



# Bluebird Monitor

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

Spring 2017



## The Return of the Bluebird

By Barbara Baudot



In writing this article, I thought of the first time I met the renowned Bluebird Lady living in my neighborhood in Massachusetts — Lillian Lund Files. The year was 1986 and she was President of the North American Bluebird Society.

Lillian was unforgettable. She had bluebirds on her 30-acre property in Tyngsboro, MA for more than 55 years. In 1942, when bluebirds were a rarity in New England, Lillian reported that birders flocked to her place every spring to view these winged beauties and witness their careful attention to their young.

In 1986, she showed me the more than one hundred bluebird nesting boxes on her property. Not only did she educate me about bluebirds but she encouraged me to get engaged in working to help these birds reproduce and survive. Today she is credited in large measure for bringing bluebirds back to New England after their near extinction.

Lillian introduced me to actual bluebirds when hitherto my only knowledge had come from acquaintance with the charming Mr. Bluebird in Disney's *Song of the South*. Lillian understood as now I firmly believe that to protect bluebirds it is necessary to appeal to the emotions of the general populace as well as to ornithologists and birders. There is a lot of knowledge about the life and benefits of bluebirds. Much is known about their struggles to survive in a disenchanted world over-populated with European sparrows and starlings, over-exploited by industrial agricultural expansion, and polluted by pesticides. Science informs bluebird enthusiasts about building bluebird trails and keeping them up in protected natural habitats. But touching the hearts of people requires reviving the symbolism long associated with bluebirds.

Lillian gave me Andre Dion's book, *The Return of the Bluebird*. A fairytale written in free verse it offers heart-rending glimpses of hardships endured by bluebirds in Quebec. In this story the bluebird overcomes many tribulations and a lonely winter

sheltered but shivering in an empty box. The final line of this poem exclaims: "How beautiful they will be, the springs of yesteryear at last returned – springs made sparkling by the celestial warbling of blue-coated troubadours." Such poignant fairytales move readers to sympathize with their bluebird heros.

The bluebird is best known in literature and song as the symbol of happiness. But it is also of hope when human life is in grave danger. In 1918, during the Russian civil war, General Kornilov of the Voluntary Army led his forces deep into the frozen steppe. "We went," General Anton Denikin recalled: "from the dark night and spiritual slavery to unknown wandering – in search of the bluebird." This "Ice March" lasted from February to mid-May 1918. Sadly Kornilov was killed, but Denikin's Voluntary Army grew to 100,000 and almost destroyed the Revolution. See E.Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, 21-22.

Photo By Barbara Baudot



Henry David Thoreau also features the bluebird as a purveyor of hope in bleak winter months: "I no sooner step out of the house than I hear the bluebirds in the air, and far and near, throughout the town you may hear them, ...harbingers of serene and warm weather, little azure rills of melody trickling here and there from out of

the air, their short warble trilled in the air reminding of so many corkscrews assaulting and thawing the torpid mass of winter, assisting the ice and snow to melt and the streams to flow."

At this moment of our history and during this gray winter season we need more than ever the bluebird's imagery of Celestial Truth, happiness and hope.

# In Contact With Our Area Contacts

By Marcy Grande, OBS Area Contact for Summit County



*Editor's note: Marcy is the OBS Area Contact for Summit County. If you live in her area and have bluebird questions or need some help please contact her. OBS appreciates the willingness of all of our contacts to help new bluebirders by sharing their time and experience to promote successful bluebird conservation in their local areas. The Ohio county Area Contacts are listed in our newsletter. We welcome the chance*

*to share some of Marcy's bluebird story in this issue of the Monitor.*

## **How did you become interested in bluebirds? Where are your nestboxes located?**

"I think I became interested when I visited a park in Wilmot near Amish country. They had nest boxes up and I saw bluebirds go in and out of the boxes. So, I asked for one for my birthday and got started the following July. The box was visited, but no one made a nest. It probably appeared on their radar too late. However the following spring they circled around the box in mid-March and started nesting in mid-April. I've since added a couple of boxes on our 1.25 acre lot and got my neighbor interested as well. She has more open spaces and has been successful every year. It has been a delight for our elderly neighbor who had not seen a bluebird in years until he saw mine! In time, my other neighbor put up a box as well and our bluebirds volleyed between our boxes, eventually settling on mine. You could say our neighborhood is a bit of a trail itself."

## **Was there a person who mentored you?**

"The people who mentored me were previous Summit County contacts. They had a look-see at my yard and scoped out the ideal locations, and I have listened."

## **What are some of the things you have done to help bluebirds in your area?**

"I consulted on a bluebird trail 5 miles from my house in May and found that the nestboxes were too high, were located in an area where freight comes in and out, and were simply mounted in poor habitat areas, inviting house sparrows to take over. I emailed my findings and visited the location twice as follow up.

I scouted out my new workplace but we don't have the right environs for bluebirds. We have a resident hawk, many jays and house sparrows there and a wren this past summer. Since it is in a busy intersection in Canton it is not conducive for blues. I have helped a friend pick out a box and plan the best

location in her spread of several acres of farmland. I have also helped family members get started on their bluebirding and even consulted with my dog's doggy dermatologist who couldn't figure out why they weren't getting any bluebirds. I will be presenting on bluebirds at the Fairlawn Bath Library on Thursday night, March 23rd, 2017."

## **Do you have any advice which would help others be more successful bluebirders?**

"My best tips are below in the article- it's about their food and inhibiting the multiplying of non-native predators."

## **Article follows:**

My cousins recently moved to a neighborhood that is fairly quiet with homes several feet apart from one another, but as they were sprucing up their new house's deck they noticed that both next-door neighbors fed birds. As it turns out however, most of the birds at their neighbor's feeders were English House Sparrows, a non-native species that has muscled its way into many a shopping center, loading dock, parking lot, high population density neighborhood, and, unfortunately backyard bird habitats.

English House Sparrows take away habitat from native species. House Sparrows were brought to this country supposedly for bug population control, but their multiplying has created unintended consequences that have negatively impacted some native songbirds.

The House Sparrow breeds several times a year and creates nuisance nests behind letters of storefronts and in nooks and crannies of rafters. They pepper surfaces with their droppings and sloppy nesting materials. They are relentless. It is difficult to keep them from rebuilding their nests, even after the nests are repeatedly dislodged. Worst of all, they will brutally kill other native adult bird species and destroy their nestlings and eggs.

