



Bluebird Monitor

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

Winter 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

Looking Forward to 2014

By Marcella Hawkins, OBS Executive Director



I hope you have had a successful year with your Bluebirds and other cavity-nesting birds. We have the final nest box results as of December 31 listed in this issue. Also included are some comments that were on our Nest Box Reports. As you can imagine, the number one problem for most of us was ... Sparrows.

Our Facebook page now has 251 followers...have you checked it out? If you have pictures you would like to share, you can send them to our e-mail address – info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org – and they will be posted for you.

It is time for me to pass the duty of Editor of this great newsletter on to someone else. Most everything can be done by e-mail and I will help when needed. Please let me know if you would be interested in this volunteer position. Thank you in advance!

Our 2014 Annual Conference will be at the same location – just in another part of the building. We have outgrown the Shisler Conference Center and will move to the other side of the building – the Fisher Auditorium, which can hold 1,000 people. This will give us much more needed room to have our displays and vendors in areas where you will be able to move around freely. The registration form is included in this issue.

Best wishes to everyone for a happy, healthy and prosperous (both financially and in our bird totals) 2014!



Out of the Box

The Barred Owl

More Than Just A Haunting Voice

By Chuck Jakubchak, Photo by Jeanne Jakubchak



Unlike many of the interesting birds that inhabit our state, Barred Owls do not migrate south during our trying winter months. Their decision to stay and tough out the cold, windy weather along with fellow Ohioans should endear this species to us as they are as perseverant as we are.

Barred Owls are comparable in size to a Great Horned Owl (21“versus 22”) but their weight is considerably different as the average weight of a Barred Owl is 1.6 pounds, roughly half of the weight of a Great Horned Owl. They also differ in demeanor as Barred Owls are less fierce and would rarely attack a human, even if they approached a nest site.

The diet of a barred owl consists of mice and voles but they will also consume small frogs, reptiles and birds and all hunting is done during the night or twilight hours. Mice and voles constitute the vast majority of their food intake and their dependence on smaller prey is reflected in the size of their talons which are considerably smaller and less intimidating than those of other large raptors. Nature has conveniently matched their talons to the size of their prey!

In late winter/early spring, the nesting season begins for Barred Owls. Cavities are preferred for nesting and they may select one formed by a broken-off branch, a severed tree top or a hole that had been previously excavated by a pileated woodpecker. Barred Owls will also use man-made nest boxes but the thought of a volunteer walking into a thickly wooded area and hoisting a

sizable wooden box more than 20 feet above the ground into a tree could be a little difficult for even the most ambitious nature lover.

Naturally occurring nest cavities selected by Barred Owls are usually 15-30 feet above the ground, 2 feet deep and the birds do not line the bottom of the cavity with any materials. If they are not able to locate a suitable nest cavity, they may opt to re-use the nest of a squirrel, crow or hawk, but that would clearly be an exception to their normal behavior.



The female produces one brood of 2-3 white eggs that she will incubate for 28-33 days and the male Barred Owl will faithfully feed his mate while she carefully incubates the eggs. The young are ready to fledge in about 6 weeks after hatching, but the parents will continue to feed and care for the young owls until they are able to take care of themselves. Full independence may not occur for 4-6 months, quite longer than most other birds.

Should you find a pair of nesting Barred Owls, you might want to note the location since this species is known for their nest site fidelity. Mated pairs often return to the same location to nest each year and some pairs have nested in the same tree for many consecutive years.

Great Horned Owls are the largest threat to Barred Owls due to their size, power and ferocity. However, a mob of annoying crows or blue jays can easily harass a resting Barred Owl and force it to leave the comfort and security of its secluded, daytime roost. Once the owl has been flushed from its daytime resting spot it is susceptible to many other perils.



Wildlife Preservation

Eastern Bluebird: America's Most Beloved Thrush

By Jim McCormac, Photo by Marcella Hawkins



Two of Ohio's best known and most beloved birds are thrushes. One of them, the American robin, is a ubiquitous fixture in suburbia and nearly every other habitat. Robins are often the first bird one encounters upon stepping outside in the morning.

