



# Bluebird Monitor

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

Summer 2014



## 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

## New Beginnings

By Marcella Hawkins, OBS Executive Director

Thank you to all the members who took time to vote for our candidates for the positions of Trustee. We have nine newly elected Trustees, and they are as follows:



Penny Brandau  
Lorain County



Jay Brindo  
Geauga County



Carrie Elvy  
Wayne County



Kurt Gaertner  
Hamilton County



Chuck Jakubchak  
Cuyahoga County



Mary Lee Minor  
Crawford County



Don Plant  
Ashland County



Dale Rabung  
Medina County



Mike Watson  
Lake County

Please join me in welcoming them as the new leadership of our organization.



## Celebrating 50 years with **Holden's Bluebirders**

by Mike Watson, conservation biologist

The eastern bluebird is generally considered one of the most stunning native birds in Ohio. As Jim McCormac of the Ohio Division of Wildlife wrote, the "male eastern bluebird is an avian work of art." Here at Holden, these little works of art are on display year round, thanks to the incredible commitment of an army of volunteers.

This year marks the 50th year of data collection for Holden's Bluebird Program. For all their efforts, success and the thousands of fledglings, the volunteers deserve a huge thank you and congratulations.

### The Need

All wild populations will fluctuate from year to year in response to a wide variety of factors, including food supply, predation, competition and weather. Human intervention is rarely justified in response to these fluctuations. However, when human activities create a problem, it is sometimes necessary for humans to fix the problem.

In the case of the eastern bluebird, humans can be faulted with a large part of their population decline. And, happily, we can be credited with their recovery as well.

A list of our crimes against the bluebird include hunting, egg collection, habitat destruction, increased car traffic – and the associated road kills – pesticide use and introduction of non-native competitors. The recognition of these mistakes has allowed conservation-minded individuals to find ways to repair the damage. Banning of DDT and regulations on the use of other chemicals, the creation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, efforts to control the populations of non-native house sparrows and European starlings, and creating or improving habitat have helped a wide range of native bird species, including bluebirds.

The Holden Arboretum entered the world of bluebird conservation in the early 1960s. Those early volunteers installed more than 200 nestboxes across Holden's then-2,800 acres. Under the careful eye of Virginia Barrus and Jean Eakin, the conservation effort became more rigorous and scientific in 1965. Since that time, we have collected data on every nest attempt by any bird using one of the nestboxes.

The early years of Holden's bluebird program appear to have been frustrating. Low fledgling numbers, competition with the non-native house sparrow and other challenges must have been disheartening. But the dedicated group of volunteers learned from their experiences and succeeded over time.

Between 1985 and 1995, the number of bluebird fledged each year skyrocketed. Rather than 80 or 100 new bluebirds each year, by 1995 the program was producing more than 300.

I consider the last 20 years to be our period of stability. There have been substantial yearly fluctuations. But overall we are not seeing the rapid growth seen during the '80s and '90s. We have reached a point where we are saturated with bluebirds; we are simply not equipped to support more nesting pairs without adding more nestboxes. We do, however, watch for small ways to improve the program. For example, in 2008 our volunteers built and installed more than 200 predator baffles, dramatically reducing the number of eggs and chicks lost to raccoons and snakes each year.

To date, Holden's program has fledged more than 10,000 bluebirds. Clearly, we have had a substantial impact on the local population simply in terms of those new bluebirds. There are other impacts that should also be acknowledged. For example, many of our volunteers have installed nestboxes on their own property and encouraged others to do the same. One former volunteer has installed a 66 nestbox trail on his neighbor's property. The birds fledged from his nestboxes further boost the local bluebird population.

We have had a regional impact as well. Holden staff, volunteers and former volunteers have helped install new trails at the Inn at Honey Run, Lakeland Community College, Perry Schools, Wickliffe High School and Lake Metroparks Environmental Learning Center. I am currently working with Ursuline College to establish a bluebird program that will be incorporated into its ornithology coursework. Holden volunteers are a local and regional source of information and support to anyone interested in joining the bluebird conservation effort.

And Holden's efforts have not gone unnoticed. Edith Konzert, the volunteer coordinator for our bluebird program, received the Ohio Bluebird Society's Wildlife Conservation Award in 2006. Jay Brindo, a former Holden bluebird volunteer, and I are on the board of the Ohio Bluebird Society.



## Our Volunteers:

Although we refer to this effort as the Holden Bluebird Program, Holden's contribution has largely been the land and permission to install nestboxes. Staff from conservation, education and our volunteer office have helped attract new volunteers, maintain communication, celebrate the program's successes and provide other kinds of support. But the origin and success of the program must be attributed to the hard work of our volunteers. I like to think of the program as a volunteer effort that Holden has been lucky enough to host.

The following (very rough) estimates will give you a sense of the amount of effort these bluebird volunteers have given to the program since 1965:

- ❑ Total time spent monitoring nestboxes: at least 60,000 hours
- ❑ Total time spent crunching the numbers and submitting data: at least 5,000 hours
- ❑ The value of the time Holden's bluebird volunteers contributed (calculated at a rate of \$22.14 per hour, which is the rate set by Independent Sector) is \$33,210 in 2013 alone.

These numbers are just one way to summarize the volunteer efforts. Our volunteers measure their effort and success in the number of native birds fledged: more than 10,000 bluebirds and nearly as many tree swallows. They also value the experience, connection with nature, friendships, and other aspects of the bluebirding experience.

