



# Bluebird Monitor

OBS encourages good stewardship  
by **Monitoring** our Trails

Spring 2012



## Mission Statement

The Ohio Bluebird Society was formed in 1987 to support the return and the perpetuation of the Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) and other native cavity nesting birds in Ohio. To this end, the Ohio Bluebird Society will strive for the best methods to use, conserve and create habitat for the protection of these species.

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## Deadline for Submitting Articles:

- Spring Issue - February 1
- Summer Issue - May 1
- Fall Issue - August 1
- Winter Issue - November 1

## 2012 Annual Educational Conference

By Marcella Hawkins



Thank you to everyone who attended the 2012 conference at the Arden Shisler Conference Center in Wooster on February 25. With attendance around 250, you helped make this the biggest and best ever! We were **Celebrating Things... with Wings – Birds, Bats, Butterflies and Bees**. All the speakers were informative and entertaining – we even got to witness Mel Bolt's first PowerPoint presentation (which went very well.) As requested, attendees brought their change to donate to OBS – which totaled \$95.16. We raised \$1,132 in our raffle thanks to the many donated items and we signed up 14 new members.

There was a nest box building activity for the youth in attendance. The Medina Raptor Center brought four of their raptors to share with us. With each new bird that was taken from its cage, you could hear the crowd utter sounds of delight.

We have already started on next year's conference which will be held on Saturday, February 23, 2013 at the Arden Shisler Conference Center in Wooster. One of the speakers will be Greg Miller, whose story about his birding obsession was made into a movie – The Big Year.

I want to personally thank Janice Petko for taking so many good pictures for us at the conference. Some of them will be posted on our Facebook page soon.

*Now, let the nesting begin!*



Blue Feather Award Winners Present  
Mel Bolt, Jean Rutan, Darlene Sillick  
and Dick Tuttle



Wildlife Conservation Award Winners Present – Dick Tuttle and Dick Phillips

*Continued on Page 2*

# Photos from the Conference

## The Speakers



*Mel Bolt – Changing Behavior of Bluebirds*



*Chuck Jakubchak - Beautiful Birds*



*Dr. James Tew - Bees and Bluebirds – Friends, Foes or Both*



*Don Plant – Bats... A Better Understanding*



*Lynda Price – Butterflies as Beautiful as Bluebirds*



*Annette Piechowski – Cloud (leucistic Red-Tailed Hawk)*



*Toni McNamara with Kestrel*



*New Member Diane Gosser with Fred Glock (Interim Membership Director) and Nancy Adams – our new Membership Director*



*L-R Lisa Wendt and Mary Warren accepting the Blue Feather Award on behalf of Dean Sheldon – presented by Dick Tuttle*



*Dick Tuttle present Wildlife Conservation Award to Ken Cochran of the Secret Arboretum (Wooster)*



*Pat Dutton, Renee Spencer and Linda Lang Selling Raffle Tickets*



*OBS Life Members in Attendance  
Front – Mel Bolt, Mary Baxter, Darlene Sillick, Chris McQuillen, Nina and Allen Bower  
Back – Don and Diana Plant, Paula Ziebarth, Dick Tuttle, Marcella Hawkins and Peggy Garnes*



*Mel Bolt – nest box construction for youth*



*Shea Finger with the Bat Dog*



# Out of the Box

## Prothonotary Warbler Migration

By Chuck Jakubchak



Winter is coming to an end and the transition to Spring usually results in unpredictable weather and a dreariness that fatigues our spirit. If you think the next couple of months will be tough to endure, let's look at what will transpire with prothonotary warblers. Thanks to Don and Lillian Stokes, authors of

Field Guide to Warblers (Little Brown and Company, 2004), we are able to generally understand the Spring migration movements of prothonotary warblers, Ohio's only cavity nesting warbler and the only warbler covered by the OBS mission statement.

You may already know that prothonotary warblers arrive in Ohio in early May, but you probably did not realize that they leave their wintering grounds in Central America during the first half of March, just a few weeks following the annual Ohio Bluebird Society Conference in Wooster. When conditions are just right, these cavity nesting warblers cross the Gulf of Mexico during an evening flight that lasts at least 15 consecutive hours and they rely on a friendly breeze along with a clear, starlit sky to aid their navigation. Upon landing in the Gulf Coast region of the United States just after St. Patrick's Day (March 17th), they immediately replenish their fat reserves and prepare for the next leg of their northward journey. By April Fool's Day our prothonotaries arrive in

central Alabama or Georgia and once again are required to find and consume an ample supply of protein-rich insects to rebuild and fuel their already weary muscles. As we celebrate Passover or Easter (April 7th & 8th), the same prothonotary warblers will reach the southern border of Tennessee, briefly stopping to rest and



Photo by Jeanne Jakubchak

replenish. At this point they have been traveling for 3 weeks but their instincts tell them that their northward journey must continue and the internal motivation of these ½ ounce creatures exceeds our comprehension.

During the latter part of April the prothonotary warblers work their way up through Tennessee and into northern Kentucky, preparing for their final push into our area. Just after May Day the warblers enter Ohio and the last leg of a journey that consumed roughly 50 days and 2,000 miles is complete. Some of the birds, but not all, successfully endure the rigors of flight, avoid hungry predators along the way and locate nutritional food in the unfamiliar areas where they forage. While we enjoy the holidays, relax on Spring break and celebrate other festive occasions, prothonotary warblers are battling the elements in the name of species preservation.

The struggles for migrating birds do not end when they arrive in Ohio. Obstacles such as weather (our infamous Ohio cold snaps for example), selecting a worthy mate, obtaining a suitable nesting site and locating a sufficient supply of food will further challenge this species once they are here. The feat of migration and acclimating to a dramatically different climate is unlike anything that we experience during our lives and may be one of the reasons we are so intrigued by birds.

