



Bluebird Monitor

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

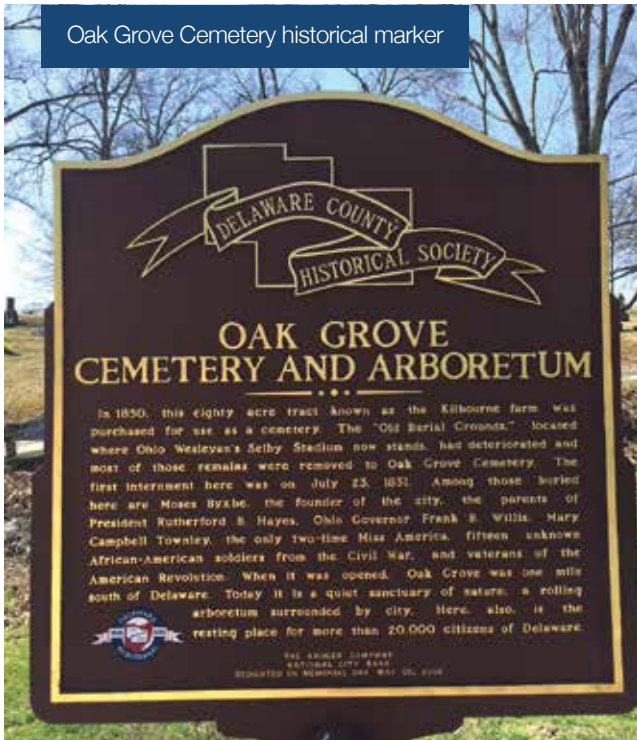
Fall 2018



Ask Madame WingNut: The Resurrection of a Trail

By Paula Ziebarth

Oak Grove Cemetery historical marker



Oak Grove Cemetery in Delaware, Ohio has a rich history. Established in 1850, Oak Grove Cemetery is the largest cemetery in Delaware County and encompasses approximately 80 acres.

In 2013, an Eagle Scout installed 23 nest boxes on the cemetery grounds. In 2014 Eastern Bluebirds were prevalent, but during 2015, boxes were overrun with House Sparrows and House Wrens. The trail only fledged 6 Eastern Bluebirds in 2015. In spring of 2016, the original trail was replaced with 15 nest boxes for Eastern Bluebirds and 6 House Sparrow Trap boxes through a generous donation by Darlene Sillick and her Zeppick Conservation Project. Volunteers from Delaware Kiwanis and Aktion Club helped to install the trail.

Individual nest boxes (no paired stations) were spaced to maximize Eastern Bluebird nestings and intercept non-native House Sparrows. House Wrens were discouraged from nesting by siting Eastern Bluebird nest boxes in open habitat when possible and blocking any boxes they tried to use. Traci Cromwell, Connie Dolder and I have monitored the trail for the past 3 years.

During the first season, it became apparent that House Wrens had been allowed to nest throughout the site, even in open areas where we did not expect to see them. With frequent monitoring, we were able to block nest boxes with sticks in them before the House Wrens finished nests or laid eggs. Boxes with sticks generally remained blocked for a couple of weeks in an attempt to drive House Wrens to find a different territory to nest in. There were 24 House Wren nest attempts in 2016, but these attempts reduced substantially in 2017 and 2018.

Surprisingly, House Sparrows were not a big issue. The cemetery is located within the City of Delaware and I



F.P. Vergon grave monument has a little owl hidden in oak tree.



Female Eastern Bluebird in (unlucky) Box #13 just before she was killed by another Eastern Bluebird and the female of THAT pair was also killed = intraspecific competition

really thought we would have a huge House Sparrow presence. Most of our “trap” boxes had Carolina Chickadee attempts that were ultimately destroyed by House Wrens. We did run across a problem with a gentleman feeding birds on cemetery grounds. I counted 43 House Sparrows eating the seed and corn strewn on the ground one day. He was asked to discontinue feeding the birds and their presence dwindled.

We thought our Eastern Bluebird fledging numbers were good in 2016 with 57 fledged. 2017 proved to be even better with 97 fledged. With so many Bluebirds in the area, we witnessed a disturbing incident of intraspecific competition. An adult male Bluebird entered the nest of a nesting pair and was killed by them inside the box. The nesting pair’s young were fine and we removed the dead interloper.

