



BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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

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www.backyardbirdcenterkc.com

March 2&3, 2013 Customer Appreciation Anniversary Sale

On the morning of March 1st 2002, I turned the key on the front door as the owner of the Backyard Bird Center for the first time. On Saturday March 2nd we celebrate our 11th Anniversary with savings throughout the store.

Like past celebrations, you can expect there to be cool door prizes, snacks and some great deals. Everything in the store (except bird seed bags 40lbs and larger) will be 15% OFF. And I will be working up some extra special deals for the weekend as well.

Store Hours:
 Mon. - Fri.
 9:30 am - 6 pm
 Saturday
 9:00 am - 5:00 pm
 Sunday
 Noon - 4 pm

A Tale of Two Cousins

by Mark McKellar

Over the last 200 plus years, many plants and animals have been introduced into this country. We often don't think of animals like Rainbow Trout, Ring-necked Pheasants or even domestic cattle as introduced species because they give us "pleasure" and are not famous for causing us problems. But what about species like Japanese Honeysuckle, European Starlings or Gypsy Moths? This is the story of two very similar birds that were introduced into this country, with drastically different outcomes.

One of the most common birds in North America, the House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), was going to be the savior of the American farmer. At least that was the plan in 1851. Like so many ecological disasters, this was done without good science to back it up and the rest, as they say, is history. The House Sparrow wasn't just released in one place, one time. Over the following 20 years, House Sparrows were trapped and released in New York, Portland Maine, San Francisco, Salt Lake City, the Bahamas and even Brazil.

How quickly did we learn that

House Sparrows only eat insects when they are feeding their young and the rest of the year they eat the very grains we brought them over to protect? By

1883, there was a bounty program put into effect and contests to see who could bring in the most carcasses. Cook-books even included recipes for tasty House Sparrow meals.

My inspiration for writing this article wasn't the ubiquitous House Sparrow, it was in fact the recent area sighting of its closely related cousin, the Eurasian Tree Sparrow. In 1870,

this European member of the same genus, was introduced into Lafayette Park in St. Louis. I would be willing to bet that most of you have never heard of the ETS (as it is known as in the birding community). How can this be? Why did one bird spread across this continent like wildfire and the other never expand much farther than a few counties from its original release site?

The answer is very much tied to the "nature of the beasts". While physically the two birds are very similar, it is their "attitudes" that vary



House Sparrow
photoby Mary Nemecek



Eurasian Tree Sparrow
photoby Jim Gorski



... Tale of Two Cousins (continued from cover)

greatly. The House Sparrow is a very aggressive bird that is adaptable in its nesting and dietary requirements. They start nesting as early as February and will nest 4 times in a season.

While many species of wildlife find it difficult to adapt to humans and their disturbance, the House Sparrow thrives off of it. One recent article suggests that this species and its ancestors have totally evolved with humans and are dependent on humans for their survival.

And what about the more timid cousin? Research tells us the ETS was doing quite well in the St. Louis area in its early years and even expanding. Then the bully cousin found its way into the area. The Eurasian Tree Sparrows like the Eastern Bluebird, Purple Martin and so many other cavity nesting birds were pushed around and driven out of the more urban area by the marauding House Sparrows. Today the ETS can primarily be found in pockets around the St. Louis area with a few scattered nesting reports up into southern Iowa. I seem to recall a nesting report a few years ago in southern Wisconsin.

It is an amazing tale that has turned out badly for many of our native songbirds. What can you do to help? If you have nesting boxes of any type in your yard, do not allow House Sparrows to nest in them. Monitor your boxes closely and rip out the nest as soon as they start to build them. You don't want to be part of the problem.

It is an amazing story from so many perspectives. For someone who is a birder who enjoys seeing as many different birds as I can each time I go out, the idea of one bird being a prized find (the ETS) and the other being one of the most plentiful and least liked in North America being so closely related is amazing. Then again I can think of a cousin I find it hard to believe I am related to as well.

**Backyard Bird Center
Ground Throw Mix**

The if I can't beat them, so I might as well give them something to eat (and keep them away from my good stuff up in my feeders mix!)

