**Female Narrator:** [00:00:00] [MUSIC] Welcome to The Lawn and Garden podcast with University of Wyoming Extension Specialist Jeff Edwards, and co-host Jerry Erschabeck. Originally aired on KGOS & KERM in Torrington. Join Jeff, Jerry and their special guests, as they talk all things gardening in Wyoming. Our Lawn and Garden podcast helps you improve your home garden or small acreage.

**Jeff Edwards:** Good morning, everybody. This is Jeff Edwards and Jerry Erschabeck, for the KGOS/KERM Lawn and Garden program. Today, we are joined by two guests. We have Tom McCreery. Hello, Tom.

**Tom John McCreery:** Hi, how are you?

**Jeff Edwards:** We're doing great. We're glad you're here today. Also with us today is Zach Hutchinson. He is from the National Audubon Society, and I believe our program is going to be about birds today. Good morning, Zach. How are you?

**Zach Hutchinson:** Good morning. I'm doing well, and I hope it's about birds otherwise this is a topic I might not be as strong on. [LAUGHTER]

**Jeff Edwards:** All right. Fantastic. Well, let's take a few moments and listen to our sponsors, and we'll be back and get on with our program.

**Female Narrator:** [MUSIC] You are listening to the Lawn and Garden podcast, presented by University of Wyoming Extension, extending the land grant mission across the state of Wyoming with a wide variety of educational programs and services.

**Jeff Edwards:** Good morning, everybody. This is Jeff Edwards and Jerry Erschabeck for the KGOS/KERM Lawn and Garden program. We have in studio with us today Tom McCreery and Zach Hutchinson. Zach is from the National Audubon Society and our program is about birds. So Zach, I'm going to turn it over to you and if you'd like to provide a little bit more information about yourself, that'd be great, and we can launch into our topic for the day.

**Zach Hutchinsion:** Okay, so yeah, I work for the National Audubon Society, but more specifically, I work for the regional office, which is Audubon Rockies. Audubon Rockies serves Wyoming, Colorado, and Utah. We're all one Audubon, but specifically, we serve the Rocky Mountain region. That's very different from, say, an Audubon Chapter, which many cities throughout Wyoming have. Cities, I use that term loosely in Wyoming, [LAUGHTER] but many communities throughout the state have Audubon Chapters, which are more social clubs. Usually, there are no paid employees with a lot of the smaller chapters. So we are all one Audubon, but we also serve very different functions. Within Audubon Rockies, I am the community naturalist for the Casper area, and I'm also our community science coordinator for much of our region.

**Jeff Edwards:** So as a community naturalist, what does that entail?

**Zach Hutchinsion:** [LAUGHTER] It entails everything. [LAUGHTER] It entails things that aren't natural, including a lot of paperwork. [LAUGHTER] So the community naturalist, one of our big things is, is essentially we are like a traveling nature center. A nature center without walls, getting kids and adults alike outside, and [00:03:00] learning more about the place they live. A lot of times in schools with the curriculum that they have, they're learning about places that aren't local. You learn about the food chain in the rain forest, instead of the food chain in the sagebrush steppe. That's something that we strive to do is, is actually teach people about the place they live.

**Jeff Edwards:** That's great. That's necessary.

**Zach Hutchinsion:** Absolutely, [LAUGHTER] it is very much is, because if you know more about the rain forest, than you do about what's 20 minutes outside of your house, then you might struggle at some point.

**Jeff Edwards:** Yes. The rest of us will be in trouble at some point. [LAUGHTER]

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Yeah, I know my backyard is one of those things that, since I've been doing the Lawn and Garden Show, I just take more notice, and as you do take more notice, you have more questions.

**Zach Hutchinsion:** Yeah, absolutely. That's what we encourage with our programming is, we want people to be curious. We want them to get involved, we want them to do more, learn more. In fact, last weekend, obviously because of the current situation, we had to have, what is normally a very large in-person event, we had to do a virtual event and it's called a BioBlitz. It's normally a 24-hour collection of surveying in a given area. But this year, since we couldn't do it in person, we held this BioBlitz statewide on a virtual level, and it was several hundred people submitting observations from all over the state, of everything from fungi to insects, plants, birds, you name it, and people were submitting observations of it through iNaturalist. Hopefully it will just continue to lead to more questions, more curiosity, and more opportunities to learn and grow.

**Jeff Edwards:** You mentioned iNaturalist. That is actually an app that I have downloaded on my phone and have used it multiple times to help me identify certain things. It's a very useful application for your phone.

**Zach Hutchinson:** Yeah, it is. Absolutely.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Since you brought that up. Does it also have the songs of birds? So if you could have recording of the bird, we have a lot of birds that, Myrna goes, that's my wife, she goes, "What do you think that is?" I say, "I don't know." [LAUGHTER] You look up in the tree and you try to identify who's saying that, or singing that song and you go, is that you? Of course, they don't answer and it'd be nice to at least be able to see maybe, what you're looking at as per what you're hearing.

**Zach Hutchinson:** Right. There's been a recent release, I believe in partnership with Cornell Lab of Ornithology, on an app that helps to identify birdsong as well as bird calls. There's already an existing app called Merlin, and Merlin is basically a bird specific version of what iNaturalist can do. With iNaturalist, you take a photo of an insect, or a plant, or even a bird, and if it's a good enough [00:06:00] photo, it can help narrow down your choices. Merlin does that for bird photos specifically, and then there is a new app, that has just been coming out recently. I've been seeing the news about it, and I cannot remember for the life of me what it's called, but it's in its very infancy stages. It learns through submissions, it'll keep learning, how to better do its job of identifying birdsong. It'll become more useful, but yeah, there's all these amazing apps like that out there that help us to learn more, when we don't have the naturalist standing right next to us, right?

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Right.

