

Wild Bird Habitat Store

October Newsletter - 2019

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October, A Season of Change

- Northern visitors are starting to arrive for the winter with Juncos leading the way.
- Most of our summer birds are now but a memory.
- The molt is over. Birds have fresh new feathers, and are becoming more active now.
- Ducks and geese are getting restless and preparing to move out.
- Blackbirds are flocking together and will soon begin to leave.
- Watch your yards for new or unusual birds passing through.
- Migration is a time when extremely rare birds may suddenly appear to your area.
- Take the time for an early morning bird walk and watch the migration take place.
- Watch mudflats and lakeside edges for migrating shorebirds.

Dr. Mary Bomberger Brown of the University of Nebraska's School of Natural Resources spent her life addressing bird conservation through research, professional publications, and instructing students about everything birds. Mary passed away on August 24, 2019 leaving a legacy that will endure forever in the world of birds. The University of Nebraska Foundation has set up a **Mary Bomberger Brown Memorial Scholarship Fund**. The scholarship will be specifically for students majoring in fisheries and wildlife at UNL's School of Natural Resources, with a sophomore standing or above, and who have a GPA of 3.55 or higher. The Wild Bird Habitat Stores are contributing \$500 to this scholarship fund and ask that our customers, friends, and associates help match this donation. Details on how to contribute can be found in this month's newsletter



Eastern Screech Owl



The Eastern Screech Owl is our smallest resident owl. It has such an eerie call that Nebraska Game and Parks receives numerous calls from people who wonder what it is. This owl has a whinny type call followed by a monotone tremolo, all in one pitch. The eastern screech owl is a very nocturnal bird. If seen during the day it is often sleeping or at rest. In the summer it will roost among the dense foliage of trees and shrubs to hide from predators and mobbing birds. During the winter when cover is less available they will resort to roosting in evergreens and cedars. It is not uncommon for them to seek shelter during the winter in natural cavities and nest boxes. One spring I removed 3 inches of owl pellets from a wood duck box at the nature center where a screech owl had spent the winter. This screech owl is common east of the Rocky Mountains and found in rural woodlands, and urbanized backyards and city parks. In fact they are found where ever there are trees for nesting and will even use nest boxes installed in backyards. They are masters of camouflaged hiding out in the nooks and crannies of trees during the day. They are more often heard than seen.

Screech owls are 6 to 10 inches with the female being the larger of the two. Weighing an average of 6 ounces they have a wingspan of up to 24 inches. They come in two color morphs, red and grey. In the grey phase the owl is a grey-brown with grey vertical stripes, barred wings and tail with spots on the under-parts. The feathers on the legs are a buff color. They have bright yellow eyes and a grey green beak. The patterns of the red phase are similar except they are a cinnamon color instead of grey. While western screech owls can be confused with their eastern counterpart, the easiest way to determine the difference is the beak. Eastern Screech owls have a gray-green beak while the western species have a grey to black beak.

The grey phase appears to be more dominant in the northern states while southern screech owls tend to be more the red phase. There is one theory that gray birds may be more tolerant of cold weather than their southern cousins the red phase screech owls. This may be why in Nebraska we see more of the grey phase. It may also have to do with their ability to blend in to the particular vegetation that occurs in the habitats where they are found.

Courtship and nesting normally begin in March. They are cavity nesters but cannot create a cavity themselves. They rely on rotted out holes in trees, old woodpecker cavities, or those chewed out by squirrels. They will readily nest and roost in man-made nest boxes provided the entrance opening is adequate for them to pass through. Nothing will be added to the chamber but what already exists. The female will settle down into what debris is on the bottom and lay 4 to 6 white eggs.

It is the chore of the female screechy to incubate the eggs which will take up to 30 days before they hatch. During this period the male will feed her on the nest. Occasionally if she temporarily leaves the nest the male may enter. But without a brood patch it is doubtful he provides any incubation time on the eggs. Once the eggs have hatched the female will continue to brood the nestlings until their eyes are open and they grow enough feathers to protect them from the chilly nights. But it will be yet 4 weeks before the owlets leave the nest cavity and begin perching on nearby branches exercising their wings. Sometimes a little owlet may fall to the ground but with the parents encouragement they can climb back up to their perch using their beak and talons.



The male is a good father. Not only does he care for the female while she incubates the eggs, but will feed the young as she broods them and continue to do so once they have left the nest. The parents will feed the owlets until the young birds begin short hunting adventures eventually becoming capable of feeding themselves. This family group will remain together throughout the summer until fall when the young birds will disperse to locate their own territories before winter.

