

Wild Bird Habitat Store

May Newsletter - 2009

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NEBRASKA BIRDING BOWL

May 1 - 31, 2023

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NEBRASKA BIRDING BOWL



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Rose-breasted Grosbeak

What a joy it is to attract the Rose-breasted Grosbeak to our feeders after they have wintered in Central and South America. This little finch, which weighs about 1-3/4 ounce, has had a long trip to its nesting territory. The Nature Center has banded these birds in past years and it is always exciting to recapture one. Some had been banded three years prior to them being caught in the mist nests once again. This truly makes one contemplate the wonders of bird migration when this little bird has traveled all those miles down to the tropics and back, returning to the exact location where it was hatched.

The adult is 8 inches long. While the male Rose-breasted Grosbeak is easily identified with its bold pattern of black, white, and bright rosy breast, the drab, striped female is more of a challenge. She resembles a large sparrow or finch with her large pale bill, dark grey upper parts, a white stripe over the eye,

May is NEBRASKA BIRD MONTH

Nebraska Bird Month is a month-long celebration of birds, bird watching and bird migration held throughout the entire month of May. From Breakfast and Birds on Mother's Day or a birding by ear hike to Birds and Brews or Fashion a Feeder, there is probably a Nebraska Bird Month event at a location near you.



Find a birding event during May, 2023 or add your Bird event at

nebraskabirdmonth.org

streaked under parts and yellowish wing linings. The male on the other hand has a black head, wings and upper parts and a bright rose-red patch on its breast; the wings have white patches and rose red linings.

The Rose-breasted Grosbeak is a Neo-tropical bird whose summer range stretches across the eastern two thirds of Canada, down through the Great Plains to northern Oklahoma, and east to the Atlantic coast. They occasionally are seen in the mountains of Northern Georgia. They winter from central Mexico through Central America and into Peru, Venezuela, and northern South America.

As soon as the males return they begin singing their lovely song. It resembles that of a robin, but much more refined. Each will defend a territory up to two acres, permitting other male grosbeaks to stop and feed as long as they do not sing. If they do start to sing they are immediately escorted out of the territorial boundary. The females arrive shortly after the male and, if they hit it off as a couple, nest building soon begins. The females will be proud of this father figure they have joined up with as often the male does all the nest building. She will assist him by supplying construction materials of twigs and sticks. That's not all either. The male Rose-breasted Grosbeak goes beyond the duties of simply building the nest. He will also share the duties of incubating the eggs, and feeding the young nestlings.

The nest is a loose, open cup of sticks and twigs lined with grasses, decayed leaves, or hair and located in a small tree, dense shrub, or thick vines. When the nest is completed the female will lay a clutch of 1 to 5 eggs which are pale green or blue with reddish brown blotches and speckles. It will take twelve to fourteen days of incubation before they hatch. At first they are helpless, eyes closed, and sparsely covered with down. These youngsters will be brood in the nest for the first week or so with both the male and female feeding and tending to them. They will fledge from the nest in nine to twelve days and both adults will continue to feed them. That is unless the female begins construction on a second nest. If she does the male will graciously and dutifully take charge of rearing the newly fledged birds.

The Rose-breasted Grosbeak prefers open deciduous woodlands close to water, thick brushy areas with large trees near open areas, marsh borders, woody over grown pastures and orchards, dense stands of small trees, woodland edges. They nest in tangles and thickets much like the Northern Cardinal. But unlike his cousin grosbeak, the Cardinal, they prefer a much more wooded rural area. Many folks in urban areas may only see them stop by the backyard feeders during migration, but if you're lucky enough to live near a riparian stream running through your community, you may have them throughout the summer months.

In rural settings they will take advantage of the supplemental foods in the bird feeders all summer. As with Cardinals, Evening Grosbeaks and Blue Grosbeaks, the Rose-breasted Grosbeak prefers to feed from platform, ground, and hopper type bird feeders. They will come to a seed tube bird feeder if it has an attached tray for them to perch on. Sunflower seed and Safflower seed seem to work best at attracting the grosbeak family.