The other thrush may be the recipient of more human assistance than any other bird species in the Buckeye State. It is the eastern bluebird, which looks and acts so unthrushlike that some bluebird enthusiasts may not recognize its family ties. The other six species of thrushes that occur regularly in Ohio are habitual ground-feeders. Bluebirds, on the other hand, typically hunt prey from posts, small trees and other elevated perches. Bluebirds have keen vision, and can spot grasshoppers, caterpillars, and other small prey from distances up to 130 feet. When a victim is spotted, the bluebird quickly flies to the spot and pounces.

A male eastern bluebird is an avian work of art. Avid bluebirders insist that the gorgeous shade of blue that paints a bluebird's topside is the prettiest color found in nature. They may be right. The rich blue is countered by deep cinnamon-brown below, and the contrast is striking. Female bluebirds resemble a muted version of the male. Juvenile bluebirds are heavily speckled below, a trait that reveals their thrush family lineage: most thrushes are spotted below, at least when immature.

Eastern bluebirds are unique among Ohio thrushes in that they nest in cavities. It is this habit that has forged

the strong bond between bluebirds and people. For cavity-nesting birds, the availability of suitable nest sites is always a pinch point. Way back in the 1930's, one of America's premier ornithologists, Frank Chapman, predicted that bluebirds would suffer due to increased competition with nonnative cavity-nesting European starlings. How right he was. Starlings, along with the introduced house sparrow, began to greatly diminish bluebird populations by usurping bluebird nest sites.

About the time of Chapman's gloomy prediction, Thomas Musselman of Illinois had discovered that bluebirds would readily take to artificial nest boxes, and

before long Musselman had strung a trail of over 1,000 boxes. He met with great success, and the bluebird trail was born. Today, there are tens of thousands of bluebird nest boxes in the eastern U.S. and Canada, and collectively they spawn a blizzard of bluebirds.

Few animals light up a meadow like a bluebird. The stunning males illuminate the summits of fence posts like Christmas ornaments, and their rich throaty warbles add music to the pasture. Thanks to the dedication of scores of bluebirders

who build and maintain nest box trails, Ohioans can enjoy more bluebirds than ever. Partners in Flight estimate Ohio's population to be 470,000 birds – that's about 32,000 pounds of bluebirds!

For an interesting and delightful read, check out the book *The Bluebird Effect: Uncommon Bonds with Common Birds*, penned by Ohio author Julie Zickefoose. It is available through Amazon.com or most major booksellers.





Monitoring the Nest Box Trail at Green Lawn

By Warren I. Grody

Reprint of Article run in *The Heritage*,
the newsletter of Green Lawn Cemetery (by permission)

It was March 2010. I had just finished filling the bird feeders at the Pit and I decided to stop to check the nesting Great Horned Owls. As I trained my spotting scope on the owlets, I heard someone call my name. I looked up and found Darlene Sillick, Ohio's Bluebird lady, waving at me. As I approached, Darlene said, "Warren, I've got a job that you are just going to love!! How would you like to monitor a nest box trail here in the cemetery?" I didn't know anything about monitoring nest boxes, but I did know that with Darlene resistance is futile, so I said yes. She taught me the basics about Eastern Bluebird and Tree Swallow nests and set me loose.

I have just finished monitoring the trail for my fourth season. At Green Lawn, the trail consists of four nest boxes. Box one is located beside the butterfly garden and the other three are located in the prairie across the street from the office. In the last four years, 35 Eastern Bluebird chicks and 37 Tree Swallow chicks have fledged from those four boxes.

I monitor the boxes to make sure they are not overrun by non-native invasive species, such as House Sparrows, and to remove threats to the new chicks, such as wasp nests. I also count eggs and chicks. On my normal rounds, I have the box open for about a minute and then I move on. This happens about twice a week. To monitor the nests any more frequently might cause too much disturbance for the chicks. For the first time this year, my data was entered into a citizen science database at Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Project Nestwatch, where it will be used to monitor the health of bird populations.