Thankfully, the OBS members will assist these birds by installing secure nesting boxes that increase the likelihood that the birds will successfully reproduce, allowing future generations of Ohioans to enjoy and benefit from this species. Without the assistance of organizations like the OBS and the diligent work of many individuals, prothonotary warbler populations would not be as robust. Whether you maintain a trail for prothonotary warblers or simply support the OBS, please continue your efforts to help the birds because in a few short months, prothonotary warblers will return to Central America, consuming another 50 days of their brief life span and churn through another 2000 miles. They will take all of the help we can provide.



# Ask Madame Wingnut

## House Wren Management

by Paula Ziebarth

Spring! Is it finally time to start monitoring nestboxes again?! My Eastern Bluebirds overwintered with me in my backyard as they always do here in central Ohio. They get an early start on nest building in my yard and I usually have a first clutch of eggs by the first or second week of April. I always hope nestlings hatch before the end of April because a small brown avian threat is headed my way: the House Wren. If I have eggs or young nestlings less than a week old when he migrates back, I put a House Wren Guard on the nestbox before he arrives if possible. For those unfamiliar with House Wrens, you may ask, “What is a House Wren and why on earth should I guard against it?”



*This house was for WRENt in 2010.*

The House Wren is a “little brown bird” that is a native cavity nester. The voluminous, bubbly song that emanates from this little brown vessel is an amazing thing and beautiful to hear... once... or twice. From a gardener’s perspective, this little bird has many redeeming qualities. My father had the practice of placing houses for House Wrens right next to his vegetable gardens. Their voracious appetite for garden insect pests worked well for him. From the perspective of someone wishing to house other

native cavity nesting birds, however, the House Wren is a pariah.

When the male House Wren migrates back to Ohio in April (generally the third week of April in the WingNut backyard), he has the nasty habit of entering cavities he finds in “his” territory and discards nest material, eggs and/or small nestlings he finds there. He pierces eggs with his sharp beak and tosses them out. You can usually tell the difference between House Wren egg depredation and House Sparrow egg depredation by the small neat round hole pierced in the egg by the pointy House Wren beak. After the male House Wren removes the eggs, and often nesting material, from “his” prospective nesting cavities, he proceeds to add sticks to the bottom of the box. He will do this in multiple boxes and is one busy hombre. He is readying his territory for his anticipated mate and she will choose which nestbox or cavity she wishes to start their family in. Because the couple can only use one nestbox, the stick start nests are often called “dummy” nests as they are not active nests. The female chooses the site she finds most desirable and finishes the nest, adding more sticks, usually up to the ceiling. She then finishes the nest with a grass cup placed in back of the box and begins laying her clutch of 3 – 10 eggs. In Ohio, they usually have 2 broods per season.

Managing individual nestboxes and nestbox trails to diminish or eliminate House Wren depredation of other cavity nesters is tricky. They are native birds so it is illegal to trap or harm them. It is also illegal to remove eggs or active nests. You can dissuade them, however, and there are a number of things that work, some better than others. Why not just let them have a box, hoping they will leave other birds alone? Many who have tried this approach

have reported that it encourages more House Wren nestings in the future, probably due to site fidelity of parent birds and their young. As we know with our Eastern Bluebirds, if birds are successful, they will nest with us again and again.

*The best strategies I know to dissuade House Wrens using boxes and depredate other native cavity nesters are:*

- 1) Site nestboxes outside of House Wren habitat.
- 2) Install House Wren Guards on boxes that have Eastern Bluebird (or other native bird) eggs or young nestlings.
- 3) Pair boxes for Tree Swallows and Eastern Bluebirds.
- 4) Remove “dummy” nests.
- 5) Block off nestboxes that House Wrens continue to attempt nest starts in.



2 days old



6 days old

**1) Site Nestboxes Outside of House Wren Habitat**

This is my preferred management scheme. Almost all of my trail boxes are sited this way so House Wrens are not an issue there. For most backyard Bluebirders, this is impossible because most residential landscapes contain bushes, brushy areas and stands of trees that place them in House Wren habitat. These little birds like to approach their nesting site using cover and stealth. To be outside of their nesting habitat, the nestbox must be placed at least 40 yards (that is 120 feet folks!) from the edge of any such areas. If you find your trail

or yard in House Wren habitat, you can mitigate the desirability of a box by placing it in the most open area of your yard or as far from wood edge as possible. Such placement also helps parent birds of more desirable species defend their box from marauding House Wrens as they travel through open air in marginal habitat.

**2) Install House Wren Guards**

I have received quite a few letters asking about House Wren Guards. House Wren Guards were developed by Bob Orthweinn. My mentor, Darlene Sillick, was a student of Bob's and has used them extensively over the years. She introduced me to the concept. The House Wren Guards I use are not available commercially, but rather fabricated from scrap wood or even cardboard cracker boxes. Because you make these yourself, you can fabricate a guard that will work on virtually any style of nestbox.

House Wren Guards are temporarily installed on a nestbox to extend from the front roof edge and down to just cover the House Wren's view of the entry hole. It is very important that you leave enough room between the front of the box face and the House Wren Guard to make sure the bird using the nestbox can easily gain access to their nest. A distance of 2.5 to 3 inches works nicely. More recent designs have included “sides” on the guards and I like these better. The original theory is that the House Wren Guard blocks the view of the hole from the bird so he searches elsewhere for a nest site. I think that

*Continued on Page 6*

may be true, but it is also very possible that the difficulty putting sticks in the box with the guard on is the deterrent; this difficulty is compounded when you add sides. Either way, it is a nice deterrent and often works to keep House Wrens out of an active Eastern Bluebird or other native nester box. A nice discussion and pictures of House Wren Guards can be found on the Sialis website: <http://www.sialis.org/wrens.htm>



*7 days old*

An interesting and very effective House Wren Guard can be made from a Cheezit box. Other similar type boxes work fine also. The Cheezit design, along with pictures and other design ideas, are described very well on the Bluebird Nut Café forum: <http://bluebirdnutcafe.yuku.com/> You may have to join forum to view it. I have fashioned quick guards for neighbors using cereal boxes similar to this and thumbtacking guard to the box. The nice thing about this design is it does have sides, which I prefer.

