



BACKYARD nature center News

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To Help or Not to Help

by Barbara Jones

Baby-bird season brings a whole new dimension to the backyard, as the young literally spread their wings and learn to fly. The activity level soon reaches chaotic proportions, as frazzled parents work ceaselessly to keep their rapidly growing youngsters fed. New sounds echo through the woods and yards, as the adults announce their imminent arrival at the nest, and the young express their interest in being fed NOW.

And, inevitably, there are accidents. For one reason or another, young birds wind up on the ground and face a whole new set of challenges. Our dilemma is what we should do. How do we know if they are just learning to be birds or actually in need of help?

As a rule of thumb, if the bird is feathered and mobile, it is probably a fledgling on the ground on purpose. The young of many species, most noticeably robins, leave the nest before they are fully flight worthy. It's part of the process. Young birds are too crowded in the nest to develop the muscles they need to fly, so mom and dad encourage them to take a first step that usually leads them to the ground. For a day or more, the youngsters will hang out on the

ground or in low shrubs and trees and gather strength, while their parents feed and train them. And you needn't worry that falls from the nests will cause injuries: Baby birds have so little mass that they actually kind of bounce to the ground.

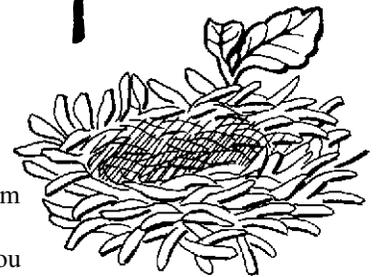
Birds grow rapidly, and the small songbirds that generally nest in our yards go from hatching to first flight in



10 to 21 days (depending on the species). Most young found on the ground are actually fledglings that are learning to fly. But if their eyes are still closed, or if there are few or no feathers, the bird is a nestling that has fallen from its nest. The best thing to do in this case is to put the baby back in the nest. The parents will continue to care for it, even if it has been handled by people, and the parents are best equipped to provide food on a schedule

that maintains optimum health.

If you can't find the nest, or if you can't reach it without threat to your life and limb, put the baby in a closed container with holes in the top (a shoe



box is good) and take it to a licensed rehabilitator. Baby birds have specific food requirements and a daunting feeding schedule (every 20 minutes or so during daylight hours). No matter how good our intentions, the birds will be healthier and better adjusted if they are raised by someone who knows what to do and what not to. The right thing is sometimes the hard

thing. So it is with baby birds. Our impulse is always to help them; but very often, the best way to help is not to help.

In the end, we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught.

—Baba Dioun, Conservationist

Birds, Bees & Me



Written by
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BACKYARD
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According to recent surveys, backyard bird watching is the second most popular outdoor hobby, following and maybe even closing the gap on, gardening. The two are so closely related that it is inevitable that more and more people are combining their two favorite outdoor activities to produce bird gardens designed to bring delight to gardeners and birds alike.

Few of us have the opportunity to restore 10,000 acres of woodland to its natural condition, but we can still contribute to recreating healthy habitat. With some attention and care, we can make our little piece of the world a better place for wildlife and for the people that respect and delight in it. Bird gardens do that and more: They also increase your daily exposure to birds and other wildlife, provide a calm center for your yard and create a visual delight for your eyes.

Creating a bird-friendly garden is a fairly simple matter. Feeders, birdbaths, nest boxes, and other garden amenities provide a focal point. You will also want to learn how to select and place bird-friendly plants. There are many good resources that will help you enjoy bird gardening, including the local library, garden clubs, nurseries, and the Internet. Ask yourself how each decision you make contributes to the basic survival needs of songbirds. Does this plant provide a source of food? Is that pond designed so that water is accessible to small birds? Does the yard have plants that provide cover for protection and nesting? Are you choosing plants that are native to your area?

Your bird garden will be a source of satisfaction for years to come. You know the feeling when you see a new bird for the first time? You want to share it with someone who will be as thrilled and impressed as you are. In the same way, when you create a good space for the birds, a yard that provides the essentials in a healthy way or a patio garden that offers a good stopping point for butterflies, you want to share that achievement too. You can even certify your habitat with the National Wildlife

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Federation. The requirements are simple, and the process will help you understand what you have accomplished to date and what still needs to be done. Don't be intimidated by the scope of the task. The birds and other wildlife won't wait until you're done to make use of your newly renovated habit; they will appreciate each step along the way as a better place to live.

