



WINTER

2008

# BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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

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[www.backyardbirdcenterkc.com](http://www.backyardbirdcenterkc.com)

## E-Mail Club

### Monthly Updates

### Full Color Newsletter

We mention it from time to time, but the newsletter looks so much better in color. If you have internet access, we highly recommend downloading a copy (if for no other reason than to look at the beautiful photos taken by our customers).

Our e-mail group is the first to know that the new newsletter has been posted on the website and they receive monthly e-mails. These updates feature recent bird sightings, feeding tips and hike and program reminders.

You can sign up for the e-mails at the store or on-line. On-line tends to reduce the chance of human error (not being able to read handwriting can be frustrating). Don't forget to add us to allowed e-mails if you have a filter set up.

If you like the e-mail newsletters you can have us take you off the paper copy list or simply receive both.

## Something Just Went "Click"

by Mark McKellar

What got you interested in birds? For a lot of people it was a parent or grandparent who fed birds, or a great Aunt who used to point out the birds on a walk around the neighborhood. For me, it was one bird.

No matter how many Prairie Warblers I see, each one puts me back on that roadside in North Carolina on an early June morning looking at this golden bird sitting in the top of a small pine tree. I said to my friend John, "that is the most beautiful bird I have ever seen, where has it been all of my life" That was the bird and that was the moment.

I had always loved wildlife but had never really been a bird person. As a young boy I thought I wanted to be the next Jacques Coustau.

When I entered wildlife school, I chose the fisheries emphasis. It wasn't until that June morning that things really changed for me. John Hammond and I were doing a walking quail survey and we had stopped at a listening station by a young stand of pines. We heard a Prairie Warbler singing its "helicopter taking off" song so I got my binoculars on him. The morning light seemed to illuminate the bold black stripes on the face and sides of this bright yellow bird. I've always said something went "click". I guess that's how it is with love.

Memories have to be one of the greatest gifts that birding gives me. I was recently updating my lifelist and it started me, as it always does, on a trip down memory lane. The "memory" that is conjured isn't always about the bird, more often it is the setting or people or even the weather that was memorable. I will now forever associate Rosy Finches with the taste of a Green Chili Cheesburger. Any grouse will now have to be called a "sprouse" at least once while discussing it. And, a Zone-tailed Hawk will be associated with a group of friends high-fiving and hugging after an incredibly exciting sighting at one of the most scenic places in America.

Do you have a "click" moment? A favorite bird memory? We would love to hear about it. Drop me an e-mail or letter and we will try to get into a future issue of the newsletter.



Prairie Warbler  
 Photo courtesy of Steve Dillinger

[www.goodsearch.com](http://www.goodsearch.com)

**If you are looking for a way to help out a good cause, this is EASY. If you do a lot of internet surfing (in particular searches) this site donates 1¢ to the nonprofit of your choice for each search. The Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary is a registered recipient and you can help them out with virtually no effort at all. Call me or visit the site!!**



# Made in the USA

by Mark McKellar

Each year when I go to Birdwatch America I really make an effort to take into account the country of origin of the products I look at purchasing. I know it is important to myself and my customers. This year, John and I were eating lunch at a table with several people and this subject came up and one inventor was telling us that he tried and tried to find someone to produce his feeders in the U.S. but no one could do it. The technology he needed was "out of date" in this country and the only place using it was China. He is not alone.

We were successful in finding new products and much of it is made in the USA. (or at least not China). Woodpecker Products Inc. is a group of Disabled American Veterans up in Minnesota who have developed their own line of suet plugs and feeders. They salvage wood from forest fire areas to make their feeders and their unique suet plug formula contains what they call BirdNip. I've been using it since the show and the birds love it.



Not only Made In The USA, how about Parkville Missouri! Walt Morris has been making Mor-bilt Feeders and Houses since 1991.

A look around the store does reveal a lot of Made in the USA stickers. Almost all of our hooks and poles are made in Chicago, Mor-bilt feeders and houses are made in Parkville, Aspects feeders come from Rhode Island, and the almost all of our seed (except Nyjer) comes from the Dakotas or Kansas.

It isn't until you get on the gift side of the store that the USA labels get a little harder to find. Even so, companies like Haw Creek Forge are all hand-made by a group of ladies in the mountains of North Carolina. T.M. Hoff rain gauges are from upstate New York.

We'll keep doing our best to find you quality products made in the USA.



Aspect Bird Feeders are all made in the USA

## PURPLE MARTIN HEADQUARTERS

I am more excited about this Purple Martin season than I have been in a long time. The chief reason for my enthusiasm is the improvements being made to the boxes.

