



# BACKYARD nature center News

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## Bringing Up Baby

Parenting is a tough job. You work dawn to dusk to earn a living and to keep bread on the table, you knock yourself out teaching them life skills, and what thanks do you get?

“Mom, I’m hungry. Got any extra bugs?” and “Dad, I’ve gotta stay here for a few more days, just until I get on my feet, OK?” Fledging babies is a tough job, but it has got to be done.

Born featherless and blind, songbird nestlings spend the first few days able to do little more than raise their heads and open their mouths. But that’s enough to encourage mom and (usually) dad to fill those hungry mouths with soft insects about every 20 minutes.

As they grow, nestlings become ever louder and more insistent. You can tell when mom or dad are approaching the nest because the kids all start screeching for attention. “Over here!” “No, no, no, not her; me first this time!” “Me, me, me, ME!” The feeding intervals increase, the size of the bugs increases, and the intensity of hungry cries increases.

When baby songbirds leave the nest—about three weeks after hatching—they are fully feathered and very nearly the size of adults. But

parental responsibility doesn’t end when the kids leave home. Since mom may be nesting again, dad will often take the lead in working with the fledglings—teaching them how to hunt, what morsels to eat, and where the good feeders are located.

You’ll recognize juvenile birds by their juvenile behavior. A young songbird—fully as large as an adult—will perch on a limb or sit on the ground, wings spread and quivering,

apparently successful often enough that some young keep at it for a while after leaving the nest.

Young birds also begin to learn their species calls and songs about this time. They will begin to imitate the sounds of the parent, albeit with cracking, wobbly voices. With practice, the contact notes and alarm calls become clearer, until they actually become useful to the youngsters as communication tools.

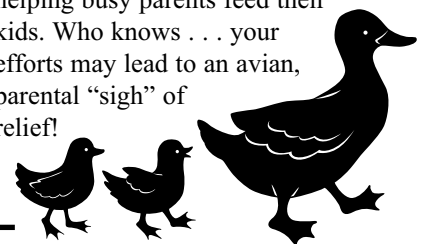
Social behaviors are also learned early in a bird’s life. Pecking order (pun intended!) is important in the avian world, and babies learn, sometimes a bit rudely, what their status is at the feeder. Reprimands generally elicit more juvenile behavior, such as open-mouthed wing quivering, an action seemingly designed to deflect parental scolding while triggering parental instincts to fill gaping maws.

Like parents of many animal species, adult birds put up with juvenile behavior long enough to ensure their kids will grow up to be strong, capable, desirable survivors—adults who can carry on the family name (or at least the family genes). And, like kids everywhere, the youngsters push the envelope of decorum and good taste. Next time you see a screaming, feathered kid at your feeder, enjoy the satisfaction of helping busy parents feed their kids. Who knows . . . your efforts may lead to an avian, parental “sigh” of relief!



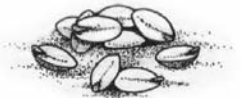
trying to catch the attention of a passing adult. “I can’t possibly be expected to fly. What am I supposed to do with these huge feet? They’re going to get in the way, you know. And hey, I’m hungry!” The kids do look pitiful and starved, even though they are quite capable of feeding themselves. The need for help is gone, but the behavior persists.

Juveniles tend to screech and to shove their wide-open mouths in the path of any passing adult. This ploy is





# Summer Feeding Problems?



Summer brings new birds and with them you can have

new problems. In March, Grackles return in flocks and take over feeding stations, running everyone else away. They can become a real pain, but there are ways to minimize their impact. Just spreading your feeders out and not having all of them in the same area will lessen the impact of these big birds dominating all the area. They will tend to concentrate on the feeders with the most room that are easiest for them to use. Feeders with small perches will limit Grackle usage by not providing enough room to perch. Thistle feeders with small openings for the Goldfinch are almost impossible for the larger birds to use. They can't get their beaks in the tiny openings. Another very effective solution is to use a feeder with a cage around it that keeps the larger birds out and allows finch sized birds access to the seed inside. But it will also keep out Cardinals, so many people switch to safflower seed at this time. The best thing about safflower is that Grackles and squirrels don't seem to like it, but Cardinals and House Finch will eat it. Grackles will pick thru it at first looking for other things and then tend to ignore it, leaving it for your other birds.

