



ALL SEASONS  
WILD BIRD  
STORE

# BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

Volume 19 Issue 2 | March/April 2012

## Indigo Buntings

+ How to Attract Them To Your Yard  
Best Birdhouses

### *In this issue...*

Feature Article .....	1
Chirps .....	2
Seasonal Checklist .....	2
Feeder Favorite .....	3
Great Ideas .....	4
Carol's Favorite Birdhouses .....	4
Nesting Trivia .....	4

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to share the joy of backyard birds  
with All Seasons Wild Bird Store's  
customers and friends.

#### FEATURE ARTICLE

## *Dreaming of Summer Gardens*

By Wayzata Manager MELISSA BLOCK  
and Minnetonka Manager CAROL CHENAULT

### The Perfect Summer Garden

As gray winter skies begin to brighten with the promise of spring's rays, you may find your thoughts drifting to colorful summer gardens, teeming with vibrant birds and graceful butterflies. What better way to usher in longer days and warmer temperatures than to plan and dream about the perfect summer garden?

#### *But what makes a garden "perfect"?*

Well, certainly it's a garden that attracts a bounty of migrant birds, native butterflies and beneficial insects, while also providing adequate food and habitat for your year-round birds. *Your best bet:* plant a mix of select annuals and low-maintenance, drought-hardy native plants.

### Annuals

Tried-and-true annuals like marigolds, nasturtiums, and sunflowers provide seeds, insects and nectar for birds. Not only are they beautiful but drought

tolerant and low-maintenance. Plus, the dried seed heads of sunflowers, for example, feed a variety of bird species.

When selecting annuals, avoid hybrid plants that boast of double blossoms. These plants don't provide nectar for bees, butterflies and birds. Many exotics, too, are not valuable to birds because they don't support beneficial pollinators, caterpillars or butterflies.

### Perennials

Native perennials such as asters (pictured above), black-eyed

Susans, blazing stars (*Liatris spicata*), salvias, and purple coneflowers offer both seed and nectar for birds and butterflies. Goldfinches, in particular, love to dine on purple coneflower  
*(continued, page 2 ...)*



## CHIRPS

# Welcome Spring!

Expect an abundance of life this season



It feels like we've had an entire winter of autumn/spring weather, but it's now official: spring arrives March 20. Since this winter was so mild, we're expecting a greater abundance of surviving birds and other creatures. And as a result, your yards, feeding stations and gardens will be bustling with new life. As always, we're here to be your one-stop resource for information, advice and anything else you might need to create a feathery oasis in your yard. Happy spring!

~ Al and Dave Netten



## Worry-Free Guarantee!

We want our customers to have a worry-free experience with every purchase. If you're not completely satisfied with any item purchased from our store, simply return it to us for an exchange or refund. **No worries . . . ever.**



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## Join the Conversation!

Like us on **Facebook.com/WildBirdStore** to post photos, ask questions and be the first to know about upcoming sales and events. Or follow us on **Twitter: #ASWildBirdStore**.

## SEASONAL CHECKLIST

MAR.  
&  
APR.

# Early Spring

By Minnetonka Manager CAROL CHENAULT

- ☐ Offer nesting material like the **Best Nest Builder™**. ▶
- ☐ Use the **80" Erva® pole system** for mounting Wood Duck nest boxes.
- ☐ Put up new or clean out previously used birdhouses.
- ☐ Create a mud patch to assist robins in nest-building.
- ☐ Add a nesting ledge for American Robins, House Finches or Eastern Phoebe.
- ☐ Clean bird feeders, or **drop 'em off and let us clean them for you!**
- ☐ Add a birdbath or water feature to your backyard birding habitat.
- ☐ Use a **Water Wiggler™** in your birdbath for added attraction.
- ☐ **Get oriole and hummingbird feeders ready!** ▶  
**The first orioles were in town last year by April 26<sup>th</sup>.**
- ☐ Store seed outside or in the garage in a metal garbage can with a secure lid.
- ☐ Help migrating birds avoid windows by applying **WindowAlert™ decals**.
- ☐ Rake up and dispose of seed shell debris.
- ☐ Dream and plant! Plan to add native plantings to your yard.
- ☐ Follow the spring migration on [www.journeynorth.org](http://www.journeynorth.org).