Many House Sparrows are urban dwellers but inexpensive bird food with high millet content and other fillers will lure them to low density residential areas. This often spells trouble for homeowners who are trying to attract Eastern Bluebirds and other songbirds to their backyards. Bluebirds (not to be confused with Blue Jays) are small, often bashful, and demonstrate exceptional parenting skills. Bluebirds are not primarily seed eaters but they share the same environs as seed eating birds, which is how they can cross paths with House Sparrows.

Better quality bird food, feeding different kinds of higher quality foods instead of birdseed with high filler content, and taking periodic breaks from bird feeding may eventually reduce visits from these "weeds with wings" as one birding

website states. For those who enjoy feeding the birds, avoid purchasing seed mixes high in millet content, milo, wheat and hemp. In one to two years House Sparrows can infiltrate and take over an entire bluebird trail.

If you want to attract bluebirds to your yard, you can post a nestbox no higher than five to five and a half feet off the ground, mounted atop a pole in an open grassy area out of the shade and away from high traffic areas. Bluebirds do not nest in the fall but they do some house hunting then. You may also see them brave the winter cold to momentarily visit a

prospective spring address. Bluebird boxes can be purchased year-round at bird specialty stores where you can also find high quality food. You can also make your own nest box by searching for nest box blueprints and other bluebird resources via these websites: [www.ohiobluebirdsociety.org](http://www.ohiobluebirdsociety.org), [www.sialis.org](http://www.sialis.org), [www.nabluebirdsociety.org](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org) and [www.birds.cornell.edu](http://www.birds.cornell.edu).

Perhaps my cousins can introduce themselves to their neighbors by bringing over a bag of high quality bird food and introducing them to the world of bluebirding!

## ***Blooming Bluebirders***

### **A New Bluebird Trail Emerges at OSU Waterman Farms**

By Darlene Sillick, OBS Franklin County Area Contact



On Saturday, October 29, 2016, on a sunny, beautiful fall day, an even dozen nestboxes were installed by a 12 year old Boy Scout named Charlie Thacker. He efficiently led a team of 18 people to complete his project. He is a member of Boy Scout Troop 387 in Galena, Ohio. I work at Cardinal Health with his father Dana Thacker who asked if I had a service project his son Charlie could do. I can almost always find a service project and this one became something special in short order.

The location was The Ohio State University Waterman Farms. I knew the area but I had never been back to the 260 plus acres. The Waterman Agricultural and Natural Resources Laboratory (WANRL), commonly referred to as the Waterman Farm, is located on the campus of The Ohio State University at the northwest corner of the intersection of Kenny Road and Lane Avenue. I learned about it from Melanie McFadin, who is the student president of the OSU Ornithology Club. We worked together on an earlier October Eagle Scout project at Chadwick Arboretum. The club members heard a presentation by OSU student Will Wilbur, Paula Ziebarth and I and the OSU students agreed to monitor the boxes starting in early March. We thought it would be good to compare 2 locations. Chadwick Arboretum and now Waterman Farms were the sites they selected.

Facilities and features of the Waterman Farm include the Turfgrass Foundation Research & Education Facility, the Waterman Dairy Facility, the Rothenbuhler Honey Bee Research Lab, the Waterman Headquarters Building (including the Wittmeyer Conference Room), the SENRL Woodlot and acres of irrigated and non-irrigated plots. We choose the Turfgrass facility for our project location.

On an early evening in late September I scouted the area to put in flags for 12 box sites with my good friends Paula

Ziebarth and Leslie Sours. Paula and I are both Area Contacts for Ohio Bluebird Society and are very active setting up new bluebird trails or repairing old ones. Right after we got out of the car, Leslie and I were distracted by 4 Common Nighthawk's dancing in the sky over us for the 2 hours we spent at Waterman Farms. There were many Killdeer, two Cooper's Hawks exchanging words, two Red-tailed hawks, one who was dining, Chimney Swifts, a great Blue Heron and many Song Sparrows and crows. Paula stayed on task and we called back and forth about locations for the flags, marking sites for the new nestboxes that Charlie would soon be putting up. There was a large pond and a beautiful, partly treed site, that was about to become home for Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows in the spring of 2017.

On Saturday October 29, eighteen people came together to install 12 nestbox set ups and in less than 2 hours the project was completed. There were 9 from the Boy Scout troop including some parents and a couple helpful siblings. Seven OSU Ornithology students helped. Our photographers were co-worker Aaron Lewis and I. The boxes were numbered, and GPS'd and all data has been entered in Cornell Nestwatch. In early March, students will begin monitoring and they will add collected data weekly to the website.

I asked Charlie to write his thoughts about the bluebird box project. In his own words:

*"On a beautiful Fall Day in Columbus, Ohio I helped lead a group project focused on bluebird conservation. I did this not only for a Boy Scout service requirement, but also to learn more about wildlife. I was able to attend a seminar at OSU about bluebirds and learned where they like to live, what they like to eat and how they compete in nature against predators and other birds. I also learned*



that there are many people who love to study and find the best ways to help birds.

Our day assembling the bird boxes (the supplies were already available thanks to Darlene Sillick) went quickly and efficiently. We had more than ten people helping and the teams worked well on their individual tasks. Whenever I visit the spot where we put the bird boxes, I will always think, "Hey - we did that!"

Thanks,  
Charlie (age 12) and Dana (his father)



Project leader Charlie Thacker and Ryan Russell

The Boy Scout team was: Matt Young, Kyan Young, Jana Hankins, Charlie Thacker, Dana Thacker, John Henry, Christopher Russell, Ryan Russell, Jeanine Russell

I also asked Melanie to explain what this project meant to the OSU Ornithology Club members:

*"The replacement of the bluebird boxes on OSU's campus fills a couple of very important roles. I believe that any successful conservation story blends a strong community and love of nature; in this case the Eastern Bluebird. As president of the OSU Ornithology Club, I was proud to be able to present a project that all the club members could be enthusiastic about and participate in years to come. This wouldn't have been possible, though, without the collaboration of Darlene Sillick and the Eagle Scout and Boy Scout youth. Being able to collaborate with young people and the community on positive projects like this spurs not only others to do the same, but also a lifelong excitement of the hobby.*

*Other than community interactions, I am hoping that we will see successful broods fledge from the repaired boxes. After such a strong decline in population, it is an amazing conservation story to see this species proliferating so successfully. One of the primary*