Eastern Screech-Owls have a diverse diet. They will feed on most small mammals, birds, and snakes but also earthworms, large insects, tadpoles, frogs and lizards. Their dinner may even include a bat. But do not be mistaken by their size. Although they are much smaller than their cousin the Great-horned Owl, ounce for ounce they are just as ferocious. They have been known to take on prey much larger than themselves during hard times. On the other hand Eastern Screech Owls will cache food away in cavities for short periods during times of abundance.

Eastern Screech Owls are most active at night. They hunt at dusk and dawn as low light levels help them spot prey. During the night in total darkness they will rely on their hearing to locate food. Occasionally they may hunt during the day. They will sit on tree branches six to ten feet above the ground and wait for prey to pass underneath. They can snag an insect on the wing, or drop talons first into shallow water for frogs and crayfish.

They make short flights when moving around traveling between perching sites. Most flights are less than 100 feet. They drop off from one perch, fly straight, and then fly up to the next perch. Almost in a U shape pattern.

Any habitat with sufficient tree cover will do for this for Screech Owls. Dead trees or branches with existing cavities or nest boxes are essential and fairly open understories are preferred, but Eastern Screech-Owls live and breed successfully in farmlands where trees are sparse and have adapted to suburban landscapes, and city parks as well. On the Great Plains, at the westernmost edge of its range, Eastern Screech-Owls occur in the uneven traces of wooded land along streams and rivers. Screech-owls cannot survive if all trees are removed, but the species readily recolonizes once trees are replanted, especially if nest boxes are also provided.



Many folks probably have Screech Owls visiting their yards at night. If you filled your bird bath in the evening and it is empty in the morning, it may have been a screechy had a nice bath. Otherwise they leave very little sign they were there. You will not hear them flying as owls are totally silent in flight from special feather adaptations. But listen in the late evening or early morning and no doubt you may hear a Screech Owl calling.

Mary Bomberger Brown Memorial Scholarship Fund

In her life, Dr. Mary Bomberger Brown chose to give of her time, talent and treasure, inspiring others to contribute to conservation efforts — both big and small, especially when it came to birds. In her death, she'll continue to give back to students pursuing conservation degrees in fisheries and wildlife at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. You can make a contribution through the Wild Bird Habitat Stores or by submitting a contribution to the "Mary Bomberger Brown Scholarship Fund" to the University of Nebraska Foundation at 1010 Lincoln Mall, Lincoln, NE 68508 - (800) 432-3216



Great Egret

Birding Area of the Month: Pioneers Park Nature Center

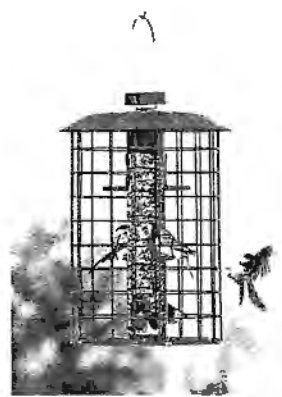
This is the oldest of Lincoln's city parks, and one of the largest. It has several ponds, native prairie and riparian woodlands. These wooded habitats support great horned owls (year-around) and long-eared owls (in winter), Red-tailed and Cooper's Hawks, and many songbirds. A nature trail extends out into restored native prairies, brush land, and through riparian wooded habitats along Haines Branch Creek, a tributary of Salt Creek. The George & Irene Alexander bird garden offers views of songbirds that gather near feeders, and looks out over a pond that attracts waterfowl. The Nature Center includes two interpretive facilities, 668 acres of woodland, wetland, and prairie habitats, and over eight miles of trails. A checklist for the park lists 237 birds. Located off West Van Dorn and Coddington Avenue. A favorite viewing area for bird migrations.

For information contact the Nature Center at (402) 441-7895 or online at lincoln.ne.gov/city/parks/naturecenter/

Winter Wild Bird Feeds

Changing seasons means changing wild bird feeds!

Linda and I have had an exciting summer feeding birds using a variety of wild bird feeds in various style of feeders. We kept a large platform bird feeder stocked with peanut rejects and peanuts in the shell. Blue Jays, Red-bellied Woodpeckers and Cardinals dined there all summer long, even bringing their young to feed. On our other platform bird feeders and ground feeders we supplied the birds with NutraSaff safflower seed where the Mourning Doves, Chickadees, House Finches, White-breasted Nuthatches and Cardinals readily fed. In several squirrel proof bird feeders we provided sunflower hearts, a favorite of many backyard birds, and those feeders with a cage to protect the hearts from squirrels and blackbirds served the smaller birds and woodpeckers. A few Goldfinches were regulars at the thistle feeder and the suet feeders were always busy with woodpeckers. On a lone platform bird feeder on the back fence we placed a general wild bird mix and black oil sunflower seed where everyone enjoyed squabbling over a bite to eat.