## Dreaming of Summer Gardens

( . . . continued from page 1 )

seeds (in addition to Nyjer™ from your feeders, if they're lucky!). And salvias are a favorite of hummingbirds.

### A special note on trees and shrubs

Native trees and shrubs are a critical part of a backyard habitat. These plants provide a source of food for native insects, which in turn are a source of food for native birds and their young. For example, the foliage of native oak trees nourishes 517 different species of native moths and butterflies. Such moths and butterflies are a primary

source of nutrients for the young of nearly all upland-nesting songbirds.

Smaller trees and bushes like mountain ash, serviceberry and juniper provide fruit and berries, as well as shelter, for birds. These more compact plants are great additions to your garden, where space is limited.

As you dream about what to plant, plan on diversifying your landscape with native plants. As your native habitat grows, you will benefit from the plant-insect-bird relationships of a native ecosystem by seeing a wider variety of birds. ■

# Indigo Buntings!

## What You Need to Know to Identify and Attract These Beautiful Birds

By Co-owner, DAVE NETTEN



One of the things that I look most forward to in spring is the arrival of some of our most colorful and beautiful neo-tropical migrants. In particular, I love it if I'm lucky enough to spot a few Indigo Buntings splashing in my birdbath or happily hopping around my feeders. Because Indigo Buntings aren't the most common backyard bird, many Minnesotans aren't aware that they can attract them to their yards and feeding stations, especially during the spring and fall migration. First, I'd like to offer a little background information about Indigo Buntings, and then I'll cover how you can encourage them to visit your backyard.

### Identification

Male Indigo Buntings are quite easy to identify, given they are the only bird that is blue all over, including the breast. Their heads are a deep rich blue color and they have a silver-gray bill. Females are more difficult to identify because, well, they're basically brown. But they do have some faint streaking on the breast, a whitish throat and sometimes a hint of blue on the wings, tail or rump to aid in identification. Both the male and female are similar in size to a sparrow.

### Habitat

Indigo Buntings prefer open or semi-open shrubby, brushy or forest-edge habitats. Recently logged areas are a perfect habitat

for Indigo Buntings, which is probably why they aren't too common in most of our backyards (*we'll offer some tips, below, to change that!*). Since 1990, Indigo Buntings have actually increased in abundance in Minnesota due to an expanding breeding habitat created by timber harvesting.

### Nesting behavior

Indigo Buntings build a small cup like nest about 3" in diameter, usually in the crotch of a shrub, small tree or blackberry thicket, not more than 5 feet off the ground. They usually have two broods of 4-5 young, which often include a nestling from an egg placed by a Brown-headed Cowbird. The incubation period for the eggs is typically 11-14 days; the young stay in the nest another 8-14 days before they fledge. Indigo Bunting eggs are less than 1" long and are a non-descript white color with a few possible brown spots. Males watch, but will not participate in incubating the eggs—it's all the work of the female!

### Attracting Indigo Buntings

If you're interested in increasing your chances of attracting Indigo Buntings to your yard this spring, consider their basic needs: food, water and shelter. Their diet consists of small seeds, berries, buds and insects. Their favorite seeds are wild thistles, dandelions and goldenrods. If you don't want to plant thistles and

dandelions (*we don't blame you!*), we recommend providing **Nyjer™** seed or **White Millet** as a substitute in either a platform feeder, tube feeder with a large tray or ground feeder. **Finches' Choice** is also great alternative and contains both Nyjer™ and white millet. Low-growing (5-6-foot) shrubs and bushes in your landscape help provide the habitat they are most comfortable in, both for feeding and nesting. They love blueberries, blackberries, serviceberries and elderberries, so consider adding some of these to your dream landscape as an alternate food source to seeds. And lastly, a great water source is a must. I most often see the Indigo Buntings in my small waterfall feature in my backyard. They are amazingly beautiful when they're glistening and splashing in fresh clean water.

