



# Bluebird Monitor

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

Summer 2017



## Photos from the 2017 Annual Conference

OBS President Mike Watson helped set up for the March 6 conference.



Trustee Mary Lee Minor created the beautiful tabletop centerpieces and also set up an educational vendor table.



Secretary/Treasurer Diana Plant managed many tasks including the silent auction table.



Trustee Carrie Elvey did a wonderful job as the emcee of the conference.



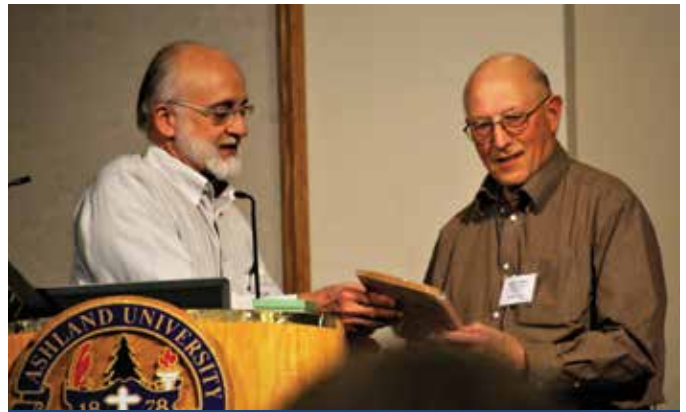
# 2017 Ohio Bluebird Society's Blue Feather Award

By Mary Lee Minor

As OBS observed its 30th anniversary it just seemed right to award Jim Coffman, a Charter member of OBS, with its prestigious Blue Feather Award. He is the OBS Area Contact for Seneca County. Jim became a bird bander in 1974 and a master bander in 1986. His history with bluebird box installation has been ambitious, with 128 at one point in time. Today he maintains 57 nest boxes, many in sheep pastures, which he "scopes out" early each January and February. A good percentage of the nest boxes are placed for grateful friends who continue to grow in curiosity about the blues. In his own words, "Bluebirds are the friendliest link to nature a person could find." He has seen them respond to help and become tolerant of human presence.

Birding found its way into Jim's soul when he was around 7 years of age. He and his dog, Poochie, would trek all over the family's 120-acre farm, listening, looking and sitting on stumps or atop the chicken coop staring into an apple orchard. A boy of few words, Jim's mother bought him a red stocking cap in an effort to keep track of him.

After returning home from his service in Viet Nam Jim found a friend at work who knew lots about birds and who was willing to teach Jim all that he knew in exchange for a ride to work. Tom Barlett helped Jim learn to identify 230 bird species. "Honestly, I was not crazy about chasing birds," Jim said. Jean Knoblauch, another birder, learned this and suggested a trail and gave him a nest box plan. Jim built and erected 7 boxes in 1974 using Lawrence Zeleny's guidelines to place them. Before long he sought support from Dick Tuttle. Dick taught Jim the finer points of bluebirding. Jim stated this means documenting trail boxes



Dick Tuttle presented the Blue Feather Award to Jim Coffman.

and keeping records. For a time, the two men were almost in competition for who could have the highest yield of nestlings and fledglings per season. Still friends, they hold a mutual respect for one another's work. Dick Tuttle referred to Jim as "a good ambassador for OBS" in his nomination form.

Perhaps this record keeping approach led Jim to journal his many trips. They include two weeks of birding in Costa Rica and treks to Middle Bass and Point Pelee Islands. He has attended many North American Bluebird Society Conferences including ones in California, Texas and Quebec. He maintains that each experience taught him so much more in the birding knowledge arena. He has even become an avid 'recycler' of house sparrow populations.

This quiet-natured man enjoys clean humor, feeling it is good for a person. He was asked by his colleagues at his retirement dinner in September 2016 to relate some of his favorite jokes. Be sure to ask him the one about the blond woman who was hired to paint a porch. Then toss in a big Congratulations for the dedication which brought him the Blue Feather Award for 2017.

Membership chair and Trustee Pat Dutton was very busy registering attendees and signing up new OBS members.



Ashland University's John C. Myer Convocation Center was a beautiful venue for the OBS conference.



Four different noontime breakout sessions were popular. Pictured is Paula Ziebarth's program called "Bluebirding 101."



Trustee Dale Rabung taught Advanced Bluebirding during the noontime sessions.



## 2017 OBS Conservation Award

By Don and Diana Plant

Don and Diana Plant are pleased to nominate the following organization for the Ohio Bluebird Society's Conservation Award at our 2017 Annual Conference. We nominate the Ashland County Park District for this award. The following will give you a brief overview of their qualifications to receive this award.

