

Wings Over Georgia

A Newsletter about Birds and Butterflies for the Members of
The Garden Club of Georgia, Inc.

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Issue 1

Occasionally, I find it helpful to clean out my "nest". Surely you have a nest, too, and understand what I mean. Well I found two articles from The Backyard Bird Newsletter, Winter 2007, that I had torn out and put in my nest to share with you even before I had been offered this chairmanship but not before I had the idea of a newsletter.

The first article came under the name "Fact or Fiction" by Kevin J. Cook. You're getting it in its entirety.

BLUEBIRD FEATHERS, THE CLAIM GOES, AREN'T REALLY BLUE.

But if not, how can the birds look so blue? Several factors determine feather color, genetics and diet being two obvious influences. Less obviously, feather age matters. Feathers newly grown consequent to molt may become duller or brighter from normal every-day abrasion. Older feathers may appear paler from daily exposure to sunlight. Feather color is either chemical or structural. Chemical color originates from pigments called "biochromes" embedded within the feathers. These biochromes can be extracted from the feathers and studied.

Structural color has no chemical origin but owes to the physical structure – the "architecture" – of the feather. Certain wavelengths of light are absorbed by the feather and so go unseen. Other wavelengths of light are scattered or reflected, and these get seen.

Bluebird feathers have no blue biochromes. Instead, it is their structural make-up that allows them to reflect blue light, which makes that color visible to the human eye. So, indeed, a bluebird feather looks blue but is not.



Also from *The Backyard Bird Newsletter, Winter 2007*, was an article by Lynn Hassler that I found interesting. I want to share some of it with you and so am lifting several paragraphs of interest.

The Pleasing Pomegranate

There are many plants that attract humans as well as birds, and the flavorful pomegranate (*Punica granatum*) is one of them. This plant has been grown for so long that no one is quite sure where it came from – possibly Afghanistan; others think Persia(Iran) or India. In any case, the plant apparently reached the Middle East and Egypt long before Roman times and spread from there to the rest of the Mediterranean region. Pomegranates were brought to the New World by the Spanish and planted by padres in mission gardens in Mexico and the American Southwest. The “pome” in the common name refers to the fleshy fruits, and “granite” is from the Latin *granatum* meaning many seeded.

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It's easy to see why pomegranates have been popular with people throughout the centuries. All parts of the plant have been utilized for medicinal purposes and also furnish tannin for curing leather. The flowers and fruits yield dyes for textiles, and leaves steeped in vinegar were used to make ink. Fruits were carried by dessert caravans for the sake of their thirst-quenching juice. More recently, pomegranate juice has been touted as an effective antioxidant. The bright sweet sweet-tart seeds can be chewed or used to make delicious jelly; they also make a fine addition to salads. Grenadine, a thick sweet syrup used for flavoring beverages, is made from the fruit of this plant.

Pomegranates are also downright handsome plants, demanding our attention in three of four seasons. The small glossy leaves are bronze colored in spring, bright green in summer, and golden in fall. In spring and early summer blossoms blaze. Fiery-orange in color, the funnel-shaped flowers attract hummingbirds. The blooms are followed by spunky, reddish-brown fruits about soft-ball size. When the fruits ripen and split, a plethora of seeds is revealed – treasures sought out by many kinds of birds. These small trees offer perching sights as well as shelter and cover in any season.

Pomegranates are tough plants that demand plenty of sunshine but are not particular about soils. They grow at a slow to moderate rate to 12- 20 feet high and 10-15 feet wide, and are useful as specimen trees or for a shrub border or hedge. They are easily grown in Zones 8 – 10. “Wonderful” is the most common fruiting variety.



Pomegranate tree



Pomegranate fruit

Both images from www.oakcreekorchards.com

Many of you were probably dismayed if, like my goldfinch feeders, your goldfinch feeders were abandoned last spring. I was to introduce Jerry Hightower at a luncheon and a friend sent me an article about him that was in the Atlanta paper. I was far more interested in the last part of Charles Seabrook’s column. After all, Jerry had sent me a bio!

*From the Sunday Living Section of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution
Sunday, May 18, 2008
Wild Georgia by Charles Seabrook*

“Missing Goldfinches”

We get several notes this time of year from folks worried because American goldfinches have suddenly stopped coming to their feeders. Ellis Hodges of north Cobb County writes: “We had a large flock of goldfinches all winter, and all of a sudden they all disappeared.”

As the breeding season approaches and the males start taking on the vivid yellow plumage of summer, the goldfinch flocks so much in evidence in winter and early spring break up by late April and seemingly disappear. Until early fall, only scattered pairs or single birds will most likely be seen. Also says birder Lisa Hurt of the Atlanta Audubon Society, there’s a lot of wild food available right now and the birds might prefer that over feeder food. In addition, the goldfinch is a short distance migrant, and many of them may be heading to summer grounds elsewhere.

By late autumn, though, feeders should be busy again with goldfinches.



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Many of you may know Shirley Lewis, an Emeritus State Board Member who lives in Savannah. Her friend, Fritz Clarke, who is on Skidaway Island sent her some pictures of beautiful butterflies that he had seen on walks and these pictures that he took on his patio. I think that you will agree with me that he is a wonderful photographer! I appreciate his letting me use the pictures.



Giant swallowtail egg on lime tree on Fritz Clarke's patio.



First instar - Giant swallowtail



Giant swallowtail on lime tree on Fritz Clarke's patio

We have another photographer who graciously said that I could use some of his pictures - Gene Harper, husband of the immediate past president of GCG, Dollie Harper. Gene is an organic gardener and this summer, he has had a bumper crop of butterflies, caterpillars, and chrysalises.



Black swallowtail chrysalis



Black swallowtail caterpillar on fennel



Black female form of Tiger swallowtail

Hope that you've enjoyed the pictures of these two talented photographers. Sorry that this issue was not more "newsy" but I've had a rather stressful summer and have not had as much time to devote to it as I would have liked.

Suzanne

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