



BACKYARD nature center News

August/September 2019 • Issue 54

Celebrating 28 Years this month with much gratitude!

What possessed us to become bird store owners?

In an 82 Ford van packed to the hilt with tent, Coleman cookstove, folding chairs, five sleeping bags (good to 30 below), we'd head for the Grand Tetons and Yellowstone every September, taking 3 little girls out of school. John Denver's greatest hits were playing "Rocky Mountain High...". It became the theme of our trips. Nick, the official camp director, was determined to convince four females to love "roughing it" as much as he did. He did it all, set up camp, made dinner, chopped firewood and made sure we were all comfy. All we had to do was sit and take in scenery and wildlife. It didn't take long before we were on board.

Doing their homework at camp site picnic tables, the girls fed nuts and sunflower to Clarke's Nutcrackers, Gray Jays, Pinion Jays and an occasional crow or magpie. On the Snake River were Bald Eagles and small groups of Trumpeter swans. Our binoc-

become totally connected to nature.

We've been working to re-create that connection to wildlife in our own little acre ever since. The national parks were our inspiration and growing a landscape that native birds and squirrels would want to nest and raise their young was our goal. Planting trees and shrubs that do more than just sit there and look pretty, they perform a service



like providing food and shelter ultimately creating an oasis where

loaded the old van and kids and drove east to see what the buzz was all about. Could these pioneers, these little retail store owners be on to something? We must have visited 5 or 6 such quaint little shops, all with bird feeding and viewing stations on their property where customers could see the products in action. Feeders filled with the finest, cleanest quality seed blends available, tested and scientifically approved by Dr. Alred Geis, biologist for the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife, proven to attract the most beautiful songbirds to the feeders. We were hooked! Could we make a living at this? Was it stable enough year-round? Could our bodies physically handle moving that many seed bags?

The answer seems evident now as we celebrate our 28th year of business and well beyond retirement age. People who love their yards and want to invite beautiful birds to share it with them are everywhere. Birdwatching is the second largest hobby in the United States and gardening is number 1! Know anybody like that?

We count our blessings

every day that we get to work at such a happy business. Nobody is ever grumpy. Helping people find that same feeling we first discovered in the great national parks of our country. Life doesn't get much better than that!



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ulars came in handy, even though they were borrowed, big and clunky. Nights in a tent were full of eerie sounds from bugling elk and moose. We took these great trips over a dozen autumns while three little girls grew up right before our eyes. They were the some of the best years of our lives and we had

water guzzling chemically, dependent non-native lawn is the norm.

Our local newspaper ran a story about a group of backyard bird-watching stores that had opened in the D.C. area. Birdwatching, hum... we thought, right up our alley! Curious, we

Migration Navigation

At this time of year, when you see migrating birds heading south across the continent, do you ever wonder how they find their way? Many birds travel long distances, and yet return to the same wintering and breeding grounds each year. What would happen if you transported a bird, and it started its migration in a different place? Would the bird instinctively fly the same course as always, only to end up in the wrong part of the world?

An ornithologist named Ronald Lockley designed a series of experiments to answer questions like these, performed on Manx Shearwaters nesting on the island of Skolholm, off Wales. Transported shearwaters that were released in Venice and Stockholm flew over areas they had never seen before and were back in their nest burrows in 14 days. A Manx Shearwater that was released in Boston, 3,050 miles from home, took only 12 1/2 days to return to its nest.