*causes to this successful return has been because of conservationists nationwide providing bluebird box trails. Darlene has been enormously successful in getting youth involved in trails throughout Columbus. The students here at OSU can't wait to contribute to Cornell's database and watch the continued success of the bluebirds in our area."*

– Melanie McFadin, OSU Ornithology Club President

Students from OSU were Melanie McFadin (president), Matt Bell (VP), Kandace Glanville, Riley Young, Amy Luo, Alex Eberts, and Tyler Ficker

The 12 nestbox set ups were donated by Charlie Zepp and me. The boxes were built by Paula Ziebarth's son Gregory, who is an amazing 27 year old young man with Autism. He loves to build boxes for us and has built close to 200 for many projects. We were able to obtain donations for the pole/ baffle and hardware. Charlie Zepp, a friend of 30 some years, prepared the poles and baffles. What makes these conservation projects so special is the people who come together to get the job finished. How interesting watching college students working alongside the Boy Scouts. Charlie and his dad organized the work teams and I demonstrated the first set up to install then watched as it all came together.

We got together for Aaron to take a group photo and all of a sudden I said 'listen'. Back in an area where a box was installed, I heard a male bluebird singing. I wanted the group to hear his song. I wanted them to be excited that bluebirds, in short order, were finding new homes the group had just set up. Another special citizen science project by our next generation will be helping breeding bluebirds and tree swallows in just a couple months.



This gives you a sense of the habitat where the boxes were to be installed. Around the pond about every 25 yards, a box was set up for Tree Swallows. They love to hunt over a pond or lake for hatching and flying insects.



# Prisoners Restoring Ohio's Owls and Falcons (PROOF) At the London Correctional Institution (LoCI) London, Ohio

By Dick Tuttle, OBS Advisor and Past  
OBS Blue Feather Award Recipient



A unique kestrel adventure began on October 22, 2014 when I received an email from Donna Schwab, Assistant Wildlife Management Supervisor, ODNR, Division of Wildlife. Donna had presented me with contact information for Kathy Wolboldt, Case Manager at LoCI,

who was in the early stages of developing the PROOF program. Kathy was looking for potential projects to give male inmates community service time toward their release, and was initially interested in attracting Peregrine Falcons to the prison building, built in 1924. The building's window sills and cornices were saturated with resident pigeons that were sustained by salvaging grains left by farming operations that included more than 300 heads of dairy cattle and 3,000 acres of farmland. After the prison building was judged not high enough to attract peregrines, Donna thought I could help Kathy attract nesting kestrels, and possibly other cavity nesters.

As communications started, another key group came into focus. I serve on a science advisory committee at the Tolles Career and Technology Center, a vocational high school south of Plain City, also in Madison County. Twice, I had presented programs to Mr. John Thomas's Environmental Science classes promoting bluebird and Tree Swallow conservation, and I helped with the early stages of placing nestboxes throughout their campus along Route 42. From the beginning, I kept John informed on the progress at LoCI.

I arrived for my first visit at the prison on January 20, 2015 to meet with Warden Terry Tibbals and his staff and to tour the grounds. By the time I parked my car, I was convinced that all the habitats that I had seen were kestrel-habitats; open grass lands with lots of utility wires; ditches with water; mowed grass; pastures; and meadows with mature, sparse oak trees. Even the prison's tall, anti-climber fence looked kestrel-friendly. And, I had another strong thought as I left



Three carpentry students and two inmates make final adjustments to the powdered concrete around the pole's base on May 18, 2015.

my car; the area also looked like prime Barn Owl habitat since I saw no dense forests that would support Great-horned Owls, known to include Barn Owls in their diet.

The meeting went well as I showed part of my kestrel presentation that I had on a flash drive. Pictures of box K-16 that stands at Gallant Woods Park in Delaware County helped to explain how a winch works to make monitoring easy by lowering and raising a kestrel nestbox on a free-standing pole. While the Warden's staff supported kestrel management, they wanted to make sure that any system used would not lead to any type of security risk, such as an outsider's ability to hide contraband inside a baffle or nestbox for an inmate's illegal use, etc. The possible inclusion of Barn Owl conservation was also discussed since the property had numerous buildings that could support Barn Owl boxes.

After the meeting, I was given a tour of the prison yards where I could see the outside world through the heavy and tall security fences. I was fairly sure that we could install several kestrel boxes on opposite sides of the 600 yard-wide yard, and the boxes would still be visible from inside the prison fences. As the tour took place, we walked among hundreds of inmates dressed in blue. Nonviolent inmates that work outside the fence wear tan clothing and are called “tans” or “tanners.”

As the LoCI project bloomed, John Thomas introduced me to Mr. Jerry Newman, Construction Technologies Instructor at Tolles, which led to Jerry’s students building four kestrel boxes and three poles for LoCI. (I built the first of four poles as a sample to be followed.) Both junior and senior classes had outdoor construction projects to keep them busy, but the junior class was the most available, especially on rainy days that forced them inside. I delivered one pole, a sample nestbox, and building materials for other poles and nestboxes on February 9, 2015. Other trips with materials followed, including deliveries of six-inch drainpipe used for baffles, PVC boards used for nestbox sleeves that can slide up and down poles, cables and winches, fasteners, nestbox bedding, and printed plans for boxes and poles, etc. I made a total of six visitations to Tolles before everything was ready to go. I was very impressed by the effective skills of the competent, young carpenters.

I returned to the prison on March 23 to help select sites for the four poles that were nearing completion at Tolles. I and several prison personnel rode in a pickup truck and used the truck’s odometer to make sure that the proposed box locations were at least one-half mile apart so nesting kestrels would not have territorial disputes with other kestrels. The only exception of the day was 600 yards (1/3 mile) between two box locations opposite each other on the east and west sides of the prison yard. Three box locations were lined up north to south along one mile of service road on the east side of the prison property.

A most important event started at noon on May 18, 2015 when the first kestrel nestbox was installed in the yard of LoCI’s historic warden’s house that has not been used as a home during modern times. It was also a ceremonial event, and with guards in attendance, the warden introduced members of his team and gave credit to Kathy Wolbort for her vision of a project that was the first of its kind in all of North America.