The Ashland County Park District (ACPD) manages 16 unique parks comprising over 2,000 acres of beautiful forests, fields, lakes, and streams. All of this green-space is publicly owned and open to the public 365 days a year for hiking, fishing, bird watching, biking, dog walking and other outdoor pursuits. Some seasonal hunting opportunities also are offered in a few select parks.

The process of forming the ACPD started with The Ashland County Comprehensive Plan in 1999. Following a recommendation from the Plan, the County Commissioners requested Tom Kruse, at that time the resource conservation teacher at the Ashland County/West Holmes Career Center, to pursue further research on the issue. He organized several advertised public meetings, and from these meetings a "Park Study Committee" of 21 concerned citizens was formed in April 2001.

This committee met with County, City, Township, and Village officials in Ashland County, as well as representatives for nature, hunting, conservation and agricultural interests within the county.

In January of 2002, the Committee presented their conclusion to the Ashland County Probate Judge, who had the power to establish a park district within the county. After additional



Trustee Don Plant presented the Conservation Award to Ashland County Park District representative Tom Kruse.

public hearings, the ACPD was established in March 2002. The present Park Commissioners are Kolleen Crall, Robert DeSanto and Tom Kruse.

The mission of the ACPD, in part, is to conserve natural areas of forest, woodland, farm and field for the enjoyment of Ashland County residents and visitors, and to promote multiple uses for these areas. The district also works to enhance opportunities to study the natural and agricultural heritage of Ashland County.

In two of the sixteen parks, the Greater Mohican Audubon Society has established housing to attract Bluebirds and Purple Martins. In Byers Woods, south of Ashland, there is a Bluebird Trail, and 2 Purple Martin gourd systems were erected this spring. In the Cooke Family Wildlife Conservation Park, west of Ashland, a Purple Martin gourd system was erected this spring, and 4 Purple Martin nests yielded 16 young this first year.

For these reasons, we highly recommend the OBS Conservation Award be awarded to the Ashland County Park District.

# Sparrow Swap Project

From the Sparrow Swap Team at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Science

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*The Sparrow Swap Team at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences has a citizen science opportunity that uses house sparrow eggs for research purposes and may be of interest to members of the Ohio Bluebird Society.*

*We are inviting those who monitor nestboxes to participate in the Sparrow Swap Project. With house sparrow eggs collected by volunteers, we aim to investigate the variation in color and speckling of house sparrow eggs across the United States and determine the best management strategies for minimizing damage caused by house sparrows. Participants can choose to get involved in four different ways, from an easy one time egg collection and shipment to Museum to more extensive monitoring of neighboring nestboxes over a three-week period.*

*Last year we had 80 participants across 24 states. With your help, we are hoping to include even more bluebirders across the country this nesting season. We would greatly appreciate if you would help spread the word by sending the interest letter below to members in your community.*

*Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.*

Best,  
Suzanne Hartley (Project Manager)  
The Sparrow Swap Team  
Website: [scistarter.com/sparrowswap](http://scistarter.com/sparrowswap)

## INTEREST LETTER

Happy spring to all of the bird lovers out there! We need excited volunteers like you to participate in the Sparrow Swap citizen science project. A common sentiment among bluebird monitors is that house sparrows are good for nothing. Make them good for something by gathering their eggs and sending them to the egg collection at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences. We'll investigate how to use these eggs for monitoring and mapping environmental contaminants. The data will also help determine the best management strategies for minimizing damage caused by house sparrows.

The Sparrow Swap asks for your help in pursuing two long-term research goals. The first goal seeks to investigate variation in color and speckling of house sparrow eggs across the United States. Eventually the egg contents will be analyzed to explore the potential for the eggs to provide for more affordable monitoring of hazardous compounds to communities. The second goal is to improve public stewardship of native bird species by studying the effectiveness of house sparrow management strategies. We have four ways bluebird monitors can get involved:

**As a Collector:** Remove and send house sparrow eggs to the Museum

**As a Remover:** Remove house sparrow eggs, record observations in that nestbox during three follow-up visits, send eggs to the Museum

**As a Swapper:** Swap real house sparrow eggs with hand-painted wooden replicas provided by us, record observations in that nestbox during three follow-up visits, and send eggs to the Museum

**As a Monitor:** Swap or remove house sparrow eggs, record observations in that nestbox and neighboring nestboxes during three follow-up visits, and send eggs to the Museum.

If you'd like to join and make house sparrows good for something, visit [scistarter.com/sparrowswap](http://scistarter.com/sparrowswap), create a SciStarter account and JOIN Sparrow Swap. We'll provide you with instructions and datasheets. If you have any questions, send us a message through Scistarter or contact us at [sparrowswap@ncsu.edu](mailto:sparrowswap@ncsu.edu). You can also ask questions and share your experiences with us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/sparrowswap>.

