



# BACKYARD nature center News

April/May 2012 • Issue 12

## The Season for Singing



**Spring is a great time to spot new birds as the males sing loudly in attempts to attract mates.**

Throughout recorded history, poets, musicians, and other artists have sought to evoke the unique joy of spring. They play exuberant, airy tunes and sing flowers of showers. They describe the warmth of the season, the rich smell of fertile earth and the promise of rebirth and renewal. They search for just the right palette to capture the quality of the light after spring rain. They struggle to strike the chord that will resonate in is as springtime.

Then, with just three notes, the lowly robin blows them all away. Nothing elicits the joy of spring like the natural thrill of hearing birds sing.

It starts slowly. Sometime in midwinter you hear the thin *fee bee* of a chickadee in the stillness of the morning. Soon after, you may hear the

insistent *birdie, birdie, birdie* of the cardinal or the quiet *coo coocoo* of the dove. The year-round residents have weighed in with the welcome message that spring is on its way.

As the winter wanes and insects emerge, returning migrants join the avian chorus. Flycatchers and warblers fill the woods and

meadows with aural evidence of the their

arrival. Wrens, thrushes and orioles announce their intent to set up house-keeping. By late April and May, the air fills with music that promises new life.

Singing is a basic form of expression as well, but one that is not highly valued in our increasingly complex society. We tend to relegate the simple pleasure to children and professional musicians.

Songbirds know better. If they didn't sing, their species would not survive. Usually it's the male that sings, both to attract a mate and to warn off potential competitors for his

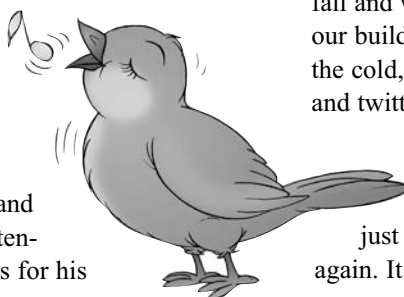
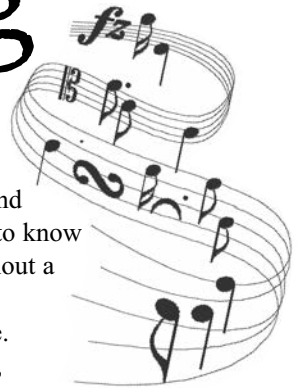
chosen territory. Each species has its own "song," and he's expected to know it. A male without a song is a male without a mate.

Some birds, such as towhees, Song Sparrows, and thrushes sit on exposed perches to drum up business and claim territory. With the brown spot on his chest puffed out like a tenor's bow tie, the determined Song Sparrow sings for hours at a time. Other courtiers, such as warblers and thrushes, seem more shy, and will usually stay hidden in dense cover. For a birder trying to locate the source of a song, this elusiveness adds to the mystique of the songster. Perhaps it has a similar effect in the intended.

Once they mate, birds will sometimes sing just to stay in touch, though they usually use "call notes" for routine communication.

Whether or not we join them, our souls are nourished by bird song in spring. We've missed hearing the birds, partly because they sing very little in fall and winter. Perhaps we've also had our buildings shuttered tightly against the cold, so we haven't heard the chips and twitters common to avian daily life.

In spring we open the windows of our houses and hearts, just as the singing begins again. It's real ode to joy.



## Purple Martin update:

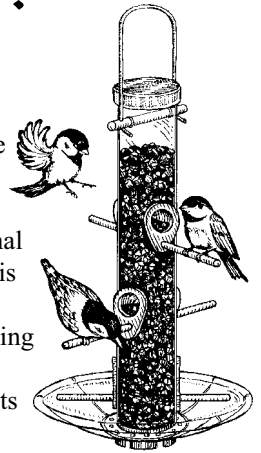


This year our older adult martins started to arrive March 23rd, nearly a week later than last year. We now have 20 compartments to facilitate a large colony. When the first birds arrived, one single pair of house sparrows felt brave enough to hang around for a couple days. Nick was ready with the sparrow trap but didn't have to use it, thank goodness. They left on their own as the numbers of adult martins was rising daily. I know it's difficult, but I beg you not to let the sparrow's co-habit in the martin house. House Sparrows are ruthless and will kill young martins and break eggs and try to take over the house. The sparrows nest 5 to 6 times a year and martins have only one single brood. That's it, one brood. Please share your stories and even pictures with us when you come in. We never get tired of hearing of your success! From now until the middle of May is the perfect time to put up a new martin house.

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Nick and Cathy Clausen, Owners

## To feed or not to feed? That is the question.

Lots of folks ask us here at the store, if they should continue to feed the birds during the spring and summer. The most common misconception is that the birds can fend for themselves during the warmer months, when in fact, the nutritional needs for the birds during nest building and feeding young, is so high that the birds can really use the help. Think about this.....flowers, shrubs and bushes are all in bloom and looking quite beautiful while providing good cover for the birds....but.....natural seed is not available until those plants reseed themselves in fall! There you have it. Those are the facts. Insects are plentiful for sure and the birds will take advantage of their abundance. Feeding young mouths is a never ending job from dawn till dusk. Seed-eating birds feed their fledglings' regurgitated insects but they themselves would prefer a nice oily sunflower!



