



# Bluebird Monitor

OBS encourages good stewardship  
by **Monitoring** our Trails  
Summer 2016



## Ohio Bluebird Society Conference: Feb. 20, 2016 Ashland University's John C. Myers Convocation Center ***Birds and People: Collaborating for a Better World***

By Mary Lee Minor, Edited By Penny Brandau, Photos By Bob Bement and Jeanne Jakubchak



Pat and Dave Dutton, membership chairs, were ready for the 133 registered bluebirders, greeting them with name tags and Ashland-oriented gift bags. They also processed 23 new memberships that day and brought efficiency and smiles to the registration process.

The silent auction had many bluebird item donations plus Eagle Optics binoculars, a Smuckers gift basket, an Ohio Light Opera event basket and even a stained glass art piece from Bob Bement. Amy and Dan Pearse donated many bluebird boxes, books, art, and sculpture which expanded the auction. Thank you to each one of you who donated items and to everyone who purchased items. You made this auction a great success!



Non-profit vendor displays bordered the full room. OBS President Jay Brindo provided the welcome.

*Continued on page 2*



Founding OBS members were recognized. Back row, left to right: Teresa and Reid Caldwell, Don and Diana Plant, Dean Sheldon, Dick Tuttle. Front row, left to right: Dale Rabung, Tom Barber, James Coffman, and Chris McQuillen.



Mel Bolt presented the OBS Blue Feather Award to recipient Tom Barber. Tom has supported OBS through education shared with the public, at school with his students, and as a coordinator for OBS. He has also had great success with his own trails in Cambridge. His fifty seven boxes (nine on his own property) have fledged a total of 4,944 bluebirds. The Blue Feather Award was certainly merited!



Conference speakers: Penny Brandau, Chuck Jakubchak, Jamey Emmert, Kurt Gaertner and emcee and speaker Carrie Elvey.



OBS trustees and officers: front row, left to right: Treasurer/ Secretary Diana Plant, Trustee Carrie Elvey, Trustee Kurt Gaertner. Middle row, left to right: Trustees Mary Lee Minor, Penny Brandau and Dale Rabung. Back row, left to right: Trustees Don Plant and Chuck Jakubchak, Vice President and Trustee Mike Watson, President and Trustee Jay Brindo.

Penny Brandau, newsletter editor, used a power point to share benefits of OBS memberships. Chuck Jakubchak, OBS trustee, brought the story of Byers Woods, a wonderful wildlife walking area, which has been transformed from a former landfill. He also spoke about the OBS Legacy Program which encourages gifting to OBS and explained the subsequent memorial nestboxes which are installed with memorial plates. Another topic Chuck presented during the conference was The Foxfield Preserve (actually a green cemetery) which embraces the cycle of life by offering a final resting place amidst the prairie plants. Keynote speaker Jamey Emmert of the ODNR Division of Wildlife, presented "Where Would We Be Without Birds?" and took the group through a historical account of the contributions birds have made to Americans. OBS trustee Kurt Gaertner presented "Bluebirds to Barn Owls: Thinking Outside the Box" in the afternoon and then emcee Carrie Elvey spoke on "First the Birds, Now the Bees". She discussed the value of bees as pollinators and their major contributions to our food sources. There were four noon breakout lunch sessions. Jay Brindo's was called "Getting Started with Bluebirds". In another corner of the room Don Plant and Dale Rabung provided help for "Improving Your Bluebird Skills". The other two lunch sessions were given by Mike Watson who talked about Grants from OBS and Penny Brandau who showed a Wild Lens video called "Restoring the Mountain Bluebird".

DVD's prepared by Dick Tuttle were offered for a donation. The book A Nest of Bluebirds was donated to those who wanted a copy.



## Getting in Contact with Our OBS Area Contacts

# Area Contact Profile:

## Mark Mohr

*Editor's Note: Mark Mohr is an OBS Area Contact for Allen County in northwestern Ohio and has been helping with bluebird conservation for over 25 years. He has worn many "bluebird hats" during those years including nest box builder, park naturalist, bluebird trail manager, volunteer coordinator and educator, and recently land stewardship manager. Mark has volunteered on the OBS board and even shared an OBS office in the past. He would be a great resource if you need help or information about bluebirds. His contact information can be found on page 14.*

got her text this spring asking me if I could relocate the boxes, I texted her back and said no need I moved the forest instead! In reality, I had rented a Bobcat heavy-duty brush cutter mower and spent a week in January mowing down trees and shrubs in the parks prairies, meadows and assorted grassland areas. The neatest part about bluebirding is all the wonderful people I've gotten to know over the years. For a few years I was on the OBS board and shared the role of President/Vice President with Doug Levasseur. I look forward to each spring when the trail monitors and bluebirds reenter my life after the dreary winter months.

My bluebirding began in 1989 and 90 when I was the camp naturalist at 4-H Camp Palmer. I salvaged slab wood from the camp firewood pile to build those first boxes. Later, I was working in a grocery store in Holgate, Ohio and was able to salvage the lumber (and nails) from the discarded produce crates to build bluebird boxes. In 1994, I began working as a naturalist for the Johnny Appleseed Metro Park District, Allen County Ohio. For the past 23 years I've maintained a series of bluebird trails in our metro parks (about 100 boxes). Bluebirds now can be seen in the picnic areas of most of our parks and are a common sight to park visitors. Eight park volunteers monitor the trails. I just maintain them, and train new volunteers as needed. My current effort is with our new purple martin colony that began in 2015, and with the dozens of screech owl, kestrel, wood duck and bat houses that I've put up in the parks. A barn owl nest box is next on my list, then maybe a tower for chimney swifts. The latest change here for me is that in summer of 2015, I was moved into a Land Stewardship job position rather than that of a program naturalist. An example of what that means for bluebirds is the following true story. Deep Cut Park has had bluebird boxes for over a decade, however, the woody vegetation had overwhelmed the meadow and the bluebird boxes. The trail monitor had asked me for several years to relocate the boxes. When I



# Helping Nature One Yard at a Time

By Cathy Priebe, Photos by Dave Priebe



The Priebe nature preserve.