2018 is winding down to be another wonderful year for the Eastern Bluebird population at Oak Grove Cemetery. Five active nests remain and fledgling numbers will reach 95 if they all make it. We did witness some new disturbing signs of intraspecies competition. One nest box had a female Bluebird killed while on eggs. Another Bluebird pair built a nest on top of her carcass and

Oak Grove Cemetery trail spring 2018



This nestbox with Resurrection lilies in the foreground fledged 4 bluebirds... Two natural chicks and two foster chicks from the Ohio Wildlife Center.

then THAT female was found dead on the nest. When the dead females and nest were removed, Bluebirds immediately built a new nest and raised a successful brood. When I say immediately, I mean the day after the monitor removed the nest, there was a 2 inch new nest start in the box.

One of our goals now in Delaware County is to establish some new trails in Delaware City to provide additional nest sites for Eastern Bluebirds in hopes of reducing the competition we are seeing at the cemetery. This is always a challenge in an older city where House Sparrows abound.

Cemeteries are wonderful opportunities for Eastern Bluebird trails. They provide perfect habitat with short mowed grass. Most cemeteries do not set out bird feeding stations so House Sparrows generally are not found there, preferring to remain near housing

developments that set out food for them. I hope some of you will approach cemetery officials in your area and ask to establish a trail if possible. Smaller cemeteries may only be able to accommodate one or two boxes.

Bluely 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.

2016 (21 nest boxes)

| SPECIES | #Attempts | 1 st egg date | #Eggs | #Hatched | #Fledged | Success Rate % |
|--------------------|-----------|--------------------------|-------|----------|----------|----------------|
| Tree Swallow | 2 | 5-20 | 9 | 7 | 5 | 100 |
| Carolina Chickadee | 4 | | 16 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Eastern Bluebird | 19 | 4-16 | 72 | 63 | 57 | 84 |
| House Wrens | 24 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| House Sparrow | 15 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

2018 through 7-23-18 (20 nest boxes)

| SPECIES | #Attempts | 1 st egg date | #Eggs | #Hatched | #Fledged | Success Rate % |
|--------------------|-----------|--------------------------|-------|----------|----------|----------------|
| Tree Swallow | 1 | | 4 | 3 | 3 | 100 |
| Carolina Chickadee | 4 | 5-19 | 16 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Eastern Bluebird | 29 | 4-17 | 102 | 76 | 75 | 59 |
| House Wrens | 6 | 6-14 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| House Sparrow | 11 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

2017 (20 nest boxes)

| SPECIES | #Attempts | 1 st egg date | #Eggs | #Hatched | #Fledged | Success Rate % |
|--------------------|-----------|--------------------------|-------|----------|----------|----------------|
| Tree Swallow | 3 | 5-14 | 7 | 5 | 5 | 67 |
| Carolina Chickadee | 3 | 4-23 | 12 | 11 | 11 | 67 |
| Eastern Bluebird | 26 | 4-2 | 118 | 105 | 97 | 88 |
| House Wrens | 9 | 7-22 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 11 |
| House Sparrow | 6 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Native Birds Fledged Annually

| YEAR | Eastern Bluebirds | Tree Swallows | House Wrens | House Sparrow Attempts |
|--------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------|------------------------|
| 2015 | 6 | | ? | ? |
| 2016 | 54 | 5 | 0 | 14 |
| 2017 | 97 | 5 | 3 | 6 |
| 2018 | 95* | 3 | 0 | 11 |
| TOTAL | 252 | 13 | 3 | 31 |

*75 EABL have fledged as of 7-23-18, but 5 active EABL nests remain. If they all fledge, estimated total will be 95 fledged for season.



“During the 45 day period when swallows claim a nestbox and build a nest, lay and incubate eggs, and feed nestlings, the family consumes more than 300,000 flying insects, with most being shorter than a centimeter. Twelve tree swallow families mean 3.6 million fewer insects to irritate park visitors, or to pass on diseases with their insect bites.”