In fact, to get a better understanding of our volunteers and their relationship to the bluebird program, I sent out a questionnaire this winter to current and past volunteers. The questionnaire included questions about the best and worst aspects of bluebird monitoring, as well as whether being a bluebird volunteer changed their relationship with nature.



KEN SCHMIDT  
BUILDING PREDATOR  
BAFFLES TO PROTECT  
THE BIRDS FROM  
RACCOONS AND  
SNAKES.

By and large, the volunteers said that the worst part of bluebirding was when a nest attempt fails. Nest attempts fail for a number of reasons: starvation, excessive heat or cold, disease, predation and even human interference. We try to minimize these problems as best as we can, but chicks still do die and eggs fail to hatch. Although nest failures are never fun, the good things about bluebirding certainly outweigh the bad.

The aspects that volunteers like best about the bluebird program generally fit into broader categories such as experiencing nature, contributing to something bigger, direct connection with birds, social interactions with staff and volunteers, the opportunity to learn something new, and the sense of accomplishment for a job well done.

Blue-birders start the season in late March or early April and work until August or September. Being out in nature during this time period is one volunteer's favorite aspect of the bluebirding experience. The volunteer described watching the emergence of spring and how the trail changed as the season progressed into summer.

Many volunteers enjoy being part of a larger project and contributing to science. All of Holden's data are analyzed on a yearly basis, which contributes to our understanding of the local bluebird population. Data are submitted to Cornell's NestWatch program, which tracks nesting attempts by thousands of birds from roughly 150 species across the entire United States. So Holden's bluebird volunteers really are contributing to a large and scientific effort. Ohio reports more bluebird nest attempts to NestWatch than any other state.



JEAN VANTINE  
CHECKS A  
BLUEBIRD BOX

New volunteers join the bluebird program each year. And all of those new volunteers train with an experienced volunteer. The expression of delight on the faces of new volunteers when they first see recently hatched chicks is one of the best aspects of the bluebird program, according to one long-time volunteer.

Although most of the bluebird volunteers already had a strong interest and love for nature, many did report that bluebirding changed their relationship with nature in some way. Most often, they report an increased interest in birds, a deeper understanding of the rhythms of nature, or that it provided a way to bring nature to their family by sharing the bluebirding experience with relatives.

One volunteer was able to hike the trail with her father during the final year of his life. This was particularly meaningful for her, since it was her father who first took her on hikes and instilled in her a love of nature when she was a child. Bluebirding offered her the opportunity to share that love of nature with her father again.

So where would we be without this volunteer effort? Holden might never have started a bluebird conservation program. The local bluebird population would not be nearly as healthy as it is now. We would not have the impressive dataset and collection of knowledge and experience that the volunteers have collected over the years. And no one could point to Holden's bluebird program as an example of a successful, grassroots conservation program. Humans have contributed to the decline and extinction of many, many species of plants and animals, and it's important to know that the hard work of a group of volunteers can make a big difference at the local and regional level.



EDITH KONZETT BANDING A YOUNG TREE SWALLOW.  
PHOTOS BY MIKE WATSON



# Care to Share

By Fred Nye



I consider receiving the 2014 Blue Feather a great honor. As I stated at the conference it has been a labor of love. I consider this award a culmination of my Bluebird work that started in 1986. I have fledged 2128 bluebirds in my career. I did not know what a Tree Swallow was for several years. But now, I know them very well and they are welcome at my nest boxes but I have

not maintained a record of the number that have fledged.

I will attempt to write a brief history of how and why I installed my first Bluebird nest box. I was born on the farm in Eastern Hancock County in 1936. I still live at the same location. When I was a 10-14 year old boy my father had a herd of dairy cows and one of my childhood duties was to go down our back lane and bring the cows up the be milked. Our farm had fences on both sides of the lane with some bigger hollow wooden fence posts. I would check those hollow posts for Bluebirds and some Bluebirds fledged without much people assistance. As time went on I started to farm for myself and didn't care much for cows and I concentrated on confinement pork production. I then eliminated all the fences on the farm – hence, no more Bluebirds.

In the early 1980's The Courier (The Findlay newspaper) had a retired biology teacher - Dr. R.S. Phillips - writing a weekly column called "In Nature's Realm". In this column he lamented the fact that there were almost no Bluebirds left in Hancock County. In his writings he would state the Bluebird was almost extinct in the area. We would still see one rarely. My conscience started to bother me a bit since I was the person who removed the fences from the lane where the birds had nested. As part of my guilt trip we installed two nest boxes at the approximate locations of the fence posts that had previously had Bluebird nests that I had watched as a youngster. To my surprise both nest boxes raised and fledged two clutches of four for a total of sixteen birds. Those Bluebirds had a lot of visitors as it would seem like half the population of Findlay had to view a Bluebird. Dr. Phillips banded all my nestlings for years until his passing. At this point in time I thought I knew all there was to know about Bluebirds. FYI – I've learned a lot since then.

My activities with OBS began in the year 2000 when I retired as Biglick Township Fiscal Officer (Township Clerk) after twenty

years of service. Prior to my retirement along with my farming operation my time was very limited. I have the belief if you don't have time to do the job well don't accept it. In 1995 (?) I accepted the position of Hancock County Coordinator and eventually became an OBS director for two terms. I now serve as an Area Contact. I have recruited numerous members for OBS. For several years I had a display at the Hancock County Fair and many members were recruited from outside Hancock County. I no longer do that activity as of three years ago. I made quite a few contacts while at the fair and have visited six counties to give Bluebird educational presentations. I referred a meeting in Franklin County to Darlene Sillick for a session of The Ohio Garden Club Annual Meeting as I was harvesting wheat at the time. I have been active with The Hancock County Park District setting up trails at various locations and giving a Bluebird educational session every two years. For several years I scheduled meetings at the DNR Division 1 Office in Findlay for Bluebird educational sessions. I have presented educational meetings at various 4-H Clubs, Lions Clubs, Boy Scout groups, Chamber of Commerce, Cub Scouts, garden clubs in and around my area, The Hancock County Naturalists, and the Coonskin Club near the Hocking Hills area.

