



# BACKYARD nature center News



October/November 2016 • Issue 37

## Fall is Here, Getting a Little Batty?



October is Bat Appreciation Month! Really, you ask?

Most folks can't think of any reason to appreciate a bat, let alone invite them to live in their yard. Well, guess what, you probably have bats and don't even know it. Ever sit out on your drive or patio after dusk to watch a meteor shower? If so, you may have noticed something silently fly by and wondered if it could be a large insect or perhaps even a screech owl. If there's a full moon, you may see a dark silhouette that flits, dives, twists in the air right in front of you, missing you by an inch as if you are in the way. Don't be afraid. These creatures of the night are not after your blood, won't get tangled in your hair. They are simply not after anything you've got with one exception.....mosquitoes! Bats become active when mosquitoes are out in full force, dusk. What a benefit and we have so many to share!

My first encounter with bats was in our very store. Some 15 or so years back, we invited a naturalist from Milford Nature Center, to bring her bat display to our store for an educational event. She laid out a curious menagerie of items to peruse. Among the items were multiple tiny skeletons and bones from a few of our



native species. Explaining, in great detail, how bats fly, how they can cling with tiny feet, and how they use echolocation to hunt prey maneuvering through the night with speed and careful agility. Saving the best to last, the naturalist reached into the cardboard box that we were all wondering about, and ever so gently lifted a tiny, quivering "big brown bat". Mind you, the name does not suit a creature of no more than four inches in length but with a wingspan of more than a foot. She placed the bat on her sweatshirt, where it clung like a furry stick pin. His large brown eyes seemed focused on his job....to educate. No longer able to survive in the wild due

to an injury, the little fellow shows people that there is nothing to fear.



Small and delicate, bats in our area are colonizing and live in large groups, some migrate and some hibernate, hunt insects, nurse their young, are meticulously clean and are not any more likely to carry rabies than any other mammal. My heart was won over! Here is a tiny beneficial animal that we should all invite to

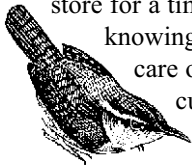
live to our yards, harbor no fear of or discourage in any way. Want mosquito control in your yard? Put up a bat box!



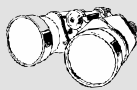
## A Special Thank You

With grateful hearts Nick and I have to thank Mary and Tammy. Without them to mind the store we would not have been able to enjoy the inspiring majestic Teton Mountain Range and beautiful waters of the Jackson lake. Though we camped in a rustic Lodge at night, no longer roughing it in our tent and laying on the ground, were too old for that, we cooked most of our meals by campfire, taking in the chip chip chipping of juncos flitting close to our picnic and nuthatches at a distance. All birds that will no doubt follow us home! Fires in Yellowstone held us back a few days, but were able move into beloved Old Faithful Inn, our favorite spot in the whole world. Having camped with our daughters for some dozen years before opening the store, the place holds the fondest of memories. Kids feeding nuts to the " scrub jays, Clarks nutcrackers and magpies, now illegal, while hiking trails through great forests along the Snake River and following creaky wooden walkways next to bubbling mud pots and purple thermal pools of boiling water that reeked of sulfur. Just the two of us now....what a life! Soaking up the best the natural world has to offer and being inspired by the simplest things like gold and orange aspens quaking ever so slightly with the cool fall breeze.

We may never completely retire but It's so lovely to be able leave the store for a time in such good hands, knowing they are taking good care of you, our faithful customers. Thank you Mary and Tammy!



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



## SPECIES PROFILE: The Northern Cardinal

The red bird with the big beak really has it made. During the holidays, just about everyone receives its picture. It might just be the number one Christmas card pinup! The Northern Cardinal, as this bird is officially called, is popular for good reason. No other bird looks so good against fallen snow. Both the male and the female sing a pleasant, simple song that's often counter sung (the male answers the female on a slightly different pitch). Cardinals seem to prosper even with the habitat alterations accompanying our home-building efforts. Few other songbirds reward us so richly or rapidly if we scatter a few handfuls of their favorite seed, black oil sunflower, on the ground or on a low feeding table.



The Cardinal is really not a hard bird to please. He will often be the first bird to feed in the morning, and the last at night. In spring, you'll enjoy seeing the male offer the female a carefully selected seed as part of their "Mate Feeding Ritual." Cardinals are "ground" feeders; however, they will feed on flat surfaces. Wood platform feeders (hopper, fly through and open platform) placed five feet or so above ground level are ideal to attract them. Perches on most tube feeders are too small to allow Northern Cardinals to comfortably feed.