**10% OFF
10, 20 & 40LB BAGS
(ENDS FEBRUARY 28TH)**

**GREAT GIFTS FOR MOM, GRANDMA,
TEACHERS OR BEST FRIENDS**

*Flags and Mailbox Wraps make great gifts.
Through the end of March, mention this and take 10%
OFF all Flags and Mailwraps in stock.*



Seasonal and special occasion flags available too!



PURPLE MARTIN HEADQUARTERS

I have always said I am my worst enemy when it comes to selling Purple Martin houses. At this store you are only going to get the truth about martin and what it takes to attract them and



maintain a good healthy colony. Since it all starts with a



good quality box that is easy to clean out, I am selective about the ones that I carry. The Nature House MSS-12 has been a standard in the industry for 50 years. They feature the **Lanyard Safety System** for raising and lowering the boxes with a rope and can be converted to nesting suites.

We now have **Add-A-Floors** for our best selling Coates boxes. Not only can you expand your boxes side to side, now you can go up, too.



Snakes and raccoons are always a challenge. The **SB9 baffle** 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 for the first time can be frustrating. We have found that 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 carry **sparrow traps** as well.

Martins are on the way. Are you ready?





Have Binos, Will Travel!

We had such high hopes for a giant finch invasion this winter. Early fall reports were really encouraging but, as it turns out, most of the invaders went east and west. Was it because of our drought conditions? No one knows for sure but we do know far more of the crossbills, Evening Grosbeak and redpoll sightings have come from the northeastern, and far western parts of the lower 48 states. Do we still have a shot at seeing the elusive Evening Grosbeaks? Yes. As I was taught when I first moved to Missouri over 20 years ago, the best month to see them is actually April. These birds are on their way back north after wintering farther south and often visit feeders that time of year.



Bald Eagles have been the stars in our area this winter photo by Mary Nemecek

The hikes and programs listed below are available to our store customers

(organized groups, can be arranged separately)

and fill on a first come first served basis.

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

Thursday Morning Bird Hikes

Every spring we suggest that you to get out as much as possible during the migration period. This spring we are going to try to help you out with that charge. Every Thursday morning during April and May, Ruth, John or myself will lead a morning bird hike at one of our favorite spots. Hopefully, one or all will fit in with your busy schedule.

<i>April 4th</i>	<i>Wyandotte Co. Park</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>
<i>April 11th</i>	<i>English Landing Park</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>
<i>April 18th</i>	<i>Parkville Nature Sanc.</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>
<i>April 25th</i>	<i>Smithville Lake</i>	<i>8:00 - 10:30</i>
<i>May 2nd</i>	<i>Little Bean Marsh</i>	<i>8:00 - 11:30</i>
<i>May 9th</i>	<i>Martha Lafite N.S.</i>	<i>8:00 - 10:30</i>
<i>May 16st</i>	<i>Weston Bend S. P.</i>	<i>8:00 - 11:30</i>
<i>May 23rd</i>	<i>Amity Woods N.P.</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>
<i>May 30th</i>	<i>Parkville Nature Sanc.</i>	<i>8:00 - 9:30</i>

In Store Classes

The Art of Bird Photography

Wednesday, March 27th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

You've admired her pictures in our newsletter, on the facebook page and on the wall in the store, nows your chance to learn some of her secrets! Mary Nemecek will take us through the ins and outs of what she looks for in capturing our feathered friends on film. Don't Miss This.

Mark's Top 10 Rules of Good Birdwatching

Wednesday, April 10th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

For the past 30 years I have learned alot about birds and the hobby of birding. If you are an experienced birder or just getting started, this class should have a thing or two to help you make your birding time more enjoyable. And yes, hopefully help you increase your lifelist!!

Weekend Bird Hikes

Smithville Lake Spring Migration

Sunday, March 24th 8:00 a.m. to noon

Most of the time we talk about the fall and winter bird populations at Smithville Lake. What comes down from the north, must go back in the spring. March can be a terrific month for birding Smithville. We will check out our favorite spots and build a good list for the day.