Soon, five pairs of hands, including those from two inmates and three seniors from the second carpentry class at Tolles, lifted the kestrel pole Iwo Jima style as it slipped into its four-foot-deep cavity in the ground. Jane Beathard, Madison Press journalist, captured the action with her camera. Sacked concrete was quickly tapped around the pole as a level insured its accurate stance. The winch was cranked to quickly raise the box to nearly 12 feet above the ground, then the drainpipe baffle was secured with its bolt, and the event’s participants and onlookers relived their roles through conversation. It was a great event.

Ken Duren, Barn Owl biologist with the Ohio Division of Wildlife, attended the ceremony and was given a guided tour of the grounds afterward. During Ken’s tour, three locations were identified as possible sites for owl boxes.

Tanners installed all the three remaining poles during the days that followed. Mid-May was a little late to attract nesting kestrels for 2015 since the population was well into its nesting season at other locations. Only starlings claimed the boxes during the 2015 summer, but tanner inmates gained experience and work credit for their supervised monitoring visits.

In the July 17, 2015 issue of Ohio Outdoor News, page 10, Jane Beathard’s article, “At prison, conservation meets incarceration” appeared. Subscribers, including hunters, fishermen, and bird watchers from throughout Ohio were made aware of the kestrel project at LoCI.

On August 31, I accomplished volunteer training and was given a badge to wear during my visits. I returned in November to do minor adjustments to the kestrel poles, including adding lengths of cable to three poles, and adding three inches to bumper stops at the tops of poles to prevent cable hardware from tangling with the poles’ pulley mechanisms. I was also scheduled to meet with an inmate bird expert in the office of their work barn. I was pleased to see the Ohio Outdoor News article displayed on the wall under a sheet of protective plastic. We discussed Barn Owls and I was encouraged to learn that Barn Owls had been seen on the prison property. I concluded that the bird projects had generated a lot of interest among the guards and inmates.

In March, I donated four books to the PROOF project: A Photographic Timeline of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary’s American Kestrel Nestlings; Project Puffin; The Audubon Birdhouse Book: Building, Placing, and Maintaining Great





A female kestrel huddled over her hatchlings and eggs as the monster-man in her ceiling took this photo.

Homes for Great Birds; and a custom-built data book for monitors to record their observations. Hopefully, exposure to these books will lead to additional effective conservation projects.

An email from Kathy on May 21, 2016 announced that LoCI had a kestrel nest. Other emails followed until it was time to add U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service leg bands to two families of four nestlings each on July 12. Sargent Gordin drove a prison pickup truck with an extended cab to each of two boxes where Kathy, the Sargent, one inmate and I hopped out to easily lower the box to extract some apprehensive young falcons. Of course, the kestrels were cute, beautiful, and full of personality. I applied the leg bands with my banding pliers as the other three participants gingerly held nestlings. After the nestlings were gently returned to their nest, we hooked the roof in place, easily raised the box and reattached the baffle, and off we went to the next box.

As we encountered other guards, there were smiles and questions about the project, and when we banded a family near the tanners' barn, the inmate on the banding team reached into the nestbox and lifted out a dead pigeon nestling that looked to be four or five days old. He held it up for a tanner work crew to see to prove that the kestrels were living up to their end of the deal; the kestrels had a place to nest, so they were helping with the pigeon problem. The small falcons had won over many members of the LoCI community.

In the September 23, 2016 issue of the Ohio Outdoor News, Jane Beathard's second article "Kestrels find their way to prison, where PROOF nest boxes awaited" appeared on page 4 to tell the triumphant conservation story. The article reported that the kestrels perched on telephone poles and buildings throughout the prison farm until late August. In other words, once the nesting season was over, the resident kestrels continued to be a positive source of interest at the prison.

To sum things up, I frequently announce that as a conservationist, I do what I do for the birds, and when people also benefit, that is icing on the cake. The icing this time included teachers and young carpenters at Tolles, staff members at LoCI, and perhaps, most important, fellow human beings that are in the process of rehabilitation and reentry into our society. If you are reading this, you know that your interactions with the natural world are therapeutical. You can't help but smile when peering into a nest cavity to see eggs, hatchlings or nestlings of any of our native species.

Multiple teams of our own species worked hard to help American Kestrels nest at LoCI, then the small falcons went about enhancing many lives. Raptor on into 2017 and beyond!

**Correction: In the Winter 2016-2017 issue of Bluebird Monitor, the "2016 Tree Swallows" article incorrectly reported the number of nests and pairs. The correct number in the next to last paragraph, first sentence, should be 278 nests and 265 pairs.**

# On House Sparrows

By Doug LeVasseur , OBS Area Contact



I recently reviewed the comments on 250 nest box reports sent to the Ohio Bluebird Society. It is not at all difficult to conclude that the most disturbing, traumatic and discouraging event for a bluebird is to live through the murderous attack of a House Sparrow on a favorite nest box.

You can hear the distress in the statement "Do you have anything to get rid of the sparrows? We need help!"

Today so much excellent bluebirding information is readily available that folks new to bluebirding seldom enter into this conservation effort without knowing something of the House Sparrow threat. Still, I have often heard first year bluebirders say, "My bluebirds are different. You should see them gang up on those House Sparrows." Veteran bluebirders know that the Bluebird-House Sparrow contest is a mismatch. It always was and it always will be. Only intervention can tip the scales to favor the bluebirds.

Twenty years ago I had a difficult time coming to terms with what it meant to "Rid my trail of House Sparrows" or what the term "eradication" really meant. Eradication in its gentlest form consists of weeding the garden. Some plants die so others can thrive. Then there are household eradications. People today seem to be less and less tolerant of household insects and spiders and heaven forbid a bat or mouse should enter the house. Farmers who refuse to deal with infestations of certain insects and rodents find themselves in the poor house.

But no one has to tell me that it is a big step from weeding your garden to eradicating House Sparrows from your bluebird trail! Why? Well, for most of us the House Sparrow has not been on our lifelong villain list. At worst, we viewed it as a useless, prolific but rather harmless species. But when he wiped out our favorite bluebird family, all that SUDDENLY changed.

Then there is the course the ridding process must take. If we could find the sparrow dead in our trap as we do a mouse that would make things easier. However all traps must capture birds alive so that protected native species can be released unharmed. That leaves the ridding process to you who now have a live bird in your hand. I am not ashamed to admit that 20 years ago, the first time around, with the murderous sparrow in my grasp, I thought for a moment and then simply opened my hand and let him fly away.