During the above time period I was a little younger and now at almost 78 years old my energy level is not what it was. But I will continue to do what I can to support OBS and the Bluebirds. I maintain a 50-nest box trail that includes my farm, one cemetery, five homesteads, one Township House, six electric poles and one ditch bank. I have several people in my neighborhood and area that have and maintain nest boxes on their own. I spend my Sunday afternoon on my 4-wheel ATV for approximately three hours doing my chores (checking nest boxes). After 40 years of raising livestock I find Bluebirding to be a lot more recreational. I would much rather confront a mad mama Bluebird than a 500-pound irritated brood sow.

In closing I would like to thank all who chose me to be the Blue Feather recipient for 2014. I feel very honored to be in the company of the past recipients.

A special thanks to Marcella and the Officers and Advisors with their efforts to save a fine organization.

Sincerely,  
Fred Nye, Hancock County



# Protecting Macho Man's Family from a Flood

by Dick Tuttle



Bluebirders frequently assign names to trail birds that show unique or extreme behaviors. A protective bluebird has never hit me, but one male bird had come so close to my face so many times that he earned the name Macho Man in 2011. He claimed a nestbox in the Southwest corner of Delaware State Park (DSP) where the upper layers of soil had been scraped off and used as fill when the park was being converted from farmland during the early 1950's.

Plant succession is extremely slow there and much of the exposed clay remains open where bluebirds find it easy to snatch crawling insects from the ground. The park's 1,686 land acres make up the eastern shore of Delaware Lake, a flood control reservoir created by a dam managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The low area in the park's southwest corner is an early flood zone when water is held back by the dam in order to protect the cities of Delaware and Columbus downstream. Only four of my 165 boxes in the park are vulnerable to rising lake water and Macho Man's box is one of them.

Since I grew up in Prospect, Ohio, a small town along the Scioto River in Marion County, rising water and floods was part of my childhood, so I check into the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' website in Hunting, West Virginia every morning to record water levels of local streams and lakes. Until heavy rains arrive, the managed summer pool for Delaware Lake is 915 feet above sea level.

On July 10, 2013, I was scheduled to monitor the southern half of DSP but when I checked the lake level that had been posted at 04:00, I found that due to heavy rains days before, the lake had risen to 927.62 feet, more than 12 feet above summer pool. I checked my data book and found that of the four flood-prone boxes in the park; only Macho Man's box had life in it. Macho and his mate had four nine-day-old nestlings that were threatened by rising water.

I drove to the park and found that the lake's water was within inches of reaching the base of the pipe supporting the bluebird family's box. I quickly returned to my car and before I left the park for home, I had a plan: I was going to attach the threatened nestbox to a five-foot long "sleeve" that I normally use for Prothonotary Warbler nestjars.

I make two five-foot sleeves from a ten-foot length of 1-1/4-inch schedule 40 PVC pipe purchased at any hardware store. I use PVC water pipe. Sleeves slip over lengths of steel pipe (or narrower PVC pipes) that are driven into the earth. Sleeves can slide up and down and are held in place with a hose clamp that threads through two slots four inches from the lower end of the sleeve. I cut the slots with a table saw.

I arrived home and removed a stored PVC nestjar from its sleeve. I drilled a 9/32" hole one inch from its top edge for a 1/4" x 3-inch

carriage bolt that would connect the box to the sleeve. From my workshop, I collected a carriage bolt, a one-inch long wood screw, and an eight-inch length of 14-gauge wire. I threw the conversion kit into my car and hit the road for the park. When I arrived in the park, I traded my shoes for knee boots as water had reached the base of Macho's pipe mount.

I used a wrench and wire cutter to disengage the nestbox's original bolt and wire loop. I was thankful that the bluebird nestlings were immature enough to "hunker down" as my hand worked immediately above their bodies. I was prepared to place the nestlings in a tote bag if they panicked, but peace reigned as I secured the box to its new mount. Once I tightened the nut to the bolt that passed through the back of the box and sleeve, I used a screw driver to twist the wood screw between the floor and back panel while leaving its head sticking out far enough to accept the new wire. I twisted the wire around the screw and sleeve to complete the box's connection.

I lifted the sleeve high enough to slide around the pipe mount, adjusted its height, and tightened the hose clamp at the sleeve's base, holding the nestbox nine or ten feet above the ground.

When I returned home, I checked the Corps' website and found the water level at 11:00 was 931.33 feet, the time that I was working on the new installation. At 20:00 that night, water had risen high enough to cross the road at the park's entrance, closing the park to the public. The lake continued to rise to crest at 940.24 feet at 04:00 on July 13 and I wondered if I had placed Macho Man's box high enough. The numbers said yes, but I still had my doubts. I was worried.

Six days passed before the lake waters receded enough for the park to reopen. I stood back more than one hundred yards and watched through binoculars as both bluebird parents delivered food to their nestbox that stood five feet above another five feet of water. Two more days passed before I could stand in mud to lower the sleeve and peer into the nest chamber to see the last two youngsters awaiting an opportunity to fledge. I turned their box to face dry land for a better landing. I returned the next day to lower the box and clean out their empty nest while celebrating the fact that all four of Macho's family got their shot at life after missing a flood.