# Students Create Labels That Help Support Bluebird Conservation

By Cheryl Fridenstine



Penny and Fritz Brandau, with Mr. Eric Robson's 9th grade students.

Located on golf courses, cemeteries, and on township, city, and Metro Park properties in Lorain County are more than 30 bluebird trails containing over 450 bluebird nest boxes. These bird houses, or man-made nesting cavities, are sanctuaries and homes for thousands of native birds to raise their young during a time when so much of their natural habitat has been destroyed.

Keeping track of what birds inhabit what box at any given time can be difficult. This is where the 9th and 10th grade students of Lorain County JVS stepped in to help.

For the past few years, JVS students have engraved more than 200 name plates and hundreds of number plates that are used to identify the bird boxes throughout the county.



These bird boxes are created for the Black River Audubon Society, which is a chapter of the National Audubon Society. Penny and Fritz Brandau are members of the society and stopped in at the JVS to personally say thank you for the work that has been done.

Fritz Brandau stated, "It is important to Penny and I that you all know how significant these plates are and understand the bigger picture of these houses; like the research at Cornell University that is being done with the data that is collected from each bird house." He added, "These name and number plates look so professional. You all did a great job."

The National Audubon Society's mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity.

## Sparrow Spookers

By Penny Brandau

Many bluebird nestboxes are located in wonderful bluebird habitat with little or no house sparrow predation. However some backyard bluebird landlords and those who manage bluebird trails which are located near towns or developed areas often find themselves looking for passive methods to help protect the eggs, young or mother bluebird in the nestbox from the deadly attacks of the non-native house sparrow. A sparrow spooker might be helpful in those situations.

According to the North American Bluebird Society's Factsheet on House Sparrow Control (which is listed on their website) there are both passive and active ways to deter House Sparrows. One of the listed passive methods is the use of a sparrow spooker. The Factsheet states "a Sparrow Spooker is a device that flutters strips of Mylar brushing the roof of a nestbox. For some reason it is very effective in scaring off House Sparrows, but does not deter native birds like bluebirds from using a nestbox. It helps to protect the nestbox contents from House Sparrow attack on a 24/7 basis. **It is placed on the box AFTER the first native birds' egg is laid, and removed after fledging** to avoid scaring off native birds, and also to prevent House Sparrows from becoming accustomed to it. Designs and instructions can be found at <http://www.sialis.org/sparrowspooker.htm>.



The use of Sparrow Spookers is becoming increasingly popular among many seasoned bluebirders as a passive way to deter House Sparrows from entering Bluebird nestboxes once active nesting has started by the bluebirds. They can be made easily with inexpensive materials and are highly effective if used according to recommendations posted on the Sialis.org website. Take the time to read this site's information and recommendations if you have problems with House Sparrows and are looking for some way to help keep your nesting bluebirds safe this summer. Sparrow spookers won't eliminate the house sparrows in your area (only active control methods can do that) but it can save a bluebird life if used correctly. Picture below is a sparrow spooker which was used successfully on a tree swallow nesting too.

# Bluebird of Happiness

By Dr. Randi Pokladnik

Originally printed in the Tuscarawas Bargain Hunter and on Dr. Pokladnik's online blog and is being reprinted with permission



Last summer I had an encounter with a fledgling bluebird. The little guy must have just left the safety of his nest and somehow his foot became caught in a hole in a leaf of our redbud tree. He was hanging upside down and screaming at me as I walked up our driveway. I rescued him and held him for about twenty minutes until he got his bearings and was able to fly up into the safety of a very tall tree.

I have mentioned before that I love birds and have been bird watching since I was ten. Birds call to something in my soul. Even during the coldest, bleakest months, you can always count on a bright red cardinal or a cheery chickadee to brighten your day. Lately, I have even seen and heard bluebirds calling in the woods around our home. So, when I heard that the Ohio Bluebird Society was having their annual conference in Ashland, Ohio I decided it was time to embrace that bluebird of happiness.

Aptly named, this group of like-minded individuals has one main goal: protect and foster the survival of Ohio's bluebird population. The society, headquartered in Wooster, Ohio celebrated its thirty year anniversary at their March 6 meeting. During that meeting, we had a chance to hear several success stories about bird populations in Ohio. Additionally, we were surrounded by everything that is bluebirds: nesting boxes, clothing, books, videos, and even motion activated bluebird centerpieces that would sing at the conference tables.

One speaker, Harvey Webster, of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History told attendees of how Ohio was able to bring the bald eagle population back from the brink of disaster. In the late 1970s, there were only about four nesting pairs of eagles around the Lake Erie shoreline. Currently, there are approximately three to four hundred nesting pairs all around the state. We have a pair that nests close to the Tappan Lake Marina. How did this bird, our national symbol, which once had teetered on the edge of extinction, make such a dramatic comeback?

