



BACKYARD nature center News

February/March 2014 • Issue 21

Real Estate for Birds

In some ways, it seems too early to be worrying about housing for the birds. Spring hasn't arrived on the calendar, winter clothes jam our closets, and most flower bulbs are still hidden. But some of our smaller feeder species (titmice and chickadees) are already beginning to pair up for the breeding season ahead, and many will soon be looking for housing in which to raise their young. Nest boxes are particularly critical to cavity-nesting species whose natural housing is being pruned, pared, and otherwise developed out of existence. Chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, woodpeckers, and wrens are among the species that traditionally nest in cavities in dead trees. Fortunately, they now often accept man-made alternatives, given the right set of circumstances.

How can I increase my chances of success?

As responsible landlords, we must get busy now so our properties will be among the first occupied when prospective tenants, both locals and migrants, begin to check out this year's choices.

If you haven't done so already, now is the time to clean out existing nest boxes and to make sure they are in good repair. New boxes can be mounted now as well, assuring their availability to the early nest builders. Different species have different requirements for the entry size, width, and depth of the box, and for nesting materials. Most species prefer houses mounted on trees or other stable

surfaces between 6 and 12 feet off the ground. Boxes placed so the entry hole faces away from the prevailing wind and storms will generally enjoy higher tenancy rates. Also, using different configurations in a variety of locations will increase your chances of real estate success.

What other species can I attract?

Some species that rarely visit bird feeders will nest in man-made boxes. The list of species that will accept our rentals include House Wrens, Wood Ducks, screech owls, kestrels, Prothonotary



hang a wren house. House Wrens are very flexible about their housing requirements and a delight to watch bustle around. One final word about nest boxes: Research on nests, nestling, and nest boxes has been conducted

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Warblers, Tree Swallows, and—of—course—the housing success story of the decade, bluebirds. We suggest you watch for evidence of the birds you want to encourage before you invest in specialized housing. No matter how perfect the house, you won't attract Wood Ducks if you are too far from water, and you won't get bluebirds to come into the deep, dark woods. On the other hand, every yard has the potential for housing some bird. If you aren't sure what birds may be around,

and published. The thing is, the birds haven't read the scientific literature. Instead, they fly in, take a quick look around, and move in—or not—based on some combination of instinct and whimsy. Technically correct boxes simply increase your chances of success as a landlord. If you don't have success immediately, don't despair—next year your little piece of heaven may look just right to a young couple on the move.

In Anticipation of Spring



Written by
Cathy Clausen,
Master
Gardener and
Avid Backyard
Birdwatcher

As the temperatures creep up, I am itching to get outside and rake, clean out garden beds, freshen up nest boxes and most of all tidy up the tube feeders and platform feeders! The yard looks so brown and grey with very little green anywhere but I still want to get out there. Windows have been closed up all winter and I have missed the birds calling to one another. An immature Coopers Hawk sitting on the screech owl house has made my bird feeding somewhat erratic but still good. I can't wait to plant more bushes for the birds to find cover in. Some twenty five plus turkeys have been daily visitors to our platform feeders doing lots of thrashing around with their enormous feet tearing up the mulched areas and mostly making a mess. I know that they will be thinning out for spring soon and that area will look a bit more tidy, but it sure has been a unique thing to enjoy turkeys in a neighborhood with houses all around. Sometimes things get messy, but what a treat!



Our small garden pond has been mostly frozen over all winter except the water fall. We keep the water flowing all year long because every bird in the neighborhood seems to enjoy the small streams flowing over the rocks. There has been so much drinking and bathing all winter. Clusters of robins and Cedar Waxwings can't resist having a feast from the berry bushes at the top of the waterfall, then dropping down to clean their feathers and have a drink. Looks like quite a social gathering. I can see the fish now and I am tempted to toss them some fish food, but the water temperature is still not warm enough, they need to stay in their lazy torpid state a little longer.