One of the other four boxes had been completely covered by floodwaters while the other two had several inches of water enter their nest chambers. Before the 2014 season, I added sleeves to the other three nestboxes so I can give all four boxes the best possible chance during high-water events. As for Macho Man, I'm afraid he made an error in judgement. He did not migrate before the severe 2013 - 2014 winter, and I am sure I found his remains lying on an inch of fecal material during my first monitoring visit on March 10. I presented his remains to the Ohio Wesleyan Zoology Museum for preservation so he can continue to impress our species. I am sure Macho Man lives on in the genes of his many offspring, but so far, I have not experienced any near-brushes to my face by any fanatical male bluebirds, but Macho Man remains a positive memory.



# Out of the Box

## Hooded Merganser

By Chuck Jakubchak

Painting by Jim Denny, *Outdoor Alabama*



The preferred habitat for hooded mergansers is similar to that of a wood duck and slow moving fresh water such as beaver ponds, flooded forests or riverside swamps seem to be especially appealing. Their diet of tadpoles, small fish, frogs, aquatic insects and aquatic plants ties perfectly to their habitat.

Prey is found underwater by sight and hooded mergansers have special adaptations for underwater feeding. They are equipped with a 3rd transparent eyelid (nictitating membrane) that acts as goggles, protecting their eyes as they search for and secure prey. Their powerful legs easily propel them underwater when pursuing prey and their slender, serrated bills allow them to easily grasp slippery prey.

Hooded mergansers prefer to nest in tree cavities approximately 15-20 feet above the ground but they may use nest boxes with a 3 ½ inch (or larger) opening if available. The female will lay one clutch of eggs per year and the clutch will contain 5-12 eggs. The male abandons the female once incubation begins and the female assumes all responsibility for raising the young. Eggs are incubated for 31 days and are “magically” timed to hatch within a 4 hour window. Synchronized hatching allows the nestlings to move in unison from the nest cavity to a pond within 24 hours of hatching. Young mergansers will take their first flight after approximately 70 days.

Occasionally other hooded mergansers will lay their eggs in the nest of another hooded merganser and this explains unusually large clutch sizes. This type of nest parasitism is different than that of brown headed cowbirds because hooded mergansers only parasitize the nest of their own species. (Cowbirds will select a variety of species.)

Hooded mergansers are smallest of the North American mergansers and are the only merganser to breed and winter exclusively in North America. They are considered late migrators, leaving just before ice forms on the ponds and usually return in the spring within days of the ice melting.

One environmental challenge facing this species is pollution that might impact their food supply as aquatic life is very sensitive. Destruction of nesting habitat is another concern as dead trees are vital to their reproduction. At this time the Cornell Lab of Ornithology indicates that the population of hooded mergansers has stabilized and may even have increased in recent years.





# Wildlife Preservation

## Bluebird-hawk

By Jim McCormac



The eastern bluebird has a reputation for gentleness. Seemingly meek and mild, the little thrush is possessed of soft features, beautiful colors, and a delightfully throaty warble. Anyone might be excused for viewing bluebirds as avian pacifists. In the words of Arthur Cleveland Bent, “And, as our Pilgrim fathers welcomed

it over 300 years ago, so do we today greet with joy the coming of this lovely, gentle bird each spring.”

In reality, the bluebird is an efficient hunter, and lesser beasts had best beware. The thrushes are quite hawklike in their hunting tactics. Bluebirds typically perch on an exposed limb or fencepost that offers a commanding view of the surroundings. They’ve got eagle eyes, too. It has been shown that bluebirds can spot small insect prey from as far as 130 feet – nearly half the length of a football field! When prey is sighted, the bluebird launches a direct flight towards the target, which is usually on or near the ground. This classic hunting behavior is known as “drop-foraging”. With a quick pounce, it traps the victim and seizes it. If chicks are to be fed, the bluebird will cart the prey back to the nest; otherwise, it will retreat to a nearby perch to enjoy its meal.

As many a bluebird fan knows, these birds are fond of mealworms. Toss a bunch of the tubular little wrigglers onto a platform, and watch the thrushes descend. It sparks a scene reminiscent of a hotdog-eating contest. But of course, most bluebirds have no one to offer them such easy fare. There’s no need – Nature is full of even better mealworms. Especially favored are big plump caterpillars known as cutworms. These moth caterpillars typically feed on grasses and other low plants, and thus are vulnerable to bluebird predation. A number of dietary studies have shown that Lepidopteran larvae – caterpillars of moths and butterflies – make up the majority of a bluebird’s warm season diet.

Another important group of insects for bluebird sustenance is crickets, katydids, grasshoppers and their kin. Watch a hunting bluebird in the summer, and it will eventually capture one of these insects. Beetles also

rank high in a bluebird’s diet, as do spiders. Depending on local conditions, any one of these insect groups might form the dominant prey at certain seasons

A tough bluebird won’t restrict itself to insects and spiders. Small frogs, lizards, and salamanders have all been documented in their diet. Food selection can get even stranger. On September 9, 1964, Annette Hill of Waite Hill, Ohio, was stunned to see a bluebird seize an eight inch snake. It flew the reptile to a nearby roof, and proceeded to swallow it headfirst, like a scaly strand of spaghetti. My favorite bluebird kill story was reported by Benedict Pinkowski of Almont, Michigan on July 23, 1973. While watching bluebirds near Mio, Michigan (home of the Kirtland’s warbler), he observed one drop to the ground and seize a shrew (probably a masked shrew). Shrews are only 3 ½ inch in length and weigh little more than a hummingbird. Nonetheless, they are savage predators and possess powerful venom, so care must be taken when handling one. The bluebird took the shrew to a nearby branch and commenced to beat the life out of the mammal, which was then swallowed.