It is well to remember that the House Sparrow is an introduced species, and not protected by wildlife laws in the US or Canada. Species that have existed together for tens of thousands of years arrive at a natural balance. When a non-native species is introduced into the system, be it the Brown Snake to Guam, kudzu to Alabama or the House Sparrow to North America, the balance can be severely upset.

The introduction of a single species can endanger not just one species, but often the entire biodiversity of the ecosystem. Many believe that when humans introduce a foreign element into a balanced system, be it a chemical such as DDT, habitat alteration, or a foreign species, humans then have an OBLIGATION to protect the species their actions have endangered.

Remember too that there are passive means of sparrow control. Nest boxes, even entire trails can be placed in habitat where no sparrows live. All productive large trails rely on such control. John Lapin from Poland Ohio fledged 836 bluebirds from a 292 box trail last season. He did trap many House Sparrows. But to think that he battled sparrows in each and every box is ludicrous.

We should all be well advised to practice passive sparrow control on at least part of our trail if at all possible. We should all remember that decisions dealing with the House Sparrow dilemma are often personal ones. There are neither easy answers nor hard and fast rules.

People's philosophies may change over time as they exchange information with other bluebirders, continue to educate themselves about sparrow problems and experience their own management successes and failures. But all positions on this difficult matter should be respected.

**Editor's note: Doug is a familiar face and name to many bluebirders in Ohio and throughout the country. He has been very active in OBS for many years. Doug is the Area Contact for Noble County in southern Ohio although he remarks that he and his wife Ethel-Marie are spending winters in Arizona and enjoy their time with her family there. Doug has put up a few nestboxes in Arizona which attracted nesting Mountain Bluebirds and even a Mountain Chickadee! Perhaps he will share more stories with us in future issues about his western bluebirding experiences too! Thanks Doug! And many Thanks also to the North American Bluebird Society for their permission to reprint this article by Doug- it originally appeared in the NABS Journal "Bluebird" in Summer 2001.**



# The American Woodcock (*Scolopax minor*)

By Cathy Priebe, Photo by David W. Loeber



The American Woodcock is one of the coolest birds I have ever seen. However, they are not the easiest of birds to find. You have to inadvertently stumble (not literally, of course) upon them and flush them from their leafy, camouflaged hiding place or better yet, go on an organized early spring “woodcock walk”.

And so I did. Many local metro parks offer this unique experience and Sandy Ridge Reservation, in North Ridgeville, is where I saw my first woodcock aerial mating dance. Before I tell you about my walk, here is a little more background on our subject.

The woodcock is a very secretive, nocturnal creature and is also our only woodland shorebird. It is commonly described as having a plump, oval-shaped body with an extremely long straight bill, large gentle dark eyes, large head, and a short neck. In all of its plumages, upperparts are a gray, black and buff pattern. The under parts are an orange buff. Not the prettiest kid on the block, but uniquely beautiful. Pete Dunne fondly calls the woodcock a “meatloaf on a stick” while others may call it a “timberdoodle”.

The species breeds from southern Manitoba and southern Newfoundland south to northeastern Texas and southern Georgia. They winter from central Oklahoma and southern Connecticut south to central Texas and southern Florida.

Damp second-growth forest, forest openings, overgrown fields and bogs are prime breeding and nesting areas for timberdoodles. Males usually reach their northern breeding grounds between mid-March and mid-April.

Earthworms are their main source of food although they do consume insects and seeds. The nest is a scraped depression in the ground and is lined with twigs or grasses. The female, who alone incubates and raises the young, will lay up to four eggs, buff with brown splotches. The nestlings emerge after 21 days and fledge within 28 days.



Displaying males will perform at dawn, dusk, and all night when the moon is full. A loud “peent” call usually signals the beginning of an aerial display that has to be seen to be believed.

Back to the walk:

A small group of us braved a chilly, but calm evening last April. We patiently waited and listened for the first “peent” that would direct our gaze toward the imminent courtship flight. I missed the first flight of the evening, my eyes getting lost in the hazy darkness. Luckily, the field contained more than one displaying male.

After a loud “peent”, the woodcock initially rises in the air in wide circles. Once it reaches around 50 feet, the wings make a “twittering” sound as he flies higher. Finally, upon reaching 200 to 300 feet, the twittering lessens and he descends in a zigzag pattern to the ground. Wow, what a thrill to witness such a dance!

According to Larry Rosche, author of *Birds of the Cleveland Region*, “No birdwatcher who has watched the antics and courtship flights of the timberdoodle has ever regretted it.” I wholeheartedly agree.

*References: Birds of the Cleveland Region by Larry Rosche; Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion by Pete Dunne; The Shorebird Guide by authors Michael O'Brien, Richard Crossley, and Kevin Carlson; Stokes Field Guide to Birds by Donald and Lillian Stokes.*



# Member News

*"Sometimes you belong so you can give, not just receive. The membership dues to OBS allow us to do so much to help birds, our communities and ultimately ourselves."*

~ Chuck Jakubchak

## Welcome to New Members

Diana Barr	Harry Price
Dan Best	Anne Smedley
Mona Buckley	Debbie Smilek
Patricia Dollisch	Kasie Spence
Laura Gray	Steve Weber
Krista Magaw (Tecumseh Land Trust)	

## Thank You to Our Donors

Eileen M. Cernea - \$50.00  
 Patricia Dove - \$100.00  
 Paulette A. Sawvel - \$200.00 - in honor and memory of her husband, John L. Sawvel  
 Daniel and Nancy Best - \$5.00  
 Ron and Carol Swart - \$10.00  
 Melvin B. Bolt - \$100.00  
 We also received \$7.92 from the Amazon Smile Project.

## Grants Awarded

The Ohio Bluebird Society awarded a \$150.00 grant to Tecumseh Land Trust, Yellow Springs, Ohio. We also gave a check for \$100.00, supporting the conference at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge.

## Conference Accommodations

From Don and Diana Plant – Hello all: We just met with Holiday Inn Express, Ashland (same as last year). It was recommended that we set aside a larger block of rooms than we feel we really may need. We had advised them that we were not really sure how many we might need, so we set aside a block of 20 rooms, for Friday evening, March 3, 2017. The cost per room will be a discounted price of \$99.00 plus tax. This price also includes breakfast from 6:30 until noon. Reservations should be made by phone (419-281-2900). Location – State Route 250, just off I-71, next to McDonald's. Check-out is by 11:00 AM. When making reservations, be sure to say "Ohio Bluebird Society".