– Dick Tuttle

Blooming Bluebirders

Operation Bluebird: project-based learning takes a community

An interview with Kate Anderson, written by Robyn Bailey;
Photography by Kate Anderson; Reprinted with permission

LEARNING BY DOING

With an M.S. in education and school-aged children of her own, Kate understood that in order for the next generation to take conservation action, they needed to have a personal connection to nature. In her words, "Awareness precedes transformation. If we want to change behavior, we need to start by fostering greater awareness and relationships with the outdoors. When things become up close and personal, we begin to care, and only when we truly care, will we take action. It all starts with the relationship." With this in mind, she approached Tecumseh Land Trust and her son's seventh-grade science teacher, Becca Eastman, at McKinney Middle School with an idea for project-based learning and conservation education on the farm. By the spring of 2017, students from the local middle school were making nest boxes in shop class, many of which were installed at the farm and monitored for NestWatch. "Operation Bluebird" was officially off the ground! In its first season, about 70 students visited the farm three times to check boxes. Bethany also taught the students about responsible monitoring, and each got certified to monitor nests for NestWatch. Students had the opportunity to collect data and present what they learned (watch a video that they made). As Kate said, "It took the land trust, school and community really pulling together to make it happen. It was a team effort, indeed."



Two Women On A Mission

Kate Anderson (left) and Bethany Gray (right) are the ringleaders of Operation Bluebird, although they are quick to emphasize how much collaborative help they receive from the community.

AN IDEA SEED

It all started when Kate Anderson was given a bluebird box as a birthday gift from her mother in August of 2015. Kate lives on Xarifa Farm, a 135-acre farm in Yellow Springs, Ohio, the entirety of which is protected under a conservation easement for open space. Kate, a board member of the Tecumseh Land Trust and an education committee member, had been looking for a way to share the farm with her community, especially its younger members. The bluebird box she had been given set her mind in motion about ways to spark a love for birds and conservation among her neighbors, while allowing access to protected private lands. The only problem was that she hadn't yet seen any bluebirds on the farm, and she didn't really know much about them.

Enter Bethany Gray. Bethany is a certified naturalist and member of the Ohio Bluebird Society, and she was looking for a space to install a bluebird trail when she approached the Tecumseh Land Trust for help. The stars aligned, and the two women began installing a few boxes at the farm in early 2016. Bethany's knowledge about cavity-nesting birds and their preferences was exactly what Kate needed to help nourish an idea that had been forming since she first received the gifted birdhouse. Not long after, like a wink from the Universe, the very first bluebird egg was laid in the box Kate received from her mother.



A Transformative Experience

It's hatching day in this Eastern Bluebird nest!

In its first year, the modest trail fledged 19 Eastern Bluebirds, 21 House Wrens, and 10 Tree Swallows—an excellent start! As an educator, Kate delighted in watching the students' awareness grow, as the students moved beyond asking "what's in the box?" to more nuanced questions about what's going on around nest boxes (i.e., habitat loss, invasive species, migration). Now the kids want to come back more often, which is fine with Kate and their teacher. In 2018, they'll be back on the trails monitoring nests and engaging in citizen science, this year focusing on how climate change affects cavity nesters. Kate was inspired to launch this program because she really believes that "When you see a baby bird, it stays with you. You don't forget it." That's the power of transformative learning.

Bethany Gray received the OBS Blue Feather Award at the OBS conference this year.



Smith Park's Nestboxes in 2018

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



Smith Park is located along Troy Road on Delaware, Ohio's West Side. Twenty boxes now stand 25 yards apart in a drainage ditch that parallels the road for 400 yards before it turns east into a pond. The nestbox trail was established in 2016 with its first eight boxes and twelve boxes were added before the 2017

season. Researchers have found that swallows can nest in peace with their neighbors when boxes are spaced twenty meters (21.9 yards) apart. I space my boxes 25 yards apart when I am trying to manage for Tree Swallows. Bluebirds usually demand a distance of 100 yards from other nesting bluebirds so they usually find nest sites among boxes spaced for swallows.

For the last three years, the nestboxes at Smith Park have produced bluebirds and swallows. In 2016, the park fledged four bluebirds and 14 swallows. For 2017, the park's trail grew from eight boxes to 20 and produced 46 swallows but only one bluebird. Alien House Sparrows caused the diminished bluebird production.

For 2018, Tree Swallows claimed 11 boxes to produce 53 fledglings. Three pairs of Eastern Bluebirds have fledged 19 from four successful nests after seven attempts. The park's splendid habitat of mowed grass with small trees used as hunting perches by bluebirds, and so far, the habitat has not attracted competitive, egg piercing House Wrens.

The nesting success of our native species at this time is partially due to a trapping campaign that began on March 28 and continues today that has led to the eradication of 49 alien House Sparrows.