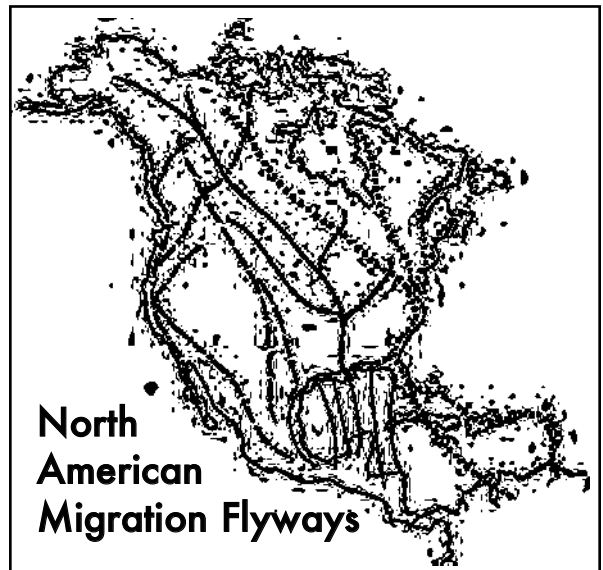
Seabirds generally have excellent navigational abilities, but so do many land birds. In one experiment, White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows successfully returned to California from release points in Louisiana and Maryland.

Navigational Systems

Clearly, birds do not journey forth “on a wing and a prayer.” They take clues from geographic landmarks, sunlight, stars, environmental sounds, and even wind direction. Most birds are capable of using more than one navigational system, and they almost always reach their intended destinations.

- **Geographic Landmarks**—most migratory birds move about quite a bit in their nesting territories and so recognize them easily upon return. When migrating, birds often use geographic landmarks—such as mountain ranges, river valleys, and coastlines—to find their way. In North America, most of these features run north-south and so correspond with the flight paths taken by birds.

- **Sunlight**—experiments in the 1940s and 1950s demonstrated that starlings use the sun for migration. When kept in cages in which they could only see the sun, the birds hopped toward and beat against the southwest side of the cage in fall and the northeast side of the cage in spring. The birds continued to base their movements on the direction of the light source even when it was blurred or deflected so that it came from an unnatural direction.
- **Stars**—birds that migrate at night use the stars for direction. Indigo Buntings placed in a planetarium where the skies were reversed 180 degrees (from what would have been normal) exhibited migratory restlessness that was consistent with the stars they were being shown.
- **Environmental sounds**—in periods of



bad weather and poor visibility, birds keep on course by listening to sounds that reflect the geography of the area, such as waves crashing against the shore, gurgling streams, or wind through the trees.

When you begin to miss the migrants that have left your area to travel south, be consoled in knowing that you can trust their navigational prowess. You can look forward to seeing them again next spring.

Ask Nick & Cathy:

Q: How do I clean my birdbath?

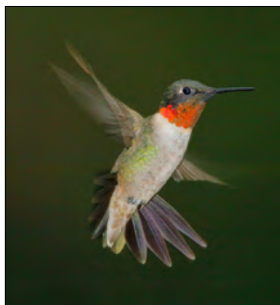
A: If your bath is being used, then it can get pretty disgusting (and empty) in one day. To clean out the dirt and poop left behind all you really need to do is dump the dirty water or blast it out with the hose, rinse and refill. This maintenance is most important for the health of your birds. An all-out sterilization of the bath is not required, just rinse and refill. Every week or so I use a scrub brush and give my bath a good scrubbing. This also keeps down the algae.

If algae is your concern, that is not necessarily the birds' concern. Algae is a perfectly natural and harmless plant that won't harm the birds. However, most people don't want a whole garden of algae in their bird baths. As mentioned above, a simple scrubbing once in a while usually keep the algae in check. Nothing will get rid of algae permanently short of using nasty chemicals. We do carry an item called Bird Bath Clear which is natural and safe for the birds. This product is especially useful for small ponds or fountains where is not being replaced daily like most birdbaths. You can also use hydrogen peroxide to help knock down your algae. Just pour in about a quart at night. By morning the peroxide will all have broken down to oxygen and water and your algae will be significantly reduced. If you can move your bath so that it does not get direct sunlight in the afternoon, that will also help reduce the amount of algae that grows. Algae likes warm water and sunlight.



HUMMERTIME!

