

Catering To Clubs



Reaching out to bird-watching clubs can help drive a garden center's birding business and increase store traffic.

By Meghan Boyer

Birds of a feather flock together — and then create birding clubs. There are so many individuals who enjoy observing and identifying birds in their natural environments that bird-watching clubs are coming together across the nation. People join these clubs to view birds, socialize and find like-minded individuals who share a passion for birding. But what do they have to do with garden centers?

Catering to groups of bird enthusiasts can drive your birding business and increase store traffic. All you need to do is reach out to them.

Birding Clubs 101

Most states have birding organizations such as an Audubon or ornithological society and most towns, regardless of size, have some sort of bird-watching club. But it is difficult to say how many clubs there actually are in the United States. Clubs exist on national, state and local levels with membership totals ranging from a few people to many thousands. They may have been founded by a few friends who discovered a common interest in birding or sanctioned by official organizations, and club members may or may not broadcast their club status to the community.

Member demographics are a little easier to pinpoint. Bill Thompson III, editor of *Bird Watcher's Digest*, feels the demographics of bird club members and garden center patrons overlap. According to Thompson, people who join bird clubs tend to be homeowners who are educated and willing to spend money on their hobbies. They have yards and earn modest to high household incomes.

The type of club often dictates whether membership is comprised of all males, all females or both

genders. Ages can range, though Thompson believes that younger and older individuals join more often: "It tends to be young people and people with a little more time and money to spend," he said.

While each birding club is individual, many have similar activities including meetings and field trips that vary in frequency. Groups may get together once a week, once a month or every few months, depending on the club and the availability of space.



Most bird clubs gather frequently for meetings and field trips.

Often bird clubs do not have an official place to meet, so they gather in public places, restaurants or at people's homes. This is especially the case for smaller groups. "The really well-established ones will have a headquarters building, and they may even own some property that they maintain as a preserve," Thompson said.

Attract Birding Clubs

Garden centers already have an advantage with the bird-club crowd. Members tend to make their birding purchases at specialty stores. "They are going to find something that suits their needs, is going to last and gives them their money's worth," said Thompson. Often the products carried by the big boxes do not meet their standards, he explained.

Clearly, carrying a quality selection of birding products is one way to attract bird-watching clubs to your store. To highlight your specialty-store status further, designate an employee (preferably one with an interest in birding) to take charge of the store's birding section. This employee can learn about the products offered and help club members when they come in to your store.

A simple way to cater to bird watchers is to set aside part of your store and offer it to bird-club members, said Thompson. Something as simple as setting up a local bird club bulletin board can help forge a relationship between your garden center and local clubs. "People can put up sightings and announcements for their clubs' meetings, potluck dinners, bird-a-thons and fundraisers," Thompson explained. Adding a clipboard for members to log recent bird sightings is also a good idea.

Since so many clubs are without a real meeting place, try offering space for groups to gather. Work with individual clubs to determine what will work best with your preferences and their schedules. If there isn't enough space for groups to meet during business hours, invite the clubs to come before or after hours. Though you will have to keep the store staffed longer, you may find that the added sales from club members are worth it. ▀



If you want
bird seed,
buy any
brand...



If you want
birds,
buy Cole's.®

Get more
with Cole's!
A better wild
bird feed helps
to feed and
attract more
wild birds.
Customers get
more birds,
you get more
business.
Now, isn't that
why you sell
birdseed in the
first place?



If you're tired
of wasting money
feeding the squirrels,
try a bag of our...

**HOT
MEATS™**

Nutritious sunflower
meats, infused with
Pepper Treat.®
Birds love it while
squirrels hate the
hot cajun flavor!

**No Squirrels,
Just Birds!**

COLE'S®

THE BETTER WILD BIRD FEED

TOLL FREE
1-877-426-8882

www.coleswildbird.com

*Attract more wild birds with
the better wild bird feed...*



Your parking lot is also an asset for birding clubs. Let them meet and park in your lot before carpooling to their field trips, Thompson suggested.

