

# Expand Your Birding Offerings to Help Your Sales

## Take Flight



Cold Creek Nurseries turned to former wildlife biologist and birding expert Ron Brenneman to help increase the birding offerings in their retail location.

By Joe Tacosik

**E**ven without economic disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic, independent garden centers and nurseries are always looking to expand not only their product offerings, but the in-store experiences for their customers as well. While many may already offer bird feeders and bird feed of various types, expanding your birding offerings can have a real impact on sales — and help generate new interest in your garden center.

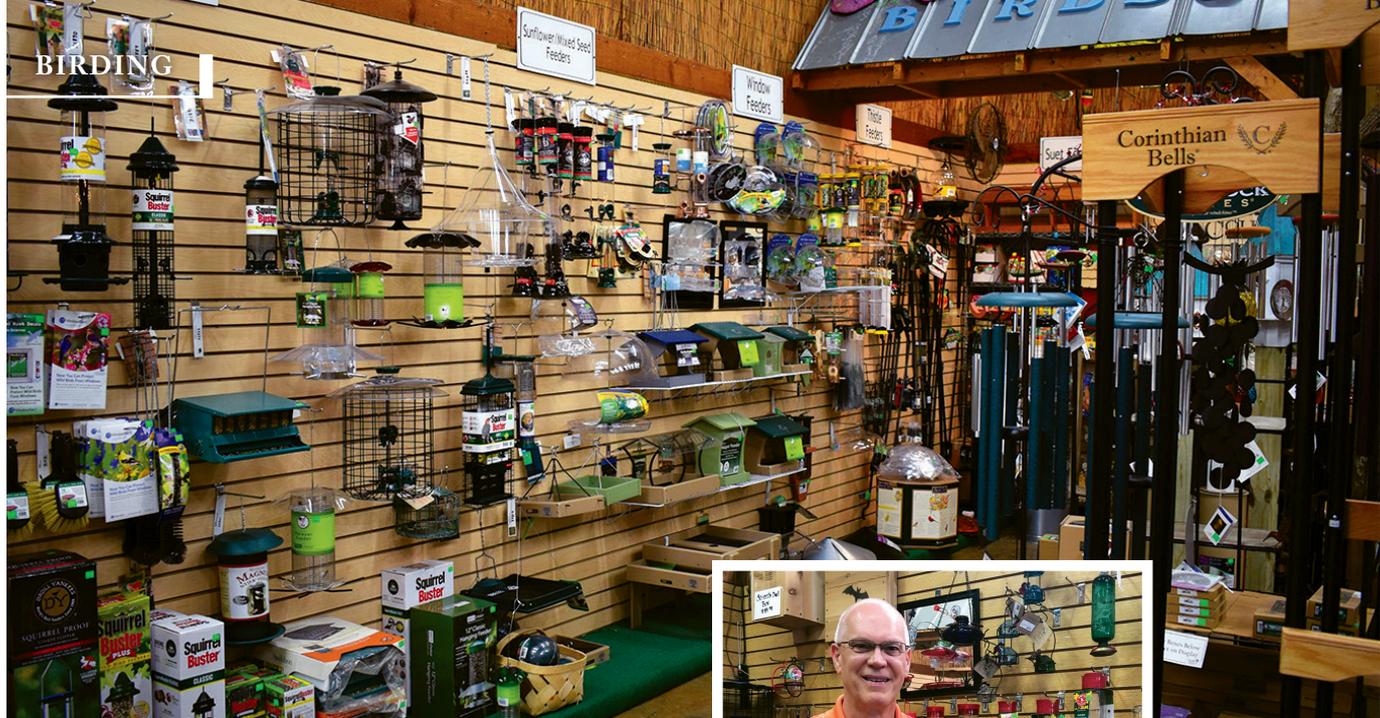
After taking a look at their current inventory of birding products in 2018, Cold Creek Nurseries, located in Aiken, South Carolina, was looking to expand the birding offerings in their retail location. That's when they started working with former wildlife biologist and birding expert Ron Brenneman.

### **Birds & Butterflies**

Brenneman, who worked for 25 years as a wildlife biologist, has always had an interest in birds — co-founding the South Carolina Bluebird Society and authoring (or co-authoring) more than 60 technical publications and articles.

When he retired from the field in 1997, he decided to open his own birding store, Birds & Butterflies, in downtown Aiken, offering a wide selection of birding products — from deluxe feeders to quality seed and more. But in 2018, Brenneman and his wife, Dori, decided it was time to retire and move on, opening the door for him to work with Cold Creek Nurseries.

“When I decided to close my business and retire, we



actually talked [with Cold Creek] before we closed, and they bought some of our leftover product,” Brenneman says. “But then they asked if I would come and work part-time to help them expand the [birding] section.”

### Expanding Birding Selection and Education

With Brenneman’s decades of expertise, Cold Creek worked to expand their birding section — both adding products from Birds & Butterflies, as well as working with Brenneman to determine other areas of need.

“When I first started, they had a very small birding section,” he says. “We came in and expanded that many times, helping put up new displays and helping get new products in.”

Focusing on sourcing a larger quantity of product isn’t the only thing to consider, however, when expanding your birding section. Brenneman said that educating your customers on the products and processes can be just as important as, if not more than, the product itself.

Cold Creek began having Brenneman come in on busier days and be available to answer

questions for customers on anything birding-related.

He also hosted several seminars a year, with topics ranging from identifying birds to hummingbird care.