**Jeff Edwards:** Yeah. Very good.

**Tom John McCreery:** You guys, I have got an interesting publication from the Wyoming Game and Fish, and since I used to work for them I got a plug them a little bit. [LAUGHTER] It's the Pocket Naturalist: Wyoming Birds, An Introduction to Familiar Species. It's a wonderful thing for Wyoming, Colorado, birds in this area. If you want a copy, all you got to do is call 1-800-434-2555. I'll go through it just quickly. It has hummingbirds and we have three basic species. I'm sure there are more, Zach. Then they have birds of prey which are my favorite, mostly the great horned owl. Perching birds, and there's a lot of those and I saw a ton of them this spring. Bullock's Oriole, I've never seen one, but I put suet out, and just all kinds, they're really cool birds. Then waterfowl birds, and upland birds, and woodpeckers. I had a woodpecker, where I had to cut the tree down because they were trying to nest and put a great big hole in a punky old tree, and so I cut it down.

**Jeff Edwards:** Talk about ruining bird habitat if you took down the tree it was trying to nest in. [LAUGHTER]

**Tom John McCreery:** Jeff, it got hit by a tornado and all the west side of it, the branches were gone. The reason they got in there, they went in and down.

**Jeff Edwards:** Sure.

**Tom John McCreery:** It was fascinating. I cut that part out and gave it to a friend of mine who wanted it. But I didn't know much about woodpeckers, and they're very cool. [LAUGHTER]

**Jeff Edwards:** Is your friend going to turn that chunk of stump into a lamp?

**Tom John McCreery:** Yeah, I think so. [LAUGHTER] It was a nice stump, do you know what I mean?

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Tom, let me tell you what I did. I went out searching for a giant limb that had fallen off of an old elm tree. I put it in the back of my truck, I carted at home, I drilled a bunch of holes in it, stuck peanut butter and sue it inside those holes, and then planted that pole. [OVERLAPPING] You can leave some of those things, it may not look as pretty, but you can say, "Hey, come look at my woodpecker nest."

**Tom John McCreery:** [00:09:00] Really, absolutely. Zach, I feed birds, I have two feeding stations, suet and all kinds of stuff. Should we be feeding the birds in the early spring or shouldn't? They say not to. Some people say not to feed birds, but I like having them around, so I do.

**Zach Hutchinson:** With bird feeding, there's a lot of questions about the ethics behind it [OVERLAPPING] and the long-term effects it has on bird populations. One of the arguments for, is that bird feeding is essentially a replacement of food that maybe has been lost due to habitat destruction. You know, as the human population grows, [LAUGHTER] habitat gets removed, and so what it does is it supplements by putting food back into the system where we've taken food out. Not just habitat destruction, introduction of invasives, things like that, that affect food sources for birds. That's one of the arguments for, is that it's supplementing what we've helped to destroy. Then the other side of it is, are you creating a dependency in birds? Luckily with the birds, that dependency is not very strong. If the food stopped showing up, they are not as much like mammals where they don't know what to do if they stop being fed. When you think about a bear that gets habituated to a campground, because there's always food in the campground. Birds are not quite like that. If the food stops showing up, the birds move. It's as easy as that. The other side of it though is, if you are going to feed, you have to clean your feeders because that is a major source of disease transmission. If you don't clean your feeders, then you're doing a disservice to the birds because then you've got E. coli, you've got conjunctivitis, salmonella, all of these things that can be transmitted from bird to bird. So if you do have feeders, you got to clean them fairly regularly so that [OVERLAPPING]

**Jeff Edwards:** How would anybody like to eat off the same plate every single day without washing it in-between?

**Zach Hutchinson:** Or eat off the same plate that your neighbor may have done their business on. [LAUGHTER].

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Zach, how often do you clean?

**Zach Hutchinson:** It depends on the type of feeder. Hummingbird feeders need to be cleaned every three to four days because that's sugar water and that's just right for mold growth. Hummingbird feeders, three to four days is about maximum. Now, early in spring, you might be able to get away with five or six days, where there's not a lot of mold growth because of the cooler temperatures, but once you hit early June to mid June mold growth starts very quickly in those hotter temperatures. If you're talking seed feeders, every week to two weeks, it depends on the frequency of the number of birds visiting your feeder. If you have a lot of birds coming in, you need to clean them more frequently. But if you've just got a steady diet of some local birds that come in, one to two weeks is probably fine. You clean most of these feeders by just soaking them in a [00:12:00] dilute solution of bleach and water. You don't have to do a lot of scrubbing or anything like that, just soak them. If they're dishwasher safe, throw them in the dishwasher. I am all about finding the minimal effort, yet still doing the maximum potential of cleaning.

**Jeff Edwards:** [LAUGHTER] Good bird hygiene.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Even like the little niger seed, that's still again one to two weeks?

**Zach Hutchinson:** It depends on what kind of feeder you have it in. If it's a sock, they're defecating away from the sock and maybe you don't have to do that. If it's a sock, you could also just throw it in the washing machine. If it's the plastic feeders where they have to stick their heads into a hole, I'm not a fan of those. I'm very much against them because a lot of these diseases, there's a wart and conjunctivitis are transmitted through the fluids on the face, especially in the eyes. So when a bird sticks its head in those little ports, it's rubbing all that bacteria onto those ports. So if it's a port feeder like that, yeah, absolutely, it needs to be cleaned. Definitely not, you don't want to wait more than two weeks. Again, how many birds do you have visiting? If you're not seeing a lot of birds, then maybe you don't need to do it every week. But you also got to consider, did it rain in those port feeders? If water gets inside of them, all of that food at the bottom is just going to mold up and go bad. In Wyoming, we have a nice dry climate. So when you put food out, lasts a little bit longer, but if you leave it in an area where there's a little bit more consistent humidity, that stuff goes bad so quick.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Well, and here's another part of it. What about your sprinklers? You need to put that bird feeder in a place where you're not watering it as well. [LAUGHTER]

**Zach Hutchinson:** [LAUGHTER] Right.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** I'm really excited about that because we have those port feeders because we have a lot of those small little birds. We also have a port feeder with a wire cage around it so that only those little small birds can get to it, and no cats can get on them while they're feeding. How do you make those birds feel safe?