The timing of House Wren Guard installation and removal is important. Guard should be installed after Eastern Bluebird (or other native cavity nester) lays their first egg. When installing guard during egg laying, I always check box day or two after guard installation to make sure female was able to circumvent the guard and continue laying her clutch. If you wait until clutch is completed to install guard, it is very important that you take the time to sit back and observe, making sure female is able to get around guard to incubate her clutch. After she

braves past it the first time, everything is fine. Removing the House Wren Guard is a good idea when nestlings are a little over a week old. Nestlings are too big for House Wrens to chuck out at this stage and the guard removal facilitates easier parental care of young and easier fledging when the time comes.

### ***3) Pair Boxes for Tree Swallows and Eastern Bluebirds***

Pairing boxes 12 to 15 feet apart is a familiar management practice to accommodate nesting pairs of Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows. From my field observations, I believe Tree Swallows are the better of the two species when it comes to chasing House Wrens away from nestbox stations. Their more agile flight closely matches the stealthy approach of the House Wren and they seem better able to intercept and stop marauding House Wrens than Eastern Bluebirds are. This is especially apparent in Tree Swallow grids where we space nestboxes 22 to 25 yards apart to house a lot of Tree Swallows in an area. On the edges of the grids, we sometimes have boxes installed in marginal House Wren habitat. While Tree Swallows are nesting, House Wrens seldom attempt to use boxes in marginal habitat. After Tree Swallows fledge their young and leave the grid, House Wrens do attempt to nest in nestboxes in marginal habitat.

### ***4) Remove “Dummy” Nests***

Removing “dummy nests” from nestboxes is a good strategy. Since House Wrens will put stick starts in a number of boxes in their territory, removing sticks



*14 days old*

from boxes that do not have active nests is good strategy. If stick nesting material is lined with a grass cup, you have to assume this is an active nest and leave it alone. There is always the danger that nest start removal can drive House Wrens to depredate a nearby cavity nester's clutch, but I believe their propensity toward depredatory behavior often occurs regardless. I have had House Wrens depredate nearby nesters while left alone to raise their young.

### **5) Block or Remove Nestboxes**

Blocking or removing nestboxes in House Wren habitat or marginal habitat forces House Wrens to nest elsewhere and keeps them off your trail. Some of our native cavity nesters, such as Black-Capped Chickadees and Carolina Chickadees, share House Wren nesting habitat. Keep track of the time frame of other native nesters and block or remove boxes accordingly at the end of their nesting season. House Wrens will attempt a second nesting in July after Tree Swallows leave an area. Chickadees will not nest this late in the season. Although Eastern Bluebirds will, the blocking of the boxes that show House Wren interest (marginal habitat) will drive the Eastern Bluebirds to use boxes in safer habitat and keep House Wrens from procreating on your trail. A very easy way to do this is cut small squares of thin plastic laminate and thumbtack them over the entry hole. If you have large vent holes in boxes, make sure to block these as well because House Wrens can fit in pretty tight cracks.



*15 days old*



*I opened the nestbox on day 16 to find that all six had fledged. Madame WingNut declared this house "Not for WRENt" for the remainder of the 2010 nesting season, removing it and storing it in the garage. The house was put back up in March 2011 and Carolina Chickadees successfully raised a brood of seven with the help of a House Wren guard. The Chickadees fledged the last week of May and nestbox was stored in garage again, as only a House Wren would use it that late in the nesting season.*

Madame WingNut's nestboxes are generally "Not For Wrent", but I usually do raise a nest or two of them each season. A couple of years ago, I allowed a family of House Wrens to use my backyard box. No other native nester was in my yard at the time and three of the neighbors on my cul-de-sac had Eastern Bluebirds incubating eggs. I "took the hit" for them so to speak. I documented their progress daily with my camera and here are a few shots from their HorWRENdous Family Photo Album.

*An experienced monitor of over a dozen Bluebird Trails in central and northern Ohio, Madame WingNut enjoys all creatures that fly, regardless of their stage of development.*



*Send your questions to Madame Wingnut at: [info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org](mailto:info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org) or by mail to PMB 111, 343 W. Milltown Road, Wooster, OH 44691.*

# OBS Spotlight –

## Ralph Windsor

By Chuck Jakubchak



*Ralph and his daughters at the trail dedication in Dublin.  
(Photo courtesy of Vicki Moran.)*

Ralph Windsor of Dublin, Ohio spent approximately 30 years helping bluebirds and his commitment to cavity nesting birds resulted in the successful fledging of

thousands of birds. In addition, he inspired his family to care about cavity nesting birds, ensuring that someone would be there to help our precious birds in subsequent generations. It is one thing to devote your own time to help birds, but an entirely greater contribution when you motivate and enlist others to partake in your passion. That is truly a wonderful feat and worthy of recognition in the Spring Edition of the OBS Spotlight.

In 1983 after a fine career as a bookkeeper with the Clark Grave Vault Company in Columbus, Ohio, Ralph retired at age 62. Shortly thereafter, with a little time on his hands and a little restlessness in his soul, he volunteered to build bird houses for Darlene Sillick (former board member of Ohio Wildlife Center). Ralph liked working with his hands and helping Darlene would satisfy his need to stay busy. Plus, Ralph had always enjoyed birds; having built nest boxes for wrens as a youth and maintained feeders at his country home as an adult.

In the early years Ralph was building nest boxes one by one until his friend Charlie Zepp entered the picture and initiated the concept of bluebird box “mass

production”. Ralph and Charlie worked together, cutting 10-20 pieces of lumber at a time and they reduced the production time for a bird house from hours to mere minutes. The increased production efficiency allowed Ralph to help more birds in a shorter period of time and he was able to build and install hundreds of boxes throughout the Dublin area. Should you ever spot a bluebird in Central Ohio, you can probably credit the prolific mass production work of Ralph and Charlie.