Essential habitats for creatures are disappearing and we can help. I am by far not an expert on this subject, but I believe that I have created an important backyard habitat for birds and other pollinators. My efforts have attracted different birds and pollinators to drop by that would otherwise have flown past if I had not provided what they were looking for.

Most of my knowledge on this subject has been gleaned from researching articles on native and annual plants, wildlife habitats and conservation, and suggestions from local nursery staff and fellow gardeners and birders. Here are just a few suggestions that I have incorporated in my backyard and hopefully will inspire you to create your own special backyard habitat.

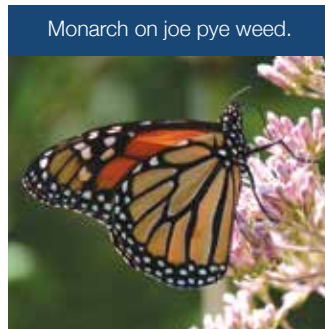
I love hummingbirds, so most of my perennial plantings are geared to their palate. Wegeila bushes, cardinal flower, native honey suckle, sages, monarda and other tubular flowers and vines. Planting containers filled with many varieties of agastache, cannas, pentas, cuphea (cigar plant), nicotiana (flowering tobacco), fuschias and other annuals brings them up close and personal.

Attract fruit eating birds, such as orioles, cedar waxwings, bluebirds, robins, cardinals etc. by planting viburnums, poke weed, crabapple and mulberry trees, elderberry, wild grapes, raspberries and roses. Even the very unpopular poison ivy vine is a food source, which is banned to only a few select areas in our woods.

Our yard has oaks, maples, pine, box elders, red twig dogwood, grasses and the very weird osage orange trees for nesting. Water is important. Anything with moving water is a great attractor for all birds, especially migrating warblers!! If you don't have space, put a solar fountain or

mister in your bird bath. Be creative, place a pole with a hook over a bird bath and hang a small plastic bucket with a hole in the bottom and let water drip down. It works!!!

I also began planting to attract other pollinators, specifically butterflies. Monarchs have been in the news recently and it has been suggested to include all types of milkweeds (ascepias) in our yards. Perennial butterfly bushes are also a wonderful food source for pollinators, along with ironweed, joe pye weed, and cone flowers. Lantana, an annual flower, is also a sure-fire attractor for all types of butterflies.



Monarch on joe pye weed.



Spicebush Swallowtail on lantana.

***Avoid using pesticides. This will help provide food for insect-eating birds. There are other organic options to control pests that will not harm your creatures and beneficial bugs.***

Perhaps the easiest way to attract birds to your yard is to set up seed, suet or nectar feeding stations. Mixed seed varieties with sunflower, safflower and millet will attract all types of birds. As you become more specific as to what you prefer to visit your yard, there are plenty of specialized seed selections and feeders at bird and feed stores. The plant and food choices are endless and that is what makes feeding the birds and creating a friendly habitat so much fun and essential to a healthy environment one yard at a time.



Hummingbird feeding on agastache.



# Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas

By Jim McCormac



The current magnum opus of Ohio's bird life is hot off the presses. Titled the Second Atlas of the Breeding Birds in Ohio, this 578 page, six pound tome is a treasure trove of all things feathered.

Full disclosure: I am one of the book's five editors. The others are Paul Rodewald, Matthew Shumar, Aaron Boone, and David Slager.

The book has strong curb appeal, thanks to a beautiful cover painted by Ohio artist Julie Zickefoose. Her work depicts a nest of our smallest warbler, the northern parula. This species has shown one of the greatest population increases in recent decades of any of our songbirds, hence its selection for the cover.

This Atlas follows distantly in the footsteps of the first Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas, which was conducted from 1982-87. The summary book was published in 1991. Results of Atlas II were especially significant, as we have the Atlas I benchmark for comparison.

Atlas II field work was conducted from 2006-11. An army of over 900 birders spent over 70,000 hours collecting data, and confirmed breeding by 194 species. Another 11 species likely bred, but could not be confirmed. Five species were confirmed as new Ohio nesters: black-necked stilt, canvasback, common merganser, Eurasian collared dove, and Mississippi kite.

There have been winners, and losers, from Atlas I to II. Notable amongst the winners is the bald eagle. Only five nests were found during Atlas I; 120 were reported during Atlas II. Rounding out the top 5 biggest increases between Atlases were the peregrine falcon, yellow-bellied sapsucker, winter wren, and black vulture.

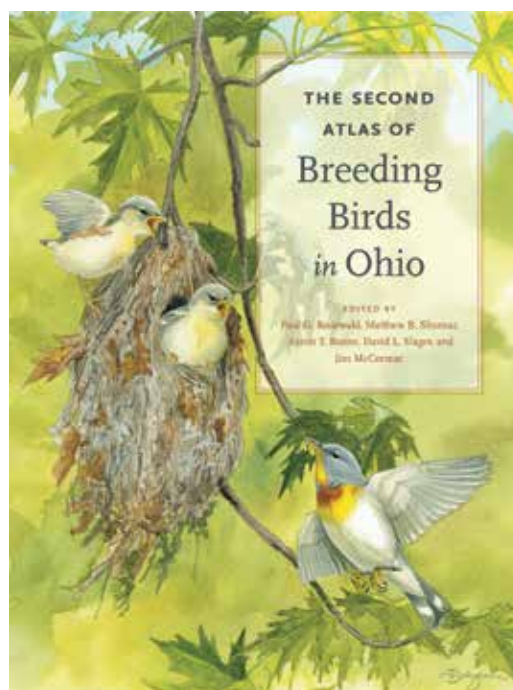
Bluebirders will be pleased to know that Atlas II data suggests that about 200,000 territorial male bluebirds occupy the state. If one assumes that most of these

males found a mate, we've got nearly 400,000 bluebirds inhabiting Ohio.