Here are some things to ponder as you begin to create your habitat.

Have you ever thought about what your lawn service is spraying on your lovely green lawn and how it may affect you and the other creatures that live there? Don't get me wrong, I'm not against the ease of the service but we can hope the trend of "dowsing" our yards with chemicals becomes a bit greener and environmentally responsible in the near future. It may be that the insect pest you are targeting is a food source for the great number of insect eating birds that frequent our yards at this time of year. House Wrens, Orioles, Carolina Wrens, Grey Catbirds, Purple Martins, Brown Thrashers and Eastern Bluebirds are just a few of the species that are



constantly foraging for insects to feed their hungry nestlings and are dependent on the abundance of life in your yard. Even cardinals, who eat almost exclusively seeds, feed their young many insects because they grow faster on the extra protein!

Consider the Honey Bee who's numbers have been in decline for the past 20 years. Much research has been done to try to discover the problem. The answer may be right in front of us. Can you imagine a life

without Honey Bees and butterflies? Who would pollinate the flowers and the worldwide food source? We all benefit from their existence. Hopefully, it makes us think twice before spraying pesticides in our flower beds and veggie gardens. Sometimes the best control for "bad bugs" is as simple as a spray of soapy water or there's always the impact of two bricks smashing together. Very scientific!

Be conscious of the time of year you pick to have that giant unsightly dead tree cut down and hauled off or chipped up. Spring and early summer may be good for the tree trimming companies, but not so great for the helpless family of baby chickadees, Tufted Titmice or nuthatches held up in a cozy old woodpecker hole. Perhaps waiting until fall would save the birds and tree trimmers may even give you a better deal.

Habitat is a big word, but it starts with just a little of the right kind of space. It's a very personal word for me as a gardener, homeowner, bird lover and the place where my grandchildren play. I can't imagine doing harm to it. It brings so much joy to my life!

Better than TV!

Our evening ritual may not be very exciting to many. We don't dance! After dinner retiring to the screened back porch to watch the quiet little



family of screech owls, that's our cup of tea. Nick has not climbed up to photograph inside the box at this writing but we estimate there are 3 or 4 young in the box who must be getting pretty big because mom and dad don't spend much time in the box anymore. They will perch on a nearby branch napping during the day, must be a lot cooler in the trees. Come early evening the action begins. The tiny owls can be seen at the opening waiting for a handout bobbing their heads back and forth, begging and watching the sky for mom or dad to bring them a yummy mouse. Squinting in the darkness to watch the silent flight of the adults across the yard to the box, we know they will continue through the night but it's time for us to retire. We already fed our kids.



ASK NICK:

Q. What can I see at my feeders this time of summer and what seed is best for those birds?

A. If you don't want a mess under your feeders or to deal with seed sprouting, try patio mix. No shells...no sprouting. Chickadees, cardinals, woodpeckers, Carolina Wrens, nuthatches and titmice will all bring their young fledglings to the feeders to learn to feed themselves.

Q. Why am I not seeing hummingbirds in my yard at this time of year?

A. You may have seen the hummers around the last of April and first of May, but if you are not seeing them now, it's because they are off nesting in thickets close to water. Just wait...the action will pick up in another few weeks when the hummer population explodes in our area. Hummers will be intensely eating at feeders in preparation for migration that begins in September. Keep those feeders fresh!



Remember Dad's Special Day Sunday, June 15



Does his scoreboard look like this?

Squirrels 5.....Dad 1
Is he tired of all his good birdseed going to the Squirrels? Give Dad the upper hand once and for all in the war against the squirrels! We've got just the feeder or baffle to help him be the winner!



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 WWW.BACKYARDNATURECENTER.COM



Martin Update

The most amazing thing about the parking lot of The Shops At Tallgrass is the Purple Martin house in the middle of the parking lot. We realize that not every yard has room for a martin house so we hope you will enjoy ours. At this writing there are 20 nests, 18 nests have eggs and the young martins should be starting to hatch at any time now. Then the action begins to intensify! When you step out of your air-conditioned car, look to the sky. The adults are singing, and flying in all directions, catching the largest flying insects they can to bring to the porch of their compartment to feed their young. Becoming involved with these birds, worrying about them when a storm blows through, driving out to the store to check after the “all clear” has sounded...this is called, in my opinion, PMS! Purple Martin Syndrome. One can’t help it; they truly are one of the most beautiful birds in North America!