Now that autumn has arrived, the birds we enjoyed through out the summer are visiting the feeders less often, instead taking advantage of the natural foods that have become available. We continue to see them off and on throughout the day, mostly in the early morning and again early evening before they go to roost for the night. These birds know the bird feeders are waiting for them and they will return in good numbers as we edge toward the winter months and colder temperatures.

The blackbirds, who were not too much of a nuisance during the summer, are grouping in flocks preparing to migrate south ahead of winter. They seem to ravage the bird feeders and will for the next few weeks. It is just part of the changing seasons. The caged feeders with sunflower hearts, thistle feeders, and platform feeders with NutraSaff safflower seed seem to keep them at bay allowing our favorite birds to grab a meal. But when these hordes of blackbirds begin to leave as the season changes, and they will leave, we will also change the types of wild bird feeds in our bird feeders.

We will continue to offer NutraSaff safflower seed on the ground feeders, adding a little white Proso millet for the Juncos and ground feeding birds. There will still be a platform feeder that is accessible to squirrels dedicated to NutraSaff safflower seed since squirrels will leave it alone, but in other platform bird feeders protected from marauding squirrels by a squirrel baffle we'll replace the NutraSaff safflower seed with sunflower hearts. More black oil sunflower seed will be made available in feeders, and a couple of thistle feeders will be added filled with Wild Bird Habitat's triple cleaned Nyjer thistle seed in anticipation of the northern Goldfinch population that will arrive to spend the winter months. And this may be the year many Pine Siskin return to the Plains to spend the winter. These little finch are avid thistle eaters.



Several shelled peanut feeders along with a suet feeder will continue to be a staple in our backyard bird feeding program during the winter as they is all summer long. Shelled peanut bird feeders are some of the most active bird feeders throughout the year attracting woodpeckers, Chickadees, nuthatches, and Carolina Wrens. Over the past several winters we also attracted Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers to the peanut feeders, the only migratory woodpecker that visits Nebraska during the winter.



Winter Water Features

Water for birds, especially during the winter months, is essential for their survival. Although they do not rely on any one food source, an open source of unfrozen water during the winter can attract more birds than bird seed alone. When birds eat snow, or travel distances for water, they are lowering their body temperature or expending the valuable energy they need to survive cold nights. And fresh water does more for birds than just meet their fluid intake. Clean feathers provide better insulation during cold nights.



With the assortment of bird bath heaters and heated bird baths on the market today, providing a winter water source for your backyard birds is convenient and easy. These devices are thermostatically controlled and use less energy than a 60 watt light bulb. And believe me, it is much more comfortable preparing a water feature now than to wait until the snow is flying and temperatures plummeting.

Pre-Season Sale Save 10% on all in stock bird bath heaters or heated bird baths
Through October 20th

Select from a variety of
bird bath heaters



or

Our best selling
heated bird baths



New Products Coming Soon

Once again Dave, Linda, and Katie will be attending the WILD BIRD EXPO at Gold Crest in Mexico, MO in October. This is a birding retailers trade show where new lines of birding products and gifts are introduced. This year there will be representatives from more than 600 birding retail stores from the United States and Canada attending with over 125 booths from manufacturers to distributors of birding products. At the Wild Bird Expo in 2015 Lincoln's Wild Bird Habitat Stores were recognized as the Top backyard Birding Retailer of the year in the U.S. and Canada by the birding industry.



Katie receiving the 2015 Best
Bird Feeding Retailer Award

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NEW PRODUCT ALERT

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Arnie's Pet Food Store
a division of Wild Bird Habitat
Alamo Plaza / 56th 7 Hwy 2
(402) 904-3573

arniespetfoods.com

NEW PRODUCT ALERT

Icelandic Cod Skin Rolls

JUST ONE INGREDIENT: This high protein dog chew is made with only dehydrated wild caught Icelandic cod and loaded with Omega-3s.

DENTAL DOG TREAT: Gnawing on these chews can help clean teeth and support healthy gums.

HUMAN GRADE: Tickled Pet fish skins meets the rigorous FDA safety standards to use the label 'human grade', ensuring the highest quality dog treats.

