



BACKYARD nature center News

April/May 2014 • Issue 22

Home Tweet Home



For those of us who feed and watch the birds in our yards the fun is not just being able to identify the various types but in learning more details about them. We learn which birds like what seeds, what time of the day they like to come to the feeder, and even how they feed. The Black-capped Chickadee for example picks up various seeds and finally picks one and flies away to eat it. What they are doing is weighing the seeds and taking the heaviest away.

Just as our growing knowledge of birds allows us to understand that all birds don't eat seed from a bird feeder, we soon learn that not all birds make use of the iconic peaked roof "bird house" with a little hole in the front. And, would you believe, that not all birds even make a nest of twigs and sticks! That's right! Of the roughly 285 species of birds in the eastern United States, less than one-third of them use a nest box! So what is everybody else doing? And who does what?

Another of the ways that birds are differentiated is by their nesting activities, which can provide great pleasure to the nature watcher and amateur sleuth. In addition to courtship and nest building, you can enjoy watching the

hatching, feeding, and, finally, the fledging of the young birds.

Most other birds nest on the ground, either in open cups or shallow depressions scraped in the ground. Common ground nesters include killdeer, towhees, and many species of native sparrows. It is for these ground-nesting birds that loose cats and dogs are a major cause of the decline in populations.

A few birds, including the Belted Kingfisher, actually build their nests underground or in holes along the banks of creek beds.

Those interested in helping and observing the nesting activities of these different types of birds can get involved and have fun doing it. Except for those crazy Kingfishers and their burrows! They will have to do that on their own!

The easiest way to help the most birds is to make some good nesting material available. The birds can usually find twigs and sticks, but you can help with some of the finishing touches. Make available some sheep's wool for lining that cozy nest, or set out some feathers, or dog hair, moss, lichen, yarn or string. You can even set out a saucer of dirt and water to provide some handy mud for the birds that want to use that to hold things together. And what a thrill, when you

find some colorful wool or yarn in a nest that makes use of "your" building materials!

Some of these nesting materials will find their way into open nests for cardinals and robins, but other bits of it will be carried away to a suitable nest box for use by a cavity nester. The design of the nest box is important; look for the following criteria: correct dimensions, untreated wood or metal, ventilation, drainage, clean-out access and no perch. That's right. No perch. The birds don't need it and it helps nest-robbing predators.

Although a lot of people hang or mount their nest boxes directly on trees, others prefer to mount their nest box on a pole, where they can see it. A pole also gives you the option of adding a baffle to protect the nest box from predators. Tucking a nest

boxes into quaint and cozy locations within deep foliage of trees hurts your chances for successfully attracting nesting birds. Remember, naturally occurring cavities are usually found on dead trees, which have no foliage. Birds are unlikely to look for cavities on healthy trees, so place your nest box out in the open if you can. If possible, mount it where it will not have the afternoon sun shining in the opening. This will help keep the nestbox from overheating. Enjoy the show!



Let it be spring please!



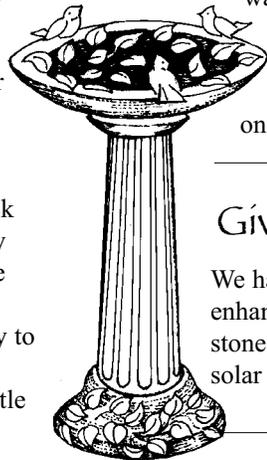
Written by
Cathy Clausen,
Master
Gardener and
Avid Backyard
Birdwatcher

Ok, winter was fun but I need GREEN! Anyone else feel the same? I'm sure you said yes, emphatically. Thanks to daylight savings time I have more time to get out, dig in the yard, plant, clean, and listen to my birds. Not just through the closed windows either! Bluebirds, chickadees, Tufted Titmice, nuthatches and woodpeckers have already started nesting and at this time are feeding young in their cozy houses and tree cavities. I'm ready to see them bring their babies to my mealworm feeder and seed feeders. It will be hard to say goodbye to the beautiful Harris Sparrow but I already missed the slate colored junco's departure. The new guys are coming soon! I need to get my jelly production going for the Baltimore and Orchard Orioles. They will be arriving by the end of April, along with the hummingbirds. Our little one acre plot of land is our own wildlife sanctuary. Nothing is more calming than a couple hours working in the yard, followed by a glass of iced tea on the screened back porch. I always feel like I am quietly spying on the birds from my vantage point where they can't see us. But frankly, I think they are just too busy to care. At this point in our lives, we remember how tiring it is feeding little

mouths and keeping everybody happy and healthy. It is our pleasure to help them by having full feeders and clean birdbaths. They really do reward us with their bright spring color and their songs!

Our four young grandchildren are benefitting from grandma and grandpa nature lover's backyard. At least I hope. We are teaching them to find beauty in all plant life and wildlife, and to observe it with a kind of reverence. That's not easy for little guys with busy hands and noisy voices but it can be done. It's kind of a "low tech" lifestyle that seems to slow the pace a bit and they learn to speak with a low hush if you want to see more birds. I hope when I'm gone the kids remember grandma and grandpa's as a quiet, peaceful kind of place. If I had my

way, I'd completely go off the grid, but turning off the television may be my only big sacrifice. Out



to the yard I go to work among the butterflies feeding on the flowers, the chickadees and titmice, cardinals and other great colorful singers just above my head. Gotta run....time to get the canna's planted for the hummingbirds!