Ralph soon expanded his interests beyond simply building and installing boxes to monitoring bluebird trails near his home. Golf courses were of special interest to Ralph because he enjoyed playing the game, but he realized that the courses were great bluebird habitat. He and his wife, Bonnie Jeanne, worked together on the trails and shared many enjoyable, peaceful hours together as they looked after the birds. After the unfortunate passing of his life’s partner in 1999 their children stepped in and accompanied their father as he monitored the trails. Bluebirds became a life teaching tool and Ralph’s bird hobby helped the family develop a deep appreciation of nature, an accomplishment for which he is most proud. Not content with just building bird houses, Ralph diversified and built feeders for both birds and squirrels. Soon he began selling his products to Wild Birds Unlimited and to interested customers. What had started as a volunteer activity to absorb some free time during retirement progressed into a successful small business that Ralph appropriately and wittingly named, “For The Birds.”

The culmination of Ralph’s work with bluebirds came on a beautiful day in March 2009 when a special bluebird trail in Dublin was dedicated to Ralph in honor



of his outstanding contributions. Ralph's daughters (Bonnie, Carol, Sandy and Vicki) donated lumber, Charlie Zepp turned the lumber into boxed sized pieces and Ralph performed the final assembly. A dozen or more friends erected the boxes on a parcel of land and Vicki, along with her husband Brian, agreed to monitor the newly established bluebird trail. Each of the 9 newly, mounted boxes were signed by Ralph and a bronze plaque marked the commemorative trail. A few extra boxes were given to relatives and friends as mementoes of the occasion.

Ralph built homes for birds, but he also spent 7 years building a home for his family. He was a skilled worker and used those talents to provide for his family, not just birds. He volunteered to help birds, but he also volunteered for the American Heart Association and the American Cancer Society as he cared about mankind too. Ralph Windsor has always generously donated his time, been dedicated to his family and loved cavity nesting birds. What's not to admire?

Ralph, now 90 years old (and darn proud of it), doesn't get out much now as age has taken its toll and his years of hard work have caught up with him. Thankfully his family has picked up where he left off and they continue to help the birds because of Ralph's inspiration. The birds also continue Ralph's legacy as they remember Ralph's years of dedication, perching on their nest boxes and singing special notes of thanks.

*(Special thanks to Vicki Moran and family for helpful insight regarding Ralph Windsor.)*



*A proud Ralph Windsor.  
(Photo courtesy of Darlene Sillick.)*

## Ohio Bluebird Society Donations

Our thanks goes out to the following donors:

### **In Memory of Bill Davis – \$330**

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### **Miscellaneous Donations – \$165**

Don Mould's Plantation  
Gilt, Tom  
Glock, Fred  
Pitre, Nancy

# A Riparian Nestbox Trail for Carolina Chickadees

by Dick Tuttle



Bluebirding is all that follows your first bluebird; it is the hobby that lets you experience the rewards of attracting native birds to nestboxes. At least that is my definition. I raised my first bluebirds in 1968 and my first Carolina Chickadee family nested the following year. Since then, I have recorded 270 chickadee nest attempts where eggs were laid, and 814 young have fledged from 174 (64.4%) successful nests. During my early years, I only tried to attract Eastern Bluebirds, then when nesting Tree Swallows showed up in 1977, I tried to raise more of them and bluebirding blossomed beyond bluebirds. For years I did not try to attract chickadees, but when they nested, I always did my best to protect their families. I add a 1-1/8-inch Masonite or plastic patch over the larger entrance to exclude all larger birds whenever I find a chickadee nest in a bluebird box. The first time that I tried to raise chickadees on a larger scale took place three seasons after another project failed in 1998.

Chickadees inherited new nesting opportunities after my attempt to win nesting Prothonotary Warblers (PROW) came up short, thanks to my poor choice of habitats and determined House Wrens. Prior to the 1998 nesting season, I designed and constructed thirty “nest tubes” for Prothonotary Warblers after having been inspired by a project led by Dan Best along the Upper Cuyahoga River in Northeastern Ohio. Dan made his warbler nest structures from Metamucil jars and I made

thirty nest tubes out of four-inch PVC drainpipe. Much of my design was unique since the nest chamber and raccoon baffle were one continuous piece of drainpipe forty inches long. For the nest chamber, I copied the easy snap-on roof from the Steve Gilbertson bluebird box. I drilled 1-3/8” entrances for my prothonotary nest tubes. (Most recently, I have learned that PROW’s only need 1-1/8” entrances.)

I installed my nest tubes on three different properties. I located four tubes in riparian habitats along the bank of the Olentangy River at the Olentangy Environmental Control Center (OECC), a sewage treatment plant for southern Delaware County where 25 nestboxes for bluebirds and Tree Swallows had stood since 1983. I installed OECC’s nest tubes as close to the river as possible while trying to avoid destructive currents during frequent high water events.

Four and one half miles west of OECC, I waded along the bank of the O’Shaughnessy Reservoir to add four nest tubes to the Izaak Walton-Columbus Zoo Nature Preserve where 19 swallow boxes and four Wood Duck boxes had stood above the lake since 1987. (My first Prothonotary Warblers fledged from one of these nest tubes in 2004, but it was the last season for this trail before I removed all of its boxes for numerous reasons.)



*Nuthatch log boxes have never hosted their target species, but chickadees love to nest in them.*



*A Tree Swallow is about to enter a nest tube with a 1-3/8” entrance. The tubes are designed to telescope above known flood levels. More than the box design, the habitat will determine tenants.*



*A female Carolina Chickadee has taken a break from incubating her six eggs. A typical chickadee nest has a moss base with a cup lined with fine vegetation and traces of animal hair.*

In 1998, I was most excited about a brushy swamp at the far northern edge of Alum Creek Lake near where our osprey team had erected three nest platforms the year before. The swamp had been a wet pasture prior to 1976 when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers flooded the Alum Creek Valley to create Alum Creek Lake. I added twenty nest tubes to the former pasture and as the 1998 season developed, I became ecstatic after I identified yellow swamp warblers singing above a quarter of my offerings during multiple visits in mid-May. The yellow and green dynamos had added moss to several tubes, then within a week, disappointment and depression set in as aggressive House Wrens wrecked everything by covering prothonotary nests with sticks. Jenny wrens had recognized the emerging brush as their favored habitat. Single pairs of Eastern Bluebirds and Carolina Chickadees managed to fledge families from the swamp's nest tubes since their eggs had hatched before the egg-piercing wrens arrived. I did learn one additional thing from my one-season experiment at the bushy swamp: bluebirds can negotiate a 1-3/8" opening.

