

BACKYARD nature center News

October/November 2020 • Issue 60

The Blended Family *By Tammy Ritchie*



Ten years ago, this spring my family adopted 4-day old white Chinese goslings. Growing up on a farm with a variety of animals, I thought it would be a great opportunity for my boys to experience the joy of raising waterfowl of their own. Through the next 3 months the

goslings spent a lot of time with us and imprinted on my family. They walked with us in the yard, sat near us when gardening and took to the water for swims as the boys splashed around.

Through the years we lost three of the geese. Gertie was lonely and I decided to find her a companion. Then along came Vinnie. He's very large Toulouse goose. On my lake folks have even referred to him as a swan! It was not love at first sight by any means. Gertie played hard to get for quite some time.

But an extreme cold front moved in that winter and these two were forced to spend some quality time together in shelter. Once they were released, the two were inseparable.

In the 9 years of Gertie's adult life, she has tried each spring to become a momma. Faithfully sitting on her eggs sometimes for months and never with any success. After trying to incubate a few eggs last year, we determined that for some reason Gertie was infertile and would never experience the joy of raising young of her own. And then it happened.

This spring Gertie had a significant setback. For about a week Gertie and Vinnie were swimming across the lake to start her spring time routine of building her nest and laying eggs. But I received a call from a neighbor with concern that Gertie wasn't able to walk. When we arrived, we noticed swelling around her ankle and a small growth on the top of her knob that was getting bigger. I brought Gertie back home and scheduled an appointment with a veterinarian to receive care. For five days Gertie was in and out of the veterinary clinic receiving treatment. The staff was amazed that this sweet goose would stand on the exam table and allow anyone in the office to hold her and evaluate her with no fear. She was indeed the perfect patient. Gertie was brought back home to begin treatment and to live in quarantine with Vinnie until treatment was complete. She wasn't very happy with me. Her instinct was to return to her nest. I needed a resolution. Yes, I knew those eggs of hers would never hatch, but she didn't know that. She wanted so desperately to return to the lake and keep working on her nest. So, my family created a

little nesting area in the back yard for her, perfectly placed near a bird bath and under a bush for shade. Next up we needed to collect her eggs from the original nest. My son offered to kayak over and collect all the eggs. Upon his return we had 9 eggs to place in her new nest.

Time passed and her mate stood faithfully by her side. Each day and night standing guard like a soldier. I knew those eggs weren't fertile. They've never been fertile. And I really needed Gertie to start moving. The medical treatment didn't work and each time she stood to eat I could see just how hard it was to move. I made the decision that it was time to remove the eggs and get her back to swimming for some goose physical therapy. As I picked up the eggs, I noticed one was cracked. With more examination I then noticed it was moving. How was it even possible? An egg that was hatching? I placed it back underneath her and waited. The next morning, I woke up to a miracle. A sweet day-old gosling peeking from under momma's wing.

Vinnie happily took over the parenting role with baby Mayble as Gertie fought to gain back strength and mobility. Mom and dad were as proud as could be. And I was just as excited to see them with a gosling. But the question still remained. How did she finally have a fertile egg? Time answered that question. Gertie hatched a Canada goose! How? You see, when my son collected those 9 eggs from across the lake a Canada goose was also nesting nearby. To our good fortune, one of those eggs must have tumbled onto the rocks just like Gertie's!



These 3 are quite the blended family on the lake. And I couldn't be more delighted to see such a happy ending!

Water...a critical lifesaving component!

Be sure your birds have water that's free of ice all winter long. As temps drop, especially night temps, songbirds wake up to ice filled bird baths and streams that are not accessible. Deep lakes are great for geese and water fowl, but not for the birds that come to your seed feeders. So many birds will die of dehydration. Feather care is so important too. As birds preen in the warm sunshine, they are distributing natural oils to keep feathers water resistant. Too much oil and they cannot "fluff" their down to build insulation between layers of clean feathers. Knowing how important water is for survival, think about providing them with a heater in your birdbath or simply a heated birdbath. The heaters and baths that we carry have built in thermostats and bring the water temp to just above freezing, then they shut off. They use minimal power and are safe for all creatures that visit your yard.