The first House Sparrows were brought to New York City in 1850 and released in 1851. The intent was to introduce birds that would nest in the city, control insects that were causing damage to trees in Central Park, and devour fallen horse feed from the streets in order to control rats, etc. During subsequent years, the introduced sparrows bred their way west and some were captured and transported to Ohio. By 1884, sparrows were nesting in all counties of Ohio.

The threat to our native cavity nesters is somewhat misled by the misnaming of House Sparrows. The non-native sparrow is really a weaver finch. It can weave a grass nest

larger than a soccer ball to fill the cavity inside a kestrel nestbox, or the large round nest can stand by itself inside the cover of an evergreen tree or thick bush. The House Sparrow's thick bill gives it the leverage needed to weave a nest, crush seeds, in addition to giving its owner the ability to pierce the skulls of our native birds.

During the 2018 season, I trapped sparrows from 19 of the park's 20 boxes and on April 25, multiple visits to the park were needed to trap 19 sparrows from 12 boxes. To be as humane as possible, you must check traps within one hour or sooner. Set traps before lunch, then check them after lunch, etc.

All of my wooden nestboxes have two round-head screws protruding from the inside surface of the front panel to hold a VanErt sparrow trap. Once captured, I euthanize the sparrows by constriction on site. A sparrow's body temperature is 104 degrees Fahrenheit which is a symptom of a very high metabolism. When they are held tightly, they cannot breathe and they faint in less than a minute. I have passed out several times in my life and it was enough to teach me that fainting is painless.

I seal the remains of harvested sparrows in plastic bags in the field and keep them in my freezer. I will ultimately transfer the sparrows to three possible locations including two university museums to be used for educational purposes, or to the Ohio Wildlife Center, a wildlife rehabilitation facility where they can be fed to recuperating owls and hawks. None will go to waste.

Before their removal, the park's sparrows managed to kill a female bluebird in addition to destroying eight bluebird eggs in two nests. Other dreaded events included two adult birds killed by traffic on Troy Road; a male bluebird on May 18, and a mature male Tree Swallow on June 24. None of the park's active nests were affected.

Also, on April 5, a sparrow nest was found to contain many feathers from a male bluebird, some with skin attached. The nest builder had salvaged its nest material after the bluebird had been the victim of a predator, most likely a hawk.

Back to happier topics. During the early weeks of monitoring, I needed to wear knee boots in order to keep my feet dry, but as summer brought warmer temperatures, the ditch dried up and knee boots were no longer needed. Periods of dryness explain why I have never seen frogs in the ditch. The best news is that on my last monitoring trip before writing this

report, I found a new bluebird nest with four eggs. The park's first bluebird egg of this season was laid around April 18 and bluebirds have time to add more nests since first eggs have appeared as late as August 10 on my trails in past years.

The Tree Swallows have completed their 73-day nesting season from their first egg on May 6 to their last fledging event on July 17. Since every family raised consumes more than 300,000 small flying insects, 11 families have consumed 3.1 million insects, and that includes mosquitoes. I enjoy the mosquito-free Smith Park for many reasons, and the most enjoyable reasons wear feathers. Conserve on!



New Home Syndrome

By Mel Bird, OBS Board Member



I have been monitoring bluebird boxes for over 25 years and over time there have been many coincidences which have occurred but you just overlook them and go on. However this coincidence keeps reappearing and I am wondering if you monitors out there have seen the

same thing? I am talking about "the new box syndrome." My trail is in a development with about 58 boxes and all neighbors are competing for the bluebirds. The lots are approximately one acre and have one or two boxes. Over the years I have noticed that a new box in an adjacent lot with an old existing box is almost always occupied first leaving the old box empty. The following are examples of what I am talking about.

First case, Mrs. J has a box in the middle of her back yard, and always raised at least two broods of EABLs each year. Five years ago, a new neighbor moved into the house next door and wanted a box just like hers, so I installed one in the center of his yard just like his neighbor. The next year the EABLs came to the new box and Mrs. J has had no EABL activity since.

Second case, Mr. T has two boxes purchased from me 15 years ago, and every year one of the boxes has EABLs and they are usually one of the first to have eggs. This year a neighbor across the street purchased a new box from me and I installed it in their side yard in mid-March and by April

first they had an EABL nest and the old neighbor has had no activity this year.

