



# BACKYARD nature center News

August/September 2011 • Issue 8

## One Singular Sensation

There are approximately 650 different species of birds in North America. Of those, an estimated 75% are migratory birds that spend various amounts of time in exotic Central and South American locales being colorful and exotic. Of these, we find that the bird that far and away captures the imagination and delight of people is the hummingbird. Basically, the Ruby-throated Hummingbird is the runaway people's choice award winner for wondrous backyard bird.

Since we are here in Eastern North America, and we have only one species of hummingbird, it is fair to say that the Ruby Throat is a true singular sensation. Unique, just as in the words of the song, "One", from the Broadway hit, *A Chorus Line*. To borrow another line from the song, the Ruby Throat provides "One thrilling combination," of characteristics that fill people with awe and delight. Why is this? What is it about hummingbirds that is different from other birds in our area? How do they do what they do?

First of all, hummingbirds just look different. People notice them because

they are not your average backyard bird. People tend not to confuse them with House Sparrows. Why? Maybe their small size has something to do



with it, as it is unlikely that any other bird will be confused with an insect

darting past. Hummingbirds are small, very small. The smallest bird known is the Bee Hummingbird, from Cuba, who measures only 2 inches long and weighs approximately 1.8 grams, less than a tenth of an ounce.

And that bill! No other backyard bird has such a long narrow beak. The bill is evolution's response to the need to reach way down into a flower to reach

the nectar. It would be hard to do that with a bill like a Cardinal's, wouldn't it? Researchers tell us that the birds don't actually suck the nectar from the flower, they catch it on their extremely long grooved tongues, pull it back into their mouth and squeeze it out. And yes, that bill opens like any other in order to catch the tiny insects that

provide the proteins and fats portion of the hummingbird diet.

Diet is another outstanding difference between hummingbirds and those other guys crowding the feeder. No suet or sunflower for these guys, they are strictly nectar and insect lovers. But, my goodness, what an appetite! Experts tell us that hummingbirds will eat as many as 15 times per hour. We also know that the very high rate of energy expenditure for hummingbirds means that they risk starvation if they must go longer than 3 to 5 hours without eating.

The most obvious difference between our hummingbirds and all other birds is the way they move. No other bird can do what they do, flying sideways, straight up, down, upside down and backwards. The key to how they do it is in their size and weight. A Ruby Throat weighs in at 3 grams or about as much as a penny. And what muscles! A hummingbird has pectoral muscles accounting for 25% of its body weight. In a human, the same muscle accounts for less than 5% of body weight. This huge strength to weight advantage permits a hummingbird to flap his wings up to 200 times in a single second and achieve flying speeds of up to 60 miles per hour. That is moving!

All that adds up to one thrilling combination of differences that make our hummingbirds a true singular sensation.



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# Milestone Reached!



Twenty years ago, in August of 1991, Cathy and I opened the first store in Kansas totally devoted to backyard bird watching and the people who enjoyed it. Retail sales were new to both of us and we had a lot to learn. There been many highs and lows along the way, but the most rewarding thing about this experience has been the people we have met and the friends we have made. Customers have drifted in and out of our lives, some move, some return, some even bring relatives in to see our quaint little store. Truly, the ultimate compliment. Sadly, we have even mourned the loss of some of our friends.

Through some tough economic times, you have stayed with us because you enjoy feeding the wildlife in your yard, and enjoy supporting a little local business that will always be grateful. It is our pledge to continue to offer the same quality products, service and information possible.

In recognition of this important 20-year milestone, we are offering you, our friends, the opportunity for big savings with a 20% discount off of your entire purchase on the day of your choice anytime in the month of August. This is for in stock items only, (optics excluded) and can be used for seed also, including adding to or opening a seed account with a minimum of \$150. Come in with your shopping list and take advantage of these big savings or just stop in and say hello. We always enjoy seeing all of you!

Be sure to give the kitties, Ruby and Mobi, a congratulatory scratch on the head, as they celebrate their 9th birthday in August also!



Special "20th Anniversary" Coupon

**20% OFF**  
your entire purchase  
during the month of August  
(excluding optics)

C110801; Expires 8/31/2011.

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



# Purple Martin Update

What's happened to my martins? Lots of us will miss the wonderful chatter we enjoyed all summer long and then.....silence. Martins prepare to migrate and group together to leave for southern winter homes. It is truly amazing to see thousands of martins enjoying an end of summer celebration. They gather in places like Riverside Park, near the water plant close to Botanica, and most recently, they congregate in the big ole' trees around Via Christi St. Francis. Treat yourself and make an early evening trip to one of their communal roost cites in the first week of August. Special note; once all your martins are gone, be sure to close up your house by removing old nest material and brushing out any debris. Most importantly, put door closures on the openings to keep sparrows and starlings from taking over the house when the martins are gone. Believe me, it can happen. Once they take claim of the house it is very difficult to remove them in the spring when your martins arrive.