In late summer the post nuptial molt takes place. At this time the male will lose his beautiful colors and become quite drab. This is referred to as "basic plumage." He will no longer sport his black back, white belly, and rosy breast as he wore when in his "breeding plumage." Gone also until next spring will be the loud, clear song which is such a joy for us to hear. Migration for these birds begins in September as they take a long, lazy trek back to the tropics.



Rose-breasted Grosbeak Fun Facts:

- The name "grosbeak" is from the French word grosbec which means "large beak."
- The nest of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak is so thinly constructed that eggs often can be seen from below through the nest.
- A group of grosbeaks are collectively known as a "gross" of grosbeaks.
- The male Rose-breasted Grosbeak participates in incubation of the eggs, accounting for about 1/3 of the time during the day (the female incubates overnight).
- Males sing from nest while incubating or brooding, and occasionally sing at night.
- Unlike most songbird species, the female is known to sing. Her song is softer and shorter than the male's.
- Both sexes sing quietly to each other when they exchange places.
- The Rose-breasted Grosbeak's song is like that of the robin, only as sung by an opera singer, being mellow and more sweetly melodic.



Wingtips:

The succession of trees spreading into the Great Plains due to lack of fire as a prairie management tool has allowed the Rose-breasted Grosbeak to extend its range westwards where they have hybridized with the Black-headed Grosbeak subspecies as a consequence.

Time for Hummingbirds - Attracting Hummingbirds, It's Fun! It's Easy!

- Have your hummingbird feeders out no later than the first week in May. You need to be ready before they arrive. It makes attracting them much easier.
- Hang your feeder in a partially shaded area. Direct sun can cause the sugar and water nectar mixture to separate and leak from your feeder.
- Hummers are very territorial and some will fight at a feeder. When this happens it is best to set up another feeder in another spot to stop the fighting. Locate a second out of site of the other feeder.
- A feeder should be cleaned thoroughly once a week in warm water and white vinegar to remove residue. A stiff bottle brush or hand-mop is useful.
- Avoid pesticides on flowers from where hummingbirds feed. They get their protein from small invertebrate insects gleaned from plants. The nectar only provides a source of energy.



If you get your hummingbird feeders up later than recommended, no problem. You can still attract these little dynamos, it just may take a bit longer. Ask Wild Bird Habitat's staff about attracting hummingbirds, and pickup our hummingbird handout

Where to go Bird Watching in Nebraska

- **Nebraska Birding Trails** - nebirdingguide.org
- **Nebraska Flyway** - nebraskaflyway.com
- **Nebraska Metro Birding** - nebraskametrobirding.com
- **Nebraska Ornithology Union** - noubirds.org
- **eBird** - ebird.org



Dave's Bird Chatter for May

May is the premiere month for songbird migration. Warblers, thrushes, vireos, orioles, and all the other birds that wintered from the southern U.S. to the Tropics will be returning to spend the summer in Nebraska. Some will be just passing through on their way farther northern to their breeding grounds. The best part of spring bird migration is birds will all be wearing their brightest colors, called breeding plumage. If you enjoy warblers, you know how brightly colored these birds can be. Warblers are much easier to identify in spring and summer. In the fall on their return trip, they will be in their basic, duller plumage which can be confusing, making it more of a challenge to identify.



Yellow-rumped Warbler

About 30 species of warblers pass through the Central Great Plains in the spring with about 8 of those species remaining here to nest. Although the Yellow Warblers, Common Yellow Throats, even Oven Birds are a treat to see through the summer months, spring is showtime to watch for warblers in all the stunning colors.

You may think living in an urbanized area you won't see these birds passing through, but on the contrary, it's just a matter of watching for them in the shrubs in your yard. At your bird bath. Or just walk down one of our many trails. Visit a nearby park. Even a quiet cemetery will produce a variety of unique birds on their journey that can cover thousands of miles to where they'll nest. All you need to be is observant. Keep a pair of binoculars nearby. And download one of the free apps on your phone that will help you identify them. Pick up our flyer on free bird ID APPs.

