

Five ways to boost bird enjoyment in your own backyard

By Sherry Lucas

When pandemic shelter-at-home orders left many stuck at the house last spring, who was still on the move? Birds.

Migrating beauties and backyard residents were about the only ones swooping by for a visit, and folks responded accordingly. Trail use at the Clinton Community Nature Center (CCNC) was up, even during the lockdown, says Audrey Harrison, CCNC board president.

"I go out there to walk and run in that neighborhood, and I have noticed people birdwatching and walking the trails with binoculars."

Bird-watching has soared nationwide during the pandemic. Apps such as eBird, to help keep a checklist of sightings, and Merlin Bird ID, with its info-packed field guide, can be a big help supporting the newfound passion.

Anytime is a good time to look for birds. But, "Typically, the best time is in the morning or the evening," says Adam Rohnke of Clinton,

a wildlife biologist and an ornithologist by training who works with Central Mississippi Research and Extension in Raymond. Summers in Mississippi, "at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, nobody wants to be out there, including birds."

Because the watch targets are usually small and skittish, the first order of business is to make buddies with a pair of binoculars. Binocular problems are more often due to user error than faulty equipment, so when experiencing trouble, frustration or focus issues, consult a fellow birder or even a YouTube video for adjustment tips.

Rohnke suggests these five birds (not standard run-of-the-mill birds but often common backyard ones) to watch for, listen for and try to attract this summer:

Eastern Towhee — The robust, robin-sized ground-dweller, found from the coast to the hills, is often heard more than seen, Rohnke says. Listen for a two-part call note "chewink" or the three-part up-swinging whistle of "Drink your tea" as the birds rummage through leaves while foraging in thickets and bushes.

The striking male has a jet-black head, throat, wings and tail, and dark-orange sides and white belly. Females and juveniles present the same pattern, but with chestnut-brown instead of black. Their diet consists of native seeds, fruit, buds, insects and crustaceans.

Towhees prefer cover and forage under short bushes like azaleas and wax myrtles. They'll visit feeder stations where there are low platform feeders and scratch along the periphery of the feeding area.

Ruby-throated hummingbird

The little ruby and emerald migratory visitor, a mark of summer, measures about the length of an adult human thumb, Rohnke says. Adult males have a metallic green back and sides with a deep ruby throat, while females and juveniles are similarly colored but lack that ruby throat. Nectar is a primary food source, but ruby-throats also prey upon insects and spiders caught in mid-air or extracted from webs. Listen for their high-speed chipping vocalization, particularly around feeders.

A hummingbird feeder filled with one part sugar to four parts water (boil, then cool, no red dye needed) is a good way to attract them, and so is providing plants they'd love to visit, such as coral honeysuckle, salvias, red buckeyes and more.

Red-headed Woodpecker

The deep-red head, white chest and belly, and bluish-black back, tail and wings, with white wing patches, make this beaut a study in contrasts.

Appearances don't differ between males and females, and juveniles

have a mottled grayish-brown head, back and wings with a lightly streaked belly and broken white wing patches. Hear them drumming on trees, utility poles, aluminum gutters and even metal lawn art. They nest in cavities, including utility poles and dead trees, and sometimes human structures.

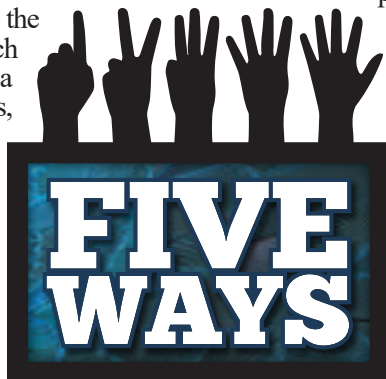
Maintaining any dead tree in the yard, safely away from structures or walkways, can attract them.

White-eyed Vireo — Small and constantly on the move in shrubs and trees of the mid-level canopy, the songbird's appearance is a contrast of overall washed yellow with gray atop its head and nape, white chest, charcoal grayish black wings and two creamy-white wing bars. It's aptly named for its bright-white iris, surrounded by yellow feathers often referred to as "spectacles," Rohnke says. Juvenile birds lack the white iris and are duller overall.

