



WINTER

2015

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BACKYARD BIRD CENTER NEWS

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www.backyardbirdcenterkc.com	

March 7th, 2015 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 8th we celebrate our 13th 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. The extra special Wild Delight Deal of the Day will be \$10 OFF a 20lb bag of Fruit & Berry. 15 oz. Filled Finch Socks will be Buy One, Get One Free. All Specials are limited to quantities on hand so get here early.

As a special treat this year, Operation Wildlife (see page 4) will be on hand from 11 - 5 with live hawks, owls and falcons.



What a Little Rain Can Do

by Mark McKellar

What a difference a little bit of rain can make. We are in what the meteorologists are calling a snow drought. For those of us who love feeding birds in winter, the absence of snow and/or really cold temperatures have made bird traffic at our feeders very slow. But wait, I remember the winter of 2011/12 when we only got 4 inches of snow all winter. My feeders were busier than this year. What's up with that?

To answer that question, we have to look back a few months in both of the years in question. This summer is easier for most of us to remember. We had loads of rain. Absolutely the wettest summer I have seen since the flood year of 1993. Many, many things benefited from those wet conditions.

We know Monarch populations had a better year and we think it had at least something to do with the more favorable weather conditions across much of their range.

Judging from the number of fledgling birds we saw at our bird feeders in late summer, songbirds in general seemed to have high nesting success.

Plants did really well. Some of my natives were the tallest I have ever



American Robin by Mary Nemecek

seen them. I had no idea that some of these species could get as tall as they did.

How about the summer of 2011? Pretty dry. The effect on natural food supplies going into winter was like night and day compared to this year. Plants require resources to produce fruiting bodies, seed pods, nuts, etc. When it is extremely dry, those resources are limited.

Do you have a crabapple in your yard? How about a wild plum? A hawthorne? Hopefully not a Bradford Pear? If you do, I expect you noticed plenty of berries this fall.

Now think about the number of Hackberries and other fruit producing trees and shrubs out there and you can imagine the amount of natural food for birds this winter.

The good news for those of us that love observing birds in our backyards, the best is yet to come. Natural food supplies are not limitless and quite often in years like this, the later part of winter is quite busy. I've got my finger's crossed!

**LIVE HAWKS, OWLS AND FALCONS
SATURDAY MARCH 7TH FROM 11AM TO 5PM**



BIRDS ON COINS

Story by Rick Jordahl

Birders often take advantage of opportunities to combine their passion for birding with their other favorite hobbies. For example, I often pack a small pair of binoculars in my golf bag or backpack on camping trips to get a good look at a bird while enjoying my other favorite pastimes.

Why not combine your interest in birds with another favorite hobby? Coin collecting presents such a unique opportunity. Many beautiful coins are available that are graced with stunning depictions of our favorite birds.

You have probably noticed the newly-released Everglades quarter from the U.S. Mint's 'America the Beautiful' series. The design features an anhinga with outstretched wings on a willow tree along and a roseate spoonbill on the reverse, or "tails" side of the coin. (The "heads" side of a coin is the obverse.) Both birds are found throughout the Everglades.

Watch for the Kisatchie National Forest coin also scheduled for release in 2015. The coin features a wild turkey in flight over blue stem grass with long leaf pine in the background.

Quarters from the U.S. Mint's 'America the Beautiful' series are also available in "jumbo" 5 ounce coins which are very popular with collectors. These "coins" (about \$155 plus shipping) provide a much larger format, ideal for displaying their beautiful artwork.

There are two avenues to consider if you're interested in bird coins. First, you can start your collection by watching your change for coins bearing birds or stop at your bank and ask about buying a new roll of a particular bird coin such as the new Everglades quarter. It's a great way to get young people interested in coin collecting as well as birding. Plus, they make great gifts.