You learn quite a bit about bird behavior when you monitor their nests. For instance, our two target species react differently when I check the boxes. I always try

to make noise as I approach so the adults have time to leave the nest before I open the box. Bluebirds will fly for the trees and mostly disappear. They want nothing to do with a human at their nest. Not so with the Tree Swallows. They fly around, get a really good bead on me, and buzz right past my ears while clicking their beaks. And it isn't just the adults nesting in the box I am checking. It seems that all of the adults nesting in the area will form a flight and take turns. I have had as many of five of them make passes at me while I tried to count chicks in a nest. As the season progresses, they also seem to recognize me (it must be the hat) so they will start to harass me as I approach the edge of the prairie and they will continue until I have exited the area completely.

Just when you think you have everything figured out, you will run into an individual who acts differently. In one nest box this year, a female Bluebird simply refused to leave the nest when I opened the box. Instead, we would stare at each other. On a single occasion, she moved to the back of the nest so I could count four blue eggs. After the eggs hatched, she also became the first Bluebird to buzz past my head as I checked her chicks. It was all worth the hassle for me: on May 18th, while Darlene and I were leading the monthly bird walk at the cemetery, we were able to band four healthy chicks: two males and two females. Darlene was even able to show us how she determines the hatch order. A little more than a week later, those four chicks fledged. As the breeding season came to a close, our modest trail saw a total of eight Eastern Bluebirds and 10 Tree Swallows take their first flights.

So this winter I will maintain the boxes and get them ready for the spring. We will start all over again. And that is a wonderful thing.

Bluebirds and Cemeteries

By Lolita Guthrie

The following article was written by my mother, Lolita Guthrie. Dad passed away this spring, having lived a very full 90 years and enjoying 66 years of marriage. A bluebird box was recently erected on a fencepost close to Dad's burial spot in Sergeant Cemetery in Liberty Township, Wood County, by his son and son-in-law. Submitted by Carla Hall.



Lolita and Mearl Guthrie

Seeing bluebirds nesting in wood fence posts along country roads are cherished memories of long ago from the childhoods of both of us - Mearl Guthrie, in central Kansas, and Lolita (Thayer) in central Indiana.

And so it was in rural Wood County, Ohio, when we arrived in 1954. But not for long! The small farms with old houses disappeared. Gone were those roadside fencerows that provided habitat for the beautiful bluebirds.

With a supply of bluebird houses, we sought out remaining natural areas and private driveways along which to mount bluebird boxes. Looking for an alternate to roadside fence posts, we turned to our local rural cemeteries, and used the perimeter of the cemeteries – the fences – as our bluebird boxing areas. Most of these cemeteries were owned by Townships, and their trustees heartily approved setting up the bird houses.

My interest in graveyard preservation melded this interest into a local genealogy society project. In the early spring of 1990, we organized a meeting program for the local genealogy group, “An Evening with the Bluebirds”, open to the public. The program included a video from the Bluebird Society, and distribution of 2-inch bluebird lapel pins that we provided. From that meeting, as part of an “Adopt a

Cemetery” project, individuals and groups agreed to place bluebird boxes, facing into each cemetery, and to monitor them. Their occasional visits to monitor nesting activity, eject mice or such, and observe bluebird action, encouraged more visitors, who in turn, alerted the Trustees to any recent vandalism – a perennial problem for cemeteries.

Among the forty or so in attendance was one Brownie Girl Scout Troop. The Brownies purchased four boxes, and Mearl accompanied them to the cemetery adjoining the Wood County Museum - the former county home. The fun part was, when they went back a month later for their first visitation, these 8-10 year old girls squealed at finding a nest of white-footed mice in one of the boxes, and they absolutely refused having them put out of their home. They had a right to live too!

A year later, a second “Evening with the Bluebirds” was held, including a slide presentation taken of birds actually inhabiting the boxes. Mearl would assist others with building the boxes, putting them up, and making repairs. Lolita went with the volunteers to take photos of the various bluebird houses during that second year. Along the way were newspaper articles – the local newspaper was good to champion the cause.

After all these years, we continue to meet friends, who on their own, maintain and enjoy some form of bluebirding.



Mearl's son putting up the bluebird box at Sergeant Cemetery near Dad's burial site

The pins pictured to the right will be available at the 2014 annual conference.



