



# BACKYARD nature center News

August/September 2014 • Issue 24

## Hummer Migration

Get ready. Have your feeders fresh! It starts now! If you didn't have very much hummingbird activity this summer it simply is that the hummers weren't nesting in your immediate area. All birds become very quiet during the nesting period.

There is not nearly the vocalization and singing going on that there was during spring. If there is nesting going on in your yard, an adult may come quietly to the feeder, get their fill up of much needed instant energy and return to their nestlings.

Here in Kansas, the only hummingbird that nests is the Ruby Throat. We are very fortunate to be in the central flyway, where many other species like Broad Tailed, Rufus and even tiny Calliope Hummingbirds will come through, are grateful to have a place to stop, rest and find a clean feeder to give them the nutrition and energy to move on, at least to the gulf area. Normally, most hummingbirds return to south Central America for the winter, a hazardous 500-mile journey across the gulf, but biologists and bird banders have documented as many as ten species that are over-wintering in the gulf-states. The theory is that there is a great deal of deforestation in Mexico and Central America making their arrival somewhat precarious.

Public and private gardens throughout the Southeast regularly attract significant numbers of ruby-throats during migration, and some locations have become hummingbird "hot spots." At these places, hundreds

upon hundreds of the birds converge. At first this may seem mysterious, since ruby-throats usually travel alone and along highly individual routes, a strategy that keeps them from draining the nectar supply. But these concentra-

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tions take place along natural landmarks, such as mountain ranges and rivers. Ruby-throats, like other

birds, tend to follow such formations during migration, which explains why their flight paths may briefly flow together. Such gatherings often occur in mountainous regions, where an abundance of wild flowers provide

migrants with food. I say they follow I-70 from Denver, turn south at Salina and take 135 south. That's the route most of us take from the mountains right? In the 1820s, artist John James Audubon

described the Ruby-throated Hummingbird as a "glittering fragment of the rainbow." I agree.



### Fun product of the summer!

#### The Original "POP's" Copper Hummingbird Swing

I have to admit, I have been poo pooing this product since we got it as a silly gimmicky gadget. Well, that is until I saw a female hummingbird land on it, watch the sky and the two feeders Nick had placed it between, then proceed as if she was next in line, now being served! Hummers have very tiny, little feet, not meant for clinging or running, but perching on a swing, yes! If your hummingbird feeder already has a perch, keep an eye on it, notice how much they enjoy pausing for a few moments, conserving energy, watching their surroundings, even guarding a feeder. Made of twisted copper, the swing has a small dangling red bead hanging down from the top. I'm sold, could be the best product of the year.



# Ask Nick & Cathy



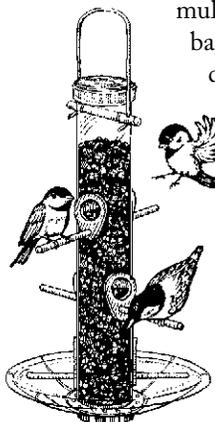
Nick and Cathy, master gardeners, avid bird watchers and owners of the BACKYARD Nature Center.

*Q. All summer I have been fighting seed growing under the feeder. What can I do to stop the seed from collecting and growing? It's amess!*

A. Great question! Any seed that has a shell will germinate under the feeder. Birds constantly rake seed from feeders throwing it on the ground. Some ground feeding birds will be excited about that. Very quickly, that seed germinates and you end up with unsightly growth. The answer is an easy one. Purchase seed which has been shelled! We have three different seed blends that fit the bill. Patio Mix with peanut halves, Patio Mix with peanut pieces and Clinger's Charms (a wonderful nut mixture), all without the shell, therefore it cannot germinate!

*Q. Over the warm humid summer, my seed became buggy in the bag. Is something getting into the bag? Should I still feed this seed or throw it away?*

A. It is not something "invading" your bag, rather it's something trying to get out! Our seed is totally organic. There are no pesticides sprayed on it in the field when it is growing. The grain moth lays eggs on the plant in the field; it gets cleaned multiple times for us, is bagged up and is delivered to our store. If you keep your seed in the garage where it gets warm, the egg hatches and the larvae emerges. That's why you should never store seed in your house!



# Night Visitor at Your Feeders? Think Not?

Off and on, we will have folks bring in a feeder that has been pulled down off a branch, hanger twisted and broken, feed ports chewed out, trays broken off, and generally in bad shape! This is not the work of squirrels.