*\$5 off any birdbath heater
Or \$10 off any heated birdbath
C113020; expires 11/30/2020*



Great New Product! Sibley Quick Guides

David Allen Sibley, America's most widely respected bird illustrator and ornithologist has created a collection of handy fold-out laminated/waterproof quick guides to pack along on any hike, toss in glove compartment, or just keep by the window for quick identification. We now carry Backyard Birds, Raptors, Woodpeckers, Hummingbirds, Shore Birds and more. Find them on our front counter. We think you'll find them so handy!



Winter Seed Storage Do's & Don'ts



Store seed outdoors if possible. Cold temps are good for keeping seed fresh.

*Never store seed indoors. House temperatures are perfect for hatching out the unwanted seed grain moth that's in all organic seed. Nobody wants that. If you have no choice but to store inside, consider the freezer and buy small bags instead.

*Don't store on a screened porch. Ever watchful squirrels will see where you are dishing it from and eat through your screen. We sell metal storage cans with fairly tight-fitting lids!

Bird Feeding Basics - Or which feeder suits each bird best!

Platform feeders



A feeder placed close to the ground/perhaps with a screened bottom will be a great gathering place for winter visitors like juncos (commonly called “snow birds”), doves, beautiful native sparrows like the Harris Sparrow, White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows, Rufus-sided Towhees and everyone’s favorite Northern Cardinals! Ground feeding birds enjoy black oiled sunflower and very often white proso millet. Place this feeder near bushes, these birds will feel safer if they need to escape to cover quickly.

Tube feeders



Any elevated tube feeder with or without perches filled with sunflower, in or out of the shell, will be attractive to chickadees, Tufted Titmice, goldfinch, House Finch and most of all woodpeckers. These birds have strong feet and have no problem clinging to the tube feeder. Make sure you buy a good feeder with a Lexan tube so it will hold up in icy conditions. A nice dome over the feeder will help keep weather out and maybe even squirrels!

Hopper feeders

Great for beginners, made from wood or sturdy composite. These feeders are two sided with clear plastic windows to monitor seed levels and a large landing area to accommodate most any species. Mixed seed blends work well in this feeder. Be

sure your blend has a good mix of sunflower and nuts with no fillers like milo or wheat, which songbirds will kick out and go to waste.

Finch feeders



Often called thistle feeders, this type has tiny slit openings in a Lexan tube or are made of steel mesh which only small clinging birds like goldfinch, pine siskins and beautiful small house finch will eat from. Filling these types of feeders with fine sunflower hearts/chips is nearly irresistible to finch. Skip the thistle, it goes rancid quickly and is not at the top of any birds list. Woodpeckers like the sunflower chips too and have the ability to cling to the steel mesh variety of feeder.

Caged feeders



A caged feeder is a good answer for keeping large intrusive and bullish birds out. Chickadees, titmouse, finch, Carolina Wrens, nuthatch and even downy woodpeckers can access a tube feeder surrounded by a large mesh cage.

Suet feeders



Suet feeders will be especially welcome during cold weather. Offer suet, or rendered beef fat, highest in caloric value and very quickly turned to much needed energy to fuel body heat and keep warm. It’s a great insect substitute too!

Peanut feeders



Clinging birds have very strong feet, love peanuts and find them irresistible! Peanuts out of the shell, or peanuts splits, make a wonder addition to your backyard bird feeding station. Most peanut feeders have a mesh area with ¼ to ½” openings, just enough for the long probing beak of a woodpecker and large enough for a chickadee to chip off a large chunk of nut. Nuts are heavy in good calories for year-round feedings. Clinger feeders encourage big birds like starlings, grackles, pigeons, etc. to look elsewhere!

Hopefully, this makes clear some of the basic options available to make bird feeding a delightful, peaceful activity in your yard. We know the birds will feel Thanksgiving in your hearts.

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

Monday–Saturday: 9 a.m.–5 p.m.
Sunday: Closed

PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT:
WWW.BACKYARDNATURECENTER.COM



Happy Autumn!

from left to right
Leslie, Tammy, Cathy & Nick

Fall Birdseed Sale

Now through October 31st

It's that time again! Twice a year we offer this savings!
All large 20- to 50-lb. bags of premium bird seed is 20% off,
take it with you that day, or . . .

Join the penny-wise and open or add to an EARLY BIRD
SEED ACCOUNT with a minimum of \$150.
You can deposit as much as you like to your personal seed
account and take any size bag of seed, suet, peanuts, meal-
worms from your seed as you need and at the 20% discount
until your funds are used up.

Ask us to check to see how much you used last year.
We're glad to check for you.