Finding Your Happiness Through Nature



the Domino Effect of Bluebirding

OBS Annual Educational Conference
Saturday, February 22, 2014, 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Open to the public. Cost - \$10/Person or \$25/Family

Fisher Auditorium (OARDC)

1680 Madison Ave., Wooster, OH 44691
Wayne County Visitors Bureau: www.waynecountycvb.org



Agenda

- 8:00 - 8:45** **Registration; light refreshments**
- 8:45-9:00** **Welcome** - Marcella Hawkins, OBS Executive Director;
Introduction of Jim Tew, MC
- 9:00 - 9:45** **Paula Ziebarth** - Trail Tales, Tips and Tricks
- 9:45 - 10:30** **Dick Tuttle** - The Beaver Hypothesis:
Bluebirding in the Seventeenth Century
- 10:30 - 10:45** **Break**
- 10:45-11:00** **Presentation of Blue Feather Award and Wildlife Conservation Award**
- 11:00 - 11:45** **Medina Raptor Center** - Eagle
- 11:45 - 1:15** **Lunch/Raffle/Vendors**
Ohio Wildlife Center - Owls and Kestrel
- 12:00 (optional)** **Breakout session - Jay Brindo**
Bluebirding 101
- 12:00 (optional)** **Panel of Experts to answer questions -**
Mel Bolt, Dick Tuttle, Dean Sheldon, Don Plant
- 1:15 - 2:00** **Carrie Elvey - Wilderness Center**
Milkweeds, Monarchs, and More
- 2:00 - 2:45** **Chuck Jakubchak** - Kestrel Project
- 2:45 - 3:00** **Break**

3:00 - 3:45

Darlene Sillick -Youth
Working on Conservation Projects
for the Birds

3:45

Close; Pick up Raffle Prizes

Pictures will be taken at 11:45 for:

- All Life Members in attendance
- All Blue Feather Award recipients in attendance
- All Wildlife Conservation Award recipients in attendance

Accommodations

Hotel

Hilton Garden Inn
(across the road from Fisher Auditorium)
Rooms for Friday (21st) and Saturday (22nd)
are being held until January 23.

959 Dover Road, Wooster, OH 44691
Phone - 330.202.7701; Fax 330.202.7781
\$95/night plus tax

Bed and Breakfasts:

Market Street Inn

Phone: 330.262.4085
www.marketstreetinnwooster.com
\$90-\$120/night (full breakfast included)
Mention OBS and get 10% discount

Mirabelle Bed & Breakfast

Phone: 330.264.6006
www.bbonline.com/oh/mirabelle
\$85/night (full breakfast included)

OHIO BLUEBIRD SOCIETY ANNUAL CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORM

Deadline for pre-registration: Must be **received** by February 14. **Walk-ins welcome!**

Note: pre-registration will give each person one additional door prize ticket.

Name(s) for name tags: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Number of People Attending: _____ E-mail: _____ Phone: _____

Boxed lunch(es)? Enter number for each. All lunches are \$8.00 and come with sandwich, macaroni salad, chips and a cookie. Prepared by Honeybaked Ham.

TOTAL

_____ Turkey Classic \$ _____

_____ Chicken Salad \$ _____

_____ Veggie Delight \$ _____

_____ Ham \$ _____

Registration Amount \$ _____ *

*\$10/person or \$25/family

TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ _____

Make checks payable to "OBS"

Mail to:

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

To use PayPal, please send request to
info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org

Questions?

Please call Marcella Hawkins at 330.465.6987 or send
e-mail to info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org

*This Is An Educational Event Provided By
The Ohio Bluebird Society*



For map: <http://mapq.st/19vfp14>

If you would like to have a vendor table at the conference, please send an e-mail request to info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org or call 330.465.6987.

*Don't forget to bring a raffle item. The money we raise helps us with our conference costs.

OBS Spotlight

The Pioneer Ridge Bluebird Team

By Chuck Jakubchak, Photo by Jennifer Barden



**Penny Brandau,
OBS Member &
Pioneer Ridge Mentor**
(photo by Jeanne Jakubchak)

The OBS Spotlight column usually focuses on veteran bluebird monitors that have a sustained interest in the restoration of the Eastern Bluebird population. Everyone featured in previous columns has demonstrated an incredible passion for cavity nesting birds and their efforts have been above and beyond the call of duty.