Since I had Osprey nest platforms and kestrel nestboxes on my mind at the time, it was easy for me to admit defeat and pull the nest tubes from the swamp. I put twenty nest tubes in storage and concentrated my efforts on more productive conservation projects. Meanwhile, the nest tubes that remained standing at the two other sites became increasingly popular with *Poecile carolinensis*, the Carolina Chickadee.

### **Trying for Carolina Chickadees at the OECC**

The OECC occupies 70 acres between the Olentangy River and State Rt. 315, just north of Mt. Air, Ohio.

Highbanks Metro Park, whose shale cliffs overlook the neighbor-friendly sewage treatment facility, occupies the river's east bank. The OECC was designed to please its neighbors, and to everyone's surprise, its grounds are so aesthetic that the management sometimes receives a request to host a wedding there. The facility has hosted my nestboxes since 1983, and my first chickadees there fledged seven young in 1997 from a nestbox that I had specifically designed for White-breasted Nuthatches. For each nuthatch box, I had custom-sawed thirty inches of wooden fence post to fit over the front panel that allows a nuthatch to descend headfirst, down to, and through, a 1-1/4" entrance hole. I had installed several nuthatch boxes along the "dry border side" of the riparian forest but the target species has never used them. Chickadees, on the other hand, love the hybrid log-houses.

Since the Olentangy is a state-designated scenic year, the OECC staff has allowed woodlands to reclaim a wide protective zone along its channel. Mature trees, including tall sycamores that hug the river channel, makes up the riparian zone that stretches for 20-30 yards and blends into younger growth that expands the forested zone to a total of sixty yards from the river in some places.

I have always said that a nestbox raises no birds while in storage, and since chickadees had nested in nest tubes over water at the Columbus Zoo in 1999 and 2000, I decided to take eight prothonotary nest tubes out of storage and put them to work for chickadees at OECC before the 2001 season. To limit competition, I made patches with 1-1/8" openings from small pieces of PVC drainpipe and riveted them over the original 1-3/8" entrances.

By the start of the 2001 season, I had added one nest tube to a wooded swamp near OECC's northern border and turned back south along the river to add seven tubes to stand in line with the riparian zone's original four tubes installed in 1998. Two nuthatch boxes and four standard boxes stand along part of the "dry" edge of 1100 yards of riparian corridor and continue to host nesting chickadees that hunt and feed inside the forest. By 2001,

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*When counting nine-day-old chickadee nestlings, it is easiest to count their ivory-colored bills. Do you count six?*



*These nestlings are too close to fledging to bother. I quickly snapped a photo before gently closing their door to the outside world.*

I had also installed a nine-box, three-by-three nestbox grid for Tree Swallows near the property's three-acre wetland that I showcased during a field trip for the North American Bluebird Society during their 2001 convention hosted by the Ohio Bluebird Society. Today, twenty-seven bluebird boxes are mostly managed for swallows and join two nuthatch boxes, 12 nest tubes, and two Wood Duck boxes that make up a combined trail of 52 nest structures.

### **Carolina Chickadees at OECC: 1997 - 2011**

During fifteen nesting seasons, Carolina Chickadees at OECC have started 73 nests with eggs and fledged young from 44 for a 61.3% success rate. Of the 29 nests that failed, 19 (26%) chickadee nests became victims of wren competition. Two nest failures each are attributed to raccoons (2.7%), bumblebees (2.7%), and "unknown" (2.7%). Raccoons can climb baffles once their wet fur picks up sand, and bumblebee queens like to claim moss nests for their own families and will "buzz off" chickadees as well as paranoid monitors when they sense unwanted company. Cold weather caused four failures (5.5%) out of 73 nest attempts. Chickadees laid 400 eggs, 252 (63.0%) eggs hatched, and 224 (56.0%) eggs matured to fledge. Using the same numbers, chickadees fledged nearly nine of every ten (88.9%) hatchlings.

Clutch sizes ranged from three to nine eggs with an average of 6.23 eggs for 47 completed clutches. Six eggs were the most common clutch size found in 15 (31.9%) nests. Other clutch sizes recorded were nests with three eggs, 2.1%; four eggs, 4.3%; five eggs, 21.3%; seven eggs, 25.5%; eight eggs, 10.6%; and nine eggs 4.3%.

Successful nests raised between one and nine young with 5.09 being the average number of fledglings per nest for 44 successful families. The most common number of fledglings was six counted from ten (22.7%) nests.

The earliest first-egg-date (FED) recorded for chickadee nests at OECC was 12 April 2005. The latest FED for a successful nest was 20 May 2003 for a small clutch of three eggs that fledged two. Using one egg laid per day with an incubation period of 13 days, and a nestling period of 17 days, the active chickadee nest season recorded from the first egg to the last fledgling at OECC runs for 71 days between April 12 and June 21.

Another of my favorite characters, Carolina Wrens, attempted to nest four times within the riparian zone; once in a nuthatch log-box after a woodpecker had enlarged its entrance, and three times in the original nest tubes with larger, 1-3/8" entrances. Carolina Wrens fledged 14 gregarious offspring after three of their four attempts became successful.

### **Monitoring Methods**

Presently, I try to check my nestboxes every nine days. Since chickadees nest only once, and no first eggs appear beyond Memorial Day (May 31), after chickadees fledge their young, I cover their entrance holes with duct tape. Then, on my last visit in early September when I return to winterized the trail's nestboxes, I reopen the nest chambers and use new tape to cover both ventilation ports so small forest birds can have draft-resistant winter roosts. In mid-March, I remove tape from one of two ventilation ports to start the new nesting season.