Come winter, at least in northern climes, bluebirds temporarily shift to a diet rich in fruit. The berries of sumac, red cedar, and many other fleshy fruits are avidly consumed. But bluebirds do not live on vegetable matter alone, and a succulent insect will always trump a berry.

Next time the chance arises, carefully watch the foraging behaviors of our gentle little thrushes. You might be surprised by their food choices.

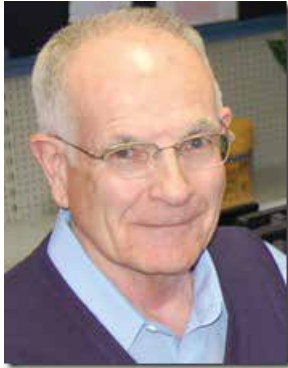


Cutworm caterpillars are important in bluebird diets



# Controlling the House Sparrow

by Mel Bolt



A recent incident where an unknown individual was monitoring a bluebird nest box in a state park near Columbus, OH caused a negative reaction when another person observed him twist the neck of a captured House Sparrow that had invaded the box.

Compounding the negative

reproach was that several children were nearby when the act was accomplished. The publicity of this event should be an alarm to all who monitor Bluebird nest boxes that any control of House Sparrows should be accomplished as discretely as possible. Wide spread exposure of this nature could have a long term effect on all of the Bluebird groups across the nation.

Therefore, House Sparrow control should be considered a ticking time bomb to OBS and other Bluebird organizations. There are several well known groups that would view this as cruelty to animals as they apparently are unaware of the history of House Sparrows and how they have upset the balance of nature in this country. There are very strict laws against confirmed cases of cruelty to animals. These laws are not currently applied to House Sparrows because they are alien (imported) from England and are not subject to the Migratory Protection Act of 1913.

House Sparrows were originally imported into New York City from England in 1850. Its purpose was to eat the seeds from the horse droppings in the city and/or consume the canker worms in the trees outside one man's office building, as is reported in several articles. Having survived in the city it came to be considered a "prestige bird" so many other cities in the eastern part of the country also imported them including some in Ohio. Shortly thereafter they were observed as

being a nuisance bird which was displacing our native cavity nesting birds, devastating the sprouting leaves of farmers newly planted crops, accumulating around barns where grain is stored or building their nests in obstructive places as gutters, vent pipes, signs of store fronts etc. Their nests were bulky & messy and their droppings were unsightly & required frequent clean up.

Public speakers promoting the protection and survival of Bluebirds have undoubtedly been exposed to the backlash of promoting the control of House Sparrows. Most listeners have no knowledge of their past history and especially the negative effects they have on our small native cavity nesting birds. Therefore, some who are offended proclaim we sacrifice one species of birds so another can live, or that it is an act of cruelty, or it is a beautiful bird and should be left alone to do its own thing along with other reasons for their offense. People of religious persuasion will defend them because of their being referenced in the Holy Book but fail to realize they are actually finches and not sparrows.

House Sparrow control may be accomplished in two ways, namely, passive and active. The method an individual chooses likely depends on his endurance as to certain aspects of the life of birds and other animals.





## Passive Control:

1. Nesting material
  - Frequent removal from the nest box
2. Eggs
  - Removal from the nest after the entire clutch is laid
  - Pierce a pin hole in each egg and return to the nest (will not hatch)
  - Heat the eggs (boiling) so they will not hatch
  - Place fake eggs in the nest

Each of these will cause the female to incubate for a period of time and eventually she will abandon the nest.

3. Entrance Hole
  - Plug the hole until the Sparrows leave for another location

These three procedures limit the reproduction of House sparrows but frequently chase the birds to your neighbor, making him deal with the problem.

## Active control:

1. Capture the Sparrow live and take it to a bird rehab center so that it can be fed to another bird in recovery.
2. Trap live bird and permanently dispatch it along with its mate if possible. Allowing one of the pair to remain will not interrupt the reproduction cycle as it will seek another mate and continue the reproduction cycle.
3. Never dispatch a Sparrow in the sight of others to witness. Be as discrete as possible so that the Columbus event does not happen again.

Never publicly use the words “kill” or “killing” as they are very inflammatory to most people, especially animal lovers and young children.

Bird groups frequently request that you report the number of Sparrows dispatched during the year. This is a bad practice as it provides information that in the future can possibly be used against bird groups.



## Why is it necessary to control the House Sparrow?

1. House Sparrows usurp existing nests of all of our native cavity nesting birds, including Bluebirds. They peck holes in their eggs and remove them from the box, then build their own nest over the original nest.

2. House Sparrows find chicks or adults in the nest box and maul them to death.

- Their beaks are very hard for cracking seeds and the top beak overhangs the lower and is very sharp. It becomes a lethal weapon which it uses to attack the chicks or adults.
- The male House Sparrow sits in the entrance hole, blocking the exit, thus making the birds captive inside the box. It first pecks the eyes, blinding the resident bird. Next it pecks the head of the bird, exposing the skull, causing the eventual death of the bird.
- Once the adult or chicks are dead, it builds its own nest on top of the old nest and decaying bodies. Since they have little or no sense of smell this does not create a problem for the sparrow.
- The House Sparrow is a non-native bird to which our native birds have not yet evolved enough to compete with them for nesting sites or to defend themselves from attacks when trapped inside the nest box.

