



Wild About Birds

Spring 2004

# BirdChat

Backyard birdfeeding experts serving the Cincinnati area since 1989!

## Understanding Bird Behavior: Migration

### Inside Volume XVI Issue 1

Understanding Bird  
Behavior: Migration

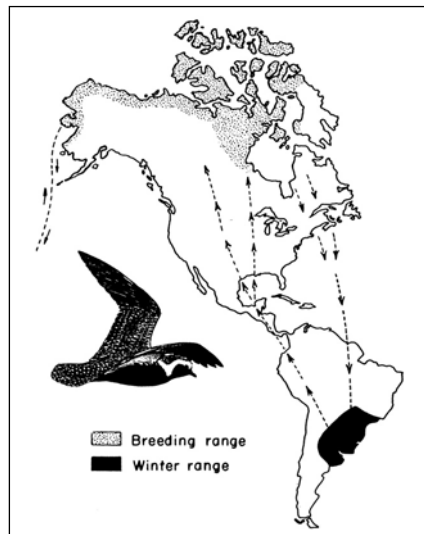
Species Specifics:  
Northern  
Mockingbird

Spring is Near...  
Don't Stop Feeding

**S**pring is right around the corner and the seasonal movement of some of our North American birds is about to commence. It won't be long before the juncos and white-throated sparrows that fed on the ground beneath our feeders all winter long return to their breeding grounds in northern Canada. The hummingbirds and warblers that wintered in Central and South America will also soon be on the move heading north to our backyards.

Ornithologists assume that migration occurred as soon as flight was acquired by birds. The mobility that wings provided allowed birds to move hundreds, if not thousands, of miles away to cope with changes in the climate and food supply. Migration, thus, became an inherent part of life and migratory species could not exist without it, even by compensating in some other way. As a species gained the advantage by this periodic movement, migration patterns evolved that were passed from one generation to the next. A great example of this is our ruby-throated hummingbird: The adult hummers head out of our area before the babies but because of their inherited instincts, the 2-month old juveniles know when to leave, where to go, and how to get back the following spring.

For most migratory North American species, migration is seasonal and coincides with the reproductive cycle—the birds move north to their breeding grounds and south for the winter. But why do they move? Species that nest in Canada and the northern United States—like the juncos and white-throated sparrows—head south in the winter to find food. Species that



winter in the tropics—like hummingbirds and many warblers—nest in more temperate areas to take advantage of longer days and an abundant food supply.

It is thought that the external stimulus that triggers the urge to migrate is length of day and that an internal clock is what birds rely on to tell them to actually go. Before heading out, migratory species have to prepare for their journey by adding layers of fat. For instance, the ruby-throated

hummingbird that must cross the Gulf of Mexico (about 600 miles) non-stop, increases its body fat from 10% to 50% of body weight.

So, come early April when the juncos and white-throats leave your backyard to begin their long trip back to their breeding grounds in northern Canada and later when the hummers arrive from their southern winter grounds, think about what a dramatic event migration is in the life of these birds!

### Quick Facts....

- ♦ most songbirds migrate at night
- ♦ the altitude some birds attain during migration is as high as 12,000 feet; the average is probably closer to 5,000
- ♦ birds usually migrate in flocks
- ♦ the Arctic Tern's annual migration covers about 25,000 miles

*Wild About Birds* is owned and operated in Milford, Ohio by Peggie Flierl. *BirdChat* is a periodic newsletter written by Ms. Flierl for customers of *Wild About Birds*. Material appearing in *BirdChat* may not be reprinted without permission. Any comments should be directed to Ms. Flierl at:

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## Species Specifics: Northern Mockingbird

*"...extremely territorial, aggressively defending feeding areas..."*

**M**ockingbirds—you either love ‘em or you hate ‘em! They are extremely territorial, aggressively defending feeding areas in the fall/winter and the nesting area in the spring/summer. On the one hand their singing—mimicking other birds, repeating their songs 2-6 times, and sometimes singing at night—is very entertaining; on the other hand, they often chase other birds (dogs, cats, and people!) out of your yard. When I take my morning walk around our subdivision, I’m often followed halfway down the street (and back!) by a scolding mockingbird, flitting from tree to tree warning me to stay out of his territory!

Mockingbirds are about 11", gray with long tails, and white patches which are evident on their wings in flight. They feed on the ground or in the foliage seeking out spiders, insects, snails



and small snakes or lizards. They also eat berries and will come to feeding stations for fruit and suet. During the winter of 2002/03, with as much snow cover as we had, I had mockingbirds eating sunflower chips from my feeders for weeks.

Male mockingbirds place nesting material in many potential nesting sites but the female chooses the final site in a tree, shrub or vine about 3-10' above the ground. They both build the nest of loose thorny twigs, dry leaves, stems and moss lined with rootlets. The female alone incubates about 3-5 bluish-green eggs with brown blotches for about 12-13 days. Mockingbirds usually

have 2 broods each year.

The mockingbird is a fascinating species but consider how territorial it is before you encourage this beautiful singer to live in your backyard.

## Spring is Near...Don't Stop Feeding

**S**pring arrives on March 20<sup>th</sup> but this should not signal the end of the bird-feeding season. Many people believe there is no reason to feed the birds in spring and summer. We look at the budding trees and flowers in spring and the blossoms and greenery in early summer and think there is plenty of food.

The truth is that during the spring and summer, birds have a hard time finding natural sources of food. The seed that matured last summer and fall were depleted by the birds during the winter. Our plants and trees have not yet developed seeds and fruit and the insect population is not at its peak.