In order to understand the reasons for the dramatic increase in the bald eagle population, you first have to understand why their populations plummeted in the 1970s. The primary culprit of the decline was the lack of viable eggs. Female bald eagles would lay eggs but those eggs were so frail that most of the time they broke well before the needed incubation time could elapse.

The main cause of this "weak egg syndrome" was thought to be the widespread spraying of pesticides, namely DDT. The bald eagle is at the top of the food pyramid, therefore, all the food that it eats has bio-accumulated the toxins that affect reproduction and egg viability.

The Cleveland Museum of Natural History embarked on a program to breed bald eagles and was one of only six programs in the country at the time. The first eaglet was hatched in 1984. These programs along with the EPA's banning of DDT, and passage of both the Clean Water and the Endangered Species Acts, all contributed to the recovery of the bald eagle populations.

Additionally, the work of the Ohio Bluebird Society and other state and federal bluebird organizations has greatly increased the populations of not only bluebirds but also Tree Swallows in the USA. Both species benefit from man-made nesting boxes.

During the conference, I observed the proper way to remove fly larva from tiny baby bluebirds. I met a member who had designed the state of the art bluebird nesting box complete with clean out hinges, air ducts, and shields to protect the birds from predation. I heard bluebird success stories and testimonials of how many fledglings had been produced from bluebird nesting trails. One member's work had successfully fledged almost 11,000 bluebirds.

All in all it was a happy, informative day and I met a lot of dedicated people who inspired me to step back into my world of birds. Incidentally, I won one of those singing bluebird centerpieces. It reminds me daily that there are still reasons to have hope for our planet.



Centerpieces made by Mary Lee Minor



# A Prolific Female Bluebird

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



Occasionally, a nestbox in Central Ohio will produce three broods of bluebirds in one season. Unless the parents wear leg bands, you cannot be absolutely sure who the parents are in order to declare that they were the ones that raised three families during the same season. Nonetheless, if a female bluebird lays three large clutches and does a good job

raising the hatchlings to fledge, then the monitor develops a strong feeling that one female can claim credit for a job well done.

Such was the case in Ohio's Delaware State Park in 2016. Fourteen bluebirds fledged from one nestbox after three clutches of five eggs were laid. The accomplishment led to the female earning the name "Ova." In biology, "ova" is plural for ovum, or egg, and the bluebird's monitor is a retired science teacher that was impressed with Ova's reproductive competence.

I offer a chart that shows first-egg-dates for Eastern Bluebird triple broods laid in forty-eight nestboxes during a forty-five-year period from 1968 through 2012. Once the cumulative percent of first-egg-dates are plotted from the earliest first egg on March 28 through all first-egg-dates until the last and latest on August 9. The launch dates for three nesting periods during the bluebird's nesting season can be seen as three mounds on the line.

Earliest dates for each of three laying periods for forty-eight nests are March 28, May 15, and June 26, respectively. Ova's first-egg-dates for three broods in 2016 are April 1, May 18, and June



An image captured by the late Bob Orthwein shows a bluebird's dedication at her nest.

28. The comparison reveals that Ova is an early egg layer since she started her clutches an average of three days later than the earliest of 48 clutches per period.

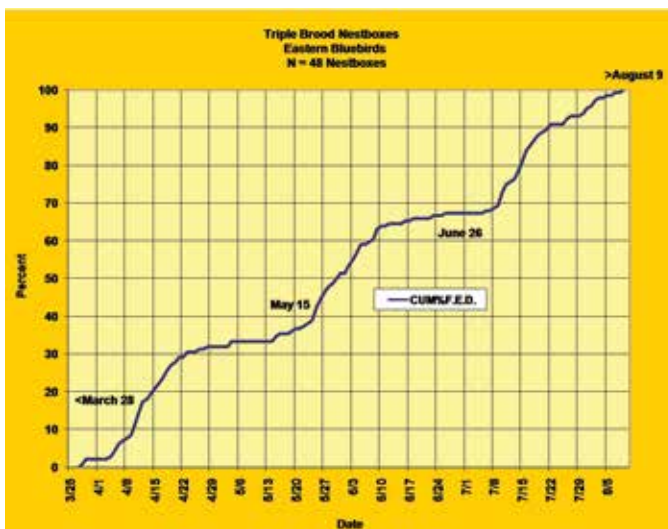
What caused me to notice Ova was the fact she laid five eggs for all three of her clutches, then she and her mate fledged all but one after an egg from her second clutch failed to hatch. Usually, clutches shrink in size as the summer progresses, but Ova always laid five eggs. It is a common management practice that once nestlings fledge, I clean used nests from the nest cavity, but when I opened Ova's nestbox on June 25, a new nest cup for the third brood had already been constructed over Ova's used second nest, so I did not tamper with the nest layers.