Third case, Mr. M. has two boxes (not my boxes) that are 10 years old and in great condition. For 8 years he had EABLs or TRES and for the last two years he has had no activity at either, so he contacted me and asked if he should put up new boxes and I told him it would be a waste of money. He decided to purchase new boxes from me anyway and I replaced the old boxes. Within one week he had a EABL in one box!

Fourth case, in my yard I have three boxes that have been routinely used by EABLs or TRESs since 1994. Several years ago, I placed a new box on our mail box post on the street and immediately it was occupied by EABLs. Since then, there has been no EABL or TRES activity at the other three houses. This is the only house in use now.

I can cite at least three other similar cases but I think 4 is sufficient to get the gist of things.

Coincidence? Maybe... Your guess is as good as mine. I have a gut feeling that the female bluebirds like new houses just like the women in our society usually prefer new homes.

A fifth case also just occurred. A Mr. W. has had the most productive box on my trail for the last five years and has had three broods every year. This year, just prior to his first brood fledging, his next door neighbor put up a new box about 500 feet from Mr. W's and now the bluebirds from Mr. W built a nest in the new box and have 5 eggs. Mr. W's box is now vacant. I would like to hear any of your comments on this subject

A Christmas Story

By Dean Sheldon,
OBS Advisor



Editor's note: Although the days are still warm it won't be long before fall and then winter will be upon us. Christmas is truly only several weeks away! This article by OBS advisor and long-time conservationist Dean Sheldon will resonate with many of you! Dean remarks, "This, like all Christmas stories, has a happy ending if not an auspicious beginning."

Once upon a time... on a cool, but brightly sunny afternoon in early May, I was working my way east on the Savannah Trail in rural Ashland County. It was still chilly enough to fire up the heater in the truck as it bounced along Noble Road on the first monitoring visit of the new bluebird year.

Three very productive boxes are across the road from the Vale of Alford buffalo ranch. But, on this day, Box 13 had nothing and Box 12 was packed tight with a sparrow's jumbled mess. Box 11, in the best location of the three, looked good. When I opened the box front, 4 bluebird eggs rolled right off the tilted edge of the nest and fell to the hard ground. All of the eggs broke; none appeared to be fertile. The nest, itself, was shallow and poorly constructed. There was really no nest at all- probably the initial effort of a young female "doing her thing" for the very first time. Discouraged, I cleaned out the box and scooped up the mess on the ground at the base of the utility pole.

The truck and I moved on to Amish country along beautiful Clear Creek Road where our very best boxes have always been located. Box 20... a fine bluebird nest with 5 eggs. Box 21 held a new nest... no eggs. We moved west to Box 22 which is on a pole set back some distance from the edge of the road and right next to Clear Creek itself. A very steep, wooded hill rises from the water's edge on the far side of the stream.

My eyes were fastened on the box as I opened the door of the truck. As the latch clicked, a female bluebird left the box and flew directly across the road toward the wooded slope. In the "blink of an eye" she was snatched in midair by a

sharp-shinned Hawk which had been perched ... waiting... on a tree branch overhanging the running water. In another instant, he had carried his prey to the ground behind a Sugar Maple at the base of the hill rising from the stream. Spreading his wings in that beautiful, possessive, mantled position, he began his meal. Of course, I was thunderstruck at having been the catalyst for this fatal mix of events.

But that was only part of the mixture.

I crossed the road and went, immediately to the Box 22. As I opened the front I saw a perfect nest... and 5 just orphaned bluebird eggs.

Almost instantly, I mentally examined the options at hand for the unhatched victims of the accident at Box 22. I slid my fingers under the nest...and removed it, warm eggs and all, from its protective shelter. I quickly carried the nest to the blissful warmth of the sundrenched truck cab on the other side of Clear Creek Road.

Placing the orphan's nest on the bench seat beside me, we set out for Noble Road... the buffalo ranch... and the utility pole which held Box 11... where the clutch of infertile eggs had rolled out only minutes before. Moving swiftly, I took the beautiful displaced nest and eggs from the heat of the pickup directly to the nest box orphanage on the power pole. I slipped the nest into place and secured the box front. I ran back to the truck and moved it a short distance away from the pole...and watched...and waited... and hoped for a miracle to happen. And... sure enough... that inexperienced mother made the move right back into the orphan's home to begin her new adventure in bluebird parenting. Needless to say, ... I was both relieved... and delighted to witness this marvelous event!