All has not been rosy, and many species have declined markedly between the Atlases. Hardest hit have been the loggerhead shrike, ruffed grouse, upland sandpiper, common nighthawk, and eastern whip-poor-will. Each species account features color photos of bird and habitat, range maps featuring population density markers, and a map showing the change between atlases. Text includes a description of the species' behavior, overall range, changes in Ohio status, and comments on conservation and management.

Major credit goes to the Ohio Division of Wildlife, which provided the majority of financial support for this project. Thanks to all of the skilled birders who conducted field work, and everyone who sponsored species accounts.

Copies can be obtained directly from the publisher, Penn State University Press, or retailers such as Amazon.





# 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

**Ruby Barck**  
**JoAnn Bartseh**  
**Beaver Creek Wetlands Association**  
**Douglas & Kim Beckley**  
**Penny Borgman**  
**Jim & Lina Farrar**  
**John Fogarty**  
**Pam Gum**  
**Richard Herman**  
**Stan Kline**  
**Charles V. Koester**  
**Chick & Lorry Kormanik**  
**Paula Kramer**  
**Mr. & Mrs. Paul Kubala**  
**Richelle Laippy**  
**Patricia Lehane-Hoffman**  
**Linda Mash**  
**Tim Mendiola**  
**Steve Miller 9**  
**Teresa Peters**  
**Bill & Geri Rea**  
**Dustin G. Reichard, Ph.D.**  
**Kelly Richards**  
**Lara Roketenetz**  
**Lynda Schilderink**  
**Charles & Beth Weil**  
**Mickey & Bonnie Wilkinson**  
**Cindy Woods**  
**Earnest Yambor**  
**Bluebirds Over Delaware County**

## OBS Trustee Nominees

Both Jay Brindo, President of OBS, and Mike Watson, Vice President of OBS, will relinquish their Trustee positions in order to focus more fully on their officer positions and responsibilities. Their Trustee positions will need to be filled and the following two highly qualified individuals have been nominated to fill those openings.

Dean Sheldon nominated Mel Bird and writes the following about him: "I last saw Mel and his wife, Mona, at the most recent conference of OBS at Ashland College. Both of the Birds have an extraordinary interest in bluebirding. They maintain a trail of more than 40 boxes in a residential area near Edison High School on SR 113 just east of Milan in Erie County. They have been very successful in their efforts and have maintained detailed records of their work. Mel is a box builder and has been successful in experimenting with many different nest box designs. Based on my long-standing OBS experience, I would say that it would be hard to find anyone who could do a better job on the board than Mel would."

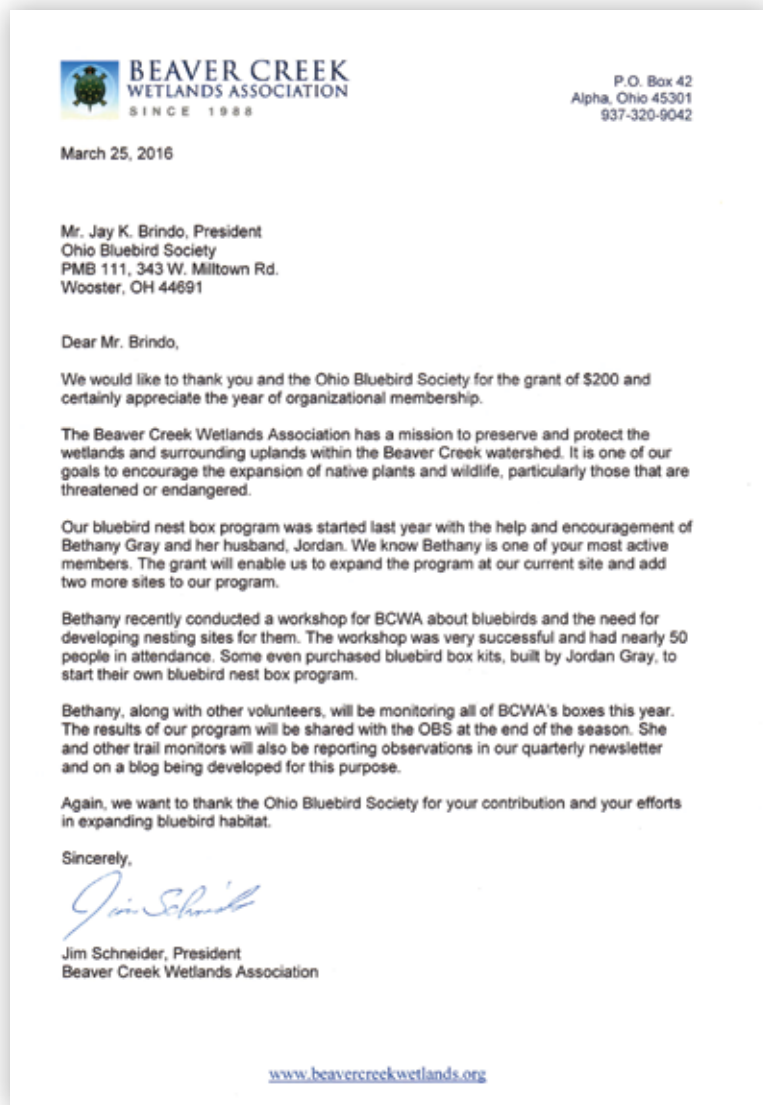
Jay Brindo nominated Rich Benz for the second open trustee position. His resume is extensive in teaching experience and professional service, and he has been the recipient of many awards and recognitions. Rich has published many papers and reviewed many texts and from 2010 to the present has been the Lake Metroparks Environmental Curriculum Specialist for Lake County Metroparks, Concord, Ohio.