# Member News



Chickadees cover their eggs with a blanket of moss and hair before they leave their nest, and in order to count eggs, I sometimes have to gently pinch and pull the upper layer of nest material until I lift the free edge of the “egg blanket.” I pull the blanket back to expose the eggs before counting them with my hand-held mirror. Of course, I return the blanket to its original position before I leave. Also, for nest chambers that are top opening, a hand-held mirror works best when counting mature nestlings.

When monitoring, be aware of the “snake act” that chickadees and titmice practice to scare away predators. They puff up, and hiss like a striking snake while smacking their wings on the nest. The sound is more like an avian sneeze or cough, if there is such a thing. Since all humans are borne with a natural snake reflex that kept our ancient ancestors out of trouble, the striking-snake sound has worked on me several times, causing me to jerk away from the nestbox. Of course, once my conscious mind takes over, I break into a healthy laugh.

In 2011, 34 Carolina Chickadees fledged from seven nests at OECC after eight attempts. Other trail boxes at the plant fledged 27 bluebirds, 115 Tree Swallows, four House Wrens and two families of Wood Ducks. I enjoy helping feisty chickadees as I follow a worn path along the Olentangy and observe Wood Ducks, Canada Geese, Mallards, Great Blue Herons and other river life. Of course, warblers and patches of Virginia Bluebells, trillium species, and other forest life are always pleasing. And thanks to the timing of the chickadees’ life cycle, the riparian nestbox trail becomes dormant just as the mosquito population becomes annoying, so I don’t have to put up with the little bloodsuckers.

In conclusion, if your bluebird trail abuts a woodlot or a wooded stream, weave your nestbox trail through tall trees and try for chickadees. And, while every species has its own charm, once chickadee nestlings sprout their black caps and chins, they win my vote for the cutest nestlings on my trails.

Happier Bluebirding with chickadees!

## Wanted:

**OBS Area Contact Coordinator** to take a leadership role and add continuity to the services provided to the public by our OBS Area Contacts. If you are interested in this position, please send an email or letter of request for the job description. See page 17 for email and address.

## Welcome - To Our New Members

Benchoff, Margaret	Lewis, Peggy
Bolea, Marlene	Merchant, Robert & Mary Ann
Conrad, Carol	Myers, Jennifer
Corney, Cheryl	Nelson, Ann
Corrigan, Fr. Allen	Panak, Sue
Costa, Gabe & Adrienne	Pierson, Jane
Doran, Meghan	Raubenolt, Becky
Fifer, Neal	Stonkus, Paul
Fryman, Todd	Summers, Neel & Elsie
Gant, Susanna	Tew, Dr. James
Gosser, Diane	Van Keuren, Kerry
Hall, Frank & Johanna	Zarara, Carolyn
Headings, Mark	Zaugg, Carol
Jenkins, Becky	

## New Membership Director

Please welcome our new Membership Director - Nancy Adams. In October we received word from John Duecker that he would be resigning from this position and Fred Glock stepped in during the transition - thank you Fred! With John’s help, both Nancy and Fred learned the many duties of this position. Fred has agreed to help out when needed. Thanks to both for volunteering their time.

## In search of.....

We are looking for the OBS wooden logo - pale blue - shield-type shape - 20” tall. If you have this, please send an e-mail to [info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org](mailto:info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org) - we are just trying to find out where it is. Thanks!

## Go Green

Help us save printing/shipping costs by getting the electronic version of the Monitor. Our printing/shipping expenses to send out the last quarterly issue of the Monitor were **\$772**. If you would like to switch to the electronic version only, please send an email to [info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org](mailto:info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org). We also gladly accept donations to help with these costs.

# Trail Tales

## A New Trail and a New Friend By Tammy Seaman



One would sure think that seven nestboxes on our five acre property would be satisfying enough but the bluebird bug bit again and plans began forming in my mind to start a bluebird trail on a path that I often bike. The Wabash Cannonball Trail was an old rail line that was

converted into 63 mile multi-use recreational trail years ago and is only about ¼ mile away from my house.

After many calls were made I finally got permission to put nestboxes up on the trail. A lot of the trail is treed on both sides and therefore not a good location for bluebird nestboxes but there are places where farmland hugs one side of the trail. In one of these spots there were old dilapidated, unusable boxes that a farmer, now deceased, had put up. I removed some of the uninhabitable boxes but one box was still in decent condition. I could stand on my tip toes and see layers of soft nesting material inside the box and thought maybe a titmouse or dee had been nesting. I reached in and removed a little of the nesting material but decided to bring my 6'4" hubby to help, since my 5'1" self couldn't reach in very far. He took a little of the soft material out and then used a stick to dig down deeper. He then turned to me and calmly said, "Mice". I smiled thinking he was joking (as usual) but when he didn't continue digging I knew that he was serious. I did a



little shudder dance thinking about how my hands had been in that mouse nest the day before. The thought still makes me cringe.

At the 2011 OBS Conference Paula Ziebarth (a.k.a, Madame Wingnut) and Darlene Sillick, both well-known to the OBS, had surprised me with six nestboxes. My darling husband helped me attach those boxes to poles, make baffles for them and put the boxes up. There was a box in the area that wasn't mine and wasn't put up by the farmer. The box was in good shape but had many other problems: it's a top loading box - which I don't like because I'm short and can't monitor it, it's on a t-post - I prefer a slick metal pole, it's turned the wrong direction - facing prevailing winds, it's right next to heavy shrubby area - house wren territory and for a baffle there was an old half-there bleach bottle. The nestbox had four bluebird eggs in it already, and a strong storm earlier that week had blown open the top. I fixed that problem by bungeeing the roof closed and hid a large bucket in the thicket to use to stand on for subsequent nest



checks but the eggs were later abandoned. I was hoping to make some changes to this box but besides not being my property there was another issue; this box was put up in memory of someone's loved one that passed away and it has a plaque on it. The plaque reads "In Memory of Ann Meade."