Living in the center of the United States, and especially in the Central Great Plains, migration becomes a very exciting time. Many of the birds that winter in the tropics and southern United States pass through a bottle neck in Mid-America's Great Plains region before spreading out across the vast expanses of the North American continent. This bottle neck passes right through Nebraska utilizing the Central Great Plains flyway and the Missouri River flyway. If you live in Nebraska, you're in the middle of a bird migration mecca. Watch the woodlands for a variety of migrating songbirds, the wetlands, mudflats, and prairie potholes for more than 36 species of shore birds, and the grasslands where some of the largest remaining populations of grassland birds occur. While many bird species will remain to nest, others will only spend a few days to a few weeks before moving on.

The other side of the migration story is that all our winter visitors will be leaving if they haven't already done so. These birds will slowly head back to their northern breeding territories as winter continues to subside. Many spring bird migrants will return to the Boreal Forests of Canada for the summer. Others will continue to the sub-Arctic and as far west as Alaska. Unlike humans, birds have no boundaries or borders. They only have to identify with the ecological regions that can support their species.

One bird many missed this year was the Red-breasted Nuthatch. They must have had an abundant food supply in the North Country so there was no need for many of these little birds to drift south in search of food resources.

One bird that has become more noticeable at the bird feeders is the American Goldfinch. That might be due to the males changing into their bright canary-yellow breeding plumage, along with their numbers

having increased substantially at the bird feeders. But be prepared - by mid-June they will seem to disappear from urban settings as they drift out into rural areas to nest. When they do return to urbanized backyards in the fall, the males will have traded their beautiful yellow feathers for their olive drab winter wardrobe.

Backyard bird feeders will remain busy throughout the spring and summer months. Natural foods for birds have become somewhat scarce after the winter months. It will take an entire growing season before those natural food resources are replenished. A good reason to continue offering supplemental food for birds with maintaining well stocked bird feeders.

The nesting season is a high energy period for birds. They must attract a new mate or re-establish their bond with an existing mate. Locate and defend a territory. Construct a nest. Then make hundreds of trips to the nest every day with food for the young brood of chicks that have hatched. And the chores continue. Once those young chicks have fledged the nest, the adults must still provide them food for a time. The adults will also need to show their offspring how and where to find food and water. Locate evening roosts and shelter from the inclement weather along with how to avoid predators and navigate all the perils that humans have put in their way. It is a huge task that birds undertake each year. Then consider many species will repeat the process raising a second or third family during the summer having multiple broods.

Besides offering birds a supplemental food source and fresh water, you may also want to supply nesting material for them. Supplying nesting material can be a welcoming and easy resource for birds building and lining a nest. Feathers, short strands of yarn, a small pile of shortened twigs, even a little muddy spot for birds to use as a nest binder can become quite popular. Hair is a prize for many nesting birds to line their nests with, be it human, horse, or dog hair. At Wild Bird Habitat we have prepackaged nesting materials to make providing the nest building materials easy. We have also acquired wool locally that is ideal for a bird to line their nest with keeping chicks dry and warm.

We discourage using dryer lint as a nesting material. Cotton and synthetic fabrics have a tendency to hold moisture which can cause problems for naked nestlings. If you live in rural areas where Tree Swallows nest, get some feathers. All Tree Swallows line their nests with feathers and offering them a few is a lot of fun. You may even enjoy holding the feathers in your fingertips over your head and let these swallows snatch them from you.

Dead standing timer and dead tree branches provide the perfect nesting habitat for cavity nesting birds. Woodpeckers excavate a new cavity for nesting in dead trees every year. Old woodpecker holes from previous years then provide cavities for secondary cavity nesters such as bluebirds, Chickadees, wrens, and others. But all too often dead timber is removed, reducing this vital bird habitat. But again, you can help by putting up nest boxes and bird houses to accommodate these birds during the nesting season. And its great fun to watch.