And now, this Christmas story really becomes TWO stories:

On the day following the accidental death along Clear Creek, I visited the "scene of the crime" only to find the widower singing his most poignant song and wing waving on the wires above his now vacant nest box. Not wanting a repeat of the hawk's attack, I moved Box 22 to a new location one pole west of the original site... and, sure enough, that lusty male



moved right along with the box... and a day later was found singing/ wing waving on the wires above the new settlement. A new mate was lured to the homestead and, on May 18th, a nest was in the box. Four youngsters were hatched from this latest union... and 4 fledglings went to their Clear Creek way sometime after June 22nd;

On May 18th, we monitored Box 11 and found that the 5 orphaned eggs, from Box 22 in Amish country, had become 5 healthy, if not yet lusty, nestlings under the care of their surrogate mother in the orphanage across the road from the buffalo ranch. On May 28th, while monitoring the Savannah Trail with Sue Atkinson, a birding enthusiast from North Kent, England, it was found that the 5 orphans had left the box to seek their fortunes in the wider world of bluebirding in Ashland County. How could it be better???

The stories of Christmas are wonderful. But many people have an even greater interest in Christmas presents. In order to please the latter group, we offer these gift-like reflections on the stories related above: - season after season, we hear field reports from even the most experienced bluebirders about nest abandonments. Why is it that good clutches of eggs in well built nests are never hatched out? Why is it that a healthy group of nestlings never make it to fledging? All kinds of reasons are set forth... and almost are of them could be valid. But one very good reason for nest abandonment is clearly illustrated in our Christmas story: - all kinds of "old wives' tales" are told about the intolerance of birds to nest disturbance. And yet, here we have a story about orphans, predation, nest relocation, surrogate parenting, new mates, re-nesting... the whole avian biologic process... continuing, successfully, despite the ultimate in nest disturbance.

And the whole piece just continues to point out the single greatest gift which all of us have received... the bluebird itself.

Merry Christmas!!!

One of My Young Birders is Published - Again!!

By Darlene Sillick, OBS Trustee



As many of you know, I am a co-advisor for the central Ohio Young Birders Club and I like to encourage students age 9 to 18 to consider monitoring a nestbox or 2. This past spring, Katelyn Shelton decided she wanted a trail of 6 boxes to monitor for the season. She built and installed the boxes with her family and she set

the bar high to record the data on Cornell Nestwatch and take photos and write about her wonderful experience. At age 14, her article was picked up by Robyn Bailey, director of Cornell Nestwatch and it was in their eNews letter in early May. This summer a writer for National Audubon asked Katelyn to write about her full trail experience. She has a charming writing style and she captures things that happened as she was 'introduced' to 4 native species in her 6 trail boxes. I am delighted as her co advisor for central OYBC and I am a passionate bluebird of over 30 years. I feel we are in good hands with youth like Katelyn monitoring boxes for our native species. Enjoy her story and pictures and click on the link in her last paragraph to read her eNews story on the Cornell site.

May you all find a caring and curious teen to mentor and give hope to our tomorrow!

<https://www.audubon.org/news/chicks-and-wasps-galore-behind-scenes-first-year-bluebird-trail>

You may need to copy and paste the link in your browser.



Katelyn with one of her six nest boxes this spring.
Photo: Courtesy of Katelyn Shelton

Present Day Status of the House Sparrow in North America – how many are there and where are they?

By Bernie Daniel, Ph.D; Article reprinted with permission from the author and NABS



Bernie Daniel is the current president of the NABS and has held that position since 2014. He is a past president and life member of the Ohio Bluebird Society. Bernie is retired from a 38 year career as an environment research scientist with the US Environmental

Protection Agency. During his working years he published 144 peer-reviewed research papers dealing with a range of environmental issues. He received a Ph.D. in biochemistry from the Ohio State University in 1974 and is a veteran of the US Army (active duty 1970-72).

SUMMARY: The House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) is not a native species and prior to its introduction in 1851 was not found in North America. But approximately half a century later it was one of the most abundant birds on the continent. Today, the best scientific evidence indicates that the House Sparrow (HOSP) population in North America is decreasing. However, despite the decreasing population, HOSP are not uniformly distributed over the continent and there remain “hot spots” across the landscape where the HOSP remains populous. This essay presents a brief summary on the history of the species, current HOSP population trends and species distribution, and the possible significance of these trends for bluebirds.