**Zach Hutchinson:** That comes back to planting. Planting things that give them shelter. Brushy plants, especially things that have a nice thick foliage that they can dive into when a predator is in the area. Something that they feel safe getting inside of, preferably natives. But if you don't have that option, then you get creative. If you can find natives that also produce maybe a late season berry, then it's serving two purposes, then you have structure and you have food for fall migrants. So always will I say, plant natives first, things that they're used to, things that they know, and things that promote food sources for them, whether it's berries or the insects that depend upon those bushy plants.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** What's the best feed that you like, the feed that attracts the most birds?

**Zach Hutchinsion:** I [00:15:00] don't like to waste money on the seeds that have a lot of filler. If it's not 100 percent black oil sunflower seed, you're wasting a lot of money or you will attract a lot of birds that some people might consider less than favorable, like house sparrows and your Eurasian collared doves, which are both non-natives and both invasive. A bird could be non-native without being invasive, but both of those are competitive with our native species, with tree swallows, with house wrens, with blue birds. If you do just black oil sunflower seed, the house sparrows will eat it, but not as frequently. You won't have the large numbers as if there's a lot of millet in it. A lot of millet will attract house sparrows absolutely, the smaller seeds especially attract house sparrows. Now, of course, millet also attracts mourning doves, but again, it's that balance. You got to find the balance, if you don't want to attract the house sparrows in the Eurasian collared doves, but black oil, sometimes it attracts so many different species of birds, everything from finches, to native sparrows, to Blue Jays love it, Red-winged Blackbirds love it. I mean, you can attract such a large variety with black oil sunflower seed, and then I prefer platform feeders because large birds can get on platform feeders. So then you can get birds like, doves, blackbirds, Blue Jays, all on the feeder enjoying that black oil sunflower seed.

**Tom John McCreery:** What about fruit? I tried fruit this year and I've got the Bullock Oriole. I cut oranges up.

**Zach Hutchinson:** Yes.

**Tom John McCreery:** Just a feeding station, yeah. There are beautiful birds, so I really enjoy that. Of course, the goldfinches, they like the niger and I've got a feeder, and I'm glad you mentioned that I need to clean it, because I haven't been cleaning mine. [LAUGHTER] I'm sure that's not good so, that's a good tip, Zach. I'll start cleaning them.

**Zach Hutchinson:** Well, you'll see some of the birds will come in with a lot of build-up on their face, and sometimes that's a product of dirty feeders.

**Tom John McCreery:** Very good.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Even with the suet though. You're always seeing those birds cleaning their beak, criss-crossing like you would a sword and cleaning their beaks off. I didn't even realize that they would transmit disease.

**Tom John McCreery:** [OVERLAPPING] Watering stations, Zach. I clean those every day because they get full of [LAUGHTER] [OVERLAPPING]

**Zach Hutchinson:** [LAUGHTER] I tend to recommend to people platform feeders that have a mesh bottom because then if it rains or something like that, it helps to wash a lot of that fecal material through the mesh, and they're easy to clean. You spray them with little dilute bleach solution and rinse them off. If you've just got them fixed outside with your garden hose, you can do it that way too, especially if it's got that nice wire mesh [00:18:00] bottom where things can just drain through. Then I just don't put out a lot of food everyday. If you put out one of those feeders that has multiple pounds, you just risk losing so much of the food to waste. It just goes bad before the birds can use it. Unless you're feeding in a place that sees couple hundred birds in a few days which some places do, some places don't, but smaller amounts is fine. The birds don't need to feed at your feeders all day, every day. [LAUGHTER] They're going to get a little bit of fat stored up if you're doing that. That's not a bad thing, but if they're house sparrows, then I could care less how much fat they have stored up.

**Tom John McCreery:** The other thing that's really interesting is I don't have feeders, the squirrels just hang upside down on my feeders. They scoop the seed out of the feeder. It is a mess, but I like the squirrels so I don't shoot them or anything.

**Zach Hutchinson:** If you want a non-lethal way to handle squirrels, cheap cayenne pepper. Buy a one dollar container of cayenne pepper and sprinkle it on top of the seeds when you put it out. Because the squirrels know when you feed, they learn your schedule. Just think of a dog. A dog knows when it's feeding time. If you feed everyday at the same time, squirrels know it too. They know it, they're waiting, they're watching, they're listening. They hear when that crack of the plastic lid is, and then they do, "Oh, here comes that good, sweet sunflower seed." A little bit of cayenne pepper, just a sprinkle over the top of the seeds. [OVERLAPPING] They'll come down, because they're sniffing it first, they'll sniff it up into their nostrils, and then they'll start chewing on it. It doesn't affect birds, but the capsaicin, the stuff that burns mammals, the squirrels get irritated by it, and then they'll stop coming around this frequently. Use that for a couple of weeks, just sprinkle it, on maybe every day, every other day when you go to feed. That helps a lot.

 This year, at one of the research sites we have here near Casper, we had a black bear problem. He came in and he broke three feeders this year. I got very frustrated with him, and I decided I was going to treat him like a very large squirrel [LAUGHTER] because he climbed into the platform feeder and sat in it [LAUGHTER] and was just eating out of the feeder, just sitting inside of the feeder, like he was a bird or something, or a squirrel. So the remainder of the feeders, I went and bought a bunch, 13 bottles of cayenne pepper, and I just loaded those feeders up because again, doesn't affect the birds, but that bear has not been back since that happened.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Good deal.