I know it is only May, but it won't be long before the birds which nested early will be bringing their young to the bird feeders. Research has shown that the availability of supplemental foods offered at bird feeders has helped many of these birds nest quicker and have more successful nestlings. The reason for this is less time is spent foraging for dwindling food resources after the winter months allowing more time to focus on nest construction and raising a family.

Spring and summer bird feeding does provide numerous benefits for our birds. So, keep the bird feeders well stocked and the suet feeders filled. Woodpeckers consume much more suet in spring and early summer than all winter long and will bring their young to it as an easy source of food. One year I had a male Downy Woodpecker take suet from a suet feeder and wipe it in a knot hole on a tree where the two young Downy fledglings feasted.



And do not be misled that feeding birds will cause birds to lose their ability to forage for natural foods. That is one of the great myths of feeding birds. Birds are survivalists. Birds are opportunists. They will exploit any available food source. And although bird feeders, when available, only provide about 30% of a bird's diet, they will take advantage those offerings.

This is one of the most exciting times of the year for those who enjoy feeding and watching birds. Take the time to enjoy the birds coming into and through your backyard. This is also a good time to take a walk on one of the many hiking trails or take an early morning or early evening walk through one of the many parks, natural areas, wildlife preserves, or nature centers. Those spots will be teeming with migrating birds. Ask our staff at Wild Bird Habitat for the Nebraska Birding Guide flyer or go to nebirdingguide.org to locate birding sites in your area. Get a free eBird account and explore where various birds are being observed. But be careful though, it can become habit forming.

Do birds see in color?

With the exception of owls, all birds see colors. But their view of colors are more vivid than ours. The brightness of red, orange, and yellow really stand out. This may be why those collars attract hummingbirds and orioles. Still, birds have a very poor sense of smell so they locate food by sight.

Who Makes Your Pet's Food?



**ARNIE'S
CORNER**

Did you know 90% of all pet foods made in the U.S are produced by 5 corporate conglomerates. That those companies only meet minimum nutritional standards set for pet foods by the FDA spending millions of dollars to lobby the FDA at the federal level about what they can put in pet foods and ingredient labeling that can be misleading and confusing to pet parents. On top of that, these companies then spend millions of additional dollars marketing their pet foods to make consumers believe their pet food lines are what your pets need to thrive?

For example: Nestles makes all Purina pet food products. General Mills makes Blue Buffalo. Mars makes, Eukanuba, IAMS, Nutro, Pedigree, Royal Canin, and many other name brand pet foods raking in more than 33 billion in profits off their pet foods alone. And there is Proctor & Gamble, Smukers, and now Post. These companies spend billions of dollars buying lines of pet foods, then diminishing the quality of the products to increase their bottom lines, all with the lobbied approval of the FDA.

This is why at Arnie's Pet Food Store we select only pet food products that exceed the nutritional guidelines for pet foods set by the FDA. That the products we offer pet parents are free of fillers, preservatives, dyes, and artificial flavorings that entice your pet. That the ingredients are guaranteed all natural and are sourced and produced in the U.S.

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Can I still attract Orioles & Hummingbirds?

Yes! Even though the Wild Bird Habitat Store recommends you have Oriole feeders out by April 25th and Hummingbird feeders ready by May 10th, these are only the dates when these Neo-tropical birds are migrating into the Central Great Plains and Midwest. Arrival dates are earlier in southern states, and a later in northern states. We encourage people to be ready for them prior to their arrival as it enhances the ability to attract them to your feeders early. Birds migrate at night, and upon arriving are tired and hungry and immediately seek out a source of food.

The Orioles begin arriving the last week of April, but they all don't show up at once. They will continue to arrive in Nebraska through Mid-May with many remaining to nest. As such, you always have the opportunity to attract these beautiful birds to oranges, grape jelly and nectar as they continue to migrate in. Even in June you could possibly attract them as they expand their food resources during nesting.

Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, on the other hand, migrate through Nebraska to northern areas with the exception of those that nest and raise families along Missouri River and eastern Platte River. These little feathered dynamos will continue to pass through the Great Plains until about the first week in June. In fact, the hummingbirds at your feeders in early May are likely not the same hummers you may have by months end. Those early arrivers have undoubtedly moved on. So once again, being ready early increases your chances of attracting these little Jewels. But at anytime during May you might have some stragglers stop by your feeders for a couple of days.



Just keep in mind that birds, although they are creatures of habit, continue to be somewhat unpredictable. That just when you think the Orioles have chosen to ignore your offerings, one or two show up to feed on the jelly you have been keeping fresh. Or when you think the hummingbirds have passed you by on their trek north, a straggler or two stop for some energy boosting nectar.

Neonicotinoids - Is this the new DDT?

Neonics are a class of synthetic, neurotoxic insecticides that are used on agricultural crops, lawns, gardens, golf courses, and in flea and tick pet treatments. Developed in the mid-1990s, neonics are now the single-most popular insecticide class in the United States.



Plants treated with neonics or grown from treated seeds, causes the entire plant to become toxic, from the pollen, to the nectar, to the plant itself. The seed is fatal to birds if ingested. Neonicotinoids is so efficient reducing insects that it is now impacting birds especially in pre-migration as birds try to build up fat reserves for the long, distant flights during migration. And once in the soil, neonics remains active for years while rain or irrigation water can easily carry them long distances to contaminate new soil, plant life, water supplies, and wildlife.

Just as alarming is that many garden outlets sell plants treated with neonics. That means you may be purchasing pollinator plants for your garden to help insects, but it is actually causing them more harm. Neonics reduced bee populations by 45% in a matter of two years. It continues to impact bees as well as butterflies and other beneficial insects. Neonics has been detected in many ground water resources having impacts on birds and other wildlife including deer. It has even been detected in foods for human consumption.

So now when we purchase plants from local outlets we specifically ask if their plants have been treated with neonics. But beware - there are at least seven brand name insecticides that contain Neonicotinoids. **To learn more just Google 'neonics'**

Enjoy birding more with eBird

Did you miss the live, online eBird tutorial by Nebraska Game & Parks and Audubon Spring Creek Prairie? Now you can watch this excellent tutorial at your leisure. Just Google Nebraska Birding Bowl, scroll down to eBird tutorial and click the link.

While you are on the Nebraska Birding Bowl website, check out all the other great birding information, and while you are there, register for the Nebraska Birding Bowl. All ages, all levels of birding experience. There is no charge to participate and you could win prizes.

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A Big Month of Birding

A Word About Home Made Hummingbird Nectar

Making your own hummingbird nectar is relatively easy. You just add one part sugar to four parts boiling water (example: 1 cup sugar to 4 cups water). Stir mixture until the sugar is thoroughly dissolved.. Remove from the stove and let cool.. It can then be refrigerated. Never attempt to add any red dyes. It's important once you fill your hummingbird feeder to change the nectar every other day and wash the feeder. Refined sugar, when it starts to ferment, creates bacteria that can be harmful to hummingbirds.

Commercial hummingbird nectar on the other hand uses fructose instead of refined sugar which is more stable only needing changed every 5 to 7 days. And the red coloration in commercial nectar comes from the geranium flower and is all natural.



Can I attract orioles where I live?

Orioles are a woodland edge bird and can be easily attracted to orange, jelly, or nectar feeders in urban setting, especially if you live in the vicinity of greenspaces such as open commons, city parks, urban trails, even local cemeteries with mature trees. Parking lots and boulevards bordered by large trees makes good urban habitat for orioles. We previously lived three blocks from UNL's East Campus and attracted several pairs of orioles to our backyard. When in doubt spear a few orange halves to the branch of a bush or tree. You may be surprised.



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