If you're more serious consider bullion coins. Bird coins are available in .999 pure silver. And, if you are real serious, Gold Eagle coins are also available from the U.S. Mint and are priced based on the spot price of gold bullion, currently between \$1,200 and \$1,300 per ounce.

With silver bullion currently around \$17 per ounce these coins provide a more affordable way to start your collection. For more information and ordering gold and silver bullion coins go to USmint.gov.

We all know the thrill of birding. Collecting bird coins is a fun way to extend your interest in birds to a beautiful way to hold one in your hand!



Announcing Our Newest Optics Line:



I am super excited to announce that we are now a Kowa Optics dealer. Many of you may not be familiar with these great binoculars and spotting scopes but I assure you they are outstanding. I used a Kowa Spotting Scope for many years and absolutely loved it.

If you have known me for any length of time, you know my dedication to Nikon. I am still a Nikon dealer and love their products but this past year, they forced my hand with spotting scopes. They discontinued my favorite spotting scope and didn't replace it with a reasonable solution. I started researching other companies and discovered the Kowa had "blown away" the scope market with their new Prominar Pure Fluorite line of lenses.

Wow! This scope is absolutely phenomenal. If you doubt me, go on and read the reviews by leading optics reviewers. Be careful to select an unbiased site that isn't run by a rival company.

I will be bringing in some of their binoculars in the coming weeks but the TSN-883 will be available very soon.



KOWA TSN-883
AN AMAZING VIEW!!



Have Binos, Will Travel!

In a winter that was so incredibly mild through this writing, the bird activity has been about what you would expect. Throw in the really wet summer that proceeded these mild conditions and you have a perfect formula for certain species of birds. American Robins, Cedar Waxwings, Northern Mockingbirds and Eastern Bluebirds have flourished in this berry rich environments. Most area Christmas Bird Counts set new records for some of these species. These same conditions have made feeder activity extremely slow. Among all of these mild conditions, one of the rarest, most sought after birds in North America showed up in Quincy Illinois. John, Ruth, Mary and I rode over with two more friends and saw our first Ivory Gull. There were over 30 of us there that day with hundreds more from around the country arriving over the next few days. An incredible opportunity for midwest birders to see this arctic specialty.



**Ivory Gull Photo by
Linda Williams**

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.

April 2 nd	Wyandotte Co. Park	8:00 - 9:30
April 9 th	Parkville Nature Sanc.	8:00 - 9:30
April 16 th	Burr Oak Woods	8:00 - 10:30
April 23 rd	Smithville Lake	8:00 - 10:30
April 30 th	Cooley Lake C.A.	8:00 - 10:30
May 7 th	Martha Lafite N.S.	8:00 - 10:30
May 14 th	Weston Bend S. P.	8:00 - 11:30
May 21 st	Amity Woods N.P.	8:00 - 9:30
May 28 th	Parkville Nature Sanc.	8:00 - 9:30

In Store Classes

Are My Binoculars Good Enough?

Wednesday, March 25th 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

There are many choices in birding and nature viewing optics. We will learn what all the numbers mean and how to choose the right binoculars for your needs. Whether it is for going to a Royals' game, Starlight Theater, a vacation to a far away land, everyone need a good pair of binoculars. Everyone attending will receive an free gift from Nikon.

Mark's Spring Migration Primer

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

One of our more popular classes each year is this chance to brush up on the upcoming migration season. Mark will take us through the who, what and where of our most exciting birding season. Warblers, vireos, tanagers and more

Weekend Bird Hikes

Wookcock Walk at Martha Lafite Nature Sanc.
March ? You have to be flexible with Woodcocks.
Call MLTNS in Liberty for Date and Time
(816)781-8598

Scope Day at the Lake

Sunday, March 29th 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
 Looking through a good spotting scope or pair of binoculars while in the store is one thing but looking through them at birds on a lake are quite another. My plan for this day is to see what great birds are on Smithville Lake and demonstrating great birding optics at the same time. Spring migration should be in full swing and our new Kowa Spotting Scopes should be in stock as well. We will demonstrate digiscoping with a cell phone
 Meet at the Jerry Litton Center at 1 p.m.