**Tom John McCreery:** But you get the powder to the ground up, right, Zach? The ground up pepper?

**Zach Hutchinson:** Yeah.

**Tom John McCreery:** Okay, that's what I thought.

**Zach Hutchinson:** Yeah, just like you're seasoning your food, maybe. If you like spicy food, absolutely. Just like that. It can be the cheap stuff that's a dollar bottle. It just got to have that kick. Then when the squirrel is sniffing at it and then chewing on the seed and it gets in their mouth, [00:21:00] you'll see them, they'll start shaking their heads, and then they'll run away. Again, you're conditioning then to learn that seed is not good seed to eat.

**Jeff Edwards:** What about spraying it down with bear spray?

**Jerry Erschabeck:** But it's not the same thing, it's a capsaicin in there.

**Zach Hutchinson:** Right.

**Jeff Edwards:** Just to do the different delivery method.

**Zach Hutchinson:** Probably a little bit hotter too. I don't know what the concentration is in that bear spray, but I know that's not a pleasant thing.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Be really careful if you're doing bear spray and then feeding and using that feeder, and touching your face or your eyes. [LAUGHTER]

**Jeff Edwards:** Right. Exactly. Yeah.

**Tom John McCreery:** When I mountain bike between Guernsey and Fort Laramie, I see a lot of owls. I really like the birds of prey and there was a mating pair. I'd stopped and watched for them. I can't remember what time of year it was. It was in maybe June when they laid their eggs, and then later on, they were gone. Great horned owls are fascinating. Western screech-owls as well, they're smaller, and there's just a lot of cool birds of prey around here.

**Zach Hutchinson:** The owls are interesting because they can nest so much earlier in the season, the large raptors. Eagles, owls, some species of hawk will nest so early in the season because they're residents, they're not migrating away during winter time, and so yeah, you'll see them. You'll have some great horned owls that drop eggs in February. It's incredible. Because as long as there's a food source, then they have no issues. As long as rodent populations are in a place where they can feed their chicks, they'll start nesting very early. Owls are interesting because they don't build their own nests, they are nest thieves. They'll take them from magpies.

**Tom John McCreery:** Okay, I didn't know that.

**Zach Hutchinson:** Yeah, absolutely. If you see them on a nest, they didn't build that thing, they stole that thing.

**Tom John McCreery:** [LAUGHTER] Okay, very good.

**Jeff Edwards:** They ate the owner. [LAUGHTER]

**Zach Hutchinson:** Right. That's one of the benefits of nesting early. You get in there before anyone else does.

**Tom John McCreery:** Another thing, Zach, is this spring, out at the Table Mountain [OVERLAPPING]

**Jeff Edwards:** The Vineyard?

**Zach Hutchinson:** Wildlife Habitat Management Area.

**Tom John McCreery:** Three times, and watch the sandhills cranes come in. They weren't there very long, they flew north. It was fascinating. The number of birds at Table Mountain was huge, and way fun to watch. We took that binoculars out and just fascinating. I think they ran out of food, there were so many of them. I can't tell you how many, but thousands.

**Zach Hutchinson:** Yeah, Kearney, Nebraska is known for the migration of hundreds of thousands of sandhill cranes. A lot of people travel there just to see that incredible movement of animals, to see half a million cranes take off to Platte River first thing in the morning, it's incredible. But a lot of people don't know that in Wyoming, [00:24:00] Table Mountain sees thousands of cranes. Yeah, it's not going to be identical to Kearney, but for for Wyoming, I've been there and seen somewhere between 5,000 -10,000 cranes hanging out in Table Mountain. Just before the cranes arrive, the number of snow geese and Ross's geese which look like snow geese but they're just slightly smaller and more petite, they'll number into the 30,000 and 40,000 of birds. When they take off, it's like you're inside of a tornado, but this glistening white and silver tornado as the sun hits those white feathers, it's incredible to be a part of it.

**Tom John McCreery:** If anybody lives closer, or even if you don't, next spring. I'll talk to the game warden here and see when they come in. I don't want to bother, they've got parking areas away from the bird. So I don't think it's a big thing but if they get [OVERLAPPING]

**Jeff Edwards:** They would be migrating through both in the spring and the fall, right?

**Tom John McCreery:** I didn't know that. It makes sense.

**Jeff Edwards:** I noticed some more in the fall when we're out working in the yard, they'll be way high and flying South.

**Zach Hutchinson:** The biggest concentrations at Table Mountain are in the spring. In the fall, the cranes, they come through, the snow geese, Ross's geese come through. But your biggest concentrations are when they're staging in the spring before they're heading up to the high arctic or throughout lower parts of Canada. The spring is the best time to see the big numbers, at least in that area.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** So Zach, a lot of people feed birds, but they don't particularly like one or two of the species that come. Grackles are one of the things. My wife says, they all have babies, they all are hungry, feed them.

**Zach Hutchinson:** With something like a grackle, it's tough because they are considered a nuisance by many, but they are native species and they are protected. There's not much you can do against a grackle. Starlings, house sparrows, Eurasian collared doves, you can control them and there are humane ways to do it. But with native birds, you can't do as much against a native species and even though grackles, again, I know they're considered a nuisance, but they are native species and they are an important part of the ecosystem. If you will watch the grackles, you'll learn when they're spending most of their time around your feeders. If they're bullying your feeders, just stop feeding during those times. Every year, when their chicks hatch out, there's about a two-week period where their chicks will start to hatch out and maybe there's a lot of birds at your feeder. Just stop feeding during that time. The grackles will find somewhere new to go, and then after you've given enough time, start feeding again.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** So Zach, why do they always look up? There's always like two or three, [LAUGHTER] they're looking up in the [00:27:00] air, are they looking for predators?