I am so happy to be bringing back in the Nature



House MSS-12. This box features the Lanyard Safety System for raising and lowering the boxes with a rope. It is so much easier and safer than most systems. The redesigned boxes can be converted to nesting suites.

Our best selling Coates boxes are improved as well. We now have Add-A-Floors so you can expand your boxes up as well as side to side. We



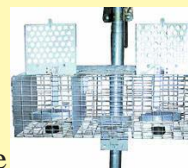
also carry their Eco-Friendly Martin House Cleaner.

Erva (our hooks and pole folks) have introduced a new baffle designed to keep snakes from climbing poles. the SB9 has light holes at the top of the baffle which fool the snakes into trying to climb the pole from inside the baffle.



Attracting martins can be frustrating but a couple of decoys can help. Dawn Song and Daytime Chatter CDs have been very helpful to many of our customers.

Don't let sparrows take over your box. We have sparrow traps.



Martins are on the way. Are you ready?

## A CLEANER WAY TO FEED BIRD SEED

### Mr. Bird's Seed Cylinders

We met "Mr. Bird" at Birdwatch America this year and were immediately impressed with his products. The "seed block" concept is not new but his feeder design and seed quality were both enough to get our attention.

There are two major advantages of seed cylinders. First they are a very clean way to feed birds. No seed flinging! The other advantage is that the blocks feed a lot of birds at once yet last a long time.

Mr. Bird says 5 times as long as bagged seed.

As a newsletter reader special: Mention this ad and get a FREE EZFeeder when you buy two 72oz Mr. Bird Cylinders (any flavor).

(Limit 1 Free Feeder - Expires 3/31/08)





## Have Binos, Will Travel!

Late fall and early winter were also affected by the Easter freeze. The absence of fruit affected the movement of many species. Classic fall migrants like Cedar Waxwings were scarce but waterfowl numbers were good. Our trip to Squaw Creek was very productive. The Snow Geese were arriving in droves, we counted over 70 Bald Eagle and there had to be several thousand ducks of various species. The January Smithville Lake trip gave us a unique look at all three of the mergansers and several Bald Eagles as well.



❖ **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 for more information and to register (816) 746-1113**

### Attracting Nesting Birds (in store class)

**Wednesday, March 12<sup>th</sup> 7:00p.m. to 8:30p.m.**

From the tiny House Wren to the energetic Purple Martins to the secretive Wood Duck, we will discuss how to attract nesting species to your yard. Every backyard is different, so come with yard specific questions.

### Smithville Lake, The Spring Edition

**Sunday, March 16<sup>th</sup> 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.**

We haven't been up to see the eagle's nest (see back page) for a while so I thought the time is right now. We will search the lake for ducks, loons and other goodies before heading up to the north end of Smithville Lake. If time permits we will search for owls and woodcocks.

### Gearing Up For Spring Migration

**Wednesday, March 26<sup>th</sup> 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.**

The old saying "If you don't use it, you lose it" really does apply to bird identification. Think of this class as a review for the Spring migration "test". The birds in your yard can change daily during April and May so we will go over the birds you are most likely to see as they pass through (or stick around).

### Parkville Nature Sanctuary's Early Spring Birds

**Thursday, April 10<sup>th</sup> 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.**

This is the time of year you really want to be out. Resident birds are singing, wildflowers are blooming and Spring migration should be well underway.

**Meet at Store @ 9:00 a.m. or the Sanctuary @ 9:15.**

### Prairie Chicken Booming Grounds

**Sunday, April 20<sup>st</sup> 4:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.**

No. That isn't a typo. You have to be an early riser if you want to get up close to the prairie chicken dance. I promise you will not be disappointed that you did. Space is extremely limited so call quickly for details.

### Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary

**Saturday, April 26<sup>th</sup> 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.**

Join us for an early Spring stroll through the woods and prairies of one of the jewels of the Northland. Last year they had a Lazuli Bunting spend a few days there during spring migration. You never know what may turn up this time of year.

**Meet at MLTNS at 8:00 a.m.**



*Wood Duck*  
Photo by Rick Jordahl

### Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivera N.W.R.

**May 3rd & 4th Sat 5:30 a.m. to Sun. 6:00 p.m.**

This is a fantastic two day trip to a globally important wetland located in central Kansas. We will be there at a key point in migration and should see thousands of ducks, shorebirds and songbirds. On our last trip there we saw Burrowing Owls, Western Grebes doing their courtship dance, Yellow-headed Blackbirds and Mississippi Kites.

