

# Expanding the Birding Concept

Habitat products push specialty birding retailers beyond feeders and seed.

By Mitch Whitten

One wild bird store owner built his store on a garden center's property. Another sublet land on her property to a small plant store. Still another birding business owner offers habitat-scaping advice to customers who want to outfit their backyard.

They all share a vision for backyard retailing: Plants and birding supplies should be sold in proximity because consumers need both for a complete backyard habitat. This means birding retailers selling merchandise well beyond the scope of feeding birds. Beyond optics, platform feeders and gourmet seed.

For other birding storeowners, the trend means they are locating their stores near garden centers or even creating strategic alliances with purveyors of plants. "Instead of just selling the bird feeder, we're trying to sell a lifestyle. We do habitats," says Beverly Vogt, owner of Wild Birds Unlimited in Northport, Ala. A former buyer for Neiman-Marcus, she has run her store for five years but only recently developed the habitat concept when two women approached her about opening an adjacent garden center.

Eric Moore broke similar ground, when he opened Jay's Bird Barn on the property of Watter's Garden Center, a venerable retailer in Prescott, Ariz. Vogt says, "It's a big leap — but a very worthwhile one."

## EMERGING TREND

Birding has been a hot topic lately, grabbing headlines in magazines and newspapers. The film "Winged Migration" was even nominated for an Academy Award.

The habitat movement trend has been emerging for several years. It combines backyard birding with gardening, which was trendy in the 1990s and has continued to capture the consumer's imagination.

Retailers and manufacturers consider the trend at trade shows, discussing how customers want their help "putting it all together."

Dane Moore of BestNest.com, a birding industry distributor, says that the industry is moving in this direction — faster than some retailers may realize. "Once you have products for squirrels, bats, butterflies, you wake up and realize you're not a birding store; you're a habitat store," Moore says.



In addition to feeders and water gardening supplies, bat houses are selling well at BestNest.com, which Moore attributes to West Nile virus concerns and the mammal's ability to nibble away at mosquito populations.

## GETTING CREATIVE

Vogt saw the trend coming when she opened her bird shop in an old house with a garden. "People kept walking into the garden. Things would be blooming, and people would ask 'Where can I get that?'" The house afforded her 3,700 sq.ft. of retail space. But then she took a business risk when she decided to move her store onto the property so she could lease the house to a law firm.

The gamble seems to have paid off. The firm's lease provides a new source of income. And, she is making the same sales in 1,400 sq.ft. as she did in the larger space in the house. The beautiful grounds inspired her to offer habitat tours. "When you're in a small town, you just don't have the traffic that you do in a city like Dallas. I had to get creative," Vogt says.

Getting creative also meant revving up a PR machine. Many marketers know that getting mentioned in magazines and newspapers outweighs any paid advertisement they could buy. Vogt stole an idea from Chicago — sporting life-sized, painted cows around town — and asked local businesses to paint birdhouses. She then auctioned them and sent the proceeds to charity. She received support from Wild Birds Unlimited, Alabama Power and local tourism officials. "That gave me all the credibility in the world. I wasn't just some little shop owner doing this," she says.

## BIRDSCAPING

Mike and Tina Shaw are retail pioneers with their birdscaping business



near Cleveland. They each have full-time jobs. He is a police officer; she is a police dispatcher. In their spare time, they are trying to grow a business that offers habitat consulting to well-to-do homeowners.

Customers, for example, will ask for advice on attracting birds. The Shaws walk the property and suggest products from a notebook they've created. Need a refill? They will bring a special seed over to top off the tubes out back.

Mike, who has spotted 30 species in his backyard, says the business started with his eye for ornithology. The Shaws are now certified by the Windstar Wildlife Institute.

"People started asking questions, and we started giving them advice," Mike says. "We just started with some friends who wanted birds." That was two years ago. Their average sale? Nearly \$200.

The couple is still searching for a business plan that will allow them to turn this part-time hobby into a full-time enterprise. The couple is not shy about seeking advice from others in the industry — especially tips for marketing and advertising. "I can't say 'Hi, we're birdscapers. Call us,'" he says. "People would say, 'What's a birdscaper?'"

The personal experience drives sales in this business. "Hopefully, we're saving them some trial and error by going to their homes to get a first-hand view," Mike says.

## SELLING PLANTS

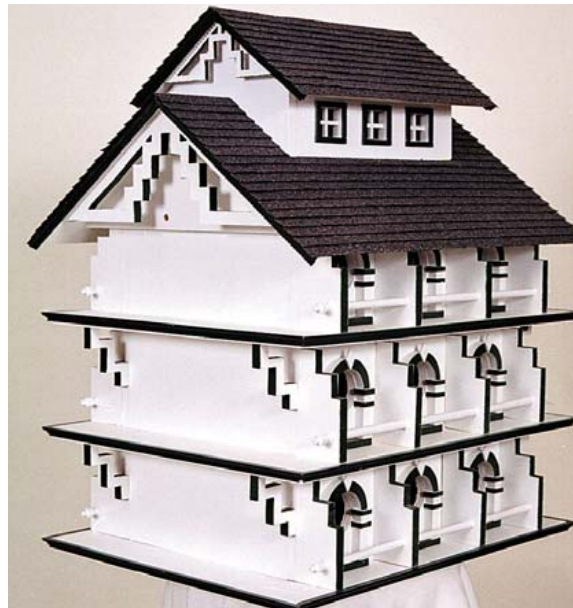
There has traditionally been a church-state-like separation between retailers selling birding products and those selling garden plants. But market forces are chipping at the wall. Consumers see birds, plants, water and accessories working together in their backyard.