Don't be discouraged if you didn't have hummingbirds during mid-summer. They most likely didn't nest on your property. Heavy dense trees and shrubs near a creek, river or lake are the preferred nesting sites for our Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, the only hummer to nest in Kansas by the way. Now is a good time to keep your feeders full and fresh. Adults and young are both coming



to feeders and September is when migration begins. It's fun to spot a juvenile. They look dumb-founded as to why they're at the feeder. Feathers are fluffy and new where mom's look a little bedraggled! Beefing up their body weight is so crucial at this time in preparation of an extended migration to South and Central America.

An interesting observation from a hummingbird banding expert in Louisiana is that she has documented 11 different species of hummingbirds who have spent entire winters in her state. The consensus is that the apparent deforestation is so bad across the Gulf of Mexico, some hummers haven chosen to over-winter in the southern United States. Good thinking!

Flutter Flat Butterfly House



Why chase butterflies? Nathaniel Hawthorne once advised, happiness is a butterfly, which when pursued, is always just beyond your grasp, but which if you sit down quietly may alight upon you. One of our favorite craftsmen, Heartwood Designs, absolutely created perfection in this paragon of design and construction. Sit back year after year, watching your social butterflies flock.

Gather a small bouquet of fine branches and set them inside. In damp rainy weather the winged beauties will find safe refuge inside. The house comes with its own wooden pole or a hanging hook on the backside. We know you'll enjoy the grace it brings to your garden.

A One-time Wild Card Coupon

15% OFF
entire purchase*

C190801; Offer expires September 30, 2019. Cannot be combined with other offers. Excludes optics. *One-time use only.

Product Info

Clingers Only Please!



A special feeder for Chickadees, Titmouse, Nuthatches and Goldfinch, and the Downy woodpeckers will use it. The big benefit is that encourages larger birds like Starlings, Grackles and Doves to feed elsewhere. Great when filled with hulled sunflower!

Feeder Fresh

A Great way to battle the elements this fall and winter!

Change is coming at the feeders. With empty nests and full-sized babies in tow following mom and dad to the feeders, you can expect lots of action! We had a wet spring and a soggy start to summer.

Feeders can get mucky with soggy seed, not a healthy situation for the birds. Throw some Feeder Fresh in with your seed and you'll be pleased with how freely it flows. Mixed with seed, especially sunflower hearts, it provides healthy grit for the birds and keeps seed flowing nicely even in rain or snow. Best product of the year!



**BACKYARD
nature center**

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

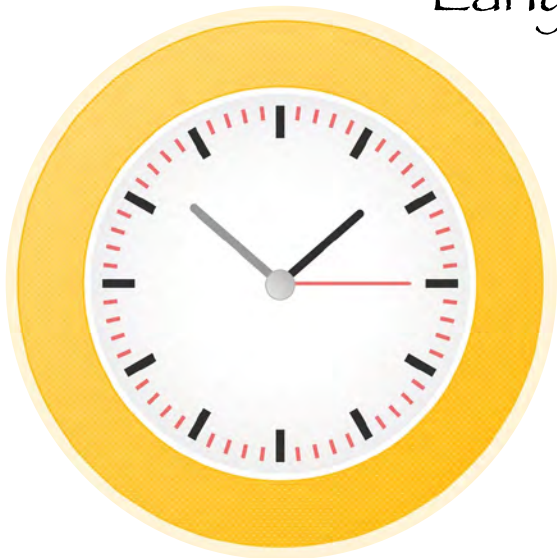
OPEN 7 DAYS WEEK

Monday–Saturday: 9 a.m.–5 p.m.

Sunday: 12 noon–4 p.m.

PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT:
WWW.BACKYARDNATURECENTER.COM

Early Bird Change in Hours!



For your convenience, we will be opening an hour earlier each weekday.

Effective August 1, our new hours will be:
Monday through Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
and Sunday will remain 12 noon to 4 p.m.

We hope you find this helpful!
Cathy & Nick