Meet at the Jerry Litton Center at 8 a.m.

Spring Sparrow Quest at Burr Oak Woods

Sunday, April 21st 8:00 a.m. to noon

So you want to beef up your native sparrow section of your lifelist? This is a great time of year to add birds that are only with us a few weeks each year. We will look for winter birds that are still here, nesting birds that are either just arriving or have resided and those that are just passing through. My old stomping grounds at Burr Oak Woods in Blue Springs is a terrific spot.

Meet at the front gate @ 8:00 am

Are you a Time Warner Cable subscriber? If you are, you can checkout our Thanksgiving Sunday trip to Squaw Creek to see the eagles. Just go to channel 411 and click on the Excursions topic and select us. If you know anyone who lives up in the Lincoln area, they can do the same. The more watches it gets the more likely they are to ask us to do more!



LeConte's Sparrow photo by Mary Nemecek



Northern Harrier Photo by Mary Nemecek



SPECIES PROFILE: Common Redpoll (*Acanthis flammea*)

Story by Mark McKellar

I usually reserve this column for birds we commonly see in our area but this winter's finch invasion has inspired me to write about a unique visitor that I want you all to be on the lookout for. The Common Redpoll is a northern finch that rarely wanders this far south. This winter is quite the exception with many individuals being reported at feeders mixed in with American Goldfinches and Pine Siskins.

At first glance, redpolls can be written off as a light-colored Pine Siskin. That is until you see the red forehead, black face and tiny yellow bill. When folks have called in to report one, the first question I ask is about the bill color. Like other finches, they prefer nyjer, sunflower kernels and black oil sunflower and will almost always be found in mixed finch flocks.

I remember a presentation about Peregrine Falcons nesting on Greenland and the presenter said there were

only 4 species of songbirds that nested on Greenland and Common Redpolls were one. It goes without saying then that Common Redpolls are extremely hearty little birds. I have also read they they conserve energy at night by sleeping in snow tunnels.



Common Redpoll
Photo by Bonnie Dickson

When you nest "at the top of the world" and only winter as far south as you have to due to food availability, you're a survivor. In typical winters they are only commonly seen in our northern tier states with stragglers wandering into Nebraska, Iowa and Northern Missouri. This winter is quite different as there must have been a significant seed crop failure (typically Birch trees) for them.

Keep your finch feeders filled and your eyes open. Let us know if you see these little guys at your feeder this year or any year. We would love to document their movement.



FEBRUARY SPECIAL: \$5 OFF 20LB FRUIT & BERRY !



CONSERVATION CORNER: The McGee Family Conservation Area

Missouri's newest conservation area, The McGee Family Conservation Area, opened this fall just south of Plattsburg, Missouri, in Clinton County. I knew Thomas McGee from my days with the Nature Conservancy. I knew him as a man who deeply cared about nature and its longtime protection.

Tom bequeathed his farm to the Missouri Department of Conservation upon his death in January of 2010.

Whether it was hunting quail or mushrooms, Tom was very proud of his farm and loved sharing it with others. He always wanted to donate the property after his death for preservation and enjoyment by the public.

In a MDC press release in 2011, Anita Gorman of Kansas City, former member of the Missouri Conservation Commission said, "He said he just couldn't let it be developed because there were so many Bobolinks living there." All grassland species, including Bobolinks, are in

decline due to habitat loss.

Currently the area is almost 1,000 acres of upland grasslands and hosts 6 ponds and a timber corridor along the Little Platte River. Future plans for the site include more wildlife friendly habitat such as row crops and native warm season grasses as well as wetlands around the river. The area can be accessed off County Road C or Hwy 240 in southern Clinton county.

Thanks Tom. Your legacy lives on through the birds and wildlife you loved so much.



Grassland birds like these Bobolinks have declined at alarming rates in recent years
Photo by Linda Williams



Time To Ask Mark...