Because the Ohio Bluebird Society is always anxious to see new people get involved in bluebirding, today's column features the efforts of a community in North Ridgeville, Ohio that became first-time bluebird box monitors in 2013. Many of the individuals had not even considered themselves birders, yet most had some interest in nature and everyone had an appreciation for the bluebirds that they routinely observed throughout their neighborhood.

Pioneer Ridge, an "over 55" sub-division, contains ideal habitat for bluebirds as it was farmland before being converted into a housing development. The open spaces, combined with ponds, assorted small trees and the woodland's edge were a draw for several bird species and they quickly caught the eyes of the residents. Of

particular interest to everyone was the sweet song of the Eastern Bluebird and their beautiful blue plumage. Becoming box monitors did not happen overnight and the decision to become one came about in an indirect manner. Residents of Pioneer Ridge had gathered to discuss possible arts and crafts activities and bird watching was not even on their radar. Woodworking projects were proposed and someone suggested building bird houses since everyone shared a general interest in birds. The discussion morphed into building bluebird houses and things took off from there. Initially 6 people expressed interest in having a bird house in their yard and before long, the group had built 33 bluebird houses with the intent of erecting them in their backyards.

Fortunately the Pioneer Ridge team group realized that if they were going to be successful in their endeavor, they would need education and training as they were novices and lacked necessary technical expertise relative to bluebirds. Penny Brandau of the Ohio Bluebird Society and Bluebird Chair of Black River Audubon in Lorain County met with the enthusiastic team and conducted a "Bluebird 101" program, immediately establishing herself

as a valuable resource. Penny was just what the Pioneer Ridge team needed and she became their mentor; providing guidance, answering questions and being available whenever needed.

The 2013 Pioneer Ridge team was comprised of 58 individuals (33 households) that began putting up the new boxes in January 2013 with the last boxes going up in early April. They admitted that their learning curve was steep and their first task was to differentiate the nests and eggs of various species, singling out those of the dreaded house sparrow. Recycling sparrow eggs was a minor hurdle that the team quickly overcame.

All of their work paid off as birds were attracted to their boxes in 2013 with 27 Eastern Bluebirds successfully fledging. In addition, 20 tree swallows also fledged and they were the icing on the cake. When asked about the highlights of their first year of box monitoring, everyone stated that finding eggs in the box and seeing those beautiful birds in their community made it all worthwhile. Clearly they are motivated to build on their success and make 2014 a bigger and better year!

After learning about the Pioneer Ridge team, it was hard to determine the best part of the story. Was it the 47 new birds that came into the world because a community took the time to build, install and monitor new nest boxes? Perhaps it was the fact that Ohio now has 58 more individuals that care about cavity nesting birds and are willing to volunteer their time. Maybe it was the 58 people that could become Ohio Bluebird Society members and attend the 2014 Conference to increase their knowledge and share their enthusiasm with other prospective bluebirders.

Another positive element to this story is Penny Brandau of the Ohio Bluebird Society and Black River Audubon because she volunteered to share her expertise and successfully guided the Pioneer Ridge team through the project. Penny's actions typify the core values of a dedicated bluebirder and we are grateful for her support!

The underlying theme for this edition of The OBS Spotlight is that many wonderful things happened because Pioneer Ridge decided to become bluebirders; a community worked together, energized individuals learned various skills and 47 beautiful new birds hatched. This is a heartwarming story that illustrates how people can rally for a common cause, obtain favorable results and make our world a better place.

Member News



Welcome - To Our New Members

Donations
\$50

Glock, Fred

Cass, Fran
Coffman, Jim (new LIFE member)
Fox, Richard
La Sala, Al (new LIFE member)
Rust, Dean

Wanted:

Editor for OBS Newsletter. Please send an email to info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org if you are interested in this volunteer position.

2014 Annual Conference

If you are interested in having a display or if you would like a vendor table at the conference, please send an email to info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org

Black Swamp Bird Observatory Petition

Sign the Black Swamp Bird Observatory petition to stop any additional wind turbines in the highly bird-sensitive areas of Lucas, Ottawa, Erie, and Sandusky counties, Ohio, specifically the wind turbine projects at the Camp Perry Air National Guard facility and the Lake Erie Business Park, and find alternative locations.