Now what was I to do? Do the owners of the box still frequent this trail? Would they be offended if I moved

this box to a new, more open area or better yet even moved the plaque to another box? Who was Ann Meade? I didn't dare do any of these things without permission. So for several months I watched this box and fretted over the situation and did nothing.

One week while monitoring my boxes I noticed a new nestbox that seemed to pop up out of nowhere - top loading but baffled, on a pole, and facing the right direction and on the box was a plaque....honoring Ann Meade. The mystery continued. Right away a house sparrow moved into the box, I know because I sneaked a peek when there was no one around, and I began worrying again. Were they offended that I had placed my nestboxes near theirs? Do they know about the destructive behavior of the House Sparrow? Would they mind if I trapped these House Sparrows or removed their nest? Are they monitoring the nestbox at all? After getting advice from a bluebird forum that I frequent I decided what to do. I put a note in a ziplock bag and ziptied it to the nestbox pole. In the note I said, "Hi. My name is Tammy. I was so excited to see your new box up. I've been wondering about Ann Meade and would love to hear about her. If you want to contact me feel free to write me at ...." and gave my email address. It was Sept. 10. Were they even on the trail anymore this season? Would they see my note? On September 19 I was pleasantly surprised to get an email from Ann Meade's sister, Judi. It read :

*My name is Judi Reese. I got your note on my bluebird box on the bike trail yesterday. What a nice surprise!*

*I was wondering who put up the other boxes. I thought maybe the park did. My sister was Ann Meade and she died in 2004 from breast cancer at age 50. She loved bluebirds and used to ride the bike trail with my husband Ken and I, so that's why I put the boxes up in her memory. I had met the old farmer named Harold, who had put up the original blue boxes. He said he owned the land around there and the park owns that along the trail. He and the park said they didn't mind me putting up my own box. I haven't seen Harold for the last few years and his boxes haven't been tended to so I don't know if he's still alive.*

*Anyway I was so thrilled to get your note and am happy to see your boxes there. Maybe we will run into you on the trail. We ride several times a week so I'll send a photo of us in case you see us out there. Give a shout out. I'll also send a picture of Annie.*

*It's funny, last week I was asking Annie to give me a sign that she's still around somewhere watching what's going on and then I find a letter on her bluebird box. I always say, "There are no coincidences".*

*I'm looking forward to hearing from you again.  
Judi*

How fun! The following email from her had "Bluebird Buddy" in the subject line.

Since that time we have talked via phone. Judi knows a little about bluebirds and is interested in learning more. She's considering switching the nestbox with another for easier monitoring and she even asked me if I would watch it for her since she didn't get out on the trail much. We are meeting for lunch sometime soon and I'll make sure that Judi knows... that I don't believe in coincidences either.



# Blooming Bluebirders

## The Return of Spring

By John Bigham Jr., Preble County



I went birdwatching on January 2nd. It was snowing, and the creek that runs through our place was full of birds. There were Bluebirds, Robins, Mockingbirds, Woodpeckers, and Sparrows. The cold weather and snow had driven the birds into the protection of the creek bottoms. Cardinals and White-Crowned Sparrows were

flocking to my feeders. Winter is a good time to see many birds but soon you get tired of the cold weather and snow and it's time for the return of Spring.

When Spring arrives we get all excited thinking about when the Bluebirds will start nesting, what you are going to plant in your garden, and wondering how many new birds you will see this Spring.



If you want to attract Orioles to your yard or garden don't waste your money on sugar water feeders. Buy a jelly feeder and put grape jelly on it. It may take one or two years to attract

them but they will come. Don't give up. I put jelly out for two years before I had my first Oriole. Now we have tons of them during migration that stop to eat some jelly on their way north and three or five pairs all Summer. They nest in the cotton woods and sycamore trees we have scattered around our farm. You will most likely have more Baltimore Orioles than Orchard Orioles but last year we had a pair of Orchard Orioles. Have fun and enjoy the Orioles!



Here in southwest Ohio most of the Bluebirds over winter. I feed them mealworms, raisins, dried cranberries, rose hips, and dogwood berries all Winter but as

soon as the starlings return from the south I quit feeding them because the starlings eat all the mealworms. It won't bother the Bluebirds if you stop feeding them in the Spring because there are all kinds of insects for them to eat.



Our farm has 100 acres with mostly cropland and pasture with scattered trees and rolling hills that meet in the creek bottom below our house. We have two ponds one of

them is more brush and swamp than pond. It is a Yellow Warbler and Red-Winged Blackbird heaven. There is a 60 pound beaver and a lot of muskrats that also inhabit this "swamp." We have some brushy woods along our creek and not much woods - maybe 10 acres of woods at the most - but we have neighbors with plenty of it! I have 10 nest boxes on our land and four boxes across the road on a neighbor's land. I start monitoring my nest boxes in the middle of March thru August. I'm hoping to have a Great Crested Flycatcher, Tufted Titmouse, or a Carolina Chickadee nest in one of my nest boxes. I would also like Bluebird nests almost every box. Of course those are just wishes.





I participate in Nest Watch (watch.bird.cornell.edu/nest). You can monitor cup nests along with cavity nests. Nest Watch is easy and fun! I monitored

a Canada Goose nest, American Robin nests, Chipping Sparrow nest, Northern Mockingbird nest, Redwing Blackbird nests, Pileated Wood pecker nest, and a Mourning Dove nest. I encourage you to look for open cup nests of other songbirds and monitor them along with your nest boxes.

Look for Warblers from the beginning of April to the end of



May if you would like to see a species of bird that's little, fast, and beautiful. They like to hide from you and the ones that don't hide move extremely fast - you can get dizzy and you can also get a neck ache from staring up so much. I like Warbler watching in our neighbor's woods. They have a swampy pond with mature forest all around it. Some beavers took over the pond and built a dam in the creek that runs into it. It really looks like a Canadian beaver pond. It's a great place to see Warblers, Wood Ducks, and Tanagers. I saw almost 20 different species of Warblers there last Spring. I saw my first Scarlet Tanager there. I have seen many different species there like Wood Thrushes and many others.