Both nominees would bring experience and complimenting skills to the OBS team and would greatly benefit the OBS organization.

## Sparrow Swap Project

If you are like lots of other bluebirders in Ohio you are probably removing House Sparrow eggs from some of your bluebird nestboxes. Paula Zlebarth, OBS member and Area Contact for Delaware County, recommends that a useful citizen science project for those eggs might be found in a project being conducted by Caren Cooper with the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences through CitSci.org. Click on the website link here for more details about the project and how to help provide data as you remove those HOSP eggs. [http://citsci.org/cwis438/Browse/Project/Project\\_Info.php?ProjectID=356&WebSiteID=7](http://citsci.org/cwis438/Browse/Project/Project_Info.php?ProjectID=356&WebSiteID=7)

Thank you from the Beaver Creek Wetlands Association was written in appreciation of the grant they received from OBS.



## North American Bluebird Society Conference

The Ohio Bluebird Society is proud to be an affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society which is having their annual conference at Ellis Bird Farm, Lacombe, Alberta, Canada this year from July 8-10. This multi day conference is an awesome opportunity to meet bluebirders from all over the United States and Canada and to see both Mountain Bluebirds and Western Bluebirds on field trips. Check out the link for more information about the conference and registration forms. <http://nabluebirdsociety.org/index.htm>

## Bluebirding on Wikipedia

Members: Are you birders or bird-watchers? The following definitions were taken from Wikipedia's article on birdwatching (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birdwatching>):

**Birder.** The acceptable term used to describe the person who seriously pursues the hobby of birding. May be professional or amateur.

**Birding.** A hobby in which individuals enjoy the challenge of bird study, listing, or other general activities involving bird life.

**Bird-watcher.** A rather ambiguous term used to describe the person who watches birds for any reason at all, and should not be used to refer to the serious birder.

— *Birding*, Volume 1, No.2

## 2016 Ohio Bluebird Society Conference Survey Summary – by Mike Watson

The 2016 OBS conference was held Saturday, February 20th in Ashland, Ohio. A survey was designed using Google Forms and was sent to 134 attendees via email/mail on Feb 26. The survey consisted of 13 multiple choice questions and 2 comment sections. A total of 44 responses were returned as of April 15th. Most responses were digital; only one mail-in paper response was received. More than half (24) of the responses were returned on the day the survey was sent (February 26). A total of 596 answers (559 multiple choice + 37 comments) were returned.

Overall, the responses to this survey indicate that attendees largely enjoyed all aspects of the conference. 84% of the answers were positive in tone (Strongly Agree or Agree) while only 4% were negative. In many cases, complaints by one attendee were contradicted by comments from another (e.g. liked having vendors in the past vs nice to have less commercialism; would like raffles to return vs enjoyed not having interruption of raffle drawings; spent too much time on other

species vs importance of addressing conservation of wide range of species). The agenda was the focus of most of the critical comments and suggestions. Again, many of these comments disagreed with other comments, suggesting that attendees have very specific ideas of what a bluebird conference 'should be', but these concepts vary from attendee to attendee.

The OBS conference committee appreciates the comments and suggestions of each member and are incorporating this information into planning for next year's conference! Thank you for your responses! The 2017 OBS Conference will be held on March 4th at Ashland University and will focus on the 30th anniversary of the founding of OBS. This conference will be a celebration of what OBS has accomplished, a recognition of the hard work that made those accomplishments possible, and a view towards the next 30 years. We will share more details with you as we continue planning and hope to see many of you there.

# An Impressive Female Tree Swallow

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

Photo by Penny Brandau



During a 13-year period between 1980 and 1992, I attached U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service aluminum leg bands to 5,785 Tree Swallow nestlings raised in nestboxes on six bluebird trails in Delaware County, Ohio. In addition, bands were attached or read after each of 2,018 captures of female Tree Swallows that took place during daylight

hours or at night. Regular nest visits made it possible to record nest histories that revealed lifelong breeding histories.

After establishing my first bluebird nestbox trails in 1968, I tried to attract nesting Tree Swallows after I read about their need for nestboxes in the Griggsville Purple Martin News, a newspaper out of Illinois. I installed my first nestboxes for Tree Swallows in a pond at the original Big Walnut Middle School (BWMS) in Sunbury, Ohio where I taught life science. Nonetheless, my first Tree Swallows nested on Elmer and Nance Hinnenkamp's sheep farm in 1977. Nance was the art teacher at BWMS.

In 1979, Tree Swallows nested in Delaware State Park and the new ornithologist at Ohio Wesleyan University, Dr. Edward H. Burt, Jr., or Jed banded five families of nestlings. By 1980, I had a sub-permit with Jed's master banding permit that ultimately led to my own master permit in 1985.

Since 1968, I had been using a penlight and machinist mirror to inspect nestboxes. Starting in 1980, whenever I found a swallow in its nest, I opened the box and attached a leg band to the adult bird. During 1980, analyzed data showed that only 41.2% of eggs fledged after females were captured before they had invested at least five days of incubation, while 81.8% of eggs developed to fledge after females were captured after having five or more days invested in incubation. After that revelation, I made no effort to band a female swallow unless she had at least five days invested in incubation.

Whenever I captured an adult swallow, I turned it on its back and blew on its belly to part its feathers. A bare belly revealed a pink brood patch, found only on female Tree Swallows. Male swallows do not have brood patches, but they show a cloacal protuberance during the nesting season.