**Zach Hutchinson:** Well, if it's in spring, their ritualistic mating display, a lot of it is their head is up in the air and they're singing, [LAUGHTER] and while it does not sound so melodic to us, to them, it's sweet, sweet music.

**Jeff Edwards:** It's very [inaudible] .

**Zach Hutchinson:** Yeah, exactly. I wasn't going to sing anything, but that's where I would have gone, had I. They're singing and they're displaying to each other, they're showing off their plumage. Really, they're forming pair bonds, and then they're copulating. So if it's in the spring, it's then. Also, you'll see birds do that a lot too, where especially birds that are prey to other species, they can see behind them sometimes when they lift their heads up like that, or in grackle's case, you think of how big their bill is. Sometimes they'll lift their head up slightly because they're trying to look at something because sometimes that big bill might get in the way a little bit. But if it's in the spring, usually, it's part of their pair bonding and their mating displays.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** All right. Blue jays, salted peanuts or unsalted?

**Zach Hutchinson:** Always unsalted. If birds want salt, they they know how to find it in other ways, but yeah, always unsalted. The Blue jay is interesting. If you'll allow me to go go down a rabbit hole for a moment.

**Jeff Edwards:** Certainly.

**Zach Hutchinsion:** Blue jays did not use to be in Wyoming. They were basically restricted to east of the Missouri river, basically until we started to plant enough trees along the riparian corridors across the Great Plains that they have used those as green highways to spread into the West. If you look at from the 1970s onward, Blue jays have expanded into the basin states simply because of the damming of rivers, allowing for cottonwood galleries to get really big and full. All the big cottonwoods are starting to age out, but all of that happening after the damming of rivers allowed Blue jays then to start to move West, and bird feeding has helped that as well because that provides a food source for them that even having those trees would not be enough, and so having bird feeders has, also, it's allowed Blue jays to expand Westward. Again, since the 1970s, we're getting reports now where they're residents in Jackson area now, where 10 years ago, a Blue jay in Jackson was a pretty big deal and now they're into Utah.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** There are so many different types of Blue jays depending upon the elevation, correct?

**Zach Hutchinson:** The Steller's jay is the mountain jay and then it is blue and [00:30:00] black. What I'm referring to as the Blue jay is the bird species that is named the Blue jay, and that is the one that it's got a lot of blue, and white, and gray, and some black markings on its wings and body. But yeah, there are different types of jays and yeah, if you go into the Intermountain West, if you're up in higher elevation, you're going to see the Steller's jay. But yeah, the bird that came from the East is the original Blue jay.

**Tom John McCreery:** Are they called camp robbers?

**Zach Hutchinson:** The term camp robber, I've heard it mostly used for Gray jays, which actually just had its name changed by the birding authorities that be. It is now officially called, in the bird world, the Canada jay. But I enjoyed the name Gray jay a little bit more, but yeah, if you see it, it is a jay, and it is gray, and it occurs in the US, even though its name got changed to Canada jay, but that is the one typically referred to as a camp robber, yeah.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Just 30 miles away in Guernsey, my brother had a powder blue Blue jay.

**Tom John McCreery:** A Steller jay.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Well, no, they were just a real powder blue. Even the top knot was blue.

**Tom John McCreery:** Cool.

**Zach Hutchinson:** If it had the crest area there, that really peaked crest and it was blue, that would be the Blue jay, the original Blue jay. The one that's just called a Blue jay. Now, if it didn't have that little pointy part on top of its head, the Mohawk, then it was likely a mountain Bluebird, which are very frequent around the Guernsey area. So it's, did it have that crest because if it didn't, it's most likely that mountain Bluebird.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Okay. Yeah. The Steller's, I like it the best because it has the biggest top knot a'goin, and it's just black. [LAUGHTER] Now, when I serve out peanuts, I try to break them in half because those Blue jays will put three or four of them in their mouth, they'll fly over a fence or fly 20 feet and bury it. Do they really remember where they bury them?

**Zach Hutchinson:** They remember a lot of the places. However, that's one of the ecological functions that corvids serve and the Blue jay in the East obviously would do that with native plants in the East, things like oak trees. They would maybe stash an acorn or something like that. In the West, a species that does it in the West, obviously, Steller's jays would do it to some extent, but also, the Clark's nutcracker, which is related to jays, the Clark's nutcracker takes pine seeds, it pulls them out of the cone and then it does that. It hides them, it caches them, and the ones they don't remember, then that is an ecological function of planting trees, something that humans just cannot replicate.

 There was a study done to show it is worth hundreds of millions of dollars in what would be human labor and costs to plant the number of trees that the Clark's nutcracker population plants in North America [00:33:00] because they do it so much better than we ever could and they do it for free. Again, it's all about the ecological function, and while we shouldn't need to put a value on it, there is always an actual tangible value to humans, whether we know it or not. Yeah, so the ones they don't remember, they turn into trees, hopefully.

**Jeff Edwards:** Social services.

**Zach Hutchinson:** Right. Exactly.

**Jeff Edwards:** Yeah. Gentleman, on that note, we're going to take a break and listen to our sponsors, and we'll be back in a few moments. [MUSIC]

**Female Narrator:** If you have an interest in gardening and want to help your community grow, the University of Wyoming Extension Master Gardener program is for you. A new 14-week training begins September 3rd. This session will be virtual, so anyone across the state is welcome to join, To sign up, visit the bitly link in this episode's description or visit wyoextension.org and click Programs, Master Gardener. Registration is $75. The Master Gardener program: learn, give, grow.

**Female Narrator:** [MUSIC] Looking for the best way to keep up with all the news from University of Wyoming Extension, the College of Agriculture, and Wyoming Ag Experiment Stations, the uwagnews.com website features real-time education, research, and extension events, and feature stories from across the state. Bookmark uwagnews.com today and subscribe to our monthly e-mail newsletter. uwagnews.com, growing people, knowledge, and communities.