ALL NATURAL: This healthy dog chew is made with no by-products, preservatives or fillers and is Non-GMO Project verified.

Caught wild from the pristine waters of Iceland, these chews make a great treat for any pet. Low odor and full of Omega 3 and collagens, these treats are loaded with nutrients that your pet needs.



Stop by Arnie's Pet Food Store for a **FREE**
Icelandic Cod Skin sample

Dave's October Bird Chatter

It has been a fair year for attracting hummingbirds to the feeders. Except for a few stragglers who will quickly retreat south, many of these little jewels have passed through. By mid October we should start to see the Juncos, commonly referred to as "snow birds" for preceding the first snow fall. Look for them foraging on the ground for seeds scattered from the feeders by other birds, or on the ground feeders. These Juncos will be with us through the winter until mid to late April. Goldfinches will begin reappearing in larger quantities at thistle feeders. Many of these birds will be the northern flocks that move south for the winter in search of food. The male Goldfinches, having completed their fall molt, will lack the bright canary yellow breeding plumage and will now be in their basic plumage, more the olive drab color of the females.



Dark-eyed
Junco

October is also a great time to view migrating native sparrows as well as the fall warblers. Keep your binoculars and a good field guide handy. The Juncos are followed closely by the White Throated Sparrow. These two early arrivers announce the onset of the fall migration of our northern birds which winter in the Midwest and Central Great Plains states. Many of these birds have spent the breeding season far to the north in the Boreal Forests of Canada, and in the winter they can become common visitors to our backyards. Others will continue south. One bird which will begin to arrive this month from the north will be the Harris's sparrow that is only found in the Plains States into the central grasslands of Canada. White Crowned Sparrows, Pine Siskin, and the Red-breasted Nuthatches will follow.



Harris's
Sparrow

And if we are lucky again this year, as last, we may enjoy some other irruptive species such as Purple Finch and both Red and White Winged Crossbills. Iruptive species are birds that travel south in the winter when natural food resources are scarce in the normal range. The Red-breasted Nuthatch has to be everybody's favorite winter bird. Last year they arrived in good numbers to spend the winter and were very common at just about everyone's bird feeders. People really enjoy these little birds as they seem to be fairly tame. This is probably due to the lack of human activity in the heavily forested areas where they nest. I think they find us as much of a curiosity as we do them.

October is the largest seasonal transition for birds. Migratory birds, upon their arrival on winter ranges, immediately go to work identifying winter food sources while our resident birds have already begun to identify winter food stocks. Although the majority of those food plots will be natural, well stocked backyard bird feeders will be identified as supplemental food winter sources. So I recommend you keep your bird feeders supplied with wild bird feeds during this transition. Also a fresh water source such as a bird bath will attract many migratory birds not visiting your backyard for the wild bird feed.

We hope everyone takes advantage of the fall bird migration as birds move through heading south for the winter or arrives to spend the winter with us. You never know what bird you might see.

Feeder of the Month **Platform Bird Feeder**

Attracts the
largest
variety of
backyard
birds.



Save 10%

**All Platform Bird Feeders
Through October 20th**

Wingtip

If you see a small brown bird scratching the ground with their feet to turn up seeds, similar to that of a chicken foraging for food, it's a native sparrow or other native ground foraging bird and deserves closer observation.

Note: The non-native House Sparrows sweep the ground with their bill when foraging for food

**Get 2 lbs. NutraSaff Safflower seed &
2 lbs. white Proso Millet FREE
With any ground feeder purchase**



Through October 20th

The Hawk in My Backyard!

At Wild Bird Habitat we receive quite a few reports from people seeing hawks around their bird feeders and occasionally, if they do not actually witnessing the hawk catching a bird, they will find a pile of feathers on the ground, nothing else. During the summer months it is most likely a Cooper's hawk, but between about mid-October and early May it may be a Sharp-shinned Hawk, the smallest North American hawk. The Cooper is a permanent resident raptor while the Sharp-shin is a winter migrant.

Cooper's and Sharp-shinned are closely related and so similar that it can make identification between the two a little difficult. They both prey on birds relying on an ambush strategy. They often lurk around the corner of a building or dense shrubbery then launch their attack. Their ranges overlap across most of North America, with the Coopers Hawk a permanent resident across most of the 48 states while the Sharp-shinned hawk breeds primarily in the northern Boreal Forests and visits us during the winter months.