Another problem that occurs this time of year is the accumulation of shells and debris under the feeders. It can be unsightly and uneaten seed can sprout and grow. There is any easy solution: Patio Mix! Our Patio Mix is a combination of sunflower chips, millet and peanuts, all with the shells removed. This is an extremely bird attractive mixture that leaves no shell mess and the seed is less likely to sprout with the shells removed. The other advantage is that birds that normally don't eat seed because of the shell, like Eastern Bluebirds, or Carolina Wrens, that are insect eaters,

can eat the seed when the shell is removed. The cost is a little bit more, but shells make up about 40% of the bag weight in most mixes. You get all food and no mess and the cost actually figures out to be less per pound when you buy Patio Mix!

The heat of summer also brings with it the return of insects. Ants and bees can become a problem on nectar feeders if you don't prepare for them. Ants are very easy to control with the addition of an ant moat. This is just a small cup



like addition that you hang your hummingbird feeder from. You fill it with water and the ants will not cross the water to get to your feeder, therefore eliminating them. Bees are a little more difficult to control but adding a little salad oil to the area around the opening of the feeder will make it more difficult for them to

hang on to. Using saucer shaped feeders make it very difficult to reach the nectar below but the hummingbirds have no problem.

## Best, cool products for summer!

The Water Wiggler s/Sage Pottery Top. Moving Water attracts birds. It helps stop the spread of west nile virus by eliminated stagnant water in birdbaths. The unique agitator action creates continuous ripples in the water, preventing mosquitos from laying eggs. It is easy to install! Just place and go. No wiring, no plumbing. It has a long battery life, operates on two D-cell batteries (not included), and operates 24 hours a day. Keep your birdies coming to your yard with moving water! As the



birds fly over, nothing attracts more easily than moving water. Shallow moving water is perfect for bathing and drinking.

Copper Drinker/Fountain Lotus. Use in a birdbath, pond, just about any place there is a small body of water. The unit has a concealed UL approved pump to keep water circulating !

Try any of our dripper, misters, and recirculating water features to increase your bird visits. With temperatures rising, ponds and puddles tend to dry up making it difficult for our songbirds to find suitable digs for bathing. Your backyard could end up hosting a "bird party".



### Summer Try Outs!

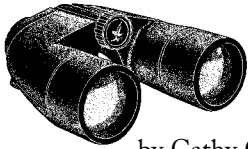
\$5 OFF a 20-lb. bag of our "no mess" Patio Blend  
OR  
\$5 OFF of Safflower 20-lb.

C130601; Expires 6/30/2013.  
Not to be combined w/ other offers.

### Keep them all wet!

Misters, drippers, water wigglers, waterfall rocks, pumps  
\$5 OFF w/coupon

C130602; Expires 6/30/2013.  
Not to be combined w/ other offers.



# Best Seat in the House!

by Cathy Clausen

As you can imagine, Nick and I don't exactly lead a wild and crazy life. Family and nature watching, that's pretty much it. No complaints. But lately, we have been having so much fun watching a family of screech owls in a large nest box just about 25' from our screened in porch. We quickly clean up dinner and grab the binoculars to take our places for the big show at dusk! The last of April, Nick was getting ready to set up a small remote camera in the largest nest box in our backyard. He sat his ladder next to the box and, to his surprise, heard tiny little noises coming from the box. Grabbing his cell phone, he snapped a picture inside the box and four fuzzy baby screech owls peered up at his phone flash as if to say, "hey, how 'bout some privacy"! We were elated! All winter long the box had been occupied by a roosting adult who found the box a cozy place to sleep during the day. He would sometimes sit in the opening to sun himself, and then go back down to finish his nap.

