



BACKYARD nature center News

February/March 2019 • Issue 51



Nesting Season Begins!

Perhaps the greatest delight of observing birds lies in the diversity of the species you can see in your own backyard. This expanding knowledge of the wide range of types of birds and their habits provides pleasure through discovery and learning. First, we learn that a Robin is different from a Cardinal which is different from a Chickadee etc. We learn that they not only don't look alike, but they act in different ways and even eat different foods.

One of the ways that birds are differentiated is by their nesting activities, which can provide great pleasure to the nature watcher and amateur sleuth. In addition to courtship and nest building, you can enjoy watching the hatching, feeding, and, finally, the fledging of the young birds.

Just as our growing knowledge of birds allows us to understand that all birds don't eat seed from a bird feeder, we soon learn that not all birds make use of the iconic peaked roof "bird house" with a little hole at the top. And, would you believe, that not all birds even make a nest of twigs and sticks! That's right! Of the roughly 285 species of birds in the eastern United States, less than one-third of them use a nest box! So what is everybody else doing? And who does what?

Some birds nest in cavities such as tree holes, nest boxes, or the nooks of buildings. These birds, which include woodpeckers, bluebirds, chickadees, House Wrens, and 85 other species in North America, are known as cavity nesters.

Many of the other 200 species of birds (including goldfinches, robins,

and mockingbirds) build their nests out in the open, on branches of shrubs and trees. These cup-shaped nests are open to the sky.

Most other birds nest on the ground, either in open cups or shallow depressions scraped in the ground. Common ground nesters include killdeer, towhees, and many species of native sparrows. It is for these ground-nesting



birds that loose cats and dogs are a major cause of the decline in populations.

A few birds, including the Belted Kingfisher, actually build their nests underground or in holes along the banks of creek beds.

Those interested in helping and observing the nesting activities of these different types of birds can get involved and have fun doing it. Except for those crazy Kingfishers and their burrows! They will have to do that on their own!

The easiest way to help the most birds is to make some good nesting material available. The birds can

usually find twigs and sticks, but you can help with some of the finishing touches. Make available some sheep's wool for lining that cozy nest, or set out some feathers, or dog hair, moss, lichen, yarn or string. I have read that you can set out a saucer of dirt and water to provide some handy mud for the birds that want to use that to hold things together. And what a thrill, when you find some colorful wool or yarn in a nest that makes use of "your" building materials!

Some of these nesting materials will find their way into open nests for Cardinals and Robins, but other bits of it will be carried away to a suitable nest box for use by a cavity nester. The design of the nest box is important; look for the following criteria: correct dimensions, untreated wood or metal, ventilation, drainage, clean-out access and no perch. That's right. No perch. The birds don't need it and it helps nest-robbing predators.

Although a lot of people hang or mount their nest boxes directly on trees, others prefer to mount their box on a pole, where they can see it. Many folks like the idea of tucking their nest boxes into quaint and cozy locations within deep foliage of trees. But doing this only hurts your chances for successfully attracting nesting birds. Remember, naturally occurring cavities are usually found on dead trees, which have no foliage. Birds are unlikely to look for cavities on healthy trees, so place your nest box out in the open if you can. If possible, mount it where it will receive a little afternoon shade, and enjoy the show!

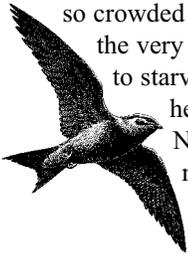
Think Purple Martins this year!

The Purple Martin is one of the most fun birds to have in your yard or neighborhood. They have a song like no other bird. Martins are the only bird in North America that colonizes, in other words they nest with other Purple Martins in the same house. As a colony there is strength in numbers and they are very social birds.

The birding community along with researchers of Purple Martins like the Purple Martin Conservation Association have studied martins in depth and have found that manufacturers of earlier martin housing were making compartments too small to house an adult along with 3 to 6, some times more, young birds who would quickly mature to the size of the adult at 8". An older style house with

standard 6x6" compartments becomes so crowded that young birds in the very back are either going to starve or smother in the heat of the season.

New style housing is now available with 6x12" compartments



made of lightweight aluminum for ease of raising and lowering during the nest season to check for signs of predation and condition of the nestlings. Purple Martins benefit from human housing as well as human interaction and prefer to nest in a house that is closer to humans rather than placed in the north 40, totally isolated and left to the ravage of

sparrows, snakes and other predators. Nick has researched these larger, more attractive houses and has brought them into the store for Purple Martin landlords who want to offer the best and be successful. Shown above is the Hilltop Trendsetter with top perch, steel cable and wench system for easy lowering, insulated compartments and roof, 2" square 14' aluminum pole and ground



socket, completely assembled. If you have questions about martins and how to attract them, don't hesitate to come in and talk to Nick. We've enjoyed a wonderful 20-compartment house that we have maintained in front of our store for some 10 years. With the large compartments and wide-open gliding space, the birds have fledged 80 to 90 young each August.