**Jeff Edwards:** Everybody, we're back. This is Jeff Edwards and Jerry Erschabeck for the KGOS KERM Lawn and Garden Program. With us today is Tom McCreery and Zach Hutchinson. We're talking about birds, which is fascinating. We're glad that you guys are with us today and it's good stuff. But I do want to ask, so we're in the middle of the season right now, what birds should we be expecting to be seeing, or be around, or trying to keep around. Zach.

**Zach Hutchinsion:** It's interesting right now. It's the middle of the season for us. Birds don't follow the calendar, birds follow food availability and the amount of daylight. Actually for birds, fall migration has started. It's not fall, but birds are already moving south again. It's hard to picture that because we're used to believe change the birds move. But for so many species that nest in the Arctic Circle and even our local species, if they succeeded at nesting early, some of them boogie. If they failed at nesting, they split, they're gone. It's interesting because our local birds, the ones that succeeded most of them right now, we are in the time when chicks need a lot of food. Planting native plants is important because most of the food for chicks, even birds that eat a lot of seeds, chicks [00:36:00] need insects, and so native plants provide habitat for native insects and especially a lot of caterpillars. Birds right now, what you're seeing, you're not going to hear as much song because parents are busy shoving food into the mouths of babies and teaching them how to be birds.

 Right now, you've got birds that are early arrivers that have finished nesting and I've already seen several migratory species moving south. In fact, in June, we had a fun observation here in the Natrona County area, right on the Natrona County/Carbon County line of a bird that nest in the high Arctic, and it's a pelagic species, meaning it spends pretty much most of its life other than nesting out over the open ocean. It spends pretty much all of its time in big water. Yet one was in the Shirley Basin, and it's called a long-tailed jaeger. I would encourage you look up the range map of the long-tailed jaeger, it should not be anywhere near the Shirley Basin where there is zilch for water. There's maybe a cow pond and it was out there. It's getting to the point it's like, it was a younger bird, it wasn't a full adult, where it maybe went to the Arctic, tried to breed, failed, and then is heading to the Gulf of California.

 You're seeing a lot of that right now where you've got birds passing through, especially shorebirds, that they're on their way south, then are local birds, if they have babies, they're feeding them like crazy right now. That's the thing to look for, is look for all the hungry mouths that are just begging for food and the adults shoving the food into their mouths.

**Jeff Edwards:** Zach, yesterday I was working on a project out at the research station for UW and I happen to notice a robin that had a large insect in its mouth, and it was sitting on a high perch, but it looked frazzled, it looked like it had been run through a wringer. I'm guessing it was just taking a moment for itself before [LAUGHTER] it went back and shove that insect into its offspring. But it just needed to take a break. [LAUGHTER]

**Zach Hutchinsion:** Maybe that insect gave it a run for all it was worth. [LAUGHTER] That’s a big insect.

**Jeff Edwards:** There were feathers going everywhere. It was not well groomed, it was not well kept, it just needed some time to itself.

**Zach Hutchinsion:** Also what happens now, it's interesting. Birds, their bodies time out energy needs. As soon as their chicks get to the point where they don't need as much parental care, adults will do something called molting. Molting, it's a high consumptive energy usage. It uses a lot of energy and molting is when old feathers fall out, but more specifically, new feathers grow in. A feather falling out is not molting, new feathers growing in is. So maybe what you saw, is a bird that when they go through active molt, they look, I don't want to say hideous, but they look ridiculous. [00:39:00] All of these, a lot of them, they'll molt all of their head feathers in at once. Their head looks like something happened to them that you're having a bad feather day.

**Jeff Edwards:** That's exactly what it looked like.

**Zach Hutchinsion:** Yeah. As soon as the chicks are old enough to kick out of their lives, not just the nest because they'll stay with them for a short time after the nest but kick out of you're on your own, feed yourself which robins should be at that point by now, robins are a fairly early nestor for us, then the adults are like full steam ahead, I have to molt before I migrate.

**Jeff Edwards:** I think that's what was happening yesterday,.

**Tom John McCreery:** Zach, I watched a Nature on public television about the American crow and the raven. It was fascinating how they use tools, rocks to break open a number of things. But if you ever get a chance, watch that on nature. You can get it I'm sure on YouTube. It was just fascinating what blackbirds, I see a lot more of them in New Mexico and Texas than I do here. There's a lot around here, but they're very smart birds.

**Zach Hutchinsion:** Corvids are some of the most intelligent birds and a lot of people don't realize the jays are actually related to crows and ravens, they're all corvids are all in the same family. So jays, crows, ravens, nutcrackers, all related and they have extreme levels of intelligence, they use tools, but they also have an incredible capacity for memory where they can actually remember human faces.

**Tom John McCreery:** Yeah, it brought that up as well.

**Zach Hutchinsion:** Yeah. They harassed some crows with masks on and then they didn't hurt them or anything like that. They did some stuff that would aggravate the birds and then they would walk around with the masks on and the crows would come down and give them the business and then they would take the masks off and the crows would leave them alone.

**Tom John McCreery:** Yeah.

**Zach Hutchinsion:** Yeah. There's some examples too, and I don't know if there's a real sound explanation for it, but in many areas where people feed crows and ravens, crows and ravens will bring shiny objects to the feeders and leave them behind and something, it's like an exchange as if they recognize that humans like shiny things and that they appreciate the food. I don't know if there's a lot of evidence to say for certain that's what it is. But at this point, it's hard to be inside the mind of a bird to know what they're actually doing.

