



BACKYARD nature center News

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Babies babies everywhere and boy are they demanding!

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, okay?” 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 fledg-

lings—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, 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 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 mouths.

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!

Time to stop feeding?

Each year I am asked by someone if they should stop feeding in the summer. Their reasoning is that the birds can eat the insects that come with warmer weather. My answer is that if they in fact are trying to help the birds get thru tough times, that spring and early summer is actually the time that birds need the most help! This is the time of the year when there is the least amount of natural food available for the birds. They have been living on the seeds and berries that were produced during the last growing season and by now, that supply is at its lowest point of the year and plants have not started producing yet for the coming year. Birds' energy needs are also higher now than at any other time of the year because they are starting to nest. They must now also find food for 4 to 6 offspring in the nest that are demanding to be fed! It is a very stressful time for birds and a feeder full of seed or mealworms or nectar is a welcome addition and a very busy place!

Also, not all birds eat insects. American Goldfinch, for example, are only seed eaters. They in fact love anything that has gone to seed in the garden so don't dead head everything. One of their favorites, dandelions!

The best reason to continue feeding in my opinion though, is that you enjoy watching the birds. Bird activity during the nesting season is more fun to watch, they sing more they fight for territory, and they are constantly trying to keep the youngsters fed. It is fun to watch for baby birds ready to leave the

nest and then follow the parents around begging to be fed, and because the days are longer, and the weather warmer and you can sit and enjoy the activity. What better way to relieve the stress from a long day at the office or fighting with those bargain hunters at the mall!



To feed or not to feed? That is the question.

Lots of folks ask us here at the store, if they should continue to feed the birds during the spring and summer. The most common misconception is that the birds can fend for themselves during the warmer months, when in fact, the nutritional needs for the birds during nest building and feeding young, is so high that the birds can really use the help. Think about this....flowers, shrubs and bushes are all in bloom and looking quite beautiful while providing good cover for the birds....but.....natural seed is not available until those plants reseed themselves in fall! There you have it. Those are the facts. Insects are plentiful for sure and the birds will take advantage of their abundance. Feeding young mouths is a never ending job from dawn till dusk. Seed-eating birds feed their fledglings' regurgitated insects but they themselves would prefer a nice oily sunflower!



Spring and summer activities are so fun to watch. It is really a special time of year and one that I always look forward to. There's nothing sweeter than watching a male cardinal feeding his mate, or a seeing a full sized baby downy woodpecker follow mom to the feeder, stand there dumbfounded waiting for a hand out. They soon get the idea. Bird feeding is a most enjoyable hobby and we know the birds are grateful. I say, if you want to see birds in your yard, feed them.



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Give your birds a water source

Often people come into the store and ask us how they can attract robins or waxwings or even hawks to their backyards. They want to know if there is something they can put out for them. Well, there is... Water!

Water is something everyone needs and your backyard wildlife is no exception. And water is such an easy thing to provide.



Honestly, all you need is a shallow dish and you are good to go.

But, if you are going to put water out for your backyard friends, you might want to dress it up a bit. Birdbaths have come a long way and now can provide not only water, but they can also pretty up a backyard.

Consider a few things when picking out a birdbath. Any water source for birds should be fairly shallow, nothing too deep; they only like to wade! Does it matter what the bath is made of? Not really. You just have to know if the dish can hold up in freezing temperatures. If not, or if you are not sure, make sure to bring the bath in when the weather gets cold (or better yet, consider heating it, but that is for our winter newsletter!).

Another thought, when considering putting a birdbath in the yard is where to place it. Under trees will keep the water cooler and you will have less algae

growing but it may get littered by the tree. In the sun is just fine, but you will have to top it off more often. Our opinion is that your birdbath should be where you can see it well. By having it where you see it easily, you are more likely to keep it clean and full. As the summer heat sets in... consider giving your birds a water source. They will thank you with lots of visits!



Check your nest box now!

Nesting may not be over for birds in your yard. Cavity nesters like chickadees, bluebirds, woodpeckers, wrens and titmice may nest two or three times per season. Inspect your birdhouses after you see the babies have fledged. Pull out the old nest material which will be full of mites from the first brood. Check for wasps. Be persistent in evicting them. You may try smearing Vaseline on the inside peak of the roof where they start their paper nest. It's a great organic trick. When adult birds have success with their first brood it will entice them to begin a second!



Nick and Cathy Clausen are owners of the BACKYARD Nature Center, master gardeners, avid birdwatchers.

Recycle Ed



I recently read that so much of our recycling is, sadly, ending up in the landfill, despite our best efforts to do the right thing. Astounding isn't it? I insist we need more education than just what's on top of the recycling dumpster. So...when I learn anything about the proper way to handle a product and keep it from lingering in the already stressed landfill for the next three million years, I've got to share it.

Here at the store, we receive shipments of products daily from our vendors filled with bubble wrap, clean white paper and Styrofoam, all meant to protect the products inside. We also get our birdseed weekly stacked on wooden pallets shrink wrapped with giant plastic sheets.

While our landlord provides us with commercial bins for cardboard, the rest is on us. For the large volume recycling or even a small amount, I found PRO-KS Recycling at 725 E. Clark, staffed with volunteers who are very knowledgeable and helpful, and if that's not enough, you simply drive in the building where everything is clearly marked, unload and be on your way. The place is totally eye opening, in fact, I learned that the shrink-wrap and any other clean plastic bags can be recycled there as long as it "stretches", which is very cool to know. All the paper, junk mail, magazines and catalogues can go there too. This great place even has a library where you can deposit old books and help yourself to a new "read"! Check recyclewitha.org for location and hours. Exiting the building there is a sign that says, "you always feel better after you leave here"! So true! So true!

**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



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ON HIS DAY**

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