Ova's third family fledged around August 2, and when I excavated her second and third nests days later, I broke open the unhatched egg from her second nest to find no development - the egg had been infertile with a fifty-percent chance that it wasn't her fault.

I have no doubt that Ova's mate, or mates, were also quite competent. Research has revealed that in order for a female to quickly start a succeeding brood, she sometimes accepts another mate as her previous partner stays with their fledglings as they learn to feed and survive into adulthood outside the nest. If there is time for a third brood after the second family fledges, a female can reunite with her first seasonal mate to raise a third family. Whatever took place with Ova's families, all adult family members did an excellent job raising 14 descendants.

Ova's nestbox is the third nestbox in the park as you turn into its only entrance from State Route 23. Much of the area at the entrance is mowed grass and Ova's box is within hunting distance of large, ancient oak trees, perfect habitats for bluebirds to hunt insects and other prey items from the ground.

For a positive update to Ova's story, on April 4, 2017, I checked one-half of the park's boxes for the first time and found four bluebird egg's in Ova's 2016 nestbox. Nine days later, I counted five eggs, making April 1 the earliest bluebird first-egg-date for the 2017 season in Delaware State Park. Ova is back, and my data book will record her progress. Bluebird on!



First-egg-dates recorded from 144 nests as triple broods in 48 nestboxes reveal three nesting periods within the Eastern Bluebird's nesting season in Central Ohio.

# The Clever Tree Swallow - *Inclement Weather Survival Tips*

By Judy Semroc, OBS Area Contact

A few years ago I started feeding live mealworms on a tray to my bluebirds in the spring when they were sitting locations for nesting. While this is not a remarkable event amongst bluebird aficionados, it turned out to be a very fortuitous event for my local tree swallows. Once the bluebirds became accustomed to feeding from the trays I had set up, I gradually weaned them down to a couple of mealworms once a day. I did not want them to become dependent on this free food to the detriment of not seeking the natural food sources which abound in my yard.

One day last spring, I noticed that one of my tree swallows had been curiously watching the bluebirds feeding from this tray. He gradually flew closer and closer to the tray until he decided to land and check out what was of such great interest to the bluebirds. When he noticed that one of the mealworms wiggled, he immediately snatched it up and looked for more. Thus began his repeated visits to the tray, even convincing his current mate to check it out as well. About a week or so after his discovery of the mealworm buffet, a snowstorm hit with cold temperatures and wet heavy snow that lingered for several days. I redoubled my efforts of feeding the live mealworms at this time since there certainly were no flying insects to be found for several days due to the tough weather conditions. Both of these tree swallows continued to visit the tray and as luck would have it, they were able to survive the unexpected cold spell.



Unfortunately I found two other tree swallows dead in their respective nest boxes, likely from the extended time period of no flying insects.

To my delight, when the tree swallows returned this Spring, I noticed that one of the males immediately checked out the tray of live mealworms as if he had never been gone. Once again, his behavior has convinced other tree swallows to check out the tray and now there are at least four different individuals feeding from the tray. As before, when the weather has been cold or rainy, they are even more attentive to the tasty mealworm treats.

Last year, during the nestling phase of both the bluebird and the tree swallow nesting episodes, I noticed that the young seemed to fledge earlier, with what I felt was due to the extra mealworm food supply I gave them once a day. This also seemed to help the mortality rate as the young were up and out of the nest faster than in the past.

I'm sure that future research will help to determine if the fledge numbers are indeed aided by the supplemental food, but in the meantime, I was happy to witness that by feeding the live mealworms during inclement weather, it truly helped the tree swallows to make it through those tough days.



# Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)

By Cathy Priebe, Photos by Sue Mowatt



“Tea kettle, tea kettle, tea kettle!” What the heck was that? My first encounter with the Carolina wren’s loud and boisterous song totally befuddled and also startled me. After we became properly acquainted, I looked forward to their musical trills and often up close and personal behavior.

The Carolina wren is a year round Ohio resident although it originally was a southerner that slowly migrated north as the climate and habitats changed. Even though these wrens are very cold hardy during the winter months, it has been determined that snow depth affects their survival more than harsh temperatures. The extreme snow during the blizzards of 1977 and 1978 inflicted a heavy toll on them, wiping out almost 90 percent of their Ohio population. It took almost 20 years for them to recover, but they are back as strong as ever according to recent bird surveys.

Described as having a chubby, rounded body with a large head, the Carolina is our biggest eastern wren. Its upper body is a warm rusty brown, with a buff belly and white throat. Sporting a very definite white eye stripe and long, curved bill, it is very easy to tell them apart from other wrens.

