkey Vulture

by Ruth Simmons

This article is probably better suited for the younger boys in the audience. I can just hear them going, “Ooooooo cool!” Most of you will say, “That’s gross!” As birds go, Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*) are probably one of the ugliest looking. They have a naked, bright red head, no feathers just skin. The rest of their large (26 – 32”) body is covered with black feathers. If you look up at them as they fly over, you might notice a two-toned effect on the underside of the wings (wingspan 6’). As they get farther away, look for the dihedral (shallow V) posture of their wings. Most hawks and eagles that are seen in our area have a flat wing posture when flying.

OK, now for the cool (or gross) stuff. Turkey Vultures eat anything that is dead, including skunks. Not just newly dead, it could be dead a week and they’d eat it. They have very strong stomach enzymes that keep the microbes and bacteria from making them sick. Sometimes, they eat so much dead stuff they can’t fly. When that happens and a predator comes along the

vultures throw up all that dead stuff on the predator and then it is able to fly to safety. A predator will get the same defense mechanism from young vultures. And remember the next time you want to look at young TVs, to the young vultures, you are a predator! If you think it smelled bad before they ate it . . .

Vultures also have a unique way of keeping cool, they defecate on their legs. As the waste evaporates, it cools the vulture and it gives their pink legs a whitish appearance.

How do these winged disposals find their food? You may have heard us say that smell is not well developed in birds – TVs are very much the exception. While they do use sight to locate food, research has shown that they can find dead animals hidden from view.

Without these garbage collectors from the sky, we would be up to our knees in road kill. Now that’s gross!



*Turkey Vulture sunning itself on a rooftop in Plattsburg. Photo by Tom Holman*

## CONSERVATION CORNER: Important Bird Areas (IBA)

Many of you have asked about the recent article, in the *Kansas City Star* about the disturbing decline in common birds. If you would like more information about the this topic, we have many copies of the original article, **Wake Up Call**, that *Audubon* published in their magazine.

It is quite easy to look at the number of Common Grackle that are attacking your bird feeders and find it hard

to believe their has been such a drastic drop in their numbers. You have to look at the big picture. Your bird feeders provide a perfect environment for grackle especially with such tremendous loss of quality natural habitat.

Ruth and I see it on our Breeding Bird Survey Routes we run each year. Where there is quality habitat like restored native tallgrass prairies, there are good numbers of quality birds.

Highly disturbed areas are often void of anything but House Sparrows and starlings.

The Important Bird Areas program has been around for several years now and is a global effort to identify and protect lands that are critical to birds and other wildlife. Audubon Missouri has identified 47 sites as IBA and you can learn more about them on their website <http://mo.audubon.org>. Once there click on the Birds and Science tab.



*Many of Missouri’s IBA sites involve wetlands. Sora (a rail) photo courtesy of Rick Jordahl.*

### 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)*

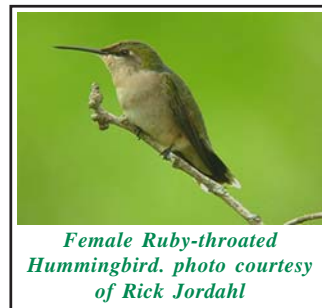
Discount applies all merchandise except bird seed but can not be combined with other specials or coupons.



## Time To Ask Mark...

**Q. How long will my orioles and hummingbirds stick around?**

**A.** Orioles are one of the first migrants to leave each “fall.” As a rule, our birds leave in early to mid-August. We will have migrant birds passing through our area through mid September. Hummingbirds on the other hand peak in numbers around September 1st and trail off until early October. Many dedicated hummer folks, maintain their feeders well into early November to help out any stragglers that might come through.



**Q. Why have the squirrels been so bad at the feeders this summer?**

**A.** Almost all of these problems are related to the “Easter Freeze” I wrote about in the cover article. The lack of natural food this early spring has been hard on all wildlife. Squirrels have been eating anything and everything. If it makes you feel any better, they really are hungry.

**Q. My bluebirds started nesting so late this year, do you think they will try a third nesting?**

**A.** I would say yes. A bird’s drive to have offspring is very strong and given the opportunity to nest again, they will often try. Bluebirds do not face the long migration that many species do, thus have more time to invest into an additional nesting attempt.

**Q. I saw a cute cat shaped bird feeder at another store. Why don’t you have carry those?**

**A.** The estimates vary, but scientific date estimates that hundreds of millions of songbirds are killed by house cats each year. It isn’t that I don’t like cats but I don’t like cats that roam free and are allowed to kill birds and other wildlife. Though it may have no impact at all, I made a pledge with myself to not promote products such as cat shaped feeders and houses. If just one bird is less defensive of cats because it associates free food with the shape or features of a cat, I have become part of the problem instead of the solution. I would plead to all of my customers, please keep your cats indoors and make your feeder stations and bird houses as cat safe as possible.

**Q. I’ve notice bird seed prices have gone up. Why?**

**A.** There are several factors that affect bird seed prices. The classic “supply and demand” rule is really kicking in right now. The demand for sunflower seed is really high because of the human consumption market. Have you noticed how many sunflower pictures you are seeing on potato chip bags lately? This is coming at a time when supplies are lower than normal. Many farmers in this country have converted their crop land to corn because of higher profits. These profits are the result of current Ethanol push by the current administration. Will it come back down? No one knows.

### LATE SEASON WILD DELIGHT SPECIALS



*White-breasted Nuthatch and Northern Flicker photos courtesy of Rick Jordahl*

**Take \$5 off a 20lb Bag of Wild Delight Woodpecker, Nuthatch & Chickadee**



Seed Blocks are a great way to feed birds with less mess. You can simply remove the wrapper and hang them with the built in hanger or use a wire cage feeder.



**All Wild Delight Seed Blocks 25% OFF**



*All Offers Expire September 30th 2007*

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## BUILT TO LAST AND LOOK GREAT

The problem with highly durable feeders is that they usually don't look that great. Very decorative feeders on the other hand, are generally not very practical. That is why I was elated to hook up with A&J Design Feeders. One look and you know they dress up any yard nicely but what you have to look harder to discover is how practical they are. Made from Cellular PVC (a wood/plastic composite), they are built to last for many, many years, they are easy to fill and they hold 6 to 8lbs of seed.



**Mention this ad for 10% off any  
A & J Design Feeder in stock**

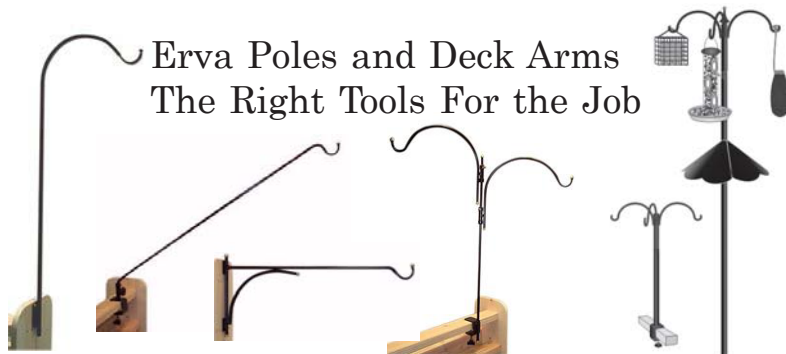
*(Expires October 1, 2007)*

## DON'T FORGET TO GIVE THEM WATER

Late summer is generally very hot and dry. A dependable source of clean water is critical for birds and wildlife. Please keep your birdbaths filled and clean this season. Misters, bubblers and drippers help keep water fresh.



*Avian Aquatics  
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The Right Tools For the Job

### 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.