**Cooper's Hawk
checking for birds
at my bird feeders**

While the Cooper's hawk is considerably larger, 14" to 18" with a wingspan of up to 35", the Sharp-shinned Hawk smaller averaging 9" to 13" with a wingspan that can approach 22". As with most raptors the females are the larger of the two genders. In fact a large female Sharp-shinned hawk can appear to be the same size as a male Cooper's hawk.

But in order to make a positive identification between these two hawks that are common backyard visitors you must look at the more identifying features know as field marks. One of the most distinguishing features is the tail. The end of a Sharp-shinned hawk's tail is square and has a thin white tip. The outer feathers are slightly longer. The Cooper's hawk on the other hand has a more rounded tail with a larger white tip.

Another significant clue is the dark grey coloration on the top of the head of a Sharp-shinned Hawk that extending down the back of the neck joining the dark coloration on its back. The Cooper's hawk has more of a dark grey "cap". The dark grey coloration on the top of the head is interrupted by lighter feathers on the back of the neck, so that the bird looks like it has a cap of grey. One way to remember this is that "*a Coop has a cap.*" Also look at the legs. The Sharp-shinned hawk has thin pencil like legs while the Cooper's legs are thick.

While it may be upsetting watching these raptors hunting birds at your feeders and at times successfully catching one, it is their primary means of survival and they will only take what they need. They do not kill other birds needlessly. I often try to explain to a customer that this is a predator/prey relationship that takes place across the world between species. The fact that this happens in ones backyard provides an opportunity to witness a part of nature seldom seen between predator and prey. In fact in my backyard we have learned to tolerate each other which have led to some very unique experiences between me and the hawk in my backyard.



**Cooper's Hawk,
a successful hunt**

Wingtip: Blue Jays will alert other birds when predators are in the area whether it is a hawk, an owl, even free roaming cats. Jays will sound warning calls attracting other Jays and work to drive the predator away. At times those flocks of angry Blue Jay will get assistance from blackbirds, robins and at times Chickadees and Northern Cardinals may join the flock. Attracting Blue Jays to your yard makes for a great early warning device in the event a hawk comes around.

Planting Habitat Is For The Birds

Add planting at least one bush when planning your fall chores in preparation for winter. Fall is the prime time for planting shrubbery and if you plant one that bears fruit, in just a short three years you'll be providing a valuable natural food source for your backyard birds.



And as that bush you plant this fall continues to grow it will also provide valuable nesting sites for your backyard bird's for raising their families.



Planting your backyard for wildlife resources

"Planting for Wildlife" - Nebraska Extension Office
Available online at: www.ianrpubs.unl.edu

"Landscaping for Wildlife" - Carroll Henderson
Available at the Wild Bird Habitat Stores

Native Wildlife Plants for Your Area
<https://www.audubon.org/native-plants>



Get your yard Certified as a Wildlife Habitat by the National Wildlife Federation
nwf.org/garden-for-wildlife/certify

Leave Some Leaves

Autumn is definitely in the air and as temperatures begin to fall, so do the leaves. But before you rush out and scour the yard removing all the dead or dying organic matter from summer's past, consider leaving some leafy debris under those shrubs and bushes. You'll be surprised at the number of birds that will rout through this litter feeding on insects and larva that is wintering over. Not only does this provide a great food source for birds, it will also help to protect the plants from the frigid temperatures and provide nutrients as they decay. Many summer flowers and grasses that have gone to seed also provide a great natural food source for birds in your backyard. And all those sticks and branches that have been windblown out of the trees? Pile them up in a corner of your yard. Birds will retreat to this woody pile in times of bad weather and to escape predators. A little less time spent cleaning up in the fall will provide you with more time to enjoy the birds you attract to your backyard.



3 Billion Birds Lost

A new study shows that the USA and Canada have lost more than a quarter of their birds over the past 50 years. This massive reduction in abundance involves hundreds of species, from beloved backyard songbirds to long-distance migrants.

This decline in bird populations is not new, but it is finally being brought to the attention of the public, and we hope the public acts. Rachel Carson in 1961 was the first to bring to the public's attention that pesticides were reducing bird populations in her acclaimed book "Silent Spring". The award winning documentary was released in 2015 again raising the alarm about the ongoing decline of bird populations. Although much has been done we continue to lose bird populations at an alarming rate.



Wild Bird Habitat hopes everyone takes the time to view the information provided on **THE MESSENGER'S** website at themessengerdoc.com. You can view the entire movie documentary of **THE MESSENGER** on Amazon video



<http://www.songbirdsos.com>