



# BACKYARD nature center News

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## Our love affair with Goldfinches

Like little balls of sunshine, they fly through our lives, leaving joy and wonder in their wake. The American Goldfinch is one of the most sought-after birds. They inspire people from coast to coast to hang special feeders and to offer special seed in an effort to win the birds' hearts and their presence. What is it about goldfinches that creates an "I want to feed them!" frenzy in humans?

Their color certainly is a start. They are yellow—the bright, clear, defining yellow of lemons and daffodils. And, as if the yellow wasn't enough, there's just the right amount of stark black as contrast—a little here, a little there—insuring that the yellow jumps out at us.

But it can't just be color. After all, our lives are full of color.

Maybe it's the song, though not as stylish as Mockingbirds, as persistent as wrens, or as tuneful as robins, goldfinches chatter quietly year-round. They have a complicated little ditty that you might have trouble humming, but it is instantly recognizable as something familiar.

But many birds have more beautiful songs and sounds.

I suppose it could be the birds' motion. Goldfinches fly with a kind of joie de vivre that would brighten any day. And they are extremely agile, feeding happily right-side up, upside

down, side-to-side, and sometimes in directions that defy both logic and gravity. It is their agility that inspired the Upside Down Thistle Feeder, a tube



feeder that has the access ports beneath the perches (goldfinches are one of the few bird species that are comfortable with this feeding style).

But all birds can fly, so it's probably not just their movements that we admire.

It could be that, more than most birds, goldfinches are dependent on seed. Perhaps we feel we can contribute more to their well-being. In fact, goldfinches are so seed-dependent that they even feed partially digested, regurgitated seed to their young. Most backyard birds, no matter how much seed they eat as adults, feed insects to their young. This also contributes to the goldfinches' habit of bringing the young to the feeders soon after they fledge.

Maybe it's the birds' large popula-

tions. Goldfinches generally travel and feed in flocks. When attracted to a feeder, goldfinch numbers often grow until the birds almost overwhelm the feeder's capacity.

But, no, if numbers were everything, we would be thrilled with the arrival of blackbirds . . . and few of us are!

Maybe we are enamored with goldfinch unpredictability. Goldfinches tend to wander at will, leaving a perfectly good feeder for no apparent reason, only to show up

three weeks later and act as though they never left. Maybe it's just a case of absence making the heart grow

fonder. But the logical extension of that would take us back to blackbirds. No, it can't be



any one thing. The secret of the goldfinch's backyard stardom is the whole package: color, sound, motion, behavior. They are a perfect combination of startling and delightful, musical and visual. They are free spirits and feeder dependents, abundant and absent.

Whatever it is that tickles your bird-feeding fancy, goldfinches are likely to oblige.

# Awww...The Night Crew! Raccoons



I recently watched a PBS story on raccoons which was eye opening to say the least. We know that all creatures are losing habitat whether it's fox, deer, raccoons, or humans.

Quite often we have folks come into the store toting a torn up, bedraggled and generally destroyed feeder,

remarking that the squirrels tore it up during the night. Well, guess what, the squirrels can chew up feeders for sure, but they do not have the dexterity or strength to pull a feeder apart and dismantle it. What we are dealing with here are "small bears". Let's call them Wichita bears! To my surprise I learned that, in any populated suburban area, there can be up to 50 raccoons' per square mile! No longer living in hollowed out trees, they make their homes in man-made structures like sheds, attics, sewers and barns. Their diet in the wild consists of vegetation, sweet foods like fruits and invertebrates which they will wash if fresh water is available. You may peer out to your birdbath at dusk and witness a surprise! Mostly nocturnal, and active at nighttime, but if you see one out late in the day, it's normal and doesn't necessarily mean that it is rabid. So...if you feel you have raccoons invading your bird feed at night, you can bring in your feeders, or use a raccoon baffle on your pole. They really do the trick!



## Tax time is Oriole time!

Time to get my jelly ready. Now I start purchasing sugar in ten pound bags! From mid- to late April Baltimore and Orchard Orioles arrive in our area. The person who is "ready", really ready, will be the winner! The oriole is, by far, the bossiest and most demanding of all songbirds you will be feeding in your yard. Songbirds are very visual and find a feeder by sight. Position, where you can view it easily, a simple feeder containing their favorite jelly and it will be one of the busiest and most delightful feeders in your yard. When selecting your jelly, check the label for fructose corn syrup. It is very bad for the birds. We carry a Bird Berry jelly that fits the bill (no pun intended) or you can make your own jelly. Ask us to print off a great homemade jelly recipe. The orioles love it!