When it comes to nesting locations, these creative birds are not very particular. Hanging baskets, old boots, broken down cars, crevices, overhangs and dense vegetation, all are prime real estate for these clever critters. They also like bird houses and nesting cavities in trees. Both birds build a cup like nest of sticks and plant material, lining the inside with moss or soft fibers. The female will lay 4 to 5 white eggs with brown splotches and incubate for about 2 weeks. Both sexes feed the nestlings.

I have had the privilege of observing a family of Carolina wrens nest and fledge from a nest box right outside my back door. It was just lucky that we were able to watch as the babies took their first leap and flight to freedom. Our neighborhood now boasts at least 6 pairs of Carolina wrens that can be heard calling throughout the seasons.

Their favorite foods are soft bodied insects and spiders but they will eat berries, fruit, seeds, peanuts, suet and meal worms.



Some fun facts about Carolina wrens:

- Males have about 32 different songs in their repertoire and will repeat one song from as many as 5 to 250 times before changing.
- Females will sing with the males when they are defending territories.
- They prefer unkempt yards and dilapidated buildings.
- They like to hang out with tufted titmice, gray catbirds, eastern towhees and northern mockingbirds.
- Can hang upside down like a nuthatch and climb like a creeper.
- Sings year round and generally in triplets. “Weed eater, weed eater, weed eater, wheet!” It also has a mutter that sounds like “a finger being run down a comb” according to Pete Dunne.
- Can fly vertically from the bottom of a tree to the top in a single bound.

If you are fortunate enough to host Carolina wrens, you will definitely enjoy their everyday antics and beautiful singing repertoires.



*References: Birds of Ohio, Jim McCormac; The Sibley Guide to Bird Life & Behavior, David Allen Sibley; Birds of the Cleveland Region, Larry Rosche; Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion, Pete Dunne.*



# 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

|                   |                    |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| Kate Anderson     | Andy McDowell      |
| Laurie Czaplicki  | Bettyann Nagy      |
| Rose Guinther     | Kathryn Newberg    |
| Debra Haley       | Dee Pendlebury     |
| Bill & Carla Hall | Susan Rice         |
| Carrie Hill       | Debra Rice         |
| John & Paula Hyde | Chris Rife         |
| Carol Jones       | Jane M. Riker      |
| Leonard A. Jorz   | Nancy Rodman       |
| Robert Keggan     | Lana Runyan        |
| Marsha Mangin     | Jim & Sharon Stump |

## Thank You to Our Donors

|                                  |                            |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Jordan and<br>Bethany Gray       | William and<br>Carol Jones |
| James Jablonski                  | Mary Baxter                |
| George and<br>Adrienne Pasipanki | Robert Bement              |
| Lee Peart                        | Tim Mendiola               |

## Thank You, Trustees!

In July 2017 three current OBS Trustees will complete their terms and OBS members will vote for their replacements. We are deeply grateful to outgoing trustees Kurt Gaertner, Don Plant and Dale Rabung for their dedication, leadership and many years of experienced service to OBS. The OBS mission of supporting the return and perpetuation of the Eastern Bluebird and other native cavity nesting birds in Ohio was strengthened by the work of these remarkable men. Thank You!

## OBS Annual Meeting 2017

The annual business meeting of the Ohio Bluebird Society voting members will be held on Saturday July 8, 2017 at the Wilderness Center, Wilmot, Ohio at 10am. The meeting will include the election of new Trustees, Treasurer's report, membership report and applicable committee reports. Please plan to attend this important meeting. The annual business meeting will be followed by a meeting of the Board of trustees and officers for the election of new OBS officers.

According to the current OBS bylaws all active members of OBS can vote by ballot for trustees either in person at the annual meeting (held this year on Saturday July 8th, 2017) or by mailed-in ballot prior to the opening of that meeting. If you chose to vote by mailing in your ballot it must be placed in a sealed envelope with a legible return name and address. The envelope should be addressed as follows:

### Election 2017

**OBS PMB 111, 343 W.**

**Milltown Rd, Wooster, Ohio 44691-7214.**

The ballot to be used for mailed in votes is shown below. Simply fill it out and mail this or vote in person at the meeting on July 8. Thank you!

## OBS ANNUAL ELECTION FOR THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES – 2017

I hereby cast this ballot for the candidates listed as nominees in this issue of the Bluebird Monitor as follows:

☐ I vote for all three candidates for the trustee positions

☐ I vote for only the following candidate(s):

**Candidate:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Print:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## NOMINEES FOR OBS TRUSTEES



### JOHN BARBER

I've been monitoring bluebird trails for almost 50 years, primarily in northeastern Ohio. Bluebirds were my entry into the world of birds, and led to my acquisition of a master banding permit. My curiosity about the nesting success and local movement of bluebirds continues to this day.

