



MN Backyard Birds owner, Judd Brink, developed his passion for birding when he was young and lived near a major migration flyway.

Birdman JUDD BRINK

Text and Photography by Kaye Dondelinger

The birds start gathering near the feeders the minute Judd Brink arrives. Sometimes they land on the feeders to start dining while he is filling them and a bird eating from his hand is not an uncommon sight.

Brink has a passion for bird watching and feeding. He developed a special interest in birds as a young man, which led him to the unique business he owns and operates today—MN Backyard Birds.

He grew up near the Mississippi River in Brooklyn Park—one of the migration flyways for many bird species. Much of his after-school time was spent observing bird species and jotting down those observations in a journal. He set up feeding stations and also planted native trees and shrubs that provided cover, shel-

ter, and food for the birds and wildlife. His family's backyard shed became a bird-watching blind, equipped with a heater and Plexiglas window.

"I taught myself," says Brink. His summers as a teenager were spent working as a naturalist at suburban nature centers near his home. The late Walter Breckenridge, a wildlife artist and neighbor, greatly inspired Brink. Breckenridge made a name for himself as curator at the Bell Museum of Natural History and for his dioramas enriched by the birder's vision.

Following a two-year degree from the natural resources program at Central Lakes College and a bachelor's degree from Northland College in Ashland, Wisconsin, Brink worked for five years for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S.

"One of the highlights of our weekends is sitting in our home and watching our bird feeders filled with action. As the seasons change, so do our avian visitors. Several kinds of woodpeckers, warblers, redpolls, orioles, grosbeaks, et. al. have feasted on the cuisine provided by MN Backyard Birds. This is one area where we feel the joy is worth the cost."

—Ross & Bridget Lein, Lougee Lake

Geological Survey as a wildlife technician. Aside from leading tours six days a week, Brink enjoyed a stretch of time that really connected him with scientific bird watching. Projects ranged from breeding bird surveys to monitoring tern populations on Mille Lacs Lake. He also designed feeding stations for the visitor's center at the Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge in McGregor, Minnesota. A highlight in Brink's career was his participation in an endangered species recovery project in Michigan to find and observe the rare songbird, the Kirtland warbler.

Judd Brink felt there was more in his life to explore. His job as a wildlife technician had served him well, but he had a dream. With experience in both natural resources projects and working in a retail bird store, Brink decided to move back to the Brainerd lakes area and develop his own business. His hobby and passion of twenty-plus years took flight in 2007 with the opening of MN Backyard Birds.

MN Backyard Birds is a unique business that offers a complimentary "backyard consultation" for those who are interested in attracting and viewing more birds

through birdsourcing. Brink installs and maintains bird-feeding stations for residential as well as commercial customers in the area. He has special packages for resort guests. Feeders are filled and cleaned weekly. Using fresh bird seed with regular maintenance of feeders can greatly increase the number and variety of colorful songbirds. "I provide the most 'active and attractive' feeders in this area," he says.

Brink is a longstanding member of Project Feeder Watch through the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, a citizen science project that uses data collected by people from all parts of the country each fall and winter to determine bird population and distribution. Bird watching is the second largest recreational hobby in the United States, and in Minnesota, bird watchers outnumber hunters and fishermen combined.

"Judd does a great job keeping the birdfeeders full of seed at Bethany. The residents enjoy watching the many varieties of birds at the feeders throughout the year."

—Tina Dunlap,
Good Samaritan Society/Bethany

Brink offers guided bird-watching tours. His tours lead to sightings the casual observer may rarely discover. Brink has guided for the past five years at Minnesota bird-watching festivals and events, held each fall and spring during peak migration periods. This is a good time to learn from a guide. 📍

For more information, contact Judd Brink at 218.838.4784 or visit: www.mnbackyardbirds.com.