By maintaining your birdfeeding station during the spring, in addition to your feeder regulars, you may be surprised by visits from migrating species or you may see some of the species that reside in our area only in the summer. In the spring it's not unusual for sunflower seed feeders to be visited by rose-breasted grosbeaks for a day or two. If you put out orange halves or nectar orioles might drop by; red-

bellied woodpeckers like oranges, too! Grape jelly also attracts orioles, as well as catbirds and robins. Apple halves will attract robins, catbirds, mockingbirds, bluejays and cardinals. Hummingbirds will become daily visitors if you provide a constant supply of fresh nectar. You might attract bluebirds, Carolina wrens and other insect lovers to your yard if you put mealworms in a small, smooth-sided container (margarine tub, cat food tin) so the worms can't crawl out! Put peanut

pieces in a feeder and you'll be visited by titmice, chickadees, downy woodpeckers, hairy woodpeckers, and red-bellied woodpeckers.

Another feature you should not omit from your birdfeeding station is a water source; a birdbath with a dripper/

mister or a small garden pond will be especially attractive to birds.

So, by all means, don't stop feeding the birds in spring and summer. The bonus you earn is that birds are more likely to build nests in the trees and shrubs around your property if you provide them with a well stocked feeding area year round!

*"...during the spring and summer, birds have a hard time finding natural sources of food."*



**D**id you know that February is National Bird Feeding Month? This time of year the birds are at their most vulnerable. Food sources are at their lowest and the birds' requirements for energy are high—cold spells and the approach of the breeding season. Please keep feeding the birds this spring!



Speaking of spring, it's time to get your birdhouses ready for nesting. The first ones up should be the bluebird boxes because bluebirds are one of the first nesters—sometimes as early as late February!

Don't forget to take the hummingbird feeders out of the closet and dust them off; by April 15<sup>th</sup> you should have them ready and hung outside for the returning hummers.

We'll probably be faced with the threat of West Nile Virus again this summer. As we've told you in the past, mosquitoes require standing water in which to lay eggs; if you clean your birdbath once a week, mosquitoes will not breed in it. But, just in case, we now have a device that agitates the water—the Water Wiggler runs on batteries and the rippling water will attract lots of beautiful songbirds to your birdbath and prevent the spread of WNV by eliminating stagnant water!



Patty and Zoey have been very upset that all we seem to carry are items for backyard birds and critters and they insisted that I pick up some toys for cats and dogs. Look what I found! Would you believe puzzles for dogs? Hide-a-Bird and Hide-a-Squirrel are plush toys with little, squeaking toys inside; Egg Babies—turtle, fish or duck—have 3 squeaky eggs inside for the dog to pull out. Too cute!!

New for the garden this spring are things that twist and turn in the wind—copper spinners and colorful acrylic twistors are hypnotic—you have to see them to really appreciate them! We also picked up some beautiful stained glass garden stakes, sun-catchers and birdfeeders.



## Things to do!

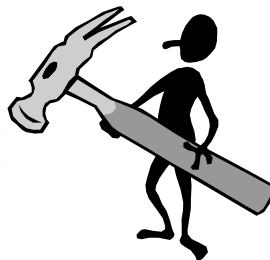
Other “shop news”:

- ◆ new Hen House greeting cards AND all greeting cards are now \$2.25 (6/\$11.99) regardless of price marked on back
- ◆ great new woodpecker feeder for peanuts-in-the-shell and suet cakes
- ◆ for all of you who have jumped on the journaling bandwagon, handsome journals for gardeners, birdwatchers, and “just for me”
- ◆ clay, neutral-colored carved coasters with bird designs—just beautiful
- ◆ large tiding stones for the garden (Welcome, Mom's Garden, Dad's Garden, etc.)
- ◆ “treat” cans for your favorite dog or cat can be special ordered with the breed of your choice
- ◆ welcome slates, clocks, calendars, plant pots, chalk boards, garden stakes, many designs, that can be personalized



## Shop news

By the way, did you know that we'll assemble (FREE) any feeder you buy from us (or anyplace else for that matter) - just ask! We can repair most feeders, too, and we'll charge you only for the replacement parts we use to make the repair.



## Did you know?

*Dear BirdGal, I bought a new birdfeeder but the birds haven't gone near it. What's wrong? Pam*

Dear Pam, You first must make sure the birds can see the new feeder as they fly through your yard. Birds do not have a highly developed sense of smell so they locate food by sight. After they have located the feeder and are actively using it, you can move it to an area better for your viewing and they will find it. It might help to sprinkle a little birdseed on top of, underneath and around your new feeder to help the birds locate it. If the new feeder is an addition to a well-established birdfeeding station, you may have to take the old feeder(s) down for a few days to “force” the birds to use the new one. Once they have accepted the new feeder you can put the others back in place. BG



*Dear BirdGal*



## Wild About Birds

*Backyard birdfeeding experts !*

*(...and gift shop)*

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Sat 10am-5pm,  
Sun noon-4pm

### INSIDE:

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# IT'S TIME FOR OUR ANNUAL SPRING SEED SALE

&

## THE SEED BANK IS OPEN FOR DEPOSITS

Take advantage of seed sale prices all year!

Deposit as much seed as you want at sale prices into your account  
at *Wild About Birds*. Withdraw your prepaid seed as you need it.

If you renew or open a new seed bank valued at \$100, your gift is any  
one of 12 Bird Watchers Digest booklets, your choice (retail value \$3.99).

Titles include Enjoying Bluebirds More, Creating Your Water Garden,  
Understanding Bats, Enjoying Hummingbirds More, etc.

Can't make it in during the sale? Just give us a call (248-2044),  
we'll take your credit card seed bank order right over the phone!

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