There has been an abundance of goldfinch at the feeders lately. Still drab, some looking a bit olive in color, you can't mistake the black wings with white stripes. By the next newsletter they will be bright yellow! Nick and I are convinced that you will get two to three times the activity on your finch feeders if you fill them with fine sunflower chips rather than using straight nyjer thistle. Be sure your finch feeder is protected from squirrels though. They really don't care for thistle but will love your sunflower hearts! You may also have colorful House Finch, Downy Woodpeckers and chickadees there too. It seems like spring is just begging to come. I saw a downy male feeding a female, I'm sure they are eager to get



started with their nesting. Cavity nesting birds can get started as early as February, building their nests in the warmth and protection of a house.

Remember, our songbirds have feasted on last fall's harvest of seeds and berries all winter long. As we come into spring the birds become active with feeding young, and making

tireless trips back and forth to the feeders to keep their own energy up. If you want to see more birds than you did in the winter, don't take your feeder down! Keep feeders fresh with the best seed and you will be rewarded with color and beautiful harmony in your own backyard.



10% OFF
any bird house or
purple martin house and pole

C020114; Expires March 31, 2014.
Cannot be combined with other offers.

FREE
feeder fill up w/the purchase
of any finch feeder (\$30 min value)!

C020214; Expires March 31, 2014.
Cannot be combined with other offers.

Lunchtime Lecture



Time to prepare for the Purple Martins

Wednesday, February 19

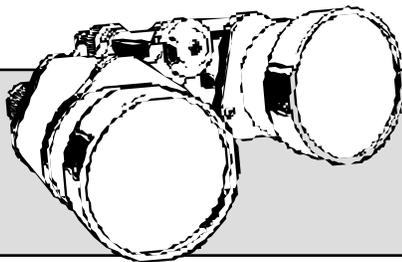
Join Nick for his lunchtime lecture on Purple Martins on Wednesday, February 19th at Botanica. Learn all there is to know about these amazing migratory and colonial nesting birds. For the past five years, we have been able to enjoy Americas most wanted bird right in the parking lot of our store. Our own yard has become too full of mature trees that encroach on the gliding path of purple martins and we are unable to get them there so it's a real treat to come to work and enjoy their beautiful chatter and flight when carrying out your birdseed. Last year the martins showed up on March 11th. The past two years cold weather hit immediately following the first bird's arrival. Martin landlords should be prepared to offer "supplemental" feeding of meal worms in the compartments to save their birds. While it is true purple martins are naturally "flying" insect eaters, they accept this offering freely when starvation threatens. Three days of no flying food is all it takes when frigid weather shows up.

The 20 compartment home was almost 100% full and fledged some 100 young birds! Remember, the younger birds (called sub adults) will be returning to the house where they fledged almost 30 days later than the older birds. If it is full, they will be looking for your house! Be ready!



Give your sweetie a Love Birds jelly feeder for Valentine's Day

Bird feeding with style! Get your jelly ready for the return of orioles sooner than you realize come mid April! This copper heart shaped feeder features a bowl for grape jelly or mealworms with a charming dangling red bead. The cup clips in and out for easy cleaning. Ask us to print off my mother in laws fantastic recipe for grape and apple jelly. It's easy! If I can do it, anybody can. The orioles will keep you busy begging for more!



The BACKYARD nature center
is your local resource for Alpen binoculars. We offer expert
advice while providing you with quality optics.



—Albert Einstein

Discover the endless possibilities

On the way to the Backyard Nature Center this morning, Nick and I spotted a Bald Eagle just off Rock Road north of 45th in a grove of mature cottonwoods! Nature is all around us, all we have to do is open our eyes and let it surprise us! We live in a very diverse area with endless possibilities for viewing wildlife and we didn't have to go searching for it!



BACKYARD Nature Center News

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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



BI-ANNUAL BIRDSEED SALE

February 15 through 28

Get the best for less! All bulk seed, 20-pound and larger bags will be 20% off!

Just two times a year we offer this special sale. Take your seed with you that day or pre-purchase 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 of \$150.

Get the best for less at the BACKYARD Nature Center. Our seed blends have no fillers and we use only seed varieties that are field-tested and proven to attract the widest variety of birds.



Remember to Recycle