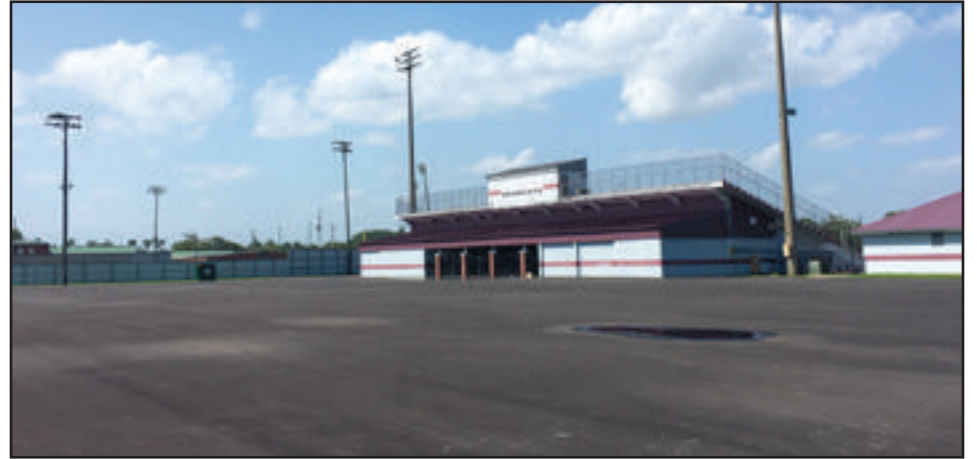
Shrubby hedgerows under mid-canopy hardwoods draw these birds, which prefer to forage and call from cover.

House Finch — Originally a western U.S. species, the House Finch has become a Mississippi resident since the 1980s and is well-adapted to living among humans. The sparrow-sized bird has brown feathers across the majority of its body, with broken dark brown streaks down the chest and belly. The male has a rosy red on the head and breast that slowly fades down the body — a coloration the females and juveniles lack.

They're easily enticed to hopper, window and tube-style feeders featuring black oil sunflower seeds and finch seed mixes.



Long Beach High students applaud finish of paved parking lot



Special to The Long Beach Breeze

The Long Beach High School parking lot is newly paved and ready for students to return for the 2020-21 school year.

By Andy Kanengiser

Long Beach High students love their newly paved parking lot on their Gulf Coast campus.

In early summer, the parking lot's new look will be a welcome sight for Long Beach students when the 2020-21 school year opens August 6.

"Constant flooding and the faded designated parking spots in the parking lots at LBHS has been an issue for many years," says incoming senior Sarah Simpson. "Some days, it felt as if I should have kayaked to school instead of driven due to the high water line."



Sarah Simpson

The school yearbook editor and a Lady Bearcats volleyball player, Simpson sees the parking lot as symbolic of a wonderful partnership.

"I am extremely grateful and appreciative for all the things the City of Long Beach does for its residents and the Long Beach School District," Simpson added.

It's really part of a two-part improvement of facilities on the campus at 300 East Old Pass Road. A new multi-million dollar Long Beach High is under construction, as well.

Simpson thanks city voters for approving the construction of the new school that nears the finish line.

"It will provide an improved learning environment for future generations," says Simpson, 17, a member of the Class of 2021.

Classmate Sami Gundlach says she is equally excited about the high school paving project in her hometown. The new parking lot enhances a new high school to replace one built in the late 1950s.



Sami Gundlach

"I have seen how invested both the city and school district are working together to make these changes happen," Gundlach says.

She's active on her campus and in the city, serving on the Long Beach

Mayor's City Youth Council. In addition to membership in the Beta Club, the Lady Bearcats swim team and golf squad, Gundlach excels as an honors student.

"We are grateful that these changes and upgrades will benefit both present and future students in the City of Long Beach," Gundlach said.

The repaving of the Long Beach High parking lot added to a series of newly paved roads in the Harrison County community earlier this year. The total price tag of the projects was \$1 million, with funds coming from the state.

Whether it is Long Beach Superintendent Dr. Jay Smith, Mayor George L. Bass, or just folks shopping at businesses along Jeff Davis Avenue, people applaud the paving projects.

Student Body President Lauren Bennett and parents like Dom Fimiano are delighted to see the parking lot done in time for classes reopening in August.

"I think all LBHS students can agree we hated for it to rain," Bennett said. "We would have to park in huge puddles and trudge through water at our ankles, and it was just a bad way to start the day."

A Lady Bearcats soccer player, Bennett is thankful city leaders endorsed the project with the support of the school board.

The parking lot extends to the Bearcats football stadium and the school's baseball field. The LBSD is responsible for painting parking lot lines.

The new parking lot will alleviate longstanding drainage issues, Dom Fimiano says.

The Long Beach High improvements combine with new safety procedures for students and employees amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Both are a big plus, he said.

Fimiano, whose daughter Sophia, 17, is a Lady Bearcats soccer standout, commends school district leaders. "I have been pleased with LBSD officials managing the safety of the students, staff and community."