Wyandotte County Lake

Sunday, April 12th 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Meet at the small dock below the Library

Mark Your Calendars

<i>Bringing Nature Home</i>	<i>Burr Oak Woods Nature Center</i>
Saturday March 21st	1pm - 3pm
<i>2nd Annual Native Plant Sale</i>	<i>Store Parking Lot</i>
Saturday May 2nd	9am - 5pm
Hoping to build on last year's success!!	
<i>Wings Over Weston</i>	<i>Weston Bend State Park</i>
Saturday May 9th	9am - 4pm
We will have a booth at this great event that is dedicated entirely to migrating birds and monarchs.	



SPECIES PROFILE: Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*)

Story by Ruth Simmons

Did I see a sea gull just now? No, you saw a parking lot gull! There are also dumpster, landfill, prairie pot hole, lake, river, and ocean gulls. Since gulls can be found near any body of water or food source, "sea" is no longer used. It's just "gull".

To get back to our Parking lot gull, our shopping center is frequented by the Ring-billed Gull. They are commonly seen in our area during spring and fall migration and gathered around our lakes and rivers during the winter. Ring-billed Gulls nest in colonies, around lakes in Canada and the northern United States.

Gulls can be an extremely frustrating group of birds to indentify. They vary widely in appearance from year to year and even within a year. Many gulls like the Ring-billed take 3 years to reach adult plumage. Some gulls take 2 years while others can take 4.



Adult Ring-billed Gull

Juvenile Ring-billed Gull
photos by Mary Nemecek



Ring-billed gulls are a medium sized gull; 17-18 inches long with a four foot wing span. By comparison, a Herring Gull is 25 inches long with an almost 5 foot wing span. Adult birds have a pale grey mantle (back) and wings with black spotted wing tips. Their yellow legs match their yellow beak which features their namesake black ring near the tip. Young birds vary widely with brown streaking dark legs and various bill colors.

To add to the confusion, most field guides only show gulls in nice bright adult plumage. To learn gulls, it really pays to invest in a more advanced field guide like Sibley's or National Geographic.

While you can see Ring-billed Gulls in our parking lot during migration (typically after a good rain), your best bet is to head out to a large lake like Smithville. Learning them takes a lot of patience, practice and a scope, but it can be done!



MARCH/APRIL SPECIAL: \$1 OFF PINK FINCH SOCKS!



CONSERVATION CORNER: Operation Wildlife

We get many, many calls each year from people who have found an injured or an apparently abandoned wild animal. One of the top facilities for dealing with these animals is located in our area. Operation Wildlife is headquartered in Linwood, Kansas and has an additional receiving center in Shawnee. They are a 100% publicly funded (no tax support) clinic that has been serving NE Kansas for 25 years.

They are obviously good at what they do as they can boast a 69% release rate which is 20% higher than the national average. The secret to their success lies in dedicated volunteers who work tirelessly to help wild animals get a second chance at a free ranging life.

As you probably saw on the cover, we are extremely excited to have this group coming out for this year's Anniversary Sale on Saturday March 7th. They will

bring several of their "education" animals that can not be released back into the wild. They will include a variety of hawks, owls and falcons.

If you want to learn more about this fine group or perhaps learn more about how to support and or volunteer for them, visit their web page www.owl-online.org. You can also call them at (785) 542-3625 or (913) 631-6566.



Program Animal Mrs. G
Female American Kestrel

If you are in the state of Kansas and find an injured or orphaned wild animal, they ask that you keep pets and children away from it, do not try to feed it or give it water and contact them immediately at one of the numbers above. They can advise you on the best way to handle the situation and get the animal to them. If you are in Missouri, you can call them for advice but it is illegal to transport wildlife across state lines.



