



BACKYARD nature center News

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A Time of Change

Late summer is a time of change for our beautiful songbirds. Nesting is complete. Full sized babies are still following mom and dad around begging, not ready to be on their own. The one obvious thing that's missing in our yard is SONG, beautiful song! No singing and chatter to attract a mate, no squawking over nest sites, no territorial rapping on trees and downspouts by woodpeckers...just silence. The serenade of spring is no longer.

But wait...there's more! Feeding at nectar feeders increases as hummingbirds and orioles beef up their body weight and reserves to travel thousands of miles to warm winter homes. You'll see some strange sights in late summer as cardinals, jays, grackles and house finch, all seed eaters; spend less effort in flight due to "molting" feathers. Out with the old and in with the new fluffier and warmer coat for cold weather.

Everyone's favorite, the American

Goldfinch finishes his nesting in late summer which coincides with natural wild thistle going to seed. The goldfinch uses the thistle as nesting material as well as a food source. That explains a lot as we ask ourselves, what did I do wrong and where are my goldfinches? They are, by nature, very nomadic at best. Feeding for days and rewarding us with



beautiful yellow and black color, hearing their sweet little melodic song. Zweeee! Then they move to someone else' yard and we think we've failed. Make no mistake, they'll be back. Gone is their bright yellow plumage molting to olive drab in order to blend in with the colors of autumn. The goldfinch is not a migratory bird. He is

here year round and will be joined at the thistle or sunflower hearts with his next of kin, the tiny Pine Siskin. Slightly more petite, with lots of vertical striping, he'll feed along side the goldfinch all winter.

Most insect eating birds will

migrate but there are always exceptions. Robins will be here when snow flies and would welcome a feeder full of dried, protein rich, mealworms and a warm heated birdbath to keep plumage fluffy and bodies hydrated. Robins from farther north visit our area for our practically tropical winters by comparison. Berry gorging Cedar Waxwings will be



competition for the wonderful fall production of bright sumptuous fair on chokecherry, cedars, honeysuckle, and woody shrubs like American cranberry. Swooping in for a yummy meal and clearing them out with the sheer number

of a flock, staying for a day or possibly two and gone...on to the next bush.

I have a tough time saying goodbye to my summer birds. It's sad to have all the busy activity from hummers and bright colorful, bossy orioles, grey catbirds and brown thrashers who have been popping about in the yard, singing like crazy with a song that sounds like they can't quite get it right so they have to start all over! I love these birds! Never fear, we still have our beautiful cardinals, jays, house finch, tufted titmice, woodpeckers and my all time favorite, the perky little black-capped chickadees who have staked out territory in my yard permanently. I hold my breath, whisper goodbye at the final hummer visit. It won't be long and my joy will be renewed with the first sighting of an eastern towhee or the darling junco's (snowbirds), or an all time favorite, the harris sparrow, who winters only in our area. Change is good, aren't we lucky!

Amazing Squirrel Facts

People watch and feed squirrels almost as much as they do the birds! Whether you think squirrels are adorable little fur balls, or think of them as “tree rats”. Squirrels are extremely interesting animals! Here are a few facts about them:

Squirrels have been around for a long time—a squirrel’s habit of gathering and storing food for the winter has allowed the species to survive for more than 35 million years! And to compensate for wear and tear, their teeth never stop growing. That’s why squirrels seem to chew everything—they gnaw on things to keep their teeth “filed down.” Squirrels even grind their teeth in their sleep! And contrary to the opinion of some birders, a squirrel’s stomach is not a bottomless pit. They need about a pound of food per week and enjoy a varied diet of bugs, nuts, fruit, seeds—and corn!

Ecologically, squirrels are important re-seeders of trees and woodland plants, busily burying their stash of nuts and seeds in preparation for winter. A squirrel can hide as many as 10,000 nuts each fall and can find his buried food under as much as a foot of winter snow. Some of these nuts and seeds are not retrieved



and grow into plants in the spring. Squirrels’ winter survival is dependent on remembering where he has deposited his caches. And what’s fascinating is that the portion of his brain that controls memory actually grows by 15% in fall, so it’s believed that squirrels really do remember where they stored all those nuts.

Squirrels can jump a distance of up to 20 feet while in the trees and can fall up

to 100 feet without hurting themselves. They have long, muscular hind legs and short front legs that work together to aid in leaping, and their hind legs are double-jointed. This helps them run up and down trees quickly. They’ll use their tail both for balance and as a parachute as they leap from tree to tree. They have five toes on their back feet and four toes on their front. A few more facts: squirrels can be found on every continent except Antarctica and Australia, the word “squirrel” originally came from the Greek words meaning “shadow tail” and the hibernating arctic ground squirrel is the only warm-blooded mammal able to withstand body temperatures below freezing.