Ironically, birds are attracted by plant material as much as seed. They're drawn to water, too, and that is another element that retailers can promote in a backyard habitat.

But don't look for birding stores to start carrying plants anytime soon. Most wild bird locations are ill equipped to handle plants buried in messy soil and requiring water frequently. 🌱

*Mitch Whitten is editor of Birding Business magazine and has spent more than a decade in retail and nature journalism. He can be reached by E-mail at [mitch@birdingbusiness.com](mailto:mitch@birdingbusiness.com).*

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### Bird feeder

Green Gables 18 Room Martin House will comfortably house 18 martin families. Constructed of exterior grade ply-board, kiln-dried hardwood details and topped with an asphalt roof, the top of this feeder lifts off with the removal of several screws. It is finished with a non-toxic outdoor paint. Home Bazaar. (516) 827-7771. **Write in 1417**

### Bird feeder

The new Ringed Tube Feeder series is a large-capacity feeder constructed of powder-coated steel with a 4-inch acrylic tube. Each feeder has four tube seed ports plus an additional four ports in the base. The roof removes easily for filling and cleaning with a bayonet-style, twist-lock mechanism. The Ringed Tube Feeders each measure 20 inches tall and hold approximately 3 lbs. of birdseed. Available in an antique copper finish with a clear tube and a silver finish with cobalt blue tube. Heritage Farms. (800) 845-2473. **Write in 1416**



### Hummingbird feeder

The Crystal Spiral Hummingbird Feeder's finely crafted copper base allows hummingbirds to perch or hover for feeding. It is easy to fill and clean and is leak free. The feeder comes with a nectar recipe and measures 12 inches. Schrodt Designs, Inc. (800) 460-3852. **Write in 1421**

### Hummingbird nectar

Liquid Nectar Concentrate is easy to use and nutritional for hummingbirds. Formulated to be the perfect food, it actually attracts and nourishes hummingbirds and is all-natural. Each 8.45-oz. box makes approximately 60 oz. of nutritious high-energy hummingbird nectar. Outdoor Seasons. (303) 751-9000. **Write in 1420**

### Bird feeder

Arch, Pediment and Gothic are three new feeders added to the Architectural series. The perforated copper tray with curved handles slides out for easy cleaning. The large roofs are made of 16-oz. copper and have a detachable tray and hanger for easy shipping. These feeders will age to a green patina over time. Vasse Vaught Metalcrafting. (866) 410-4671. **Write in 1424** ▶







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## PRODUCT FOCUS NATURE PRODUCTS

### Algaecide

GreenClean Granular Algaecide can now be used for eliminating unpleasant algae in birdbaths. Its fast-acting chemistry can be seen within minutes of application. It is currently available in 2-, 8-, 20- and 50-lb. pails. BioSafe Systems, LLC. (860) 657-2211. **Write in 1408**



### Birdbath

Attach this Copper Ivy Leaf Birdbath Dripper to any birdbath to ensure a continual source of fresh water for birds. It includes a copper hook, 17 leaves, two flowers, bendable vine, 50 feet of tubing, regulating valve, brass faucet fitting and a Y faucet valve. Backyard Nature Products Inc. (800) 817-8833. **Write in 1407**

### Butterfly house

The Garden Friends Collection includes this Butterfly Niche. Hang the niche in a shady area so the slots are at the same level as your flowers, but no higher than 5 feet from the ground. Flowers such as cosmos, verbenas, marigolds and lantanas and shrubs such as butterfly bush, honeysuckle and lavender may help attract more butterflies. Sticks, leaves, flowers and bark placed inside the house provide a perfect habitat for egg-laying and chrysalis development. First Nature. (866) 792-9590. **Write in 1414**



### Bird feeder

The Birds in Flight hanging bird feeder is stonecast to resemble the nest, birds and blossoms trailing up the curved metal hanger. The bottom of the feeder is drilled to allow water to drain. The feeder is 17 inches high. United Design Corporation. (800) 527-4883. **Write in 1423**

### Bird feeder

The All Bird Café measures 9x17 inches, weighs 14 lbs. and has a 3-qt. capacity. Acorn Bird Products. (724) 668-2462. **Write in 1400** ▶





PRODUCT FOCUS NATURE PRODUCTS



**Bird feeder**  
The Saucer Bird Feeder is made from hand-painted ceramic with a colorful, modern stripe design. The top lifts off for easy filling. BirdBrain, Inc. (800) 289-4748. **Write in 1410**