I assisted trail monitors at the Holden Arboretum in the 1960's, learning the critical skills of consistent protocols and data recording. I also began banding nestlings and adults at Holden and saw firsthand the importance of tracking individual birds. The monitoring study at Holden continues to this day, surely one of the longer longitudinal studies of one population in a single geographical area.

I monitored bluebird trails in Indiana, Arizona, and Maryland before returning to Cleveland over fifteen years ago. In each of these areas I had the opportunity to learn various study protocols from other citizen scientists, and share my experiences with nest box designs, predator controls, and other aspects of trail monitoring.

Now retired and living in Cuyahoga County, I currently monitor two trails in Cuyahoga and Geauga Counties in northeastern Ohio, one in its 15th year, another relatively new. These trails are within 50 miles of Holden Arboretum, and as a result, have yielded banded bird recoveries among the trails. I'm looking to add banding on other nearby trails to gain further insight into how bluebirds move among nesting sites.



### DARLENE SILLICK

Darlene lives in Powell, Ohio and works as a Senior Executive Assistant for the Chief Information Officer at Cardinal Health in Dublin, Ohio where she also monitors the 14 bluebird boxes on the corporate grounds. For about 32 years, she has worked with numerous non-profit and nature related organizations sharing her passion for birds

and people. She has worked tirelessly on conservation projects all around central Ohio and with many native species.

She was co-advisor with the Ohio Young Birders Club for 10 years and is very passionate about working with children and people who are differently abled giving them a wow moment in the out-of-

doors. She is a lifetime member of Ohio Bluebird Society and is the Franklin County Area Contact. Darlene is a 30 year volunteer and former board member for Ohio Wildlife Center, she organizes Columbus Audubon Birding by Kayak events and enjoys working as an advisor for Boy Scouts for their service projects or Eagle Awards (she just signed off for Eagle candidate number 28).

Darlene is on the Ohio Bird Conservation Initiative Outreach and Education Committee and also completed the OCVN, Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist course in 2015. She is in year two on the OOS (Ohio Ornithological Society) conservation committee and Columbus Audubon Conservation committee. She is in the beginning stages of work with the American Kestrel conservation project with a new nestbox and special pole design. Around Twin Lakes in Powell, Ohio, she has worked for almost 25 years to put up nestboxes for a variety of secondary cavity species from Purple Martins to Prothonotary Warblers.



### MOLLY WILSBACHER

Molly is a nominee for Trustee of the Ohio Bluebird Society. Here are some things you might find interesting about her.

Molly had an exposure to birding and gardening in early childhood and these interests were supported by her Irish grandmother in W.Va. She moved to Dublin, Ohio from Los Angeles

in 2003 and installed one nest box in her yard in Dublin. This nestbox was purchased from Wild Birds Unlimited and was complete with pole, baffle and nestbox. Molly had bluebirds in that box then and every year since! Molly's family is involved in bluebirding too.

She has certified her own backyard with the National Wildlife Federation as a Wildlife Habitat and joins 200 other Dublin residents in an effort to make Dublin a Community of Wildlife Habitats.

In 2011 she was trained in building and maintaining bluebird nestboxes and volunteered to monitor three in a city park. She is currently monitoring 12 nestboxes which are distributed in three different city parks. Molly knows how to "dispatch" House Sparrows as part of that responsibility.

Molly has worked at The U.S. Department of Justice in the Trustees Office on bankruptcy issues since 1993. She also volunteers for the Arthritis Foundation doing Walkathons, Family Day and a Classic Car Show plus supports the Dublin City Halloween Spooktacular, St Patrick's Day Parade, the Irish Festival and is a member of the Bluebird Team. She has served as a lector for St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church since 2004 and has taught religion classes for 20 years.

*All three trustee nominees would bring experience and complimenting skills to the OBS team and would greatly benefit the OBS organization.*



# Ask Madame WingNut

## Nesting for Dummies

By Paula Ziebarth



The title of this article is not meant to insult anyone. Most of those reading this are already eggsperts. It is a spin on the self-help paperbacks that were so common a few years back.

I often get asked why birds make nests and don't use them.

Bluebirders often call these

“dummy” nests. Once you identify what species built that nest, what action should you take, if any? Why?

Why the dummy nests? Birds only exert energy for a purpose. These dummy nests must help them out with breeding success. Several theories are:

1. Multiple nest starts may make territory (and thus the male) more attractive to the female, giving her nest site options to choose from.
2. Dummy nests may discourage other birds from using that box, thus reducing competition for food, shelter, and housing resources.
3. Once the bird determines the competition in its territory, it may switch to a different dummy nest depending on the level of competition from other species, a way of hedging its bets.