<http://www.bsbo.org/CONSERVATION/ResponsibleWindEnergyAction.aspx>



Ask Madame WingNut To Wrent or Not to Wrent?

by Paula Ziebarth
Photo by Marcella Hawkins

Last month I received this letter from a fellow Bluebirder and friend, Bethany Gray.

"Hi, I'm sending this message both to OBS and Paula since I know her...I had a question for "Madame Wingnut" for any upcoming newsletter. Thanks, Bethany Gray

I have read conflicting thoughts about placing wren/chickadee houses near bluebird trails. Those against the idea state that house wrens don't need extra houses in which to reproduce, and that they may use both kinds of boxes anyway. Any thoughts? Since these wren houses can also fledge chickadees, would they be a good alternative for someone to place in a yard who did not want to commit to monitoring a bluebird box or trail?"



Eggsalant question Bethany!

Eastern Bluebirds have their wings full (sorry) with two very competitive species: House Sparrows and House Wrens. Both species pierce and toss out eggs and nestlings. House Sparrows are nonnative birds and it is legal to control them with trapping or other means. House Wrens, however, are native birds and it is illegal to tamper with active nests or harm the birds themselves.

There are indeed conflicting thoughts about allowing House Wrens to nest near Eastern Bluebird nestboxes. My opinion and experience parallels that of the renowned bird researcher, Althea Sherman, who started "The Great Wren Debate" in 1925. Initially, Ms. Sherman accommodated the House Wren on her property by installing six House Wren boxes with small entry holes to exclude House Sparrows. It wasn't long before she was inundated with Wrens. All the nestboxes and other cavities on her property were pumping out House Wrens like crazy. She carefully studied their behavior and the

different bird species whose nests were destroyed by them. House Wrens do not limit their nest destruction to cavity nesting birds. The list she compiled included: Phoebe, Eastern bluebird, Mourning dove, Black-billed and Yellow-billed cuckoos, Northern flicker, Downy and Hairy woodpeckers, White-breasted nuthatch, Song sparrow, Vesper sparrow, Chipping sparrow, Grasshopper sparrow, Bewick's wren, Tufted titmouse, Black-capped chickadee, Catbird, Brown thrasher, Veery, Cardinal,

Robin, Barn swallow, Purple martin, Baltimore oriole, Warbling vireo, Bobolink, Trails flycatcher, Common yellowthroat and Sedge wren. After her third season of housing them, she removed all her House Wren boxes and discouraged their nesting as much as legally possible.

I concur wholeheartedly with Althea's advice if you have any other native species nesting in your area. If you live deep in a heavily

populated city, and are unwilling to manage for House Sparrows, you may just want to watch the two of them duke it out. Mother Hen WingNut, my dear mother, watched a House Wren and House Sparrow battle over a slot box on her front porch a couple seasons ago. It was quite amusing to listen as she regaled me with her story of the "mean House Sparrow" building a nest on top the nest of the "sweet little Wren". And then the "brave little Wren" removed the House Sparrow's nest. I still can't remember which bird won that battle. My bet is on the House Wren.

Bethany, you bring up a good point that Carolina or Black-Capped Chickadee habitat is also House Wren habitat. There is no reason you cannot install a nestbox to house Chickadees AND discourage House Wrens. In my own yard, I install a nestbox with small 1-1/8" entry hole in woodedge habitat early in the spring for Carolina Chickadees. Knowing the nesting timetable of the Carolina Chickadee and the migration schedule of the House Wren, I manage this box carefully. Carolina Chickadees overwinter here and often build nests and lay eggs before House Wrens migrate back to my area. If

a Chickadee has eggs when the House Wrens return in mid to late April, I use a Wren Guard on the nestbox to protect them. Chickadees will not nest after May 31st so at that time, I block the entry hole or remove the box entirely. House is not for Wren.

So does Madame WingNut ever fledge House Wrens? Yes! If a House Wren gets to the point of lining her nest with dried grass, or if she has laid eggs, the nest is active and it is illegal to interfere. Because House Wrens often make “dummy” nests, however, those inactive nests can be removed. Often when I see this, I simply block the nestboxes they have shown interest in, or move them to more open habitat.