Finally, Cold Creek started hosting a “Wild Bird EXPO” one Saturday each of the last two years, featuring guest speakers, displays, exhibits and live birds — drawing in large crowds and promoting the nursery’s new birding products and expertise.

“It’s important to have someone on board that has some knowledge of bird feeding and products.



(Above) The birding section at Cold Creek Nurseries. (Inset) Former wildlife biologist and birding expert Ron Brenneman.

If you’re just relying on your people at the counter, it’s not going to [be as profitable],” Brenneman says. “You need to have someone that can expound upon getting a quality feed versus just a cheap one at Walmart — that part is very, very important. It doesn’t have to be a wildlife biologist, but needs to be someone who knows the product.”

### Focusing on Quality

When it comes to sourcing new products, Brenneman said there’s one area that a lot of nurseries and garden centers neglect, and that’s ensuring that the products you bring in aren’t just in a wide variety — but higher quality than what can be found at big-box stores. Having higher-end bird feeders that are not just aesthetically pleasing but also sturdy and durable in the elements, for example, is one area garden centers should focus on.

“If a garden center is thinking about getting into birding (or expanding their current selection), I would first look at the quality of the products you’re buying,” Brenneman says. “You can buy all sorts of bird feeders and products at Lowe’s or Walmart, but people coming to the nursery are looking for products that are better quality, that are going to last and that they know are going to work.”

Another product where garden centers should favor quality over pricing and quantity is in the bird seed itself. Although bird seed at big-box stores is relatively cheaper, Brenneman said the quality of the seed and benefits customers are missing out on by “saving” are tremendous.

“Getting quality bird seed is going to help your birding section. You can buy all sorts of feed at big-box stores, but the quality isn’t very good,” he says. “It will take some time to educate customers on [the benefits of quality seed] because

they're used to buying relatively inexpensive seed ... but when you look at the benefits and the cost, it's really not that much more expensive."

**Products and Seasonality**

For most regions of the country, there isn't really an "offseason" for birding — most people who take serious interest in birding do so year-round. But there are certain seasonal product offerings Brenneman recommended keeping in stock.

"In the summer, hummingbird feeders and food are excellent to keep on hand, and accessories like brushes," Brenneman says. "Those sales will drop off some during the winter, but there are certain products, like glass hummingbird feeders, that are functional and make great gifts for Mother's Day, Christmas, occasions like that ... so it's important to keep those types of things on your shelf year-round."

Along with hummingbird feeders in the summer, other seasonal products that garden centers and nurseries can keep in stock include bluebird houses and cavity nesting products, which are most popular in the spring. But making sure to keep the basics in stock, such as quality bird seed and a wide array of bird feeders, is what will ultimately keep your customers coming back.

"Bird feeders are obviously year-round, so those are important, and bird seed is what keeps a lot of [your customers] coming back to your store," he says. "They're going to buy, run out, and come back and get some more ... it brings your customers back and they can look at other

products, like bluebird houses or hummingbird feeders."

Ultimately, Brenneman says, starting with the basics and educating not only your customers, but yourself, is a great place to start.

"You have to start by just looking at the basics and going from there," Brenneman said. "You need good quality seed, some good quality feeders, some sort of a pole system offering to hang them on ... if you get those, you've got a really good start."

**Getting Started and Increasing Sales**

After working with Brenneman to expand their birding offerings, Cold Creek saw not only an increase in interest, but an increase in foot traffic and sales as well.

"I had a large customer base that I brought with me, too, as they advertised that I was [at Cold Creek] now," Brenneman says. "But [adding more birding products] definitely increased their sales considerably from what they had before."

Whether your independent garden center or nursery is looking to start a birding section from scratch or expanding the pre-existing selection, Brenneman says that quality and education are two aspects that will be the most vital to the success of the birding sales.

"Sometimes when folks consider getting into the birding business or expanding (their product offerings), they look at the big-box stores and wonder how to compete," he says. "If you've got quality products, and you've got someone there that can help educate folks when they have problems or questions ... I really think there is a small niche there for the small independents to succeed." 🐉

**SIMPLY CHOOSE THE BEST:**

**FOR NATURAL WEED CONTROL & MORE!**

- **Providing Quality Products to the Hardware Industry for over 50 years!**
- **Made With Pride in the U.S.A.**
- **All Kits CSA Certified for U.S.A. & Canada**
- **Consumer Proven & Tested**



**CHOOSE FROM THE "ALL AMERICAN" LINEUP!**



The RED DRAGON® is America's Original Propane Torch Kit. Perfect for Farm & Ranch, Construction and Small Acreages.  
Order Model: VT 3-30 C 500,000 BTU/hr



The WEED DRAGON® is America's #1 Home and Garden Torch Kit. Hooks up to refillable propane cylinders and is fully assembled.  
Order Model: VT 2-23 C 100,000 BTU/hr



The Mini Dragon™ is Perfect for smaller jobs and uses standard 1 pound propane cylinders. The ONLY CSA Certified Cane Torch!  
Order Model: VT 1-32 C 25,000 BTU/hr

"RED DRAGON - I bought the Red Dragon to keep from using pesticides on my lawn and garden. It's one of the best environmental tools I have bought. Couldn't have been pleased more!" R. Neal - Houston, TX

**"Always give people more than they expect to get."**

"MINI DRAGON - It sure sounds like a dragon putting out plenty of heat/fire to kill weeds. Quality materials and made in the USA make this product a must for any homeowner." R. Neal - Houston, TX



**1-800-255-2469 • www.FlameEng.com**