## OBS Trustee Meeting

The Ohio Bluebird Society had a Trustees Meeting on Jan 7, 2017 from 10am to 2pm. In attendance were Interim President Mike Watson, Trustees Dale Rabung, Don Plant, Mel Bird, Mary Lee Minor, Carrie Elvey, Pat Dutton, Penny Brandau, Kurt Gaertner and Diana Plant, Secretary/Treasurer. The balance in the OBS budget as of December 31, 2016 was \$12,001.54. Agenda items for the Trustee meeting included finalizing the conference agenda, review of silent auction items, letters to speakers, press release, discussion of nestboxes for sale and non-profit displays. Blue Feather and Wildlife Conservation Award recipients were voted on and will be announced at the conference. A small grants program application was discussed and voted on. Pat Dutton reported on increased training she has received on the website which will be very beneficial to OBS. Work continues on revising the OBS bylaws and Carrie Elvey presented some changes which were discussed- further work and discussion is planned for the next board meeting on April 5, 2017 at the Wilderness Center. A conference committee meeting was set for Feb 20, 2017 prior to the actual conference on March 4, 2017 at Ashland University Convocation Center.

## OBS Project Updates

*It is always good to receive project updates from OBS grant recipients and so we are sharing a report which was received from one of our 2016 grant recipients. This note was received from student Kyle Davis of the Ohio Wesleyan University and his mentor Dustin Reichard.*

**Project:** Our project was to put up 40 bluebird boxes at Ohio Wesleyan University. We wanted to use the bluebird boxes for student research. Project outcome: We have achieved our goal of 40 bluebird boxes. We have 20 boxes set up on campus, and 20 boxes set up at Kraus Preserve, a land lab owned by the university. We have had one student conduct research with the boxes. Their research was to find out what kind of microbiota existed on nests, parents, and nestlings of cavity nesting species.

**Grant money:** The \$ 200.00 grant that we received from the Ohio Bluebird Society was used to buy the poles, washers, and bolts needed to set up the nest boxes. A local Boy Scout troop and the Big Walnut High School Woodshop class built and donated the nest boxes.



# Ask Madame WingNut

## Safer Springtime

By Paula Ziebarth



During late winter and early spring, I take certain steps to make native cavity nesters safer. I believe clean, heated water sources and supplemental feeding help a lot of birds during late winter months when unfrozen water can be impossible to find and natural food stores are greatly diminished. I feed sunflower oil seeds and homemade crumbly suet mixes during winter months. Once the

temperatures get above the mid 40's and insects become active, I discontinue seed feeding. During nest season, I may offer sugar water for hummingbirds and a handful of mealworms occasionally. Thistle seed is also fine to set out. My reason for changing bird feeding fare is to disinvite nest site competitors such as House Sparrows from the feeding station. I am also encouraging Cooper's Hawks, Blue Jays, European Starlings, American Crows and other avian hunters or nest robbing birds to frequent other areas. If I am not actively feeding them, they are less likely to hang around. Mammalian predators should also be reduced by eliminating seed feeding.

House Sparrows are prevalent in the suburbs in central Ohio. I use repeat bait traps during winter months to reduce their numbers. On warm winter days, I check nest boxes for evidence of House Sparrows roosting. If I open a box and find House Sparrow droppings (see pictures of House Sparrow vs Eastern Bluebird droppings), I set a Van Ert inbox trap near dusk and check again first thing in the morning. When doing this closer to nest season, it may be wise to install a temporary 1- 1/4" hole reducer on the box to insure that Eastern Bluebirds will not get trapped. Once the male House Sparrow is trapped, simply remove the reducer. On a warm day this past December, I captured several House Sparrows on my Powell City Trail. February and March are good to start House Sparrow trapping in nest boxes if you haven't started already. The more you eliminate now, the fewer problems you will have with them during nesting season.

Another great way to disinvite House Sparrows is to prune dense ornamental shrubs or trees that they are currently using as a roost site. Winter is the best time to prune your plants. Prune with a "hawk's eye view", opening up holes in the canopy at least 6 inches in diameter so Cooper's Hawks can readily hunt them.

When House Sparrows begin to sing, they are generally declaring

they have claimed "their" box so listen carefully and set inbox traps in nest boxes as soon as you see evidence of a House Sparrow claiming it. It is easy to catch them before they place a single piece of nest material if you see droppings in there. Once they have gone in, they will go in again. Other evidence of House Sparrows claiming a nest box include male singing on or near the box and/or House Sparrow nest material added to the box.

Late winter is a great time to evaluate habitat changes. Is box in House Wren habitat? Would it serve better elsewhere? No nest boxes should be mounted on trees or fence posts. Free standing pole with baffle will keep birds much safer from climbing predators.

Downy Woodpeckers will probably roost in some of your nest boxes during winter months. I am always happy to see them there; knowing box provided safe warm respite from the winter weather. While in there, however, they excavate material from inside front box face and around the entry hole. Before Eastern Bluebirds begin nesting, replace front on damaged boxes or simply add a new 1-1/2" or 1-9/16" hole reducer to the damaged entrance. Leaving larger hole will invite European Starlings and other predators to access box and depredate your birds.

Make sure any nest boxes blocked to keep House Wrens out last summer are now open to allow Black-Capped or Carolina Chickadees to investigate and begin their nests. To keep them safer, as soon as you see moss in any box (hallmark nest material of our Chickadees), install a 1-1/8" hole reducer on box to keep House Sparrows from accessing and depredating nest. Watch the calendar and listen for returning House Wrens. In central Ohio, I usually see them return on the third week of April. Chickadees can be well along by then. Although not foolproof, installing a Wren guard on a box that has Chickadee eggs or young birds can help to keep House Wrens at bay.

Nest season is just around the corner. With global warming, you may see some interesting anomalies. A monitor e-mailed me last week to let me know his backyard Eastern Bluebirds had built a nest during the warm spell we recently had. I would love to hear from any of you that feel climate change has affected the breeding birds in your yard or on your trails.