If you haven't already, I hope you'll have the opportunity to see one of the most beautiful birds on the planet this spring. If you're one of the lucky ones and have had success attracting Indigo Buntings to your yard, **we'd love to hear from you; visit [Facebook.com/WildBirdStore](https://www.facebook.com/WildBirdStore) and let us know your story!** ■

### DID YOU KNOW . . . ?

Like all other blue birds, Indigo Buntings lack blue pigment, which means they aren't really blue at all. The vibrant blue color comes instead from microscopic structures that refract and reflect blue light.

## GREAT IDEAS

By Minnetonka Manager CAROL CHENAULT

### Pole Systems for Nest Boxes

#### Guard against predation

The Minnesota Ornithologists Union (MOU) publication *Minnesota Birding* recommends hanging Wood Duck nest boxes on poles, rather than in trees, in order to guard against predation by raccoons and squirrels. Use our **Erva® 80" pole system**—which features a twist-in ground anchor, a **domed raccoon baffle** and a **vertical flange** that screws into the back of the nest box. This system allows for easy access to the nest box for monitoring and cleaning—no more climbing ladders up into trees! According to the MOU, boxes should be positioned at a height of 6 feet; a study published in *The Journal of Wildlife*

*Management* showed that female Wood Ducks preferred the 6-foot height 2:1 over heights of 12 or 18 feet. Prevent squirrels from dropping down onto the nest box by placing the nest box 12 feet from limbs of trees. Pick up our *Nest Box Basics* handout in the store for more information.

#### *Time-Saving Tip . . .*

*We can plan and install your nest box or feeder pole systems for you. Stop in or give us a call: 952.473.4283*

By Bloomington Assistant Manager TRISH WAGLE

### Finches' Choice

#### A great mix for Indigo Buntings

Small birds like American Goldfinches, chickadees, House Finches and especially the

beautiful Indigo Bunting—flock to our **Finches' Choice** seed. This seed mix contains sunflower chips, canary seed, millet, Nyjer™ and flax seeds. Buntings occasionally like the Nyjer™ and millet. The sunflower chips and flax seed provide high-energy fat and protein that benefit the birds year-round.



*Finches' Choice seed mix appeals to many species of birds.*

## CAROL'S FAVORITE BIRDHOUSES

By Minnetonka Manager CAROL CHENAULT

### Birdhouses From Bird's Choice®

Considering adding a birdhouse to your yard? Here are a couple of favorites!

*"Chickadees and wrens both use this birdhouse in my backyard."  
—Carol, Minnetonka*



**This sturdy birdhouse** is constructed with long-lasting Inland Red Cedar and features a side that opens easily for cleaning. The entrance hole is sized to allow both wrens and chickadees to enter but excludes

larger birds. Constructed with proper drainage and ventilation, this house keeps nests dry and cool for your birds.

Be sure to protect the nestlings from predation by using a squirrel baffle with either hanging or post mounts. For post mounts, make sure to place the pole 10 to 12 feet away from overhead branches.

#### **This birdhouse ▶**

is made from 98% recycled material, making it easy to clean and weather-resistant, and assuring it

retains its appearance over time. The house features a seamless overhang roof, vents and drainage. The roof opens for easy cleaning.



## NESTING TRIVIA



The inner portion of a nestling's beak is brightly colored so parents can easily see where to deliver the goods!



Barn Swallows make as many as 1,200 or more trips with a mouthful of mud to build their nests.

**Have an idea for a future issue of *Birds-Eye View*?** Photos and articles may be submitted by email to [info@wildbirdstore.net](mailto:info@wildbirdstore.net).  
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