*Few other songbirds reward us so richly.*

The word Cardinal, which means "principle", comes from the Latin "cardo" for "a hinge or pivot." This bird is named for its color, which matches the robes of Catholic Cardinals. Cardinals have greatly increased their breeding range over the past 80 years. They do not migrate, but simply keep pushing farther north and west as suburbs and bird feeders proliferate. Cardinals are the one "red light" you'll want to attract! Their range is throughout most of the eastern and central states, the south and much of the arid southwest preferring dense, shrubby habitat. Provide all that in your backyard, you'll keep the Cardinals happy and soon you'll be "seeing red"!



# Ask Nick & Cathy:

**Q.: Why did my birds stop coming? What am I doing wrong? I put food in the feeder..... last spring!**

A.: The biggest reason may be that you let your feeder go empty and when your birds dropped by, well...they left. Consistency, year round, keeps the birds coming! They know they can depend on a fresh food source in a clean and healthy feeder.



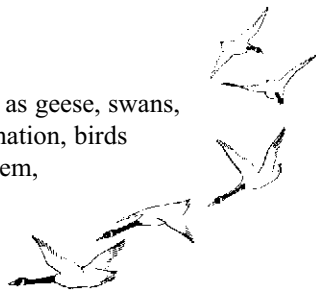
**Q.: Do birds really need water in the winter with all the lakes and ponds around?**

A.: Most definitely! Ponds are great for waterfowl but song-birds are not comfortable at the edge of a partially frozen pond, too many risks. Feather care is as important as you

wearing layers of clothing during the winter. Birds are constantly distributing oil when they preen. Too much oil makes it difficult to “fluff” those downy feathers creating wonderful layers of warmth. Providing water that’s shallow and free of ice is essential. Consider a heater in your existing birdbath or a heated bath that has a thermostat in it. It uses minimal power but keeps the water temperature just above freezing.

**Q.: Why do birds fly in vee formation?**

A.: Several bird species, particularly waterfowl—such as geese, swans, ducks, and pelicans—fly in vee formation. In this formation, birds fly either next to or slightly above the bird ahead of them, which allows them to take advantage of the upwellings of the air created by the birds in front. Research has shown that birds in a vee formation can travel more than 70% farther on the same amount of energy as a solo bird. By the way, birds in a vee formation practice “equal opportunity”—they take turns being point bird without regard to sex.

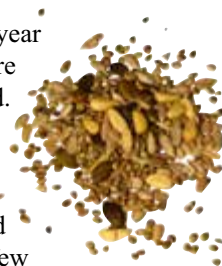


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# Storing Seed

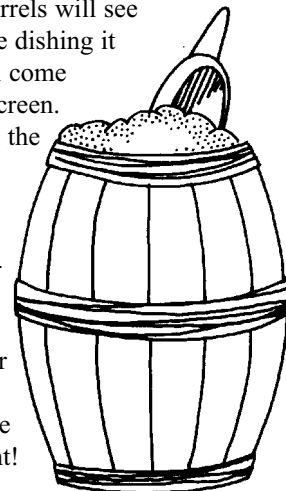
This is the time of year when many of us are stocking up on seed. Since we know we will be feeding all fall and winter, it makes sense to load up. But think of a few things before you do...



- 1) Can you store the seed outdoors. It is always best if you can. Seed stored in your home can become buggy and we don't want your house over run with moths.
- 2) If you can put it out side, make sure it is in a tightly sealed METAL can. Squirrels can smell it and they also watch you closely. They know where the seed is and will spend hours trying to get to it. We don't care how thick the plastic buckets are... they will eat right through them.
- 3) Keep the seed in the bag it is bought in if you can so that you actually use the old seed up before starting the new. If you empty into the can, really make sure you finish it off before emptying a new bag. We don't want old seed collecting at the bottom.
- 4) If you really cant store the seed outdoors, make sure it is in a cool spot in your home and only store a months worth.

One other thought... don't store the seed on a screened in porch. The ever watchful squirrels will see where you are dishing it from and will come through the screen.

We do sell the metal cans because we discovered they are difficult to find elsewhere. But, wherever you get one, just make sure the top is tight!





**BACKYARD  
nature center**

*For people who feed and care for backyard birds*  
The Shops at Tallgrass  
8336 E. 21st Street, #500 • Wichita, KS 67206  
www.backyardnaturecenter.com  
**316-683-2121**

**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

Remember to Recycle



Enjoy a  
beautiful autumn!  
Tammy, Cathy, Nick  
and Mary.

**20% OFF!**

## October Seed Sale is Here!

**Now through October 23**

Enjoy the best value of the year in time for winter's freezing temps and grateful feathered friends!

All 20–50 lb. bags of birdseed are 20% off from now until October 23rd, you must take it with you that day or open or add to an Early Bird Seed Account by

depositing a minimum of \$150 and get 20% off any size bag of seed, suet, nuts, mealworms (any food product), at

the 20% discount while your money lasts. The advantage of the Seed Account is that you only take what you need that day!