**House Wrens** are renowned for their dummy nests. The male migrates back from its southern wintering grounds and begins nest attempts in central Ohio beginning the middle of April. When he does, all clutches and young nestlings are in danger if the bird(s) are nesting in House Wren habitat. Males often enter multiple cavities in the territory they choose, piercing eggs with their tiny needle-like bill and tossing them out of nests and/or removing young nestlings that are generally less than a week old. He will also remove nest materials of other birds. He adds a few sticks to a box here, a box there... He attracts a female and she will decide which box to use, complete one stick nest, line it with a fine grass cup and

lay her clutch. A completed House Wren nest is generally constructed up to the ceiling and their eggs and young are fairly safe behind their stick fortress of a nest.

I discourage House Wrens in my yard and on my trails by siting nest boxes outside of House Wren habitat wherever possible. If I do find stick nest starts, boxes are generally blocked or removed. My intent is to drive them to a different territory to nest. If they are successful, site fidelity will usually have them returning to nest again. Their young may follow suit. If House Wrens complete their nest with grass cup, I leave them be as this is legally an active nesting and protected under The Migratory Bird Act.

If your boxes are in a very urban area, overridden with House Sparrows, then House Wrens may be the only bird that will nest with you. On smaller city lots, I encourage homeowners to set out nest boxes with 1-1/8" diameter hole for House Wrens. Hole size will not allow House Sparrows to enter and my WingNut imagination has House Wrens roaming the city, piercing House Sparrow eggs everywhere...

**Eastern Bluebirds** also make dummy nests. These are especially evident in Tree Swallow grid trails or perimeter trails around ponds where boxes are spaced 25 yards apart for Tree Swallow colonization. I have seen a single pair of Eastern Bluebirds build four dummy nests around a pond. I see this in paired box stations as well. With this species, only the female builds the nest so the first theory of dummy nests does not apply.

I always leave Eastern Bluebird dummy nests. Usually a Tree Swallow finishes and uses the dummy nest. Sometimes the Bluebirds' first nesting is thwarted and they move to that other nest start.

If Tree Swallows are using more than 50% of your nest boxes on a trail, or you observe intense competition in your yard, pairing may be needed to allow Eastern Bluebirds to nest successfully. Tree Swallows can mob a box (four or more vying for the nest box the Bluebird has chosen), harassing the Eastern Bluebirds and causing

them to abandon their nest attempt. Placing another box 12 to 20 feet from that first box should help both species nest. I find this is the case in areas with good Tree Swallow habitat: any area near a pond or other substantial water source. In good Bluebird habitat, I find Eastern Bluebirds generally outcompete Tree Swallows. In good Tree Swallow habitat, the swallows usually win the day. Having food resources close to their box allows either species to stay closer to their nest site and boldly defend it.

**Chickadees**, whether they be my Carolina Chickadees south of State Route 30 or their northern Black Capped cousins, these birds also make dummy nests.

This spring on one of my trails, 3 boxes around a pond had moss starts in them. As soon as I find any moss in a box, I immediately put a 1-1/8" reducer on the box. This keeps larger birds from depredating or taking over their nests, and especially keeps the dangerous non-native House Sparrow from killing them. Last week, I monitored and found female Carolina Chickadee incubating her 6 eggs in nest box while pair of House Sparrows chattered angrily in adjacent spruce tree. I believe they really wanted in there... Once I determine box the Chickadees are using, I often remove the reducer to allow another bird to use the box.

Always gently tap box with Chickadee nests before opening. If you hear a loud buzzing noise, a bumblebee has decided to take over that nest and the birds will abandon.

**Other species** known to make dummy nests in nest boxes include Tree Swallows, Carolina Wrens, and Prothonotary Warblers.

Always inspect nest and box carefully if you find it is not being used. Often, you will find a paper wasp nest start on ceiling of box. Birds generally will not use a box with wasp(s) in there.

Notice I have not discussed non-native House Sparrows in this dummy nest discussion. I have never observed a House Sparrow to make a dummy nest. Every nest start, or box entry for that matter, is deadly serious. They have no need to hedge their bets as they are aptly equipped to take what they want. Please don't let them.

*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:**  
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343 W. Milltown Road, Wooster, OH 44691.

## In Memorium

Lum and Meriam Bourne were both OBS members for many years. As a couple, they were always enthusiastic supporters and a presence at all annual meetings. They lived in Westerville and maintained bluebird trails in that area of Ohio. However, most of their summer monitoring efforts took place in and around an old family farm in Indiana. Largely because of those annual trips, bluebirding was always a loving central feature of their charming lives together. In recognition of their conservation work, the Bournes were [jointly] presented with the OBS' Blue Feather award in 2000.

The Ohio Bluebird Society extends its sympathies to the family and many friends of Meriam Bourne upon her passing.



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## 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

# 30 Years of Bluebird Happiness!

## Happy Birthday to the Ohio Bluebird Society!