INTRODUCTION: Most bluebirders would probably agree that HOSP are one of the most intractable and unpredictable problems commonly faced on our nestbox trails. In fact, of all the threats to bluebirds in a nestbox perhaps only two, weather and HOSP, are essentially uncontrollable. We have reliable pole baffles and hole guards for climbing predators (raccoons, snakes, cats, etc.), and remedies for infestations (e.g., blow flies, wasps, nest parasites). But for HOSP, there are almost no practices that will always protect the nestbox. Certainly there are counter measures often used with some success (e.g., “sparrow-resistant” nestboxes, sparrow “spookers,” or monofilament fishing line), but none of these are certain deterrents. Only trapping or shooting are “foolproof” methods, but these are often not possible or not practical and in any case they only deal with one bird at a time. With the possible exception of placing the nestboxes

well outside of HOSP habitat (i.e., distant from human dwellings), there is essentially nothing that will guarantee that a bluebird will not be greeted some day with a destroyed bluebird nest and eggs or worse.

Of course HOSP do not “belong” here. Almost all bluebirders know the story of how HOSP were brought to the North America by the Brooklyn Institute in early 1850s. Less known are the many subsequent releases of HOSP (in fact more than 100 such releases have been documented) in many other cities across the continent including places as disparate as Galveston, Texas, Salt Lake City, Utah, San Francisco, California, and from cities in Quebec and Ontario, Canada. As noted, once established, HOSP populations across the continent increased dramatically and by the early 1900s they could be found in great numbers virtually everywhere in the USA, southern Canada, northern Mexico, and some Caribbean Islands.

By the 1880s many in North America including private citizens such as farmers, gardeners, home owners, and groups as diverse as U.S. Department of Agriculture and the American Ornithologists’ Union were aware of how unfortunate the decision to import this bird was. The HOSP was labeled a pest and individuals were encouraged to do what they could to reduce the numbers of these birds. But the damage was done.

DISCUSSION: The total numbers of HOSP on the continent have long been a matter of interest and speculation. Some ornithologists believe that the HOSP population may have been as high as 500 million around the early parts of the previous century (i.e., 1900–1920s). However, at that time the data needed for making good estimates of the avian populations was not available. In 1943, Wing estimated that the number of HOSP in North America was about 150 million birds. But by then there was already strong speculation that HOSP populations had peaked and might be decreasing.

In 1966, the North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) was started and for the first time much of the guesswork about bird populations on the continent was eliminated and replaced with scientifically supported estimates. The BBS collects data every breeding season (typically June) from approximately 4,000 “monitoring routes” that are distributed across North America. The data from all of the BBS routes is collected and analyzed using sophisticated, statistically supported models in order to

compute the distribution and abundance of each bird species. The BBS program is now the largest database on vertebrate animals in the world. We are fortunate to have it.

So what does the BBS analysis show for the HOSP populations? For starters it shows that every year since the survey started, in 1966, the population of HOSP in North America has been decreasing at a rate of 3.6% per year. The average rate of decline is slightly higher in Canada and slightly lower in the USA (see Table 1).

Table 1. Populations trends for HOSP based on BBS Surveys

| Area Sampled | Number of BBS Routes | 1966 to 2015 | | 2005 to 2015 | |
|---------------|----------------------|--------------|---------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| | | Trend | Confidence Interval (95%) | Trend | Confidence Interval (95%) |
| North America | 3804 | -3.61 | -3.82 to -3.45 | -3.05 | -3.44 to -2.62 |
| United States | 3181 | -3.54 | -3.76 to -3.36 | -2.8 | -3.21 to -2.35 |
| Canada | 623 | -4.2 | -4.63 to -3.78 | -5.05 | -6.33 to -3.86 |

Looking at trends over a more recent time interval (2005–2015) the continental rates of HOSP population decline are slightly less with an average decrease of 3.1% per year across the continent (USA decline of 2.8% and Canada 5.1%; see Table 1.).

Figure 1 gives a plot of the average number of HOSP seen on per route from 1966, when the BBS started, to 2015. In 1966, the BBS surveyors were observing an average of about 115 HOSP per route. Of course, this means some routes in 1966 were seeing significantly more than 115 HOSP per route while others were seeing far fewer. However by 2015, 49 years later, the average number of HOSP seen per route had dropped to about 17 or an average decrease of 85% in HOSP numbers detected per route over the period.