The BACKYARD Nature Center martin house had an excellent year! The five level house in the middle of the parking lot fledged 75 young from 19 nests. Truly amazing....no wonder purple martins are America's favorite bird!



## Gardening for the Birds

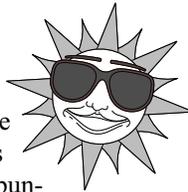
by Cathy Clausen, avid backyard bird-watcher and organic gardener

Mulching, mulching, mulching! To dead head or not to dead head...that is the question. Once we get to the end of August, I say no more deadheading. Beside the fact that we're tired of doing it (I am always a little "bent" over from deadheading)—your backyard birds will appreciate the yummy seed heads available as we go towards cooler temperatures. Delighted by jumbo sunflowers looming at the edges of my garden with their giant heads so heavy with seeds, there is always a chickadee or downy woodpecker hanging upside down feasting on the freshest dinner possible. All perennials are reseeding in late summer so I say....let 'em go! As they dry the birds will eat on them until they are depleted. Both your garden and your beautiful birds will benefit. Remember to protect your valuable perennials from extreme temperatures and frost keep up the mulching, mulching, mulching!

## Fair Weather Friends

This has been a historically hot and dry summer. Plants have struggled to stay alive and so have our birds. Our Christmas bird count will tell the true story. Normally, fall brings an abundance of food, in the way of yummy nutritious fruit and seed heads, ripe and ready for the taking. Unfortunately, seed is scarce right now. Plants, whether in our gardens or in the wild, have not faired well with the hot temps and precious little water necessary for baring fruit or seed.

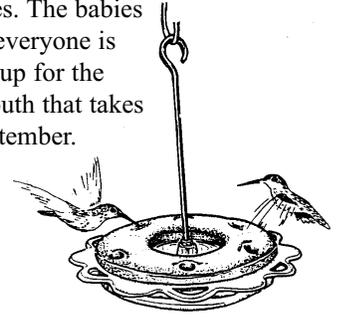
On the up side, your bird feeders will be very busy this fall! Of course, don't forget to provide clean water for drinking and feather care. Enjoy....I know the birds will!



## Hummer Suggestion

We often hear from people that they got discouraged when trying to get hummingbirds to come and so took their feeders down. We can understand this. It is tough to keep changing the solution when there are no takers, but we would like to make a quick suggestion. Start up again mid-July. This is when the hummer population in our area explodes. The babies are out and everyone is just feeding up for the migration south that takes place in September.

We promise you will be rewarded!!



## Seed Storage

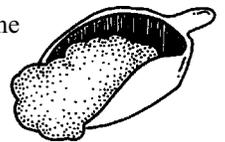
Remember store seed outside if you can, especially in the summer months. All seed (even our fabulously clean stuff) has the potential for seed moths.



You do NOT want these in your home. Consider a seed can (they look a lot like metal trash cans). Stick it outside and then there are no worries...

## Safflower Seed

As we get closer to the end of summer you may notice the blackbirds mauling your feeders. If they get to be too much, consider switching to Safflower Seed. They don't much like it and the other birds take to it pretty well.



**BACKYARD Nature Center News**  
is a publication of  
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Nick and Cathy Clausen, Owners



*For people who feed and care for backyard birds*  
 The Shops at Tallgrass  
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 www.backyardnaturecenter.com  
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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.

## Clean Up Time!

We have talked a bit over the last few months about birds needing water to drink, but also to help keep their feathers clean. They spend a huge amount of time preening and preening because they know it is key to their survival.



There is another side to the “clean” idea and that is the feeders and things that we use to feed them. It is really a good idea to take a look at these once in a while and give them a good cleaning if need be. We certainly don’t want them to harbor any germs (mold or mildew) if we can help it.

Take a minute to see how much you can take the feeder apart. The more

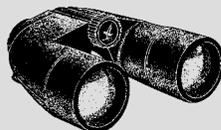
apart it comes, the easier it is to get into the nooks and crannies. Then get in there and give it a good cleaning. A stiff brush can be invaluable for this job. Once the debris is removed, consider soaking the whole thing in a light bleach or vinegar solution. This kills the germs hiding and if rinsed well, will not harm the birds at all. Same idea can be used for your bird-baths. A good brushing removes the debris, but don’t forget to rinse again with the above solution. This way the germs and also the algae are killed. This really slows down how quickly your bath water turns green!



A few minutes of work on your part and you will be rewarded knowing you are providing not only the best seed (ours of course), but also the cleanest environment for your feathered friends!



Another "clean" idea is to consider using hulled seeds. Seed without shells helps keep the areas under and around your feeders clean. This is good for the birds but also really nice from a "human" standpoint!



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