**Transportation (van & fuel), hotel and box lunch for Saturday - \$150 each (based on double occupancy)**

## REMEMBIRD



**Remembird  
Digital  
Recording  
Device**



**Now this is cool! The Remembird is a recording device that attaches to your binoculars. The forward-facing microphone makes it handy to record singing birds so you can study or identify them later. The other mic faces you so you can record verbal descriptions while looking through your binos. It is also great for keeping a paperless bird list in field.**



## SPECIES PROFILE: Red Crossbill

by Mark McKellar

One of the greatest examples of adaptation in the bird world has to be the crossbills. At first glance, these robust finches make you think their bills are deformed due to some birth defect or injury. On the contrary, crossbill have evolved a very specialized bill for specifically feeding on cones of different evergreens.

We currently observe four species of crossbill in the world with two (white-winged and red) occurring in North America but researchers believe the number could be much higher. Within Red Crossbills (*Loxia curvirostra*), there is a great variety of bill sizes and flight calls. The bill sizes are linked to the particular cone that they like to feed on.

White -winged Crossbills are quite uncommon in Missouri but Red Crossbills are generally reported from a few locations around the state each winter. The number of birds each year is linked to the success or failure of



Male Red Crossbill  
Photo Courtesy of Judy Farris

their favorite food crop.

This winter we have had several reports of Red Crossbills. These bird will typically join in with their smaller cousins the goldfinch. Male Red Crossbills are a dull brick red while females and young males are yellow. Both are rather mottled with gray. They are quite chunky with short, stubby tails.

Customers lucky enough to have them stop by their feeders have had the best luck with black oil sunflowers and sunflower chips. More often than not, those who have them in their yards have a stand of pine trees close by. One of the best sites in our area was in the Jack Pine stands at Lake Jacomo. Unfortunately, most of those trees died out and had to be removed.

Don't give up looking. Late winter and early spring can be a good time to see uncommon birds at your feeders and around your neighborhood.

## CONSERVATION CORNER:

So many people care about the environment and want to help but I often hear "But what can I do"? That is one of the reasons I like the 10,000 Rain Gardens initiative. Rain gardens are wonderful ways of helping conserve and filter the most precious substance on earth while taking care of various problems you may be faced with in your yard.



Do you have a low spot in your yard where the grass won't grow because water puddles there after it rains? Or an erosion gully where rainwater drains away from your downspout? An easy, attractive Raingarden may be the solution. Raingardens are gardens with shallow depressions designed to capture rainwater with beautiful plants that don't mind getting wet on occasion.

Raingardens help prevent quick run off which can help with flash flooding, they're designed to drain quickly to control mosquitos and their associated dangers and they provide food and cover for wildlife.

If you are a bird watcher or butterfly fan, you can turn your raingarden into a smorgasbord for our winged friends by providing seed, nectar, and habitat. Plant Blue Lobelia and Cardinal Flowers for hummingbirds, Purple Coneflowers for goldfinches, or Marsh Milkweed for Monarch butterflies. These are just a few of the plants that can attract birds and butterflies to your yard. Visit [www.RainKC.com](http://www.RainKC.com) to learn more.

## DO IT YOURSELF

### Easy Rain Gardens

Parkville Resident David Dods is a lifetime environmentalist. I met David many years ago as a former board president of the Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary. It didn't take long to identify him and his wife Carla as people who really care.



Ruby-throated Hummingbird  
illustration by Dan Shaw

David has joined forces with two others to author a book on rain gardens. This beautifully illustrated book contains easy to follow



instructions for building a raingarden, sample garden plans, and descriptions of over 100 plant selections. Best of all, the guide is geared for plants, soils and conditions of our area.

This book is not widely available but you can get a signed copy at the Backyard Bird Center.



## Time To Ask Mark...

**Q. I haven't seen nearly as many robins or bluebirds this winter. Where are they?**

**A.** Robin and bluebirds are both dependent on fruit during the winter months. The Easter freeze this past spring really took it's toll on fruiting plants. My guess is that both of these species as well as waxwings have had to move around a lot this winter to find suitable supplies of berries to survive.