Diversion Feeding

Now that you know a little about squirrels, you may be asking, “Yes, but how do I keep them off my bird feeders?” Well, first keep your feeders away from anything squirrels can jump from—count on them being able to jump at least 10 feet horizontally and 5 feet straight up vertically. So, your feeder needs to be up on a pole, at least 5 feet above the ground, and if necessary, employ a pole baffle to keep squirrels from climbing to the feeder. And then try diversion feeding—it really works! This is simply feeding squirrels in a different part of your yard with foods they like better than birdseed—and that’s mostly corn and peanuts. Offer these as a critter block you can just place on the ground, or in a special squirrel feeder. Some corn on the cob feeders can be extremely entertaining, for both you and the squirrels! So, just keep bird

feeders up high and away from jumping-off places and give your squirrels another place to munch. Squirrels are much easier to like when they aren’t raiding your bird feeders! And even if you’re not a squirrel lover, perhaps you will come to find these creatures the interesting and resourceful little animals they are!



Most Fun Product

Mamma and baby owl are a charming addition by day and intriguing accent light by night. Made from resin, white LED’S in the eyes illuminate automatically at dusk. A solar panel discreetly located on the back of the sculptures offer up to 8 hours on a full charge. Mamma is approximately 14" tall and the baby is some 6". Decor by day, light by night and you’re all set for early fall evenings!

R.I.P. Mobi

A fond farewell to our beloved friend, store kitty, Mobi. Mobi, a yellow tabby, had been declining in health for some time, bless his heart! Losing half his body weight and suffering from multiple health issues, he went to kitty heaven mid July. If you recall, Mobi and Ruby were dumped behind the store over 14 years ago as tiny kittens. They’ve been loved by so many of you and often stroked at the counter by folks with “cat allergies” for goodness sakes! He was a sweetheart and a good looking boy in his day! He will be missed very much.



Purple Martin Update from Nick

We were off to a rocky start in mid March with cold weather! Most martin



enthusiasts reported their birds getting a late start building nests. Most all energy reserves were used for simply staying alive. Three days of cold weather and there are no flying insect meals available and death is a possibility. Off we did get with 20 compartments here in the store's martin house, located in the parking lot. 20 full nests (100% occupied is rare), and fledged some 85 young martins flourishing and taking in the abundance of flying meals ample with all the humidity. A purple martin diet consists of less than 1% mosquitoes. Being a large swallow, they are 8" long beak to tail with a mighty 18" wingspan for soaring and maneuverability. They require a more substantial meal like dragonflies, damsel flies, and butterflies. Note to self: for mosquito control, consider a bat house! Great idea!

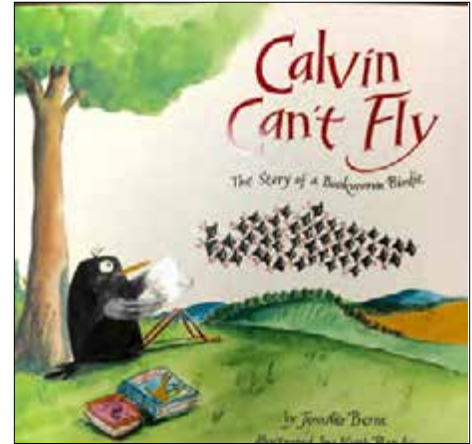
Book Reviews

Calvin Can't Fly

I know the little people in your life will love this darling book about Calvin, the starling that couldn't fly.

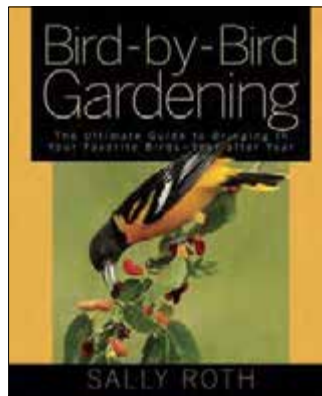
Calvin was born under the eaves of an old barn with 3 brothers, 4 sisters and seventy six thousand four hundred and thirty two cousins. Calvin may be one of many, but he's certainly different from the rest.

While other starlings learn to swoop and hover and fly figure eights, Calvin buries his beak in books. In the library his mind soars, taking him places wings never could. The trees bend and the winds blow hard and the air starts to smell strange. It's a hurricane, and only Calvin can save the day because he has read all about it! Calvin is an endearing hero, and this delightful story makes this a true celebration of the pleasures of reading!



Bird-By-Bird Gardening

This beautiful book is right down my alley! Gardening and Birdwatching.



When snow flies, its fun to curl up and read about the possibilities of spring! Bird-by-Bird Gardening shows us how to lure preferred species with bird-friendly features such as water, shrub cover, nesting plants and feeders. Nineteen garden designs for attracting specific bird families as well as water projects and feeder recipes for bird families. Full of color pictures and easy to hold. Would be a great gift at the holidays!

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PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT:
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Nick and Cathy Clausen are the owners of the BACKYARD Nature Center, Master Gardeners, and avid backyard birdwatchers.

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



Fun Feeder Give-Away

We had so much fun with this last year that we decided to repeat it. We are giving away two squirrel-proof feeders. One with a small electric buzz (a \$95 value) and the other feeder closes as the body weight of Mr. Squirrel tries to get near the feed ports (a \$45 value). Put your name and phone number in the bucket at the check out area and on September 30th, we will have our friend and neighbor, Noel from Rug Studio draw for the winners! Be ready for our call!

