



# BACKYARD nature center News

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## Which Nest is Best?

Perhaps the greatest delight of observing birds lies in the diversity of the species you can see in your own backyard. This expanding knowledge of the wide range of types of birds and their habits provides pleasure through discovery and learning. First, we learn that a Robin is different from a Cardinal which is different from a Chickadee etc. We learn that they not only don't look alike, but they act in different ways and even eat different foods.

One 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.

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 at the top. 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?

Some birds nest in cavities such as tree holes, nest boxes), or the nooks of buildings. These birds, which include woodpeckers, bluebirds, chickadees, House Wrens, and 85 other species in North America, are known as cavity nesters.

Many of the other 200 species of

birds (including goldfinches, robins, and mockingbirds) build their nests out in the open, on branches of shrubs and trees. These cup-shaped nests are open to the sky.

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. I have read that you can 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 box on a pole, where they can see it. Many folks like the idea of tucking their nest boxes into quaint and cozy locations within deep foliage of trees. But doing this only 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 receive a little afternoon shade, and enjoy the show!

# Planting for the Birds

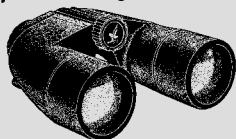


by Master Gardener, Cathy Clausen

If you don't want the birds eating the strawberries and picking the flower buds off your veggies, entertain planting shrubs that provide good cover and food. Create groupings and borders of choke cherry bushes or service berry, if you have the room. These terrific woody shrubs are native and fast growing. Mockingbirds, catbirds, robins and thrashers, Cedar Waxwings, cuckoos, and even cardinals will be grateful for the high calorie fruit. Create the most diverse habitat possible. You will see more birds in a grouping of low lying shrubs than in a single perfectly groomed tree. Plan for graduating heights in your landscape going from lawn to shrubs to trees. Remember, when young birds jump, and I mean leap, from their cozy nests, they immediately look for low cover. Not able to fly at first, they are safer sitting quietly among the shrubs and squawking for food only when they hear their parents. Avoid having your trees sprayed with deadly pesticides. You may kill baby birds helpless in their nests. Besides, the birds are going to provide natural insect control. What a great natural balance.



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



# Best nest box in my yard

The busiest nest box in our yard is an acorn-shaped bluebird box made of terra cotta and concrete. On a pole, and tip to toe, 17 inches tall with a 1.5 inch entrance hole! A big house! Located next to our small pond and backing up to a great cover of bushes and trees, the wise little House Wren finds it irresistible. Each spring the male wren flits from house to house singing with all his heart. "Do you like this one honey he says, or," how about this one with the pretty blue roof?" This goes on for days before she settles in to her favorite, the biggest real estate in the yard. In and out all day long, tirelessly they fill up the deep acorn with twigs and sticks. Then.....all becomes peaceful as she begins to lay her five to six tiny white and light brown speckled eggs. No longer is the male singing and making racket near this nest site. Mama wren wouldn't have him attracting unwanted guests to this now sacred place. Now only leaving for a quick snack, she sits for almost 15 days.

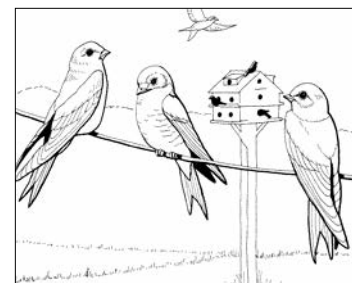


To fully enjoy this sacred ritual and right of spring don't hesitate to do a nest check periodically. You may want to do this once a week. Stand to the side of the box, tap lightly on the box. The female will fly out, perch on a nearby branch. You count the eggs and make sure there are no signs of disturbance and no troublesome wasps moving in, close the box up quickly and step away. Be brief. The more

accustomed she is with this procedure the better. It is an old wives tale that birds will abandon the nest after humans have touched the area or messed with the babies. Birds have a poor sense of smell and are great parents. They have too much time invested in these kids to let them go at this point. Be assured they will always return.