**Jeff Edwards:** Hey, that's just a barter system in use?

**Zach Hutchinsion:** Right. [LAUGHTER]

**Jeff Edwards:** I wish they're bringing something of value other than just tin foil though.

**Jeff Edwards:** A gold coin would be nice every now and then. [LAUGHTER]

**Jerry Erschabeck:** So Zach, when you say that the birds, do they look at food or do they see food, or do they smell food? Or all of the above?

**Zach Hutchinsion:** Depends on the bird however, and this is something that it's been a wives tale for some time [00:42:00] that if you touch your baby bird, the parents will abandon it because they'll smell you. Most birds do not smell. Virtually little to no smell capabilities. An exception for us in Wyoming is the turkey vulture. Turkey vultures actually have a large sensory organ that allows them to smell and they smell carcasses. That's what turkey vultures eat, they eat dead things. The rare occasion will a turkey vulture eat something live, but they love dead things and they can smell carcasses, but pretty much all other birds, they cannot smell at all. If you find a baby bird on the ground and you scoop it up and put it back in its nest, the parents will not abandon it. They might wait 20 minutes before they come back to the nest because they think a predator maybe was hanging around the nest because they can't tell the difference between a human and a predator, some humans are predators to birds. So they don't recognize that, but they do not smell. Most birds, they are identifying food by sight.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** I know when I fill my feeder, they're there within five minutes.

**Zach Hutchinsion:** Again, if you have a lid that makes a certain sound when you go to get your food out, they can hear it and they do remember those things. They remember, hey, I hear that sound, food is on its way.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** What about a water source for our birds? Tell me about that and how that- we have a small pond and it comes up onto a little bit of a rock and trickles down. But tell us how to best serve water to our birds.

**Zach Hutchinsion:** Fresh, and moving, and shallow is best. If you can't do that, then you want to make sure you're cleaning frequently with water and shallow, if you have something that's a little bit deeper, more than a few inches, put some rocks or something in your bird bath that give birds something to perch on and grab on to get out of the water source if they were to get stuck. A lot of ranchers are moving to these ramps that they put into their water tanks because birds will get into those big water tanks and they can't get out. They can't find a way to grab a hold of anything to get out. A lot of ranchers are putting bird ramps into their water tanks and it helps small mammals too, but it ensures then they have something to grab a hold of and crawl out of that water source. Do that for your bird bath. Give them something to sit on or make it so that it's very shallow, they don't need a deep thing of water, especially if you're keeping it fresh.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** So float a board?

**Zach Hutchinsion:** I wouldn't say float something. Again, I would say rocks, like little rocks that just give them something that they can grab a hold of and move themselves out of, floating is unstable. Give them something stable because like those ramps, they are secured and attached. It's something that they can grab a hold of and easily get their way out.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Let me ask and go the other way then. If you put a ramp in and you have fish in the bottom, isn't that an invitation for a raccoon?

**Zach Hutchinsion:** It could be. If you have a pond with fish, then maybe you don't want to go that [00:45:00] direction, maybe find a different direction. Although honestly, if the raccoon wants your fish, the raccoon is going to get fish. [OVERLAPPING]

**Jerry Erschabeck:** I have a friend that has a pond just north of Torrington here, up on the flat, and blue heron, they are really good fisher birds. They've cleaned them out three or four times. He says, "Okay, no more fish."

**Zach Hutchinsion:** [LAUGHTER] Yeah, the one thing when you make a small pond efficient, it's like shooting fish in a barrel for a great blue heron. [LAUGHTER] Literally, you put fish in a barrel, that great blue heron is going to take advantage of it. You could try to put up some bird safe, preventative, like a netting or something to prevent a great blue heron from getting to your fish. But animals are going to find a way a lot of the time.

**Jeff Edwards:** We had a pond where it was actually built underneath a pergola and covered on three sides and a heron got in and got a fish.

**Zach Hutchinsion:** Yeah. [LAUGHTER]

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Oh boy. Thank you!

**Jeff Edwards:** Yeah.

**Tom John McCreery:** Zach, during the eclipse, we were near Jay Em, Wyoming. I watched when the sun went behind the moon.

**Jeff Edwards:** Moon went in front of the sun.

**Tom John McCreery:** Right, the night hawks came out, they thought it was time to feed. It was right in the perfect area because about two minutes of the eclipse, where it was really dar. And also the barn swallows, and tree swallows, and banks swallows. They quit moving around, it kind of freaked the birds out, I think. I don't know.

**Zach Hutchinson:** There there were some studies done and of course, it's hard to study in a two-minute period, right? But they wanted to see how birds responded, and a lot of the preliminary results, yes, showed birds were responding as if it were becoming nighttime. Birds respond to light, as the light went away, a lot of birds thought "Hey, if I'm a singing bird, I should stop singing and go to roost." Birds that come out in the evenings, some of them were starting to become more active.

**Tom John McCreery:** Right.

**Zach Hutchinson:** [OVERLAPPING] I'm sure it was very confusing during that time for the birds.

**Tom John McCreery:** The other thing, I've got bird houses, and I can't seem to get the birds to nest inthem. What am I doing wrong?

**Zach Hutchinsion:** That's a tough one because a lot of times what it is too, it's just the habitat around your house. If you put a bluebird boxes in places where bluebirds aren't going to have a lot of food opportunities then they won't nest there, right? If there's not a place where they can feed nearby, then it's hard to get them to use it. So there's a lot of reasons birds might not nest in a bird box. It depends on what type of box you put out for what type of bird, but [00:48:00] a lot of times it's just, if there's more opportunities for nesting in prime areas, they're going to choose those first, [OVERLAPPING] and so making a yard as hospitable to a bird like a bluebird that does not eat seeds.