Another option is to help local clubs financially. "The clubs are all struggling with keeping their finances solid," said Thompson. Expenses such as newsletters, field trips and general organizational costs can add up. Lend your support in any way

you can. Try donating coupon books for them to raffle at events. This will help you make contact with clubs and bring coupon recipients into your store! You can also sponsor some of their events or offer to have group t-shirts printed — just make sure your logo is prominently displayed.

The goal is to make your store bird-club friendly by providing many aspects that most clubs don't

have such as a place to meet and someone to offer support. You want members to associate your store with being a supporter of their club. Anything garden centers can do — from assisting in the recruitment of new members to handing out club literature — will help birding clubs and, ultimately, bring people to the store.

Look Them Up


Of course, the first step is finding bird clubs in your area. Talk to customers who frequent the birding section of your store. Even if they aren't in clubs themselves, they may be aware of them.

Some Web sites such as www.birdwatchersdigest.com offer services that allow members to add their bird club to a searchable database of clubs. Even though the listings aren't complete, they provide those who are searching with a sampling of clubs that exist in their areas. If all else fails, try searching the Internet for bird clubs in your city or state; many have Web sites that list activities and recent sightings.

Meghan Boyer is associate editor of Lawn & Garden Retailer. She can be reached at (847) 391-1013 or mboyer@sgcmail.com.


LearnMore!

For more information related to this article, go to www.lgsmag.com/lm.cfm/lg040607




One World Trade Center
Suite #800, Long Beach, CA 90831
T: (562) 432-8181 F: (562) 432-8186
gardentools@brookandhunter.com
visit www.brookandhunter.com

Exceptional Value and unsurpassed customer support are the hallmarks of **Brook & Hunter** premium quality Garden Tools.




Hand Tool
The Red Oak handles are beautiful, pleasant to the touch and extremely strong.
Heavy gauge quality Stainless Steel.
Specially polished Stainless Steel Blades
Manufacturers Serial number on each tool to track performance




Harvest Trowel
Beautifully Designed.
Perfectly in weight shape and size.

Black, Hand Tool Line



Premium quality carbine steel with black powder coating. Red Oak handle. Traditional design.

Garden Tool Tote Sets with Tools



Our new Harvest Tote is beautifully designed, blending both aesthetics and practicality to create a fashionable, yet extremely useful bag. This Garden purse with a detachable center bag and the length and size of the totes straps are designed to fit perfectly over the shoulder.

Write in 760



Join us for the 2006
Southeast
Greenhouse
Conference
and Trade Show
June 21 - 24, 2006

Plan to attend the largest educational conference and trade show in the south specifically designed to enhance your profitability as greenhouse operators and retailers. You'll have the opportunity to hear nationally-recognized experts in production, marketing and management.

The trade show features over 400 booths offering the latest and most technologically-advanced equipment and services available.

Don't be left out . . . join your fellow growers to learn new techniques, share new experiences, and grow your business to be more profitable.

For more information
Call 877-927-2775
www.sgcts.org

Write in 862



Bird feeder
Classic Bird Feeders now have a polished pewter finish, and the A-6F, A-6 Mini, TH-3 and TH Mini are now fully assembled. The packaging is open and designed to be hung or shelved. Droll Yankees. (800) 352-9164. **Write in 1524**

Metal mesh feeder
Made from metal mesh, No/No wild bird feeders are squirrel-damage resistant and serve perching and clinging birds. The feeders should require no assembly. Spring-loaded latches let the roof swing aside for filling. Sweet Corn Products, LLC. (877) 628-6115. **Write in 1529**




Squirrel-proof feeder
This high-capacity squirrel-proof feeder has flow control and a seed diverter. The feeder is made of polyethylene plastic and comes in many styles, colors and sizes. It holds up to 7 lbs. of seed and hangs from a tree, freestanding hanger or deck. Backyard Bistro Ltd. (877) 550-3868. **Write in 1519**