After attaching bands during the day, I released swallows to fly free from my hand. I soon developed an obsession to band all female Tree Swallows to study their longevity and nesting behaviors which led to capturing and banding swallows at night. I soon found that I could easily capture all incubating females at night, but it was difficult to aim a flashlight properly since I only have two hands, and in Delaware State Park, I rode a bicycle to monitor nestboxes. I created a portable desk from a five-gallon bucket and a piece of quarter-inch plywood. The bucket supported the plywood as dowel rods held a flashlight in place. It all worked well in the field to function as a desktop.

My data book and all the hardware needed for banding easily fits into a pants leg sewn into a handy cloth bag. Standing on my knees was a fairly comfortable position to band captured adult swallows. I soon found that at night, female Tree Swallows can easily be lifted from their eggs and nest, banded, and gently returned to their nest through the entrance hole, or held and returned to their nests through an opened side or front panel. While still in my hand, they would settle onto their clutch of



eggs. Their security appeared to be to stay in the nest chamber rather than try to escape.

During 13 nesting seasons between 1980 and 1992, I recorded 2132 Tree Swallow captures for banding procedures. Data emerged that chronicled many nest histories. One Tree Swallow female stands out as the oldest. I'll call her 960 after her band's prefix, and she lived during 11 calendar years to raise 11 broods of offspring during ten nesting seasons in Delaware State Park.

In 1982, I captured my first two dispersals. I had banded 960 as a nestling on the Hinnenkamp farm in 1981 and she had dispersed 9-1/2 miles to nest in Delaware State Park in 1982. At the park, she nested in Box-88 in 1982, and then moved seven-tenths of a mile to nest in Box-50 near the beach parking lot overlooking Delaware Lake during the next three years. In 1986, 1987, and 1988, she nested at the opposite end of the beach parking lot in Box-51, then the next two years in Box-121 that was paired five yards away from Box-51, essentially nesting in the same location for five years. For 1991, she dispersed four-tenths of a mile to a pair of boxes, 56 and 133, where she raised a successful brood in each box that year.

During her long life of ten calendar years at the park, 960-raised 11 families from 12 attempts. During her last two nesting seasons, she raised three families after four attempts. After her nest failed in 1990, I did not expect to see her again, but was quite happy to capture her twice more in 1991.

During 960's last year nesting, I captured 105 female swallows nesting in the park, including 70 that arrived wearing leg bands, and 35 other females that arrived without bands but left my hands wearing new bracelets.

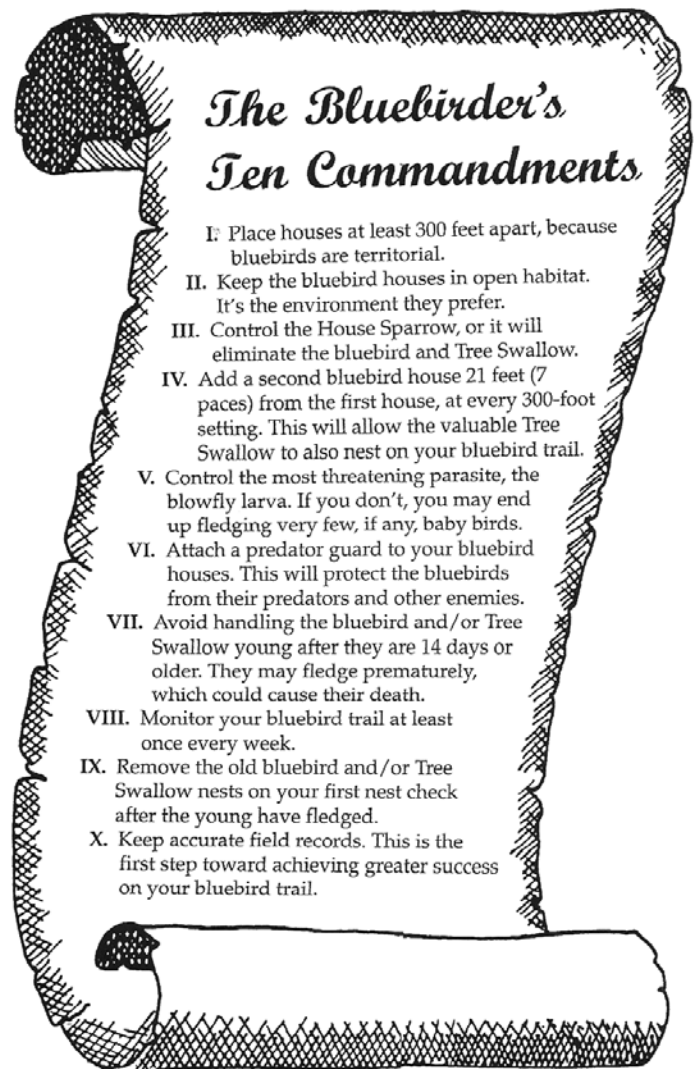
Birds are aged according to the calendar year they are living in and 960 was the only female living in her eleventh year in 1991. She represented less than one-percent of the nesting females. Of 105 swallow females captured in the park, none were living in their tenth or ninth year and only two (1.9% each) were into their seventh or eighth year, six (5.7%) represented their sixth year, twelve (11.4%) lived in their fifth year, ten (9.5%) in their fourth year, 44 (41.9%) in their third year, and 28 (26.7%) brown females were living in their second year.

The reason for 960's nest failure in 1990 will remain a mystery since no evidence was found at the empty nest. In addition to her age, 960 is exceptional after having raised 43 fledglings during ten nesting seasons. With the exception of her only nest failure, 960 raised all hatchlings once they emerged from their eggs. And, of course, I thank 960 for her tolerance. After all, during her life, her "monster man" (me) held her in his hands 13 times.