**Q. I have had a neighborhood cat killing the birds in my backyard. What can I do?**

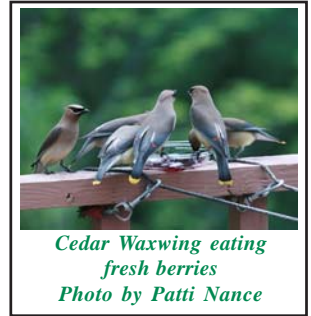
**A.** If you are a regular reader, you know we talk about this issue from time to time. It seems that this winter, we have really received a lot of call about cats. I am a firm believer in keeping cats indoors. There isn't enough space here to go into details but let's just say it is better for the cats and far better for birds. If you have a free roaming cat, I encourage you to talk to the owner or call animal control. In most municipalities there are leash laws that apply to cats (though rarely enforced). In the meantime, to protect the birds at your feeders, it is best to keep as much seed off of the ground as possible. Use trays and bird seed blocks (see page 2). While we generally recommend keeping your feeders close to cover so birds can quickly fly to safety, these areas usually help cats to ambush birds.

**Q. Why can't I get anything to use my birdbath?**

**A.** There are generally two major issues that plague birdbaths. First is their distance from cover. Just as with feeders, a birdbath that is too far from escape cover will make birds feel vulnerable. By far, the most common problem is that the birdbath in question is too deep. Birds need shallow water and most "bowls" don't have shallow areas. We recommend placing rocks in a bath to give different depths of water but now we have a new option. The Bird Raft™ is designed to fit in water features to create a shallow bird bath that can change with the feature's depth.

**Q. When do the grackle return?**

**A.** While we have a few grackle around here all winter, most do migrate further south. We tend to start seeing them in larger numbers in early March. When battling these pests your two greatest tools are safflower and the grackles' size. Grackle in particular seem to really dislike Safflower and good caged feeders are wide enough to keep them away from the seed. Though they sometimes figure them out, weighted feeders like the Squirrel Buster Plus can be effective against them as well. Don't forget, while most of us find them to be a pest, they are a native species thus protected by law.



*Cedar Waxwing eating fresh berries  
Photo by Patti Nance*



*The floating Bird Raft fits bird baths of most sizes and keeps a consistent shallow depth of water.*

## WATCH THINGS TURN GOLDEN IN MARCH AND APRIL!



*Male Goldfinches begin their annual Spring molt in March. Over several weeks, the males gradually replace their dull winter feathers with bright feathers that aid them in attracting a mate. A well stocked finch feeder will serve you well into the summer season as these birds don't nest until July.*



**A Great Chance to See Why Special Finch is Wild Delight's Best Selling Finch Mix**

Mention this Ad and Take **20% OFF**

**A 20 lb. Bag of Special Finch (Black Tie)**

*(Limit 1 Offer Expire 3/31/07)*



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## LOTS OF NEW TILLEYS



It is no secret that we all love our Tilley hats. 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. In March we will be adding new styles and new colors to our selection.

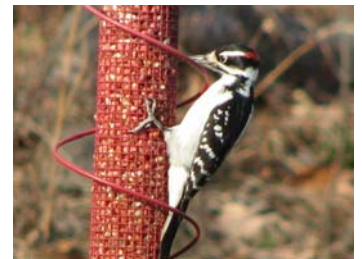
*The TM10 & TM11 have full mesh sides yet maintain their UPF50 rating.*

## FREE FILL UP WITH ANY PEANUT FEEDER PURCHASE

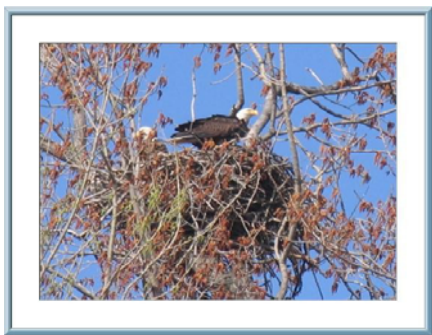


*Red-bellied Woodpecker on an Aspect Peanut Silo with Tube Top*

It is little surprise that people who try peanut feeders love them. A great variety of species love them, they don't produce any waste and you get to watch the birds longer. The peanuts do not easily come out of the wire so the feeder is usually limited to those birds who can break up the peanuts with their bills to get their reward. Peanut feeders are also quite busy during the late winter and spring periods. Now through the end of March, get a free fill up of jumbo Spanish peanuts with the purchase of any peanut feeder.



*Male Hairy Woodpecker  
Photo courtesy of Lisa Owens*



*Plattsburg Eagle's Nest  
photo courtesy of Tom and JoAnn Holman*

## UPCOMING IMPORTANT BIRD DATES

- February 21st or so - Clean Out & Place Bluebird Boxes**
- March 1st - Open 1 Martin House Door**
- March 10th - Average Arrival Date For Adult Male Martins (females and young males will filter in through April)**
- 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**