Critical Winter Survival

Temperatures are still cold and often below freezing. Water couldn't be more critical for song birds for drinking as well as bathing. Ponds are not inviting to small birds, ducks and geese of course, but for the little guys, finding water that's free of ice can be a real problem. More birds will die from dehydration than starvation during winter. Bathing is equally as important. Feather care during bathing helps remove excess oil from preening and allows the birds to fluff out layers of feathers, further insulating themselves. Just like adding long johns, sweaters, coats, scarf and hat, we layer to keep warm and cozy. Be sure your birdbath has a heater in it to keep an open area for the sake of your birds.



Barn Swallows



Messy & muddy? Yes. Bothersome? Likely. Dependable and recurring? Absolutely. Cute and beneficial? For sure. Here's an insect eater that you'll want in your yard!

Barn Swallows are all those things. Every spring I hope they will forget my house address and find another spot to nest that isn't right on my front porch down light. Then when

they come late, I find myself worrying about them and wondering why on earth they wouldn't want to nest high up on my porch where it's cool and dry, safe from predators, and enjoyed completely by the home owners! Our yard is organic, free of poisonous pesticides and provides the adults with plenty of good insects to feed their young all summer long. I've tried many things to contain the messy droppings on my lovely porch. One year I placed a big fern under the nest but the droppings just made the plant look horrible. I've found success in laying out a clear plastic carpet runner that has adhesive on one side. When the runner gets really bad, to the point of embarrassment, I can either hose it off or wad the runner up and replace with a fresh one. Where there's a will.... there's a way! I really don't blame them for wanting the best for their family! Oh, did I mention that after the first brood leaves the nest, they may do it all over again!



Holiday Bummed?

Ruby update: The holidays appear to have been rough for our beloved store cat, Ruby. Now 17 years old, she is mostly grateful for her new all-natural wool bed from Feline Groovy, a new specialty shop next to the Cat Hospital. Save our beautiful songbirds by keeping your cat indoors whenever possible.



Spring is no time to stop feeding



All plants re-seed, or drop seeds to reproduce themselves, in fall. Berries and seeds are plentiful in fall and our songbirds can feast on them to survive cold weather. By spring, however, most of these foods have either been eaten or are no longer desirable. New fresh crops of seed will not be available again until fall. Oh sure, when temperatures warm, our yards provide plenty of insects to feed nestlings, but adult seed eaters continue to look for seed for themselves. Spring feeding is appreciated by the permanent residents like cardinals, goldfinches, chickadees, nuthatches, house-finches, titmice, Carolina Wrens and woodpeckers. It also helps migrants and birds that arrive early to their breeding grounds. When migrating birds see other bird activity in your yard, they are more likely to check it out, if only for a drink of water. By late spring, most birds have begun to nest. At this time, they need extra energy for males to define and defend territories and for females to build nests and produce eggs. Once the young are flight ready, the parents may bring the awkward youngsters to the feeders where they'll beg to be fed until mom pulls back and lets them pick up a few seeds for themselves, learning to be more independent. Spring is one of the busiest times at your feeder. Dressed in colorful mating plumage, couples pair up, males feed females and serenade to impress. With your continued support, birds will bring interest, joy, sound and color into your yard all through the year.

Prepare for spring nesting! Most cavity-nesting birds are searching for a cozy nesting site by mid-February. Be ready and don't miss out!

15% OFF
any nest box, including Purple
Martin Houses

C190201; Expires March 30, 2019.
Cannot be combined with other offers.



**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

SEMI-ANNUAL BIRDSEED SALE



Now through February 28th

It's that time again! After the holiday hustle and bustle, it's calming to enjoy the birds outside your window, and to think of them when temps are cold and natural seed that was produced in the fall has been depleted.

Now through February 28th, all 20 to 50lb. bags of premium bird seed are 20% off, take it with you that day or join the folks who've figured out how to make their dollars go further by adding to or opening an **EARLY BIRD SEED ACCOUNT!**

Deposit a minimum of \$150 and all your seed, suet, nuts or mealworms, in any size, come off your account at the 20% discount until you have used your funds up.

20% OFF!