Q. I saw big hawks this winter that looked like Red-tails but had big patches of white on their tail. What were they?

A. Without a picture, it is hard to be 100% certain, but I can tell you that this has been a really good winter for Rough-legged Hawks. These northern invaders have been fairly scarce in our parts the past few winters, but the low grass conditions due to our drought seem to really favor their hunting preferences. Like Red-tails they vary in color quite a bit but the best features to key in on are the dark “wrist” marks on the underside of the wing, the very dark lower belly band and the wide black tail band near the tip.



Rough-legged Hawk photo courtesy of Mary Nemecek

Q. Does anything eat Safflower?

A. I still chuckle when people say “nothing eats that stuff”. If that is the case, it is disappearing by the thousands of pounds each year from feeders in our area because it is only second in sales to Black Oil Sunflower. It is true that less birds like Safflower, but this is considered a good thing by most. It is the less desirable birds like House Sparrows, Common Grackle and Brown-headed Cowbirds that tend not to like it (not to mention squirrels). The good news is we have been experimenting with a new Safflower seed known as NutraSaff, that is both more nutritionally valuable and accepted by more birds. At my house I have seen many species of birds including American Goldfinches eating it, something I never witnessed with regular Safflower. My squirrels still hate it. Check the information out below.

Q. When should I have my bluebird boxes up?

A. Last year was an incredible year for early bluebirds. Typically they do not start nesting until April, sometimes late April. Will we see eggs again in March like some landlords did? I recommend each year to have your boxes up and cleaned by late February no matter the weather. Bluebirds will start their pair bonding then and start checking out potential nesting sights. We often see them taking a few sprigs of grass into the box that gets us really excited but it is much too early for them to be laying eggs now. Be patient and remember they generally nest 3 times per season.

Q. The Squirrels keep chewing the hole of my nest boxes so they can get their heads in. What can I do?

A. This is actually a very common problem and a simple fix. We have portal protectors from 3 different companies in stock. They come in 3 different sizes and easily drill into your box. If the hole is too big now, it is best to cut a new square of wood that will fit over the old hole, drill a new hole and attach the protector to the new piece of wood.



Portal Protector from BirdsChoice

ALWAYS LOOKING FOR A GOOD DEAL?

FEEDERS FOR UNDER \$12

What a great way to get started bird feeding. These feeders are surprisingly well built and have easy clean bases for an amazingly low price.

BirdsChoice

4 Port Multiseed Feeder

\$11.99

8" Finch Feeder \$8.99

8" Peanut Feeder \$8.99



NutraSaff (or Golden Safflower)

Growers of Safflower seed set out to improve their product. What they came up with is a version of their seed that has a much thinner seed coat that is easier for small birds to deal with, tastes better to more birds and is more nutritionally valuable.

Ask For A Free Sample

BirdsChoice's new mesh feeder build specifically for safflower and or sunflower hearts.



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DID YOU KNOW?

Free roaming house cats kill up to 3.7 billion birds each year in the continental United States. A staggering number that we can all help reduce by keeping our cats indoors. Cats live longer, healthier lives and don't bring fleas, ticks and other potential harmful things into our homes. For more detailed reading, visit the American Bird Conservancy's website and/or follow this link. http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/pdf/Loss_et_al_2013.pdf



SPRING MIGRATION IS ON THE WAY. ARE YOUR BINOS GOOD ENOUGH?



Nikon Monarch 5
8X42

My nephew in North Carolina is an avid outdoorsman. He called me just before Christmas and said he had decided to get the Nikon Monarchs I have been telling him about for a while. When he got them in the mail, he called and said "Holy Cow! I knew they were going to be better than my old pair but I was not prepared for how much better they are!" It is a common reaction by new Nikon owners. Do yourself a favor, bring in your binoculars and compare them to a set of Nikons. You will not be disappointed.



Nikon Action
8X42



Heartwood Bluebird Manor
photo by Jim Braddock

UPCOMING IMPORTANT BIRD DATES

- Late February - Place and clean out bluebird boxes
- March 10th - Average Arrival Date For Adult Male Martins (females and young males will filter in through April)
- April 1st - Clean out wrens, chickadees, titmouse nest boxes
- 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
- 2nd Week of May - Peek Migration for Warblers, etc.