Our native cavity nesting birds require human intervention as the result of importing the very aggressive House Sparrows. Prior to 1850 our native birds had evolved to deal with their natural threats and were successful in reproduction and growth in their numbers. This natural existence was changed when man upset the balance of nature by bringing in these alien birds.



# Ask Madame WingNut

## Kamakazi Kent

by Paula Ziebarth

All of “our birds” are special, and some more than others. I have one extremely aggressive male Eastern Bluebird that I have named Kamakazi Kent, as in Clark Kent because he is Superbird. Superbird: Bird of Steel...

I think he was nesting at the Village Green Park in Powell in 2009, but most definitely in 2010 when the trouble started. I went back through the historical data I keep in the NestWatch database and looked at my field notes. In June 2010, “feathers 1/8 inch out; defensive parents – male hit me in head; city has fenced off box area for big festival scheduled for Friday/Sat. Over 8 HOSP showed up to check out picnic tables city has placed here for festival - EABL stressed.” I thought it was undue stress, but have since learned that he simply HATES me. A week later, he hit me 5 times in the head.

In 2011, he remained with this box and thwapped me good again. I started wearing a hat. His behavior escalated as the nest cycle progressed. It started with silent swoop and clicking of beak when nest was complete; silent swoop, click and light thwapping when eggs were in the nest; and full attack mode when chicks hatched. I believe he cut me that year (thus the hat).

In 2012, he remained with same box for first nesting and moved to box by railroad tracks for second. This was better location as HOSP were awful problem in first location. Thwapping commenced with only eggs this time. What happened when the eggs hatched? “Male hitting me multiple times in head - hard!”

He was back in 2013. He had two successful nestings in box paired with the first one he tried by the railroad tracks. I think he preferred this one because the design was less attractive to HOSP. Maybe not. He may have preferred it because he could now sit atop the power lines which were 30 to 40 feet above his box. It allowed him to get up a good head of steam as he dove straight down toward me. THWAP! ouch.... I put my bird bag on my head now when I monitor his box. Flimsy hat was not working so well.

“Male perched on power lines above box; hit me in the head HARD - silent assault and clicks beak later - no warning - definitely same male that was here last year (ouch...)”. I brought a friend to experience the joy. She walked right up to box, opened it and no attacks. He only hates ME.

It is spring 2014 and he has moved again 100 yards away to a solitary box on the edge of the parking lot. Box is still in close proximity to power lines so he is fully utilizing that attack perch again. Young are ready to fledge tomorrow. Last week, he was hitting me hard about both the head and shoulders. “It IS HIM! He gave me multiple hits on head and shoulders - HARD. Amazed he is still standing (me too...)”.

Some years, Kamakazi Kent has a lull in his nest cycle. He tends to nest early and late. During the time in between, I wonder if he is taking his male progeny on a journey to Krypton for special training.

Where will he show up next? Which nestbox shall he choose? He blends in well with others of his kind, and you may not recognize him at first glance. But look closer at his bright blue and rust attire. Look for him, chest puffed out, perched atop the power lines at Village Green Park. Wherever you find him, his arch nemesis, Madame WingNut, is sure to follow. It's a bird! It's a plane! No wait, it IS a bird: Superbird!

Bluey Yours,  
Madame WingNut



*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.*



# Member News



## Diana Plant is New OBS Secretary/Treasurer



We are very pleased to announce that Diana Plant has accepted the volunteer position of Secretary/Treasurer for OBS. Diana graduated from Ashland College (now Ashland University), where she met her husband, Don. They were married in 1964, and just celebrated their 50th anniversary. She taught Family and Consumer Sciences at Ashland Middle School for 36 years, retiring in 2001. She then served as a substitute

teacher for 10 years. She and Don maintain a 64 box Bluebird/Tree Swallow trail and a large Purple Martin colony at their residence. In addition, they established and maintain a Purple Martin colony at Malabar Farm State Park. They are also involved in the study of bats. Her other hobbies include gardening, cooking, and sewing. She and Don are members of Perrysville United Methodist Church, where she is the organist and pianist. They also established the Loudonville/Perrysville Food Bank, in conjunction with the Ashland County Food Bank. They are members of the Greater Mohican Audubon Society, where Diana serves as Treasurer.

We wish to express our thanks to Kara Scott for volunteering as Treasurer for the past two years. Kara resigned as Treasurer on March 31.



Photo by Marcella Hawkins

## Need a Wildlife Rehabilitator?

Ohio Wildlife Rehabilitators Association website has a list (by county) on their website at [www.owra.org](http://www.owra.org).

## Wanted:

**OBS Area Contacts** for the southern part of the state – see map on page 14 to see which counties are in need.

## Welcome To Our New Members

Brokner Nature Center  
Clouser, Vickie  
Cummins, Steve  
Decker, David  
Gaertner, Kurt  
Getz, Vivian  
Hamlin, Karla

Kinsey, Susan  
Klopfer, Pam  
Lehman, Gladis  
Masterson, William  
Schneppat, Dieter  
Seidel, Linda

## Donations = \$1,553

<b>Bob Evans Fundraiser</b>	<b>\$103</b>
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	<b>\$100</b>
~ Oates, Ruth	
~ Miller, Betty	
<b>Noble Soil &amp; Water</b>	<b>\$250</b>
<b>ODNR Grant</b>	<b>\$1,000</b>
<b>Ralph Frase Memorials</b>	<b>\$100</b>
~ Frase, Glenn & Pat	
~ Schroeder, Edward & Lois	
~ Waggamon, Ervin & Ruth	



Ellie Kidwell 4-H project for the Knox County Fair. Her project was chosen to advance to the State Fair. This is just one of her projects.