You can imagine the excitement of seeing the adult pair, mother and father, feeding those baby owls! In the evening, when everyone else is inside their air conditioned homes watching their "programs", we grab our binoculars, the ones with the best brightness capability, short of being night vision, sitting on the porch observing the most sacred family ritual, feeding the kids! The young are now waiting patiently, well....not so patiently...at the opening, heads bobbing and weaving from side to side, pensively watching for food delivery. Communication between the nest box and the adults is evident. Sounds like 101 Dalmations "mother, I'm hungry"! All the sudden, a light colored large pair of wings silently swooshes up to the box with a meal. She doesn't stay long and she is off hunting. Soon, the second adult flies up to the box with a talon full of dinner. Tirelessly, this goes on for hours and most likely all night long, we don't know for sure, we can't see any



more and we have to go to bed.

The eastern screech owl is only about 8 1/2" tip to toe and can be either gray (called gray phase), or red. Their wingspan can be 3' from tip to tip. They are very common in our area. Resembling the much larger great horned owl, they have ear tufts which can be raised or flattened. They are a cavity nester that will build in old dead hollowed out trees or a large nest box like ours. I'm sure you've heard their call but perhaps didn't know what was making that eerie little whinny with a quavering sound. An incredible little bird of prey with such stamina. Good thing too, since that's what good parenting requires. A steady nerve and lots of energy.



Just for fun, I tried to create an "owl feeder", offering the most disgusting little frozen dead mice! I put them in a jelly cup on a feeder pole just across from the nest box. Thinking that the adults may find fast food too hard to resist but to no avail. They don't want frozen, they want wiggly!

It is amazing, the activity that goes on in our yards after we are in bed. A secret, private world that we can only imagine. I know Nick will get that camera in the box earlier next year because this is a show that we don't want to miss! I know I won't want to miss it either, I've got the best seat in the house!

## Bird Brain Teasers—Match the following:

Cauldron:	of eagles
Murder:	of geese
Raft:	of owls
Convocation:	of wrens
Covey:	of ravens
Gaggle:	of hawks
Colony :	of crows
Band:	of quail
Parliament:	of ducks
Scoop:	of swans
Huddle:	of turkeys
Congregation:	of plovers
Murder:	of vultures
Ballet:	of jays
Rafter:	of gulls
Herd:	of penguins
Kettle:	of geese

Answer key is on the back page.



*For people who feed and care for backyard birds*  
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 www.backyardnaturecenter.com  
**316-683-2121**

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 Monday–Friday: 10 a.m.–6 p.m.  
 Saturday: 10 a.m.–5 p.m.  
 Sunday: 12 noon–4 p.m.  
*We will be closed on Independence Day.*

**Return Service Requested**

PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT:  
 WWW.BACKYARDNATURECENTER.COM



**Help Wanted**

Are you retired and looking for something to do? We are looking for someone to work part time. Must be able to lift mostly 20-lb. bags and work some weekend hours.

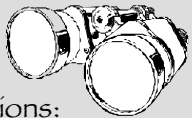
**Remember to Recycle**



**HAPPY FATHER'S DAY  
 ALL YOU DADS!**

**WE APPRECIATE ALL YOU DO FOR US!**

Show Dad you love him with a gift from the Wild Bird Center. We have many special Father's Day gifts to choose from. Here are some quick suggestions:



binoculars • spotting scopes • bird guides • birdbaths  
 birdhouses • squirrel-proof feeders • bat houses

**Brain Teaser Answer Key**

Answers: Caudron: of hawks, Murder: of crows, Raft: of ducks, Convocation  
 of eagles, Covey: of quail, Gaggle: of geese, Colony: of gulls, Band: of jays,  
 Parliament: of owls, Scoop: of pelicans, Huddle: of penguins, Congregation:  
 of plovers, Murder: of ravens, Ballet: of swans, Rafter: of turkeys, Herd: of  
 wrens, Kettle: of vultures