Spring and summer activities are so fun to watch. It is really a special time of year and one that I always look forward to. There's nothing sweeter than watching a male cardinal feeding his mate, or a seeing a full sized baby downy woodpecker follow mom to the feeder, stand there dumbfounded waiting for a hand out. They soon get the idea. Bird feeding is a most enjoyable hobby and we know the birds are grateful. I say, if you want to see birds in your yard, feed them.

## Naked hot tub party anyone?

Okay, now that I've got your attention. How's the condition of your birdbath this year?

Is it time for a fresh shiny new place for your birds to drink and meet other birds socially? This spring we brought in a beautiful new line of stone baths from CAST ART. The finish is a rich rusty bronze and the bowls are decorated with raised hummingbird, dragonfly or butterfly designs.



Functional, beautiful and a real statement for your yard and garden. We also have new colors and sizes available in our traditional glazed baths. Check out the drippers you can add to your bath to keep water coming and fresh! Try a "water wiggler"? A little dome shaped object that sits in your bath and wiggles. Now in either solar powered or battery powered, it keeps water moving and fresh making it impossible for mosquito's to lay eggs and become stagnant. A great idea for sure!

*Let them party!*

**10% OFF  
Birdbaths**

C120401; Expires 5/31/2012.

Not to be combined w/ other offers. Limit one coupon per customer. Must present coupon at time of purchase.

**FREE ant moat  
w/purchase of any  
oriole or hummingbird  
feeder**

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*WILD CARD*

**\$10 OFF  
any purchase  
of \$50 or more**

C120403; Expires 5/31/2012.

Not to be combined w/ other offers. Limit one coupon per customer. Must present coupon at time of purchase.

# Ready....Set.....Go!

Get your jelly feeders ready! The orioles are on their way and they are sugar junkies for sure! In our area we enjoy both Baltimore Orioles and Orchard Orioles. The difference, you ask? Orchard Orioles are more rusty



brown and black while the Baltimore's are very orange and black. Females and young birds are very different. Look for a greenish/yellow bird in amongst the males. Last year we were bombarded with orioles. I kept two jelly feeders going filling them morning and late afternoon. My favorite feeder is a little copper feeder with a small red bead dangling in the middle. The copper wire is curled into a heart shape and cradles a simple blue glass custard cup. made by our creative friends at "Holland Hill" who just keep coming up with wonderful ways to twist and turn copper into beautiful garden ornaments for feeding the birds.

Now I want to share a secret. I truly think the reason I get so many orioles in my yard is the special jelly I feed them. It's not just any old jelly. It is my dear Mother-In-Law's grape/apple jelly. I'll share the recipe with you. Just ask us to print it off Grandma Clausen's jelly recipe for you from the registers receipt printer. Made with grape and apple juice and pectin, one batch uses 12 cups of sugar! See what I mean? Sugar junkies!



## SPECIES PROFILE:

# Barn Swallow

The Barn Swallow is probably one of the most graceful birds that we can see flying about our yards this summer. They are also one of the easiest to identify because of their lovely, deeply forked tails! All swallows have a bit of a notched tail but this guys is so prominent, you can't miss it. (The story on his tail is that he angered the gods by bringing man fire, and one of the deity tossed a firebrand at the swallow, singeing away it's middle tail feathers.)

Swallows feed on the wing and eat mostly flying insects. They will also pick up grit and small pebbles (to help with digestion) and might grab some of the eggshells we talked about in our nesting bird column! Their flight, while foraging, is often very low to the ground or water... and they have learned to follow farm equipment as it moves through fields because of the insects it kicks up.

Barn Swallows are so named because of their propensity to nest in structures. Before we gave them this help, they nested in caves, but today very few do. It seems we are providing them all they need when we put up our homes. Their cup shaped nests made of mud and grasses are glued to walls. They nest in barns and stables... but I have to say, I see more of them coming out from under bridges than anywhere else.

Keep an eye out this summer for this beauty. He has come a long way from his wintering grounds in South America to forage in our backyards. Take a moment and enjoy the show he puts on for us here.



## Portrait of Mother Nature

*Beneath the clouds lives the Earth Mother from whom is derived the Water of Life, who at her bosom feeds plants, animals, and men.*  
—Algonquin legend

In many cultures, dating back since the first civilizations, Mother Nature or the Earth Mother has been associated with plentiful harvests, fruitfulness, and fertility. Her image is depicted in many mediums and we are proud to offer a sculptural Mother Nature to encourage abundance in your own home and garden.





*For people who feed and care for backyard birds*

The Shops at Tallgrass

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

**316-683-2121**

### STORE HOURS

OPEN 7 DAYS WEEK

Monday–Friday: 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

Saturday: 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

Sunday: 12 noon–4 p.m.

**Return Service Requested**

PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT:

[WWW.BACKYARDNATURECENTER.COM](http://WWW.BACKYARDNATURECENTER.COM)

Mother's  
Day  
•  
Sunday  
May 13



Give Mom a breath of fresh air  
with the gift of nature from the Backyard Nature Center!

Here are a few suggestions:

High-quality optics • wind chimes  
decorative bluebird houses • birdbaths • nest boxes  
Bovano copper wall art • hummingbird feeders

The BACKYARD Nature Center is your local resource for binoculars. We offer expert advice while providing you with quality optics.