If you want to discourage House Wrens from nesting on your trails or property, here are the things to avoid, in order of birding blunders:

1. Placing nestboxes in House Wren habitat. Instead, site boxes at least 120 feet, and preferably 200 – 300 feet from brushy or heavily wooded areas. If you have no other option on your trail or yard, placing Eastern Bluebird nestbox in most open area of yard and facing entrance away from desirable wood edge or brushy area seems to help. That is how I site the Eastern Bluebird nestbox in my own back yard.
2. Clustering many nestboxes in small area. I believe this practice makes a territory especially attractive to the male. He is able to present so many different options to his prospective mate.
3. Nestbox design. House Wrens seem to find certain box styles especially attractive: Slot boxes, Gilbertson and Gilwood styles are all wonderful designs if kept out of House Wren habitat. All these boxes have larger entrances and so are easier to stuff the sticks in.

Thank you, Bethany, for that great question. Keep them coming, fellow Bluebirders.

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 or by mail to PMB 111, 343 W. Milltown Road, Wooster, OH 44691.

Eastern Bluebird Subject of 2015 Ohio Wildlife Legacy Stamp Photo Contest

COLUMBUS, OH – One of Ohio’s most iconic and beautiful songbirds, the eastern bluebird, is the featured species for the sixth Ohio Wildlife Legacy Stamp Photo Contest, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR).

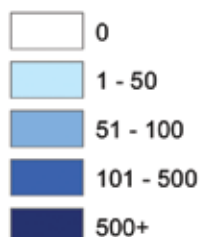
Thanks to the hard work of hundreds of “bluebirders” who build and maintain nest boxes, Ohio’s bluebird population is at an all-time high. Cavity-nesting species such as the bluebird experience intense competition for nest sites, and without human assistance this gorgeous bird would be more scarce in Ohio. The success of bluebird nest box trails is one of Ohio’s conservation success stories.

Bluebirds are a photographer’s dream. The male is striking, with a bright back colored in rich royal blue offset by the bright rusty-red breast while the females have less flamboyant coloring. These birds can be tame, confiding and often allow close approach. Photographers with typical point-and-shoot cameras can often obtain excellent images.

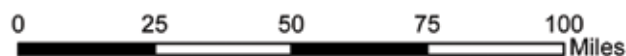
The 2015 Ohio Wildlife Legacy Stamp will feature one winning photo submission of the eastern bluebird. Entries will be accepted Aug. 10-23, 2014, and the winner will receive \$500. The selection of the winning photo will be made by the end of September 2014. The contest is open to Ohioans age 18 years and older. However, photographers age 17 and younger are able to compete in the youth division. Visit wildohiostamp.com for complete contest rules.

Entries can be submitted in a horizontal or vertical format. The winning photographer is not eligible to enter photos in Ohio Wildlife Legacy Stamp Contests for two years.

(As reported by OBS members)



TOTAL = 6385



created by Mike Watson; The Holden Arboretum

Random comments from our Nest Box Reports this year regarding “What are your most serious predator/competitor/other problems on your trail?”

House Sparrows – (Most reported problem) ~ Wrens ~ House Sparrows, Raccoons ~ Mice

.....
This year – ants – took over one box just after birds built nest. I called around for tips and wound up removing the nest, washing the box in and out, and spraying the pole and baffle only (not the nest box) with ant spray. Bluebirds returned to the box within a couple hours, rebuilt the nest in one day and began laying eggs!

.....
The House Wren – removed over 50 starts – next is the House Sparrow with small hole boxes – 1-1/2 diameter

.....
House Sparrows – but they only seemed interested in the box closest to my house.

.....
Only had to toss 1 active House Sparrow nest this year

.....
#1 House Sparrows; #2 House Wrens; #3 Raccoons

.....
I've never had a year like this. Nestlings and eggs were deserted in several boxes – I have no idea what happened – 2 boxes that always had nests had no Bluebirds at all.

.....
House Sparrow, Tree Swallow, blow flies - lost 4 birds in second brood due to blow flies.

.....
Aside from House Sparrows, House Wrens are the second most serious problem.

Two nest boxes were taken over by flying squirrels - two others by House Wrens.

.....
Only 4 House Sparrow attempts, so actually none. I use PVC predator guards on all posts.