Raccoons are the night visitors that you may never have expected would be in your neighborhood, let alone, your backyard, ravaging the feeders. Raccoons are very urban creatures, living in culverts, old woodpecker holes and dens, hiding out during the day only to make hay all night long in your yard. Their habitat is generally wooded and near water. With all the beautiful neighborhood ponds and large trees, even surrounding new housing additions, is it any wonder they find it a good place to settle in? Squirrels are very ambitious for sure but do not work at night. If you were able to film your feeders from dusk to dawn, you might be surprised at who's out there. This late-night thief can be almost 33 inches long and weigh up to 35 pounds, equipped with tool like paws and able to maneuver almost any feeder off its pole or branch. At times, they may even work as a team. Once the feeder is on the ground, however, they are very aggressive and protective of their prize!

We have finally won the battle of these masked bandits who were tearing down our feeders almost nightly. A simple squirrel baffle on a pole will not do, this night marauder is too big. If placing your feeder in a tree, generally their playground, you'll need to use a very long hanger, possibly 54" long but be sure to zip tie it to the branch and at the feeder. A pole works great as long as your baffle is at least 24" long and made of steel, plastic won't due.



Raccoons are very good climbers but not such great jumpers. We carry a wonderful product that is made of actual coyote urine. Sprinkled under the feeder, it alerts the invader that there is a predator present and that he is a meat eater so watch out. It takes some doing, but I think we can help you win the battle of the masked bandit!



## Binoculars 101

The Backyard Nature Center is a great resource for binoculars. We can help fit you with the right

optics for your face, hands and the way you are going to be using them. We carry ALPEN binoculars. Well-armed, great optics, great warranty, rated "Best Buy" by Birders' World magazine. Don't just go into a big box store where no one knows anything about binoculars! We know optics! Let us help you.

Join us for our...

23<sup>RD</sup>

# ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

During the month of August

We are now 23 years old!

Doesn't seem possible! As our thanks to you for your continued support, we are offering a mammoth 20% off your entire purchase, one time only, during the month of August. Good on in-stock items only (excludes optics), cannot be combined with other offers, cannot add to your Early Bird Seed account at this time, but you can purchase as much seed as you'd like to take with you at the whopping 20% discount!

It's time to clear out old inventory and get ready for new products coming in late October. Watch for brightly colored stickers around the store! Lots of heavily discounted items you won't want to miss! Some more than 50% off!

**20% OFF\***  
**Your entire purchase**

Now through  
**August 30, 2014**  
\*exclusions apply

## Want to update your martin system?

All "Special Order" Purple Martin systems from Trendsetter and Lonestar are 15% off when ordered before September 30th! You'll have much more success with their large 6 x 12 compartments, along with the ease of raising and lowering your house with their steel cable and wenchcranking systems. Houses ship directly to your door and come fully assembled! Don't miss this great offer!

**15% OFF**

a Purple Martin system  
when ordered before September 30, 2014

C090114; Expires September 30, 2014. Cannot be combined with other offers.





*For people who feed and care for backyard birds*

The Shops at Tallgrass

8336 E. 21st Street, #500 • Wichita, KS 67206

[www.backyardnaturecenter.com](http://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](http://WWW.BACKYARDNATURECENTER.COM)

Remember to Recycle



## SPECIES PROFILE:

### Yellow-billed Cuckoo

You know how specific fragrances or scents make you think of someone or something from your past? Well, nature sounds can do that too. All of my adulthood, I have enjoyed the sounds of warm summer days with all the singing and calling of the insects and the songbirds. What exactly are they saying, I think? What does that sound mean for them? One bird call that we have been hearing in our heavily wooded yard is the call of the mysterious and reclusive Yellow-billed Cuckoo. You may recognize this funny call: *kakakakah-kah-cow cow cow cow!* Truly there is such a bird in Kansas. A slender bird almost 12” long, with a long, curved yellow bill, he’s soft brown with a light underbelly. In late July we witnessed the most hilarious event. This very shy bird was dancing around on the net over our garden pond (our attempt to protect the goldfish from a naughty heron). At first glance, we thought he was caught and maybe we should free him. But no...he was bouncing around on the net like one of the Flying Walenda’s on a trampoline, picking off the fuzzy caterpillars that had fallen from the walnut trees above.

My memory finally caught up with me, some 50 years later, and I realized that it was a sound from my childhood. My family went to Wilson lake, northwest of town, it had a lovely beach and with lots of places to picnic. I fondly remember hearing the sound of locusts and now, in my old age, I realize it was the call of a Cuckoo that serenaded us while we swam and had our cookouts. Bless that Cuckoo for that wonderful memory!