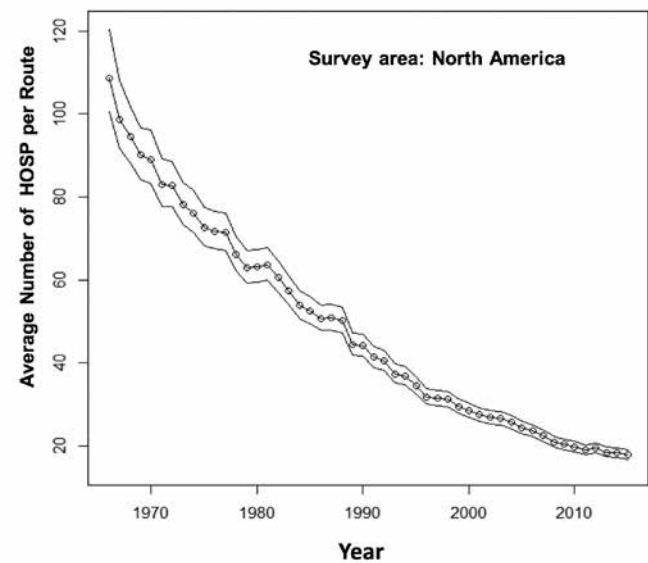


Figure 1. Plot of the average number of HOSP observed per BBS route

However the average numbers of HOSP seen per route and the population trends alone do not tell the whole story. It is also important look at the HOSP distribution or to know exactly

where on the continent that HOSP numbers are changing and also how they are changing. The BBS program also imports the survey data into a geographic information system so that it can determine what the HOSP populations are doing in specific regions (e.g., the eastern states, the prairie regions, or even the individual states or provinces). When these computations are plotted on a map it shows that HOSP are not uniformly distributed across the North American landscape (see Figure 2).

On the map in Figure 2 the reddish brown areas are places where the BBS surveyors are still detecting, on average, over 100 HOSP on each route. The dark red areas show places where between 30 and 100 birds were detected per route, and the lighter red and pink represents places where 10 or fewer HOSP (on average) were observed on the routes respectively.

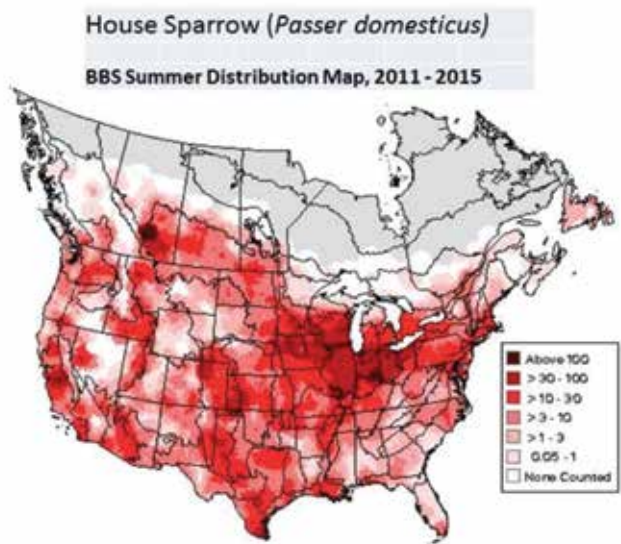


Figure 2. Map shows the distribution of HOSP across North America based on the results from BBS surveys from 2011 to 2015. A darker red color indicates a greater density of HOSP observed. The grey areas are parts of the continent not surveyed in the BBS.

One very important fact for bluebirders can be gleaned from this map. That is that there are still large sections of North America where more than 10 HOSP (on average) per route are observed. On the map it is apparent that HOSP populations are relatively high (30 to 100+ observed per route) in areas such as the US Midwest. In contrast, many southeastern states represent areas where on average only 3–10 HOSP are detected on each route. Likewise, it is easy to see that there are other parts of the continent with similar higher or lower local populations of HOSP.

It would be useful to know if the HOSP population trends were different in the areas where they were still more numerous (e.g., the Midwest) compared to areas where their numbers are much smaller (e.g., Southeast). Table 2 compares the population trends in these two parts of the continent using BBS data for 15 US states.

Table 2. HOSP Populations trends by State based on BBS

| State | Number of Routes | 1