Time To Ask Mark...

Q. Why are birds singing so early?

A. One of the biggest rewards of toughing out the winter in your year round home is first shot at getting prime nesting sites and the chance at getting extra nestings in each year. Warmer than normal conditions may play a small role in getting resident birds to start singing early but most natural processes in birds are triggered by day length. It may not be all that noticeable to us yet but days are getting longer and birds know that means nesting season is fast approaching.

Q. Were there more Bald Eagles around than normal this winter?

A. The short answer is yes. Bald Eagle populations in our state are doing quite well. According to the Missouri Department of Conservation, surveys conducted just a couple of winters ago estimated our "summer population" of Bald Eagles in MO at about 600 birds. Our "winter populaton" blooms to about 3,500 birds statewide. We have had reports this winter from pretty much all local lakes, major rivers, small streams and even farm fields. Ruth added it as a new "yard bird" as she watched one fly over her house in downtown Lee's Summit!



Bald Eagle photo
courtesy of Pat White

Q. Should I put out potential nesting materials to help birds?

A. I actually like to place nesting helpers out but you need to be selective. DO NOT use dryer lint. I know you probably have heard this from me before, but it is too dusty with very small particles. Use things like various lengths of strings, feathers, natural wool, fur (bison, Alpaca, dog, etc) and cotton. I like to place it under the overhang of my deck. Over 50 species of North American birds have been documented using people provided nesting materials.



Songbird Essentials
Birdie Bell with
Nesting Materials. It
also doubles as a seed
feeder the rest of
the year.

Q. How do I keep seeds from sprouting under my feeders?

A. The only real way is to feed hulless seeds like fine, medium or coarse kernels. Shelled peanuts will not germinate and neither will Nyjer seed (it has a seed coat but is sterilized before packaging). Regularly raking up the mess under your feeders can cut down on sprouting as can lots of Mourning Doves (the vacuum cleaners of the bird world).

MEALWORM SEASON IS HERE

BLUEBIRDS LOVE MEALWORMS

Live mealworms are great for attracting bluebirds and many other species.

Chickadees, wrens and others utilize this free source of insects to feed their young ones. The entertainment really goes up when they start bringing the fledglings and teaching them about the buffet!

500 Count Live Mealworms are \$9.99

Dried Mealworms (several hundred) \$12.99

"Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress started to do away with them. Now we face the question if a still "higher standard" is worth its cost in things natural, wild and free."

- Aldo Leopold, Foreward to "A Sand County Almanac"



FRUIT & BERRY from Wild Delight

At our Anniversary Sale on March 7th, we will be having a drawing for a FREE 20lb Fruit & Berry for a year! Even if you don't win you can still get a great deal on this popular blend all month.

During the month of March,
20lb Bags of the new Zero-Waste will be
\$5 OFF a 20lb Bag or
\$2 OFF a 5lb Bag.



BACKYARD BIRD CENTER
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Saturday
9:00 am - 5:00 pm
Sunday
Noon - 4 pm

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DID YOU KNOW?

The average return date for adult male Purple Martins to our area is March 10th. These birds are the older males and are popularly known as the "Scouts". Many martin landlords help their martins by placing a de-icer in one of the unused compartments so it can heat the box during stretches of spring cold snaps. The Farm innovator B9 can be rolled up or tapped to the bottom of a aluminum box and the heat will radiate throughout.



A REALLY HANDY IDEA



We picked up a new item from the folks who make the Flip Note pads that have been so popular. These are "pockets" that stick to the back of your cell phone or phone case. They are a sleeve that fit an ID size card or two. I use mine (pictured) to hold a few business cards. My daughter uses her for her school ID. After all, you can't go anywhere without your cell phone these days. They can easily be peeled off and reapplied.

They come in 5 different colors and are only \$4.99



Wood Ducks nest in timber as far as a mile from water.

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 - Peak Migration for Warblers, etc.