**Bird feeder**  
Classic Tubular Bird Feeders have been updated with a polished pewter finish. This powder-coated finish will not pit, chip or tarnish and is durable and attractive. The Classics include several sizes of Sunflower feeders. The Classic Nyjer feeders feature the Droll Yankees signature armor bands to protect against squirrels and carries a lifetime warranty. Droll Yankees Inc. (800) 352-9164. **Write in 1412**



**Squirrel baffle**  
The Squirrel-Away Baffle keeps squirrels on the ground and out of the bird feeder. It will provide hours of entertainment, as stubborn squirrels attempt to balance themselves and get to the seed, but every time they will slide off the edge, away from the seed. Arundale Products. (314) 652-1220. **Write in 1404**

**Water motor**  
The Ceramic Water Wiggler operates on two D-cell batteries for 2-3 months of continuous use. It keeps the surface of the water moving to attract birds and eliminate stagnant water. It has a silent operation and decorative covers that can be sold separately. Allied Precision. (630) 365-0340. **Write in 1402**



**Bird food**  
Wild Delight Advanced Formula Nut N' Berry pail provides customers with a re-usable storage pail that keeps food fresh and pests out. Pails also contain a wild bird feeding guide and a bounce-back coupon. D&D Commodities Ltd. (800) 543-3308. **Write in 1411**



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### Birdcage

The Bentley is a furniture-quality, solid mahogany, tapered, octagonal house with a spun 24-oz. solid copper roof that has been hard-burnished to a brown patina. It is topped with a solid brass ring for hanging, or it can be placed on a table or post-mounted. The Bentley features floor drainage, ventilation and a removable roof for easy cleaning. It measures 9x18 inches with a 1½-inch hole. Heartwood. (888) 490-9046. **Write in 1415**



### Hummingbird feeder

The Red Bird Hummingbird Feeder is functional and has a decorative flare. It has a 12-oz. capacity and is intended for use with non-colored homemade nectar. The feeder features three snap-in, bee-resistant nectar ports, a large mouth and snap-apart base for easy cleaning. Bird Company. (800) 269-4450. **Write in 1409**

### Birdbath

This birdbath is designed in a mosaic style. Other fountains and styles are available. Oriental Sources, Inc. (714) 526-4567. **Write in 1419**



### Binoculars

The new high-performance Audubon Equinox binoculars have the same baseline specifications (field of view, eye relief, close focus, weight and dimensions) as the original, but the Equinox HP 8x42 and 10x42 feature improved image quality from enhanced optical coatings and an exclusive glare-reduction system. Equinox HPs also include new, more comfortable, tapered eyecups and multi-stops in their "twist-and-lock" function. Audubon Binoculars by Sheltered Wings. (800) 426-0048. **Write in 1405**

### Cleaner

Uniquely formulated to clean glass, plastic, acrylic and ceramic, the Hummingbird and Oriole Feeder-Cleaner treats stains, dirt, nectar and water lines. This is not a chemical, but is made of all-natural enzymes that are bacteria-free, making it safe for birds and other wildlife. It will also clean birdhouses and feeders. This cleaner is biodegradable and available in a 16-oz. spray bottle. IPS-CareFree Enzymes, Inc. (888) 462-0969. **Write in 1418** ♦



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## PRODUCT FOCUS NATURE PRODUCTS

### T-Shirt

Show Me the Seed is the newest addition to the Squirrel Stuff T-shirt line. This image is a take off of the popular phrase "Show me the money!" This business-savvy squirrel wants all the seed he can get his hands on. Arundale Products. (314) 652-1220. **Write in 1403**



### Thistle feeder

This newly designed thistle feeder features a stainless steel screen that is removable for easy cleaning. The 15-inch feeder holds 3 lbs. of seed in a compartment that measures 13 x 4 x 4 inches and comes with a hanging cord. It is handmade and constructed of western red cedar. Backyard Designs. (877) 874-9072. **Write in 1406**



### Bird feeder

Log Cabin Bird Feeders are easy to maintain and durable, and they hold 2½ lbs. of seed. This lightweight, rotationally molded resin feeder with double-walled construction is guaranteed to resist cracking, breaking and chipping in extreme temperatures.

Detailed molding recreates the rustic look of an old-fashioned log cabin. Comes in a UV-protected, chocolate/green color combination and measures 12 x 11½ x 9 inches. Akro-Mils Lawn & Garden Products. (800) 253-2467. **Write in 1401**



### Bird feeder

Pagoda is part of the Masterpiece Bird Feeders series and measures 11x14¼ inches. The 3-inch tube holds 1½ lbs. and comes with the Easy Clean Base. Cages are constructed of heavy-gauge steel and are finished with a rust-resistant powder-coated finish. Duncraft. (800) 252-5696. **Write in 1413**



### Bird feeder

The No/No Tray Bird Feeder now comes in an optional green color. Every part of the new feeder is green — the cover, steel mesh, hanger and the tray itself. The green tray attracts clinging, perching and trough-feeding birds. It is ready to hang and fill. The roof is easily unlatched and swung aside to permit quick refills with more than 2½ lbs. of black oil sunflower seeds. Sweet Corn Products LLC. (877) 628-6115. **Write in 1422**



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