Give your "dirty birds" a bath!

We have brought in so many new birdbaths that we think will enhance your yard's color and décor! Unique glass, pottery, carved stone, and copper finished baths. Some of the glass baths have a solar light positioned under them to glow through the evening hours!

Wild Card
15% OFF
any one item

C050114; Expires May 31, 2014.
Cannot be combined with other offers.



15% OFF
any birdbath, dripper
or water wiggler

C050214; Expires May 31, 2014. Cannot be combined with other offers.

SPECIES PROFILE

Baltimore Oriole

The male is flame-orange and black, with a solid-black head. The female and young: Olive-brown above, burnt orange-yellow below, and white wing bars. Some females may have traces of black on the head, suggesting the hood of the male. They nest in open woods, elms and tall shade trees, creating the most intriguing woven sack nest hanging down from a high branch. The oriole's song is made of rich, piping whistled unmistakable notes, almost demanding to a point.



You can entice this colorful 7 to 8" bird to your yard with a simple dish of jelly. Yes, I said jelly. Fruit often quickly becomes dry in our spring and summer weather and attracts bugs. Grape jelly, on the other hand, stays moist and desirable and the birds can easily lap it up with their long beak and tongue. It normally doesn't last long enough to attract many bees at my house. I make a wonderful grape/apple jelly from fruit juices, sugar and pectin. Ask us at the store to print off the homemade recipe.

Summer bird visits at the jelly feeder can also include the much darker Orchard Oriole. He is very dark rust with a black head. Take a second look, you just may be right as they do nest here too. They just don't seem to be as easy to spot. The lovely little house finch will be happy you offered jelly too, if they can get a chance at it!

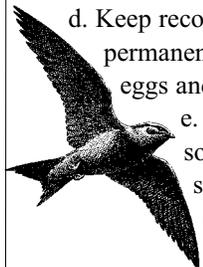
Martin Facts

that just might help

Blessed with a purple martin colony right in the middle of our parking lot, it is our hope that we can help you be successful too. Last season, the colony fledged between 90 and 100 young martins! That is incredible! Our older adult birds started arriving March 13th and at this writing are still coming. Here are Nick's top tips for helping your martins.



- a. Do regular nest checks. Do not fear lowering the house to do a quick check. The adults may fly out and around the house, but will return as quickly as you raise the house.
- b. Walk around the base of the house and do a brief check looking for young birds that may have fallen or jumped out. Also look for signs of predation that may be going undetected.
- c. Control nest competitors. This is very important as English house sparrows will kill young martins and break eggs and keep the adults from returning to the compartment. A martin egg is pure white, no speckles. An amazing fact: the martin lines the nest with bright green leaves just prior to laying their first egg. Biologists suggest that the decomposing leaves may expel some sort of natural insecticide.
- d. Keep records of what you are finding in the houses. It is helpful to use a permanent marker, number the compartments, document the number of eggs and young.
- e. Buy a martin house with the largest compartments possible, or some houses are easily modified. These are 8" birds and the most successful size compartment is a 6" x 12". Seems large, but consider the young birds will be very crowded when there are 4 to 8 youngsters in a compartment. The larger compartments will actually result in the adults laying more eggs and having more healthy young.



New Products!

Bagged aromatic chimenea wood in 10 and 20lb bags at the front of the store for your convenience. We think you will love burning this Texas Pinion Pine in 9 to 11" splits. Splits last longer and are easier to start! We think it's a real winner!



Need Boxes?

We are crazy recyclers! Know anyone who is moving and needs nice, clean, heavy, manageable boxes? Please call us here at the BACKYARD Nature Center. We will save them and you can stop by to pick them up! To reuse is a step up even from putting them in the recycle bin! Thanks.



For people who feed and care for backyard birds

The Shops at Tallgrass

8336 E. 21st Street, #500 • Wichita, KS 67206

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.

PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT:

WWW.BACKYARDNATURECENTER.COM

Remember to Recycle



Give Your Loved One Rubies for Easter and Mother's Day!

Rubies, the perfect gift...Ruby-throated Hummingbirds that is. The favorite bird of spring and summer! To ensure you get these "Rubies" for your loved one, you need to choose the right feeder, supply fresh nectar and get the simple accessories, which are necessary to keep these hummingbirds sticking around your yard.

1. Choose the right feeder and place it close to where you can see it, near flowers, whenever possible. Even a hanging basket or potted plant on your patio can be helpful. A red feeder is the most successful because it looks like a good healthy food source. Actually, the brighter, the better!

2. Keep the feeder clean. Use small bottle feeder brushes to clean the sugary nectar from feed ports as it can really gum up. Clean once or twice a week to ensure the freshest, healthiest dining.

3. Make your own homemade nectar, 4 parts water to 1 part sugar, but skip the food coloring. Food coloring is very unhealthy for the bird's reproductive system. We have super refined hummingbird nectar here at the store. Keep your nectar in the fridge and only fill the feeder half full so you don't waste it. Change your nectar every couple days during the 80 to 100 degree days as it will ferment quickly in those temps.

4. Use an "ant moat". A simple cup that hangs above the feeder filled with water. Ants can't swim so they can either retreat, or see their demise. The greatest little invention!

5. Have your feeder out and ready about tax time, April 15th.

6. Sit back and enjoy one of nature's little gems!