## Myth or Madness?

The old saying "she eats like a bird" does not apply to your feeder visitors in spring and summer! Keeping your feeders full in spring and summer is a busy task for sure. Seed eating birds like cardinals, goldfinches, house finches, blue jays, doves, and even woodpeckers are all looking for a good place to feed themselves, one with fresh pickings fast. Busily flying back and forth building nests and feeding young is exhausting and stressful. We can help by consistently providing fresh sunflower, nuts and millet, all high calorie foods that fulfill the energy requirements of tireless adults. Insects make a great meal for young while in the nest, but eventually, the seed eaters will show up with mom and dad at your feeder, begging to be fed. What a delight!



JELLY HEAVEN!

**15 % OFF**  
any jelly feeder

C041603; Expires 5/31/16. Cannot be combined with any other offer. One per family please.

## ASK NICK & CATHY:

### What tips can you give me to attract hummingbirds?

April is the time for hummingbirds to rejoin us after their winter hiatus in Central America. Let's welcome them back with open arms (and clean feeders)! If you want to attract hummers to your yard but have not had much success in the past, we offer these ideas. First off, get your feeders up and make them as noticeable as possible. If you don't think the feeder has enough red on it to get their attention, add some! A red bow will do wonders. Place the feeder in a very obvious spot in your yard. A spot they can't help but notice and that you also can see well.

Then the next thing is to commit to cleanliness! This is probably the one reason so many of us do not see hummers consistently. If the feeders are left in the sun for many days, the nectar spoils. If that happens more than once or twice, then the feeder becomes a breeding ground for bacteria. You won't kill a hummingbird with a dirty feeder, they will just stop coming!

Another hint is to put up more than one feeder. Hummers are very territorial and one will often defend a single feeder. More than one feeder placed around your yard spreads the wealth and allows more activity.

Gardening for hummingbirds is a terrific idea as well. Make them welcome any way you can!



## Creating a pollinator garden

As we look forward to the bright colors and constant activity of hummingbirds and butterflies each spring, we often overlook the fact that they are useful as well as decorative. Butterflies and hummingbirds, along with wasps and bees, are pollinators. Their daily quest for nectar to sustain the energy levels we so admire transfers pollen from one plant to another. In some cases, this role is critical to the survival of the plants: things like blueberries, cucumbers, tomatoes and cherries are dependent on cross-pollination, and they wouldn't bear fruit (or vegetables, as the case may be) without the help of pollinators.

If you want to help them help us, consider creating a "pollinator garden." Such a place would be filled with fragrant, nectar-filled flowers plus herbs good for hungry, growing larvae. Any small space will benefit these delightful creatures and us, too. Look for a sunny spot that is sheltered by large shrubs or perhaps along a garden wall. Ideally, a pollinator garden should be away from patios, decks, and doors to minimize the potential for lifestyle conflict between people and the periodic stinging insect guest, but it should be visible from the house, so you can enjoy the beauties of the garden.

A narrow border of nectar-filled flowers, pots filled with impatiens and fuschia, or a window box of petunias can provide a necessary meal or two and a resting spot between plants. Choosing the right plants can add to the safety and enjoyment of your garden, allowing you to help them help us.



### Spring is here!

Spring offers a wonderful opportunity to see, not just Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, who nest in Kansas, but to spot Rufus, Broadtail, Caliope and other migrants just stopping by your yard to freshen up and head north and west to their nesting grounds. We are in one of the best migratory flyways of the U.S.



GIVE MOM A BATH!

15% OFF  
any birdbath for  
her big day

C041601; Expires 5/31/16.  
Cannot be combined with any other offer.

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in stock bird feeder

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**STORE HOURS**  
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PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT:  
 WWW.BACKYARDNATURECENTER.COM



# Mother's Day is May 8th



**Who's been the rock in your family, MOM right?**  
 Why not treat her to a "forever birdbath" made of granite?  
 Our granite birdbaths have really been a hit. Perhaps a bit on the heavy side, but that is one of their great qualities...they don't blow around or cannot be tipped easily. A water feature in your garden is a great attractor. Add a water wiggler and keep the water moving. Mosquitoes cannot lay eggs in moving water and the water wiggler works on a couple batteries for the entire season.




Tammy, Cathy, Nick and Mary.  
 We look forward to helping you!