 So having feeders and a bird box that won't attract a bluebird because they don't need seed. They eat insects, they're insects and berry eaters. If you want blue birds well then you've got to start planting plants that have a lot of insect load, meaning a lot of insects are attracted to those plants, caterpillars, things like that, and then maybe a late seasoned berry that would also be beneficial to the blue birds as well. It's making the area around the box just as welcoming as the box itself, because if it's not hospitable to that bird species, I mean, they wouldn't want to live there.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** [OVERLAPPING] Isn't it true also the whole size will attract a certain number of birds, also if you have a perch or no perch?

**Zach Hutchinson:** Yeah, so the bluebird boxes, usually they say no perch for bluebird boxes. But a bluebird hole will attract bluebirds, tree swallows, house sparrows will occasionally use them as well, so you have to watch that. If a house sparrow does use it, you are allowed to remove the house sparrow nesting material and eggs. Now, if a tree swallow uses it and you wanted blue birds, you can't remove those eggs. That's a native species and that's a major no-no. If something uses it, that's a native species, you can't take them out, even though it's your box, you can't interfere with it but if it's a house sparrow, absolutely, you can take that out. The whole size will determine what you attract. A smaller hole size would maybe encouraged chikadees and house wrens, and there's plans all over the internet for the proper ways to build a box for a certain species. But yeah, the hole size will determine what species can use your box.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** And don't you want to clean that out on a yearly basis or once a bird is in there, it's in there for keep?

**Zach Hutchinsion:** You would want to clean it out very late in season, probably, well after the first freezes because there's a couple of things, some birds will double nest. They'll fit two nesting cycles into a single season. You'll want to do it late enough that you don't accidentally disturb a bird that's nesting still. Also parasites. One of the reasons you want to clean them out is because birds have parasites specific to birds. If you clean it out, you don't have to worry, they won't get on you, they are adapted to feeding on birds. So if you clean out the nest box they won't bother you, they might crawl on you, but they're not going to suck on you or anything like that. Wait until it's cold enough though so that when you pull all that nesting material out, it kills those parasites.

**Jeff Edwards:** Any more questions?

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Okay, I'll start. I think we tried to tap into you as much as we can with [OVERLAPPING]

**Jeff Edwards:** Great information.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Our limited knowledge, yes.

**Jeff Edwards:** Tom, did you have anymore questions you'd like to ask [00:51:00] Zach while he's here?

**Tom John McCreery:** This Pocket Guide has helped me a lot and I just want to reiterate that it's fantastic and shows most the birds in Wyoming. We have cardinals that come through here occasionally, but not very often. Most of them are near Omaha, my son lives there. The cardinals are awesome, I like their song and they're beautiful bird, and once in a while we will get one here.

**Zach Hutchinsion:** Yeah, Torrington and Goshen County sees cardinals almost annually and again, usually feeders. Cardinals another one where people feeding and the planting of trees throughout the great plains where historically there were not had been as many trees. [BACKGROUND] All has helped things like the cardinal and jay to expand it, so yeah, cardinals occasionally will peak into Goshen County there. There was actually one, I think, seen in Torrington just a few weeks ago and it's not common, but it does happen.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Yeah. [OVERLAPPING]. Also, storms also blow in different birds, correct?

**Zach Hutchinson:** Absolutely. There was a species seen two years ago in Wyoming. The farthest northern parts of its range are southern Mexico, and one showed up in Wyoming and there was a tropical depression on the Pacific side, and it came up kind of on to the western side of Mexico there, and the remnants of it came up through the western parts of the United States, and so there's some thought that was a fourth tailed flycatcher. There were some thoughts that it got caught up in some winds and it just let the winds carry it, and it showed up in Wyoming. So yes, storms they'll drop crazy birds in the middle of Tennessee for instance, I mean, you'll see a bird that belongs out on the open ocean has no business being in Tennessee, and all of a sudden, there you go, you've got a tropic bird in the middle of the Smoky Mountains or something. You'll see crazy observations after big storms move through an area.

**Jeff Edwards:** So if you come across something and you think, what is that? [LAUGHTER] Take a picture of it. Zach, do you get requests to identify things?

**Zach Hutchinson:** I do. I get e-mails from people with recorded bird song and I try my best. The sound quality is always a struggle, but I get requests like that. I'll have people just describe a bird to me and then hope I can figure it out. But problem with describing a bird between two people is the way I describe something and the way you describe something might be two very different descriptions, and so that can be a struggle at times, but always try to work through it. That's part of my job, and I actually enjoy talking to those people, explaining and helping them again learn about the place they live.

**Jeff Edwards:** Do you have contact information that you'd be willing to share on the radio program?

**Zach Hutchinson:** Absolutely. If you have bird questions, bird thoughts, want to learn more about Audubon and what we do. You can email me at [00:54:00] zach.hutchinson@audubon.org, or you can visit our site and you can find my information on our website, which is Rockies.Audubon.org.

**Jeff Edwards:** Perfect. Very good. Thank you very much for being here today, we appreciate your your knowledge and everything you're willing to share with us. Tom.

**Zach Hutchinson:** Thank you for having me.

**Tom John McCreery:** Zach. It was awesome. I loved it. Thank you.

**Jeff Edwards:** We're happy to have you as a guest as well, Tom. I think you'll be filling in for me in a couple of weeks. [LAUGHTER]

**Tom John McCreery:** That'll be good, I enjoyed this a lot.

**Jeff Edwards:** This was just prep for that. Jerry, thank you very much again as always, for being here.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Zach, thank you. Hopefully, you can come back and play with us again.

**Zach Hutchinson:** It was a lot of fun, yeah, absolutely.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** All right, great.

**Jeff Edwards:** All right. Perfect. Thank you all and you'll be hearing from us next week.

**Female Narrator:** [MUSIC] You've been listening to Lawn and Garden with University of Wyoming Extension Specialist Jeff Edwards. Presented by University of Wyoming Extension: growing people, knowledge and communities.