.....
People, Sparrows ~ Stray cats and house sparrows. Mice, Wasps, House Sparrows

.....
Competitors – Wrens, too hard to count eggs with all the sticks when you open the box. I close and leave alone.

.....
Sparrows keep overtaking the same box again and again. ~ Tree or Barn Swallows

.....
House Sparrows and House Wrens – even getting under Wren guard to destroy Bluebird eggs.

.....
Raccoons were #1 this year. They are really out of control & need to be thinned out by disease; Sparrows #2; Man #3.

.....
3 boxes with dead Tree Swallows. Not sure of cause – chemical or disease related?

.....
Raccoons and Cooper's Hawks ~ Mammalian predators (especially Raccoons) & snakes.

.....
House Sparrow, Cooper's Hawk, House Wren

Competitor – Tree Swallows – serious problem; Predator – Raccoons destroyed one nest

.....
Sparrows – Raccoons & people – some boxes I have no idea! Weather was also a problem – cold & hot

.....
This year's increase in Tree Swallows is due to a grid I experimented with this year.

.....
House Sparrows – had to close 2 houses that I couldn't trap males! Tree Swallows are becoming numerous – I keep adding houses!

.....
Trees – all woods – Bluebirds like more open country.

.....
Sparrows!!!! Until this year, we've had great success in two Bluebird houses along a country lane that runs by our backyard. This year the Sparrows were relentless, and the Bluebirds (although they seemed interested) never used these nest boxes.

.....
Took over a new trail that was too close to tree line – lost many Swallows to House Wrens – will move boxes.

.....
For Osprey: cell phone photographers might have caused two nests to fail!!

.....
Owls, snakes, ants – also a wet year



Blooming Bluebirders

Eagle Scouts Soar!

By Darlene Sillick

Reprint from Columbus Audubon Song Sparrow January/February issue

Due to the generous financial support of Columbus and National Audubon, two conservation grants are helping two Boy Scouts achieve their Eagle Scout Award, the highest award in Boy Scouts. These high school students will be working at two different sites to help native cavity nesting birds by educating the public about proper protocols for nest box construction, placement, monitoring, and data collection.

The Columbus Audubon Conservation Grant is being used to refurbish and relocate a 100-nest box trail at The Dawes Arboretum in Newark, Ohio. The FY14 Chapter Collaborative Grant from National Audubon is being used to install a new 20-box Eastern Bluebird and Tree Swallow trail, a Purple Martin gourd rig, and an informational kiosk at The Genoa Township Community Gardens. Both projects are collaborative efforts between other community groups stepping in to help fund and volunteer their time for trail installation and monitoring.

Over the next year, you will meet both of these high school students at one of our short programs where they will present their Eagle Scout projects. Both of these young men are from Boy Scout Troop 117 in Dublin, Ohio. I have worked with scouts for over twenty years, doing conservation projects locally. As an Eagle Scout Advisor, with the completion of these two projects, I will have helped twenty Boy Scouts achieve their Eagle Scout Award.

Columbus Audubon has also been a generous financial supporter of The Central Ohio chapter of The Ohio Young Birders Club which serves youth aged 12 – 18 with an interest in outdoors, wildlife, natural history, and the environment. The Ohio Young Birders Club enthusiastically does several conservation projects each year. Their most recent conservation project was a 16-box Tree Swallow grid at The Dawes Arboretum. The Licking County Birding FAN (Fun and Nature), The Dawes Arboretum Natural Resources Department, Columbus Audubon, and The Central Ohio chapter of the Ohio Young Birders Club collaborated to complete this project in April, 2013.

I wish to extend a special thank you to Columbus Audubon for their continued support of young birders in central Ohio. Without the collaboration between Columbus Audubon, National Audubon, private donations, and countless volunteer hours; these conservation projects with our youth would not be possible.

Below, I am holding Alex the Great Horned Owl from Ohio Wildlife Center.



Next is left, Dan Hall owner of Wild Birds Unlimited, Westerville Oh and helping to sponsor the Eagle Scout project, Carl Schuler, Eagle Scout Candidate Troop 117 Dublin Ohio, and myself the Eagle Scout advisor. The site for his project is the Galena Community Gardens and he is putting up nestboxes, a martin rig (martins are in metal houses there and I banded some last summer) and also an educational kiosk will go up.



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