*Happy Birding!!*

## OBS Communications Block

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Like us on Facebook! Search for Ohio Bluebird Society to join our group - there are currently 78 followers.

**Join Online!** You can now sign up online and pay your member dues via Paypal with your credit card or bank account. Go to [www.ohiobluebirdsociety.org/membership/become-a-member/](http://www.ohiobluebirdsociety.org/membership/become-a-member/) to sign up today!

# Secondary Cavity Nester Field Trip

Saturday June 16, 2012  
Powell, Ohio

What do Prothonotary Warblers, Eastern Bluebirds, Tree Swallows and Purple Martins have in common? They are secondary cavity nesters that can all be seen in less than a quarter mile site in central Ohio. But wait...how fun to go by kayak to see the Candle of the Swamp in habitat!

Join OBS Area Contacts Darlene Sillick and Paula Ziebarth for a fun day near the Columbus Zoo kayaking with The Adaptive Adventure Sport Coalition (TAASC) experts. To learn more about TAASC visit [www.taasc.com](http://www.taasc.com)

**9:00 – Arrive at TAASC, 6000 Harriot Road, Powell, Ohio 43065**



## Option 1 - Kayak Trip

Next door to TAASC is a 12 box Tree Swallow grid and a 3 year Purple Martin colony. There are also paired boxes around the grid. Less than a 10 minute gentle paddle and you are in the heart of Prothonotary Warbler habitat where you can see the birds at either natural or nestbox cavities.

Tim Daniel, ODNR, Division of Wildlife, Public Information Officer will guide you to see the birds by kayak. Birds willing, we will demonstrate bird banding either at the TAASC nesting sites or at Safari Golf Course owned by the Columbus Zoo or at OWC.

Pack your own picnic lunch and we will eat at the TAASC picnic site before visiting several other local nest sites in and around the Columbus Zoo. Trip concludes by about 3pm. **Cost is \$20.00 per person** per kayak and you will receive instruction prior to launch.

**RSVP BY June 13 – space is limited.**  
**E-mail [info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org](mailto:info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org)**



## Option 2 – 9:30 Tour of Ohio Wildlife Center

If you're not up for a kayak paddle, join Darlene for a morning tour at Ohio Wildlife Center (OWC) where you will meet their education mammals and raptors.

**Fee is \$10.00 per person** – see [www.ohiowildlifecenter.com](http://www.ohiowildlifecenter.com). Darlene has volunteered with OWC working with the education raptors for over 20 years. Plan on a gentle walk to see a 22 nestbox site on OWC property, which is less than a mile from the TAASC site. All will meet at Harriot Rd then head over to OWC by about 9:30am. We will return to Harriot Rd to picnic together. **RSVP by June 13.**

Bring your picnic lunch, water, sunscreen and camera and be ready for a special field trip.

### Contact Darlene if you have questions:

[azuretrails@columbus.rr.com](mailto:azuretrails@columbus.rr.com)  
home 614-761-3696 or cell 614-288-3696



A very interesting day is planned and a few more special stops are being arranged.

**Hope to see you then!**  
**Darlene and Paula**

# Green Lawn Summer Event

Saturday July 21, 2012



On Saturday, July 21st the Ohio Bluebird Society will sponsor an educational field trip in the Columbus area. OBS members will be able to tour Green Lawn Cemetery, Smith Cemetery Prairie Nature Preserve and Bigelow Cemetery Prairie Nature Preserve with each site offering special opportunities to view birds, insects, butterflies and prairie wildflowers. If you like nature, this field trip is for you!

The cemetery tours will also contain some interesting history as Green Lawn is the final resting place for former governors, war heroes and several famous Ohioans. Smith and Bigelow Cemeteries contain the remains of many of Ohio's first settlers as their lives were interwoven with the native prairies of Ohio. There will be many interesting things to see during the trip and we guarantee a fascinating day of activities.



We are pleased to note that Jim McCormac from the Ohio Division of Wildlife will lead the field trip and his

expertise is unsurpassed. If you haven't been on a nature walk with Jim, you don't know what you have been missing as he will point out many interesting natural elements of the habitat we visit.

For general planning purposes we are estimating that the tour will begin around 9:30 AM in Green Lawn and end around 4 PM. We are planning on stopping for lunch at Der Dutchman in Plain City but will determine our exact itinerary in June.

Cost of the tour will be \$15/person and all of the proceeds will be donated to the Green Lawn Cemetery Foundation. Space is limited to 20 people and reservations will be secured on a "first come, first served" basis. Interested individuals should mail a check (made out to the OBS), along with their participant's names and contact information (phone and e mail if available) using the form below.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

OBS Member? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

\_\_\_\_\_ Kayak Trip, June 16 - \$20/person

\_\_\_\_\_ Ohio Wildlife Center Tour, June 16 - \$10/person

\_\_\_\_\_ Green Lawn Cemetery Tour, July 21 - \$15/person

**Make Checks payable to:**

Ohio Bluebird Society

**Mail to:**

OBS

PMB 111

343 W. Milltown Road

Wooster, OH 44691



**OHIO BLUEBIRD SOCIETY**

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343 W. Milltown Rd.  
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## Ohio Bluebird Society Membership Application

- | Membership Class  | Annual | 3-years |
|---|--------|---------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student (under 21)                                 | \$10   | \$25    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior/Sr. Family                                  | \$12   | \$30    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regular/Family                                     | \$15   | \$40    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational                                     | \$40   | \$100   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting   | \$100  | \$275   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life   | \$300  |         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tax deductible gift to OBS \$ _____                |        |         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Membership renewal                                 |        |         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New membership                                     |        |         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am interested in participating in OBS activities |        |         |

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

County: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Make checks payable to:**  
Ohio Bluebird Society

**Mail to:**  
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PMB 111, 343 W. Milltown Rd.  
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