*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.*



# Ohio Bluebird Society Annual Conference

March 4, 2017  
registration 8:30, conference 9:00-4:00



John C. Myers Convocation Center ~ Ashland University ~ Ashland, Ohio

## ***30 YEARS OF BLUEBIRD HAPPINESS 1987 - 2017***

History of bluebird conservation and the OBS  
Recovery success stories of Ohio birds  
Current conservation efforts

Lunchtime breakout sessions:  
Bluebirding 101  
Bluebirding 201  
Everything Bluebirds  
Youth Conservation Efforts



~ This project is supported by the Ohio Division of Wildlife, Wildlife Diversity Fund. ~

Open to the public. Cost: \$25 OBS member / \$30 non-OBS member / \$15 student

**Registration Deadline: Feb. 18th**

**Conference Location:** 401 College Ave., Ashland, OH 44805 ~ [www.ashland.edu](http://www.ashland.edu)

Registration form, hotel information and more info available at [ohiobluebirdsociety.org](http://ohiobluebirdsociety.org)

# Ohio Bluebird Society Annual Conference

## Saturday, March 4, 2017

[ohiobluebirdsociety.org](http://ohiobluebirdsociety.org)



**Registration Deadline: Feb. 18th**

You must pre-register - there is **NO** walk-in registration this year.

**Price** (includes conference and lunch): \$25 OBS member, \$30 non-OBS member,  
\$15 student (12 and under)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ OBS Member? YES / NO

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Lunch Option: ☐Veggie Wrap ☐Ham Club ☐Turkey Club ☐Gluten-free ☐Kids (PB&J)

### Additional participants: (if different address, please use separate form)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ OBS Member? Yes (\$25) / No (\$30)

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Lunch Choice: ☐Veggie Wrap ☐Ham Club ☐Turkey Club ☐Gluten-free ☐Kids (PB&J)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ OBS Member? Yes (\$25) / No (\$30)

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Lunch Choice: ☐Veggie Wrap ☐Ham Club ☐Turkey Club ☐Gluten-free ☐Kids (PB&J)

Total Enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to "OBS"

Mail to:  
Ohio Bluebird Society  
PMB 111, 343 W Milltown Rd.  
Wooster, OH 44691-7214

Additional information and registration forms available at OBS website: [ohiobluebirdsociety.org](http://ohiobluebirdsociety.org)

## OBS Area Contacts (as of January 2016)

Up-to-date list is available online at [www.ohiobluebirdsociety.org](http://www.ohiobluebirdsociety.org)

County	Name	Phone #	Alt. Phone #	E-mail
Allen	Mohr, Mark	419-221-1232	mmohr@jampd.com	
Ashland	Lang, Linda	419-945-3005		nrws_lang@tccsa.net
Belmont	Kabel, Michael	304-551-2517		bluebirdpadre@yahoo.com
Champaign	Rutan, Jean	937-834-3336		cpjrutan@gmail.com
Clark	Gray, Bethany	937-767-1919		ohiobluebirder@gmail.com
Crawford	Minor, Mary Lee	419-562-6377		chickadee@columbus.rr.com
Cuyahoga	Jakubchak, Chuck	440-238-1720		jakubchak@yahoo.com
Darke	Luttmer, Bob	937-526-5477		bonnie561@roadrunner.com
Darke	Smith, Tom	937-996-1629		bluebirdman@embarqmail.com
Delaware	Tuttle, Dick	740-363-6433		ohtres@cs.com
Delaware	Ziebarth, Paula	614-848-3784		paulaz@columbus.rr.com
Erie	Sheldon, Dean	419-752-1451		seedbed@accnorwalk.com
Franklin	Bourne, Lum & Meriam	614-882-1188		meriam.lum@worldnet.att.net
Franklin	Sillick, Darlene	614-288-3696		azuretrails@columbus.rr.com
Geauga	Brindo, Jay K.	440-343-9275		jbrindo@aol.com
Greene	Gray, Bethany	937-767-1919		ohiobluebirder@gmail.com
Greene	Williams, Alice	937-848-2595	937-266-1857	alokay1941@aol.com
Guernsey	Barber, Tom	740-439-4284		klbarber62@roadrunner.com
Hamilton	Romine, Jim	513-236-5598		jdromine@cincinnaticomm.com
Hancock	Nye, Fred	419-387-7465		evaferdy@tds.net
Holmes	Hawkins, Marcella	330-465-6987	330-276-0909	gofish710@embarqmail.com
Huron	Sheldon, Dean	419-752-1451		seedbed@accnorwalk.com
Lake	Watson, Mike	440-946-4400 x132	440-813-2628	mwatson@holdenarb.org
Lorain	Brandau, Penny	440-670-3684		pennybrandau@gmail.com
Lucas	Seaman, Tammy	419-349-5162		erictammy@sbcglobal.net
Medina	Rabung, Dale	330-725-0895	216-973-1503	
Noble	Levasseur, Doug	740-630-7945		doug.levasseur@gmail.com
Ottawa	Ziebarth, Paula	614-848-3784		paulaz@columbus.rr.com
Richland	Plant, Don	419-606-7011		ddplantbirds@yahoo.com
Seneca	Coffman, Jim	419-618-1835	419-448-4753	jrusscoff@gmail.com
Stark	Semroc, Judy	330-877-3551		rainefox@neo.rr.com
Summit	Grande, Marcy	330-807-6983		mgrandesign@yahoo.com
Warren	Jeffries, Art	317-445-8559		gonebirding@hotmail.com
Wayne	Bolt, Mel	330-262-0448		mellen@sssnet.com
Wood	Hamlin, Terry	419-349-8596		tkhamlin@icloud.com

## OBS Board of Trustees and Advisors

### TRUSTEES

Penny Brandau - Newsletter Editor:  
440-670-3684  
pennybrandau@gmail.com

Patricia Dutton  
330-763-0474  
obsmembershipchair@gmail.com

Carrie Elvey: 330-359-5235  
carrie@wildernesscenter.org

Kurt Gaertner: 513-831-1711, ext. 121  
kgaertner@cincynature.org

Mary Lee Minor: 419-562-6377  
chickadee@columbus.rr.com

Don Plant: 419-938-3737  
ddplantbirds@yahoo.com

Dale Rabung: 330-725-0895  
twodr@zoominternet.net

Mel Bird  
419.577.9545  
mrbird90@aol.com

Mike Watson - Vice President:  
440-946-4400 ext. 132  
mwatson@holdenarb.org

### ADVISORS

Mel Bolt: 330-262-0448  
mellen@sssnet.com

Linda Lang: 419-651-4196

Dean Sheldon: 419-752-1451  
seedbed@frontier.com

Dick Tuttle: 740-363-6433

**SECRETARY/TREASURER**  
Diana Plant

### MEMBERSHIP CHAIRS

Dave Dutton: 330-674-7585 • Pat Dutton: 330-763-0474

### E-mail:

info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org  
obsmembershipchair@gmail.com

### Phone:

330.466.6926

### Website:

[www.ohiobluebirdsociety.org](http://www.ohiobluebirdsociety.org)

### Address:

PMB 111, 343 West Milltown Rd.  
Wooster, Ohio 44691-7241

**facebook**

Like us on Facebook! Search for Ohio  
Bluebird Society to join our group.