# OBS Spotlight

## Dale Rabung

By Chuck Jakubchak, Photo by Jeanne Jakubchak



Many years ago Dale Rabung's father taught him the difference between a blue jay and a bluebird and that important lesson led Dale to a lifetime of caring about Eastern Bluebirds. Since that magical day Dale has built, erected and

monitored countless nest boxes throughout Medina County and he thinks of his father every time he spots a bluebird, grateful for that early nature lesson.

Dale first successfully fledged bluebirds from his homemade nest boxes in 1983 and 4 years later he became one of the first members of the Ohio Bluebird Society when it formed in 1987. Every year for the past 31 years Dale has helped countless bluebirds fledge from his boxes in Medina County and thousands of people have enjoyed seeing the birds in neighborhoods and parks, most having no idea that they were the direct result of Dale's dedicated labors.

Early nest boxes were constructed from discarded grape crates that Dale was able to wrangle from a local grocery store, but later converted to rough sawn cedar lumber due its durability. He still relies on the old "grape crate nest box construction blueprint" that was put together by Dean Sheldon and Eric Mayer and that grape crate design is a nostalgic reminder for many longtime bluebird enthusiasts.

In 1984 Dale negotiated a deal with a local golf course to place bluebird boxes on their property to take advantage of their excellent habitat. That relationship with the golf course has endured and Dale currently maintains 12 boxes on the course, allowing golfers to experience the thrill of seeing bluebirds while enjoying their leisurely game of golf. Dale also maintains 37 other boxes throughout Medina County and he will help anyone erect a bluebird box on their property, assuming they have desirable habitat and agree to maintain it in accordance with standards set forth by the OBS.

Throughout his bluebird career Dale has enjoyed teaching children about bluebirds and has conducted numerous programs for elementary schools. One of his recent success stories was his involvement with a Christian summer camp where he helped 7th and 8th grade students build nest boxes and later trained them in the proper methodology for monitoring those boxes. Dale continually thinks of ways to help bluebirds for the coming decades and educating youngsters, developing their interest during their formative years, is an outstanding idea.

The attraction to Eastern Bluebirds has spread throughout Dale's family as his children and grandchildren are involved, allowing them to appreciate the peaceful beauty of this species. Counting Dale's father, the man who kick-started Dale's passion, and Dale's descendants, the Rabung family includes 4 generations of active bluebirders. Diana, Dale's wife, is also an instrumental part of this success story as her ongoing support and encouragement allowed Dale to expand his passion for bluebirds. Eastern Bluebirds are truly a family affair for the Rabungs.

Dale's desire to help bluebirds extends beyond the borders of Ohio as his friends and relatives were influenced by his passion. Dale provided nest boxes for their properties in Virginia, Florida and Canada and those boxes have successfully yielded bluebirds. One of his unique achievements was placing 35 nest boxes in Twin Falls State Park in southern West Virginia in response to a query from an interested park naturalist.

If you asked Dale about his most shining achievement, his answer might surprise you. He does not mention the thousands of birds that fledged from his boxes but instead recalls the times when he shows someone a bluebird for the first time. His eyes sparkle when he recalls the specific moment that their eyes magically locate the brilliant blue and reddish brown bird. Their mesmerizing gaze at the spectacular little bird says it all and makes Dale happy with his decision to help the Eastern Bluebird.





# A Tribute to Allen Bower

... “AND HE LOOKED LIKE A PEDDLER JUST OPENING HIS PACK.”

and wonder of wonders... they'd never seen anything quite like that before. Allen Bower's entrance to the first conference of the Indiana Bluebird Society [11OCT97] was, indeed, a wonder to all who assembled for the occasion.

The Bowers showed up early at that pristine and sparkling lake site at Quaker Haven Camp on Lake Dewart southwest of Syracuse... part of the wonderful lakes' region of Indiana.

Not only did they merely show up: Allen had loaded the pickup to the gunwales with his birding inventions and assorted claptrap for attracting and housing all manner of native songbirds... from wrens to bluebirds to tree swallows... flickers and wood ducks.

And... a full complement of devices designed to resist the nesting efforts of undesirable (and harmful) alien species. And there was more... devices for post mounting and poles and ropes and gizmos for crank-up/tilt-down aerial apartments to suit a wide variety of high nesters. And then, he set up shop between the lodge and the lake shore... and then he waited.

And pretty soon, down the driveway slope came a heavy rumbling of horse-drawn buggies and wagons with Amishmen and boys of all shapes and sizes toting loads of their inventions... and the fun began and ideas and inventions were shared all around.



And that's the way Allen lived his life. Searching and sharing imagination and birding experiences... freely giving his creations and modifications to everyone who would listen.

He and Nina did not miss meetings of the Ohio Bluebird Society... even with ice-covered highways. When the Indiana meetings were held in the northern part of the state, the Bowers were there. He rarely missed the midsummer gatherings with Amishmen from Michigan, Indiana and Ohio. He was a correspondent in the mastheads of the bluebird journals supporting these organizations.