## It's Martin Time!

Prepare for older adult martins (often called scouts) to return as early as March 10 to 15th. Those birds will always go back to their old house. They will even sit on that house for up to 10 days waiting for you to open it up. Amazing birds! If you are putting up a new house for



2012, you have plenty of time. Young, first year adults who have not established a home fidelity will be arriving in another 4 to 6 weeks. You will have until the first of May to get that new housing up. Catch the chatter of our busy colony right in the middle of the store's parking lot. It has been truly astounding to have such success around so much activity. Last year the house hosted 19 pair of adult martins who raised and fledged approximately 80 young. What a treat! We are so happy to share.



## SPECIES PROFILE:

# Backyard Birder

The private, secretive and illusive "backyard birder". Working 5 and 6 days a week, he can hardly find the time for an exotic bird watching



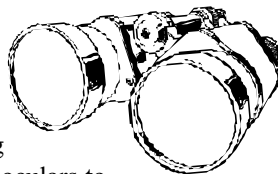
trip. He stays close to home, peering out his window, squinting to identify a new bird in his yard. BB scrambles for his binoculars, left on the kitchen table by the window. What is it? So beautiful, so new, so delicate, so.....yikes, what was that? A Sharp Shinned Hawk darts through the yard with the stealth of the B1 bomber, sending all the feeder birds fleeing for the protection of the shrubs. Over in the far backyard, a tiny screech owl peers



out of his nest box where he naps during the day, "What's all the excitement?, he thinks". Morning doves and juncos, left defenseless on the ground fail to look up soon enough. Oh, no.....close call. The hawk missed again. BB has worked tirelessly to make a great habitat for his birds. A family of robins are bathing in the birdbath top that he sat on the ground scrunched into the mulch. Goldfinch return to their feeders, the nuthatch hangs upside down like a clown on the peanut feeder. Mother birds are now feeding their young at the sunflower feeder. All is well. BB looks forward to morning coffee and "his" bird drama. Life is good!

## Introducing Alpen Optics

Once you have held them in your hands we think you will agree ALPEN has superior quality optics in both porro and roof prisms. If planning a birding trip or vacation, we can fit you with the perfect binoculars to enhance your trip. In addition, ALPEN carries an unconditional lifetime warranty and consistently rated as one of the best values available. In our opinion, a best buy.



**10% OFF**  
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C120301; Expires 3/31/2012.

\*Discount on items in stock only. Not to be combined w/ other offers. Limit one coupon per customer. Must present coupon at time of purchase.

## Why black oil sunflower seed prices have risen

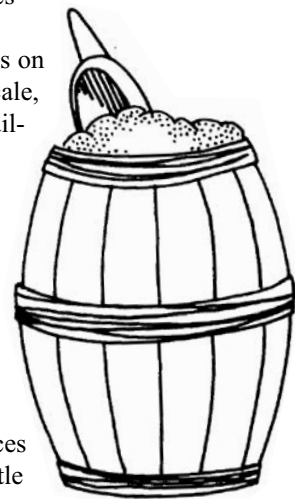
With the rise in importance of corn as both a cash



and subsidized crop, farmers can make more money growing corn than sunflowers. In addition to its food use, corn can also be converted to high fructose corn syrup, a popular substitute for sugar that's found in many food items. As ethanol is developed as a fuel source, not only can corn be sold for processing, but government subsidies are available to encourage farmers to meet the needs of ethanol plants.

Secondly, sunflower oil has become very popular in the snack food industry as a way to make their products sound healthier, as it contains lower trans fats than some other cooking oils. The Lays company led the charge in 2006, making sunflower the only oil they used for cooking their chips. Several other companies now use sunflower oil for their snack products, meaning that these companies are buying sunflower seeds on an industrial scale, there's less available for the birdfeeding industry.

These two factors, decreasing supply and increasing demand, are driving the prices higher, with little evidence that it will change in the near future.



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# BI-ANNUAL BIRDSEED SALE

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**Sale**

Don't miss our Bi-Annual Birdseed Sale! All bulk seed, 20-pound and larger bags, will be 20% off!

Prepurchase your seed at the 20% discount and let us store it for you by opening or adding to your seed storage account with a minimum \$150.