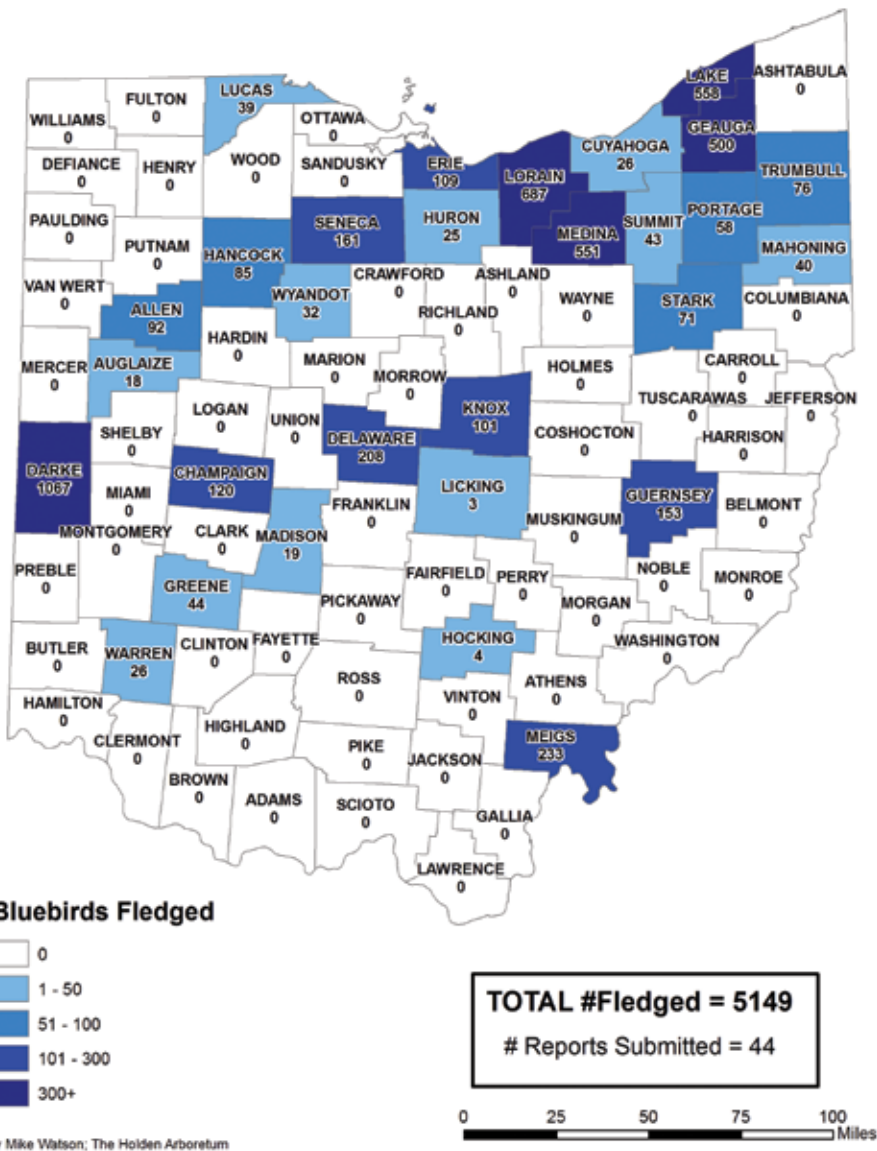
# OBS FLEDGLING REPORT

REPORTED AS OF 12/29/16:  
Eastern Bluebird - 5,149

In accordance with our Mission Statement, we support all native cavity nesting birds in Ohio.

- Tree Swallow - 4,967
- House Wren - 1,687
- Carolina Chickadee - 91
- Black- Capped Chickadee - 90
- Carolina Wren - 6
- Prothonotary Warbler - 61
- Purple Martins - 617
- Eastern Tufted Titmouse - 16
- American Kestrel - 99
- Barn Swallow - 110
- Wood Duck - 0
- Osprey - 4
- White-breasted Nuthatch - 7
- Eastern Phoebe - 4
- House Sparrow Eggs Discarded - 955
- House Sparrows Dispatched - 226

Send info to: [info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org](mailto:info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org)  
Download fillable form -  
see FLEDGLING REPORT tab



## 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	\$110
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting	\$100	\$275
<input type="checkbox"/> Life	\$300	

☐ Tax deductible gift to OBS \$ \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Membership renewal ☐ New membership

☐ I am interested in participating in OBS activities

☐ Email Newsletter OR ☐ Print Newsletter

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Make checks payable to:  
Ohio Bluebird Society

Mail to:  
OBS  
PMB 111, 343 W. Milltown Rd.  
Wooster, OH 44691-7214

Ohio Bluebird Society is a 501(c)(3) Organization



## OHIO BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

PMB 111  
343 W. Milltown Rd.  
Wooster, Ohio 44691

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

PRST STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
AKRON, OH  
PERMIT NO. 286

## 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.

[ohiobluebirdsociety.org](http://ohiobluebirdsociety.org)

facebook



Affiliated with the North American Bluebird Society

## What's Inside...

The Return of the Bluebird.....	1
In Contact with Our Area Contact.....	2
Blooming Bluebirders.....	3-4
Prisoners Restoring Owls and Falcons.....	5-7
On House Sparrows.....	8
The American Woodcock.....	9
Member News.....	10
Madame Wingnut.....	11
2017 Conference Registration.....	12-13
OBS Contact Block.....	14
Fledgling Report.....	15

## Deadline for Submitting Articles:

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



Eastern bluebirds gather in a birdbath to refresh. Ohio bluebirders are gathering too, on March 4, 2017 at Ashland University Convocation Center to refresh and celebrate “30 Years of Bluebird Happiness, 1987-2017”.

Be part of the event and register by February 18 – A registration form and more information about the conference can be found inside this newsletter!