Allen Bower's Charter membership in the Indiana Bluebird Society was registered in 1996 (a full year before the Quaker Haven Camp meeting). He received the Blue Feather Award from the Ohio Bluebird Society in 2013.

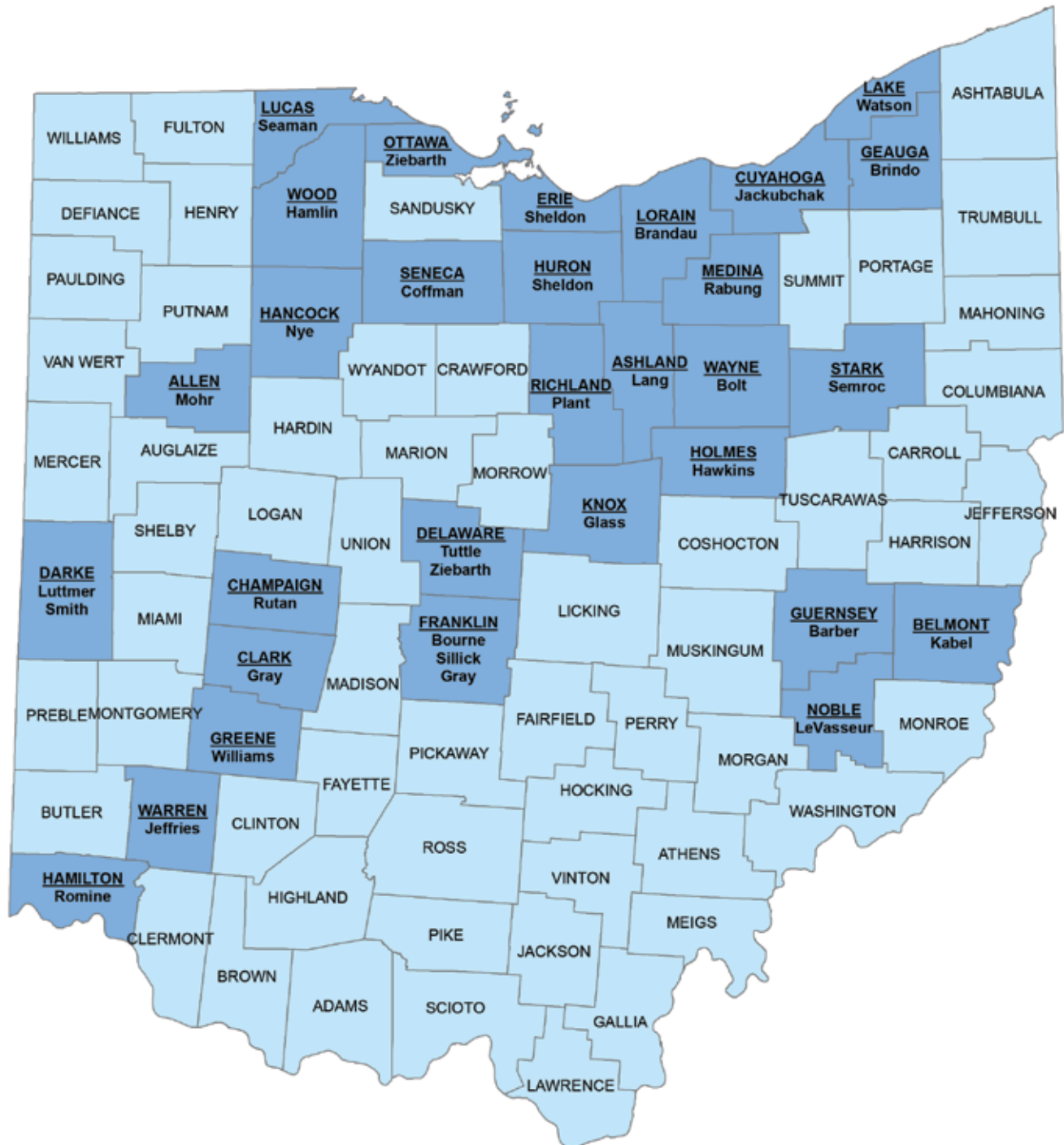
No matter when or where he traveled on behalf of birds, this enthusiastic peddler was always opening his generous and imaginative pack to all who would listen... and believe.



By Dean E. Sheldon, Jr.,  
Ohio Bluebird Society

# Ohio Bluebird Society

## Counties with Director, Advisor, or Area Contact



- Counties w/ Director, Advisor, or Area Contact
- Counties w/out



created by Mike Watson; The Holden Arboretum



## OBS Area Contacts (as of April 1, 2014)

Up-to-date list is available online at <http://www.ohiobluebirdsociety.org/about/311-2/>

County	Name	Phone #	Alt. Phone #	E-mail
Allen	Mohr, Mark	419.223.1025, phone mailbox 3		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
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
Franklin	Gray, Bethany	614-798-5123		ohiobluebirder@gmail.com
Geauga	Brindo, Jay K.	440.343.9275		jbrindo@aol.com
Greene	Williams, Alice	937-848-2595	937-266-1857	alikay1941@aol.com
Guernsey	Barber, Tom	740-439-4284		klbarber62@roadrunner.com
Hamilton	Romine, Jim	513-236-5598		jdromine@cincinnaticomm.com
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Knox	Glass, Dale	740-397-5573		dglassohio@yahoo.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(H)	216-973-1503 (C)	
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Seneca	Coffman, Jim	419.618.1835	419.862.4268	jrusscoff@gmail.com
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- ☐ Supporting
- ☐ Life

**Annual**

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\$100  
\$275

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