### *Acknowledgments:*

I most want to thank Jed Burt for his foresight to band Tree Swallows, his sponsorship of my early banding of all my bluebird trail species, and his friendship and encouragement throughout the years. I also thank Elmer and Nance Hinnenkamp for welcoming my nestboxes on their farm, and the personnel at Delaware State Park for their partnership and support of my conservation projects.

In particular, I thank *Tachycineta bicolor*, a creature of only 20 grams, for inspiring me with its persistence, tenacity, and dedication to its families, and along with other bluebird trail species, for providing me with a good hobby that kept me in touch with Mother Earth so I could be a more effective teacher of middle school life science, and a more content human being during my retirement years. Bluebird on!



Above: The Bluebirder's Ten Commandments, by Andrew Troyer from his book *Bring Back The Bluebirds Even on Your Hand* (2004). Reprinted with permission.



# Ask Madame WingNut

## Management for Multiple Species

By Paula Ziebarth

The mission of OBS is to support the return and the perpetuation of the Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) and other native cavity nesting birds in Ohio. When managing for multiple species, things get tricky. Not only are you dealing with intraspecific competition where members of the same species compete for limited resources; you are also dealing with interspecific competition where members of different species compete for a shared resource.

I hope this article will help with some tips to help attract and house multiple species. I will focus on Eastern Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, Purple Martins, House Sparrows, Carolina Chickadees and House Wrens because those are the species I work with most. They are the ones that have taught me a few things over the years.

### Tip #1 – Habitat is Key

Eastern Bluebirds need short mowed grass nearby to hunt for insects. Solitary deciduous tree(s) in their territory allow the male to use tree as sentry post and young can fledge to tree(s).

Tree Swallows hunt for flying insects so length of grass is unimportant. Nest boxes for them can be installed in tall grass habitat if you like. A source of water nearby provides a lot of flying insects for the parents and their young.



Purple martin colony.

Although you may desire a Purple Martin colony on your property, you will be unsuccessful unless you have wide open habitat and no tall trees within 40 feet of your Purple Martin housing. A source of water nearby is also very

helpful. Purple Martins' diet consists solely of flying insects. They hunt for larger insects in the higher realms while Tree Swallows hunt for smaller insects at lower altitudes.

House Sparrows prefer to be near human structures, seed lots, bird feeding stations, spruce or other stiff needled evergreen trees, dense shrubs, brush piles, etc. The non-native invasive honeysuckle bushes found near most wooded areas are also attractive to them. Keep nest boxes for native birds away from areas that House Sparrows are attracted to, but do use these areas to set out trap boxes with 1 ¼" entry hole to manage House Sparrows if you wish to decrease their numbers to keep native birds safer.

Carolina Chickadees like wooded habitat or areas near pine trees. If you have white pine, try placing a nest box near tree for them. The softer needled white pine is attractive to the Chickadee, but not so much to the House Wren.

House Wrens also like wooded habitat and brushy areas. I discourage House Wrens from nesting in any area where I have nest boxes for other native cavity nesters. House Wrens, although native birds, do depredate eggs and small young of many different species.

### Tip #2 – It's a Big World Out There

Don't limit yourself to your property when helping native cavity nesting birds. After I got established in my little yard in Powell, I took 150 big Madame WingNut steps from my house and approached other neighbors to start a little Bluebird Trail on my street. Help others get started and offer yourself as a resource to help them out as needed.

Approach science teacher at local school if they have good habitat to house some birds. Work with the teacher and her students to start a trail on school property. Other great places to set out nest boxes are cemeteries, church yards, golf courses, local parks, etc. I have worked with Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Kiwanis groups to build and install boxes on public trails.

Purple Martins require very specific habitat so if you find a golf course with a nice pond, see if they might want to start a colony there. You could offer to monitor colony weekly, and they can purchase and install the housing.

### Tip #3 – Do it Right

Use quality nest compartments or boxes designed for the species you are attracting. Make sure to protect them with predator baffles.

For Purple Martins, I would recommend getting equipment from the Purple Martin Conservation Association or Troyer's Birds' Paradise. Both companies have quality equipment. There is a lot of terrible Purple Martin equipment for sale in hardware and bird specialty stores.

### Tip #4 – Too Many Nest Boxes?

Remember that there are limited food resources within a given area. There are also different territory requirements for different species. Putting out too many nest boxes will attract species you don't want, namely House Sparrows and House Wrens. Carefully consider the habitat and territory requirements of each species you are trying to attract when setting out nest boxes for them.

### Tip #5 – Timing

Some of our native cavity nesting birds remain in central Ohio year round and some migrate back to me. Knowing who to expect and when can help manage interspecific competition.

**February/March:** House Sparrows start first. I begin inbox trapping early to remove as many as I can before native birds begin nesting.



**March:** Eastern Bluebirds and Carolina Chickadees are building nests and laying first clutches end of March to early April. Tree Swallows return mid-March.

**April:** Mature Purple Martins begin returning to their colonies first week of April. House Wrens migrate back

usually the third week of April. Tree Swallows finish up nests and begin clutches last week of April.

**May:** Busy! Everybirdy busy! Carolina Chickadees will not nest after end of May.

**June:** European Starlings will not nest after first week of June.

**July:** Most of our native cavity nesters are winding down. House Wrens make late nest attempts.

**August:** Dog days of summer and all is quiet. Purple Martins begin their migratory trip to South America.

### Tip #6 – Strategies

- Purple Martin colonies should not be opened until they return. Opening housing too soon allows non-native House Sparrows and European Starlings to establish residence. Both species kill our native cavity nesting birds. Waiting also allows Tree Swallows and Eastern Bluebirds to establish their nest sites in nest box(es) you have sited about 25 feet from Purple Martin rig. Due to territorial skirmishes, they will work to keep any new birds of their own species out of the Martin rig when it is opened up.
- If over 50% of your Eastern Bluebird nest boxes have been claimed by Tree Swallows, consider paired nest box stations every 150 yards with paired boxes spaced 15-22 feet apart.
- Installing House Sparrow “trap” box(es) with 1 1/4” entry hole in areas that are attractive to them should help protect native cavity nesting birds on your trail or in your yard.
- Exclude European Starlings from Purple Martin housing by using Starling Resistant Entry Holes on all your Purple Martin house compartments and gourds.
- Exclude House Sparrows from Carolina Chickadee nest boxes by installing a 1- 1/8” hole reducer on box as soon as you see moss in there.
- In areas with bad House Sparrow infestation, Sparrow Spookers are pretty effective keeping them out of active nest boxes.



Carolina Chickadee and her eggs

- Help protect Carolina Chickadees or other birds nesting in House Wren habitat by installing House Wren guards on nests with eggs in mid-April.
- Remove or block Carolina Chickadee nest boxes after May 31st.



*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.*

# Bluebird Monitor

The Newsletter of the Ohio Bluebird Society



Volume 1, Number 1

Winter/Spring 1988

## HERE AT LAST!

After several months of often difficult but rewarding labor we have finally given birth to the first issue of the **BLUEBIRD MONITOR**, the official newsletter of the Ohio Bluebird Society. Our sincere apologies to the many bluebirders who have patiently awaited this event because it has taken longer to bring this issue to print than we first anticipated. As is the case with most new endeavors the many steps in the process have been quite a learning experience. We feel that the time taken has been well spent and has enabled us to produce a higher quality newsletter by not rushing the process.

Our initial aim is to publish the **BLUEBIRD MONITOR** twice this year with the next issue expected to be off the press in August. As this medium develops and more articles become available for print we hope to expand our newsletter to a quarterly publication. We believe that timely communication such as this with our members is vital to the growth and development of this organization.

We greatly appreciate the many letters and phone calls we received regarding the newsletter. They served to reinforce our convictions that there are many dedicated bluebirders who are eagerly awaiting O.B.S. membership and that our efforts to organize a statewide society have not been in vain. We hope all our readers will use the enclosed membership application to join us in closing ranks in support of the bluebirds.

Once again many thanks for your patience.


Reid and Teresa Caldwell



## OBS FIRST STATEWIDE MEETING

On Saturday, October 10, 1987, the Ohio Bluebird Society was officially introduced to Buckeye Bluebirders who attended the first statewide meeting of the O.B.S. held in Knox County, Ohio. Converging on Mt. Vernon and the Country Club Retirement Center they came from all across the state, from as far away as Ashtabula and Lucas counties in the north and from Hamilton and Noble counties in the south. Seventy-five bluebirders representing 28 Ohio counties gathered together at the Beechtree Apartments on the grounds of the Center to learn about this new organization created to champion the cause of bluebird conservation in the state.

On tap was a full day of bluebird programming highlighted by informative presentations on the effective conservation of our native cavity nesters. This was followed by demonstrations on bluebird box building and mounting techniques including many tips for successful trail management. After an exciting open forum where participants shared some of their experiences in bluebird fostering, the meeting concluded with some discussions concerning the development of goals and strategies for guiding this new society. Even though we ran out of time before we did ideas, much was accomplished and the meeting was unquestionably a rousing success. The O.B.S. had finally fledged! If there were ever any doubts as to whether the bluebirders in Ohio were ready for their own society, then those doubts were certainly laid to rest that day last autumn in Mt. Vernon.

As we enter a new year spurred on by the encouragement received at that first meeting, the Ohio Bluebird Society is preparing to move forward and take a lead role in Ohio bluebird conservation. You are invited to join us in this noble endeavor and become an active member of the O.B.S., sharing your ideas for developing this, your bluebird society. If we all work together we can make 1988 a much better year for the bluebirds. 

# Bluebird Trails, Climate Change and Competition Among Cousins in the West

By Jim Jablonski

Bluebirders in Ohio know the threat to our Eastern bluebirds from invasive species such as house sparrows, which contributed to a ninety percent population decline early in the twentieth century. But, with only a single species in our area, few of us know that other bluebirds can be a threat to each other.

An article by University of Arizona ornithologist Renee A. Duckworth and biologist Alexander V. Badyaev entitled “Battle of the Bluebirds” in the Fall, 2014 Bluebird, the NABS newsletter, explained how, due to climate change, Western bluebirds have been steadily invading the habitat of Mountain bluebirds, forcing the latter to higher elevations.

The ranges of both species lie west of the area inhabited by “our” Eastern bluebird, which, during the summer, ends at the plains of Montana, Wyoming, and into Alberta, the location of the upcoming NABS conference. The Mountain bluebirds range begins there and extends nearly to the Pacific Ocean while the Western tends toward the valley areas, right to the coast.

Like the Eastern, the diets of both species consist of insects and berries but they find them in slightly different habitats – the Mountain bluebird prefers open country with few trees while the Western likes a semi-open terrain with some pines, oaks and brush at higher altitudes. The Western often perches low and drops to the ground to capture insects like the Eastern while the Mountain bluebird, in its wide open habitat, will often hover before dropping to the ground to snare its prey.

Despite the above minor differences in habitat and behavior, their ranges can overlap and competition has always existed, according to Duckworth and Badyaev. And it may be increasing lately, at least in the areas in Montana the ornithologists studied.

A review of their history puts recent changes in perspective. Both birds were in serious decline in Montana due to habitat loss from agriculture and fire suppression policies that reduced the number of suitable trees for woodpecker-drilled nesting sites.

However, beginning in the 1960’s birders began to put up thousands of bluebird boxes. As their numbers came back the bluebirds came into increased contact as the Mountain species came down into lower elevations and Westerns recolonized former areas.

A major success story for conservation-minded birders right? Well, yes and no. The bluebirds were back but fixed home areas, like box trails were not in either bird’s evolutionary history. The Westerns however, according to Duckworth and



Western Bluebird.  
Photo credit: Blalonde taken  
from Wikipedia.



Mountain Bluebird.  
Photo credit: Penny  
Brandau.

Badyaev, are both more aggressive and able to tolerate densely populated breeding areas, such as a bluebird trail, than the Mountain bluebirds.

The results? The more assertive Westerns began to drive their Mountain cousins off the trails. Suddenly, the Western bluebirds experienced a mini-population explosion in the 21st century that drove their Mountain relatives back into the high country.

This is where climate change comes in. With average temperatures rising in the West the two species are thrown into a heightened “cousins war” as the Western bluebird, expanding in numbers, can live higher on the slopes where they still out-compete the Mountain birds. Duckworth and Badyaev drily point out “it may only be a matter of time before we see a substantial upward shift in the Western bluebirds elevational range.”

The authors add “If the battles over nest sites at the nestbox trails that crisscross Montana’s valleys are any indication, an upward shift of the Western bluebird’s range may well lead to the displacement of more Mountain bluebird populations.”

And so the battle goes on – as humans attempt to undo the conservation mistakes of the past, positive results and unintended consequences both result. Add to the mix the hybridization caused as Mountain bluebird males disappear from some areas and there seems to be interesting changes occurring in North America’s western mountains, hills and valleys.

**References:** Duckworth, Renee A. and Badyaev, Alexander V., “Battle of the Bluebirds,” in *Bluebird* at [nabluebirdsociety.org](http://nabluebirdsociety.org), Fall, 2014; “Eastern Bluebird”, “Mountain Bluebird”, “Western Bluebird” in *Lives of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman; also “Eastern Bluebird”, Mountain Bluebird”, “Western Bluebird” entries in *The Birders Handbook* by Paul R. Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin, and Darryl Wheye.

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Perhaps the single most important activity relating to the management of any EABL trail is the need to monitor activity in each of the nestboxes on a regular basis. This includes keeping track of nesting progress and observing/correcting nestbox problems which may develop during the breeding season. Maintaining a written record of what has taken place at each box location is yet

another vital aspect of the monitoring process.

There are those who maintain that no bluebird trail (of one or more boxes) should be developed unless the manager is prepared to monitor each of the nestboxes on a regular basis. We subscribe to that concept.

Listed below are some of the situations/conditions which may need attention during a typical monitoring visit:

- Regular examination of the internal/external condition of the nestbox particularly with regard to weatherproofing, box opening and stability of the mounting post;
- Evidence of occupancy and nest construction (whether by EABL, Tree Swallows, House Wrens, House Sparrows or other species). HOSP nest/eggs must be removed/destroyed. HOWR are another matter.
- Look for signs of predation by raccoons, house/feral cats, HOSP, HOWR and others. Note scratches, claw marks, disturbed nests, dead chicks or nestling birds killed in the box.

- It is important to inventory number of eggs, nestlings. Note age, size, condition, arrangement/condition of nesting material, suitability of nest cup.
- Removal of infertile/unhatched eggs and/or dead nestlings. All of these should be removed from the box and disposed of away from the box itself.
- Control insects in the nestbox. Wasps in upper rear corners must be killed or the EABL will not nest in the box. Blowflies on nestlings, mites, or the presence of ants (which are likely to be in the box if there are dead birds or broken eggs or food). Ants are the scavengers or "clean up" squad. Removal of the used nesting material after fledging will be a help against ant infestations.
- Late season wasps and hornets in/around the box and mounting post pose a serious danger to the trail manager...proceed with caution.
- Look for man-made hazards on the trail. Fence posts and fence wire on the ground, woodchuck holes, ground bees, old farm implements and other unseen obstacles can be hidden by grass/ high weeds, poison ivy and brambles.
- SAFETY FIRST: There can be a need for sun protection, heavy boots/shoes, long pants, and traffic caution along roads and highways.

Monitoring bluebird trails is serious business and can be fraught with many discouraging disappointments along the way. A positive and cheerful attitude about the important conservation work being done on behalf of these charming birds will go a long way to offset many of the most difficult moments encountered on any trail.



## Ohio Bluebird Society Membership Application

Membership Class	Annual	3-years
<input type="checkbox"/> Student (under 21)	\$10	\$25
<input type="checkbox"/> Senior/Sr. Family	\$12	\$30
<input type="checkbox"/> Regular/Family	\$15	\$40
<input type="checkbox"/> Organizational	\$40	\$110
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting	\$100	\$275
<input type="checkbox"/> Life	\$300	
<input type="checkbox"/> Tax deductible gift to OBS \$ _____		
<input type="checkbox"/> Membership renewal <input type="checkbox"/> New membership		
<input type="checkbox"/> I am interested in participating in OBS activities		
<input type="checkbox"/> Email Newsletter    OR <input type="checkbox"/> Print Newsletter		

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Deadline for Submitting Articles:

Spring Issue - February 1

Summer Issue - May 1

Fall Issue - August 1

Winter Issue - November 1

## 2016 Conference: Continued from page 2



The day before the conference started round tables were centered with baskets arranged with blue, white and orange flowers, a bluebird placed within the materials. These were made by OBS trustee Mary Lee Minor and were given away as door prizes at the end of the conference day.

The "chubby bluebird" nester was given to Bethany Gray at the end of the day.

Plans are already underway for the OBS conference in 2017 when we will be back in Ashland to celebrate our 30th year of helping bluebirds and other native cavity nesters. We hope that you will save the date of March 4th, 2017 for this very special event!

We give many thanks to Jeanne Jakubchak and Bob Bement for sharing the above conference photos and to Mary Lee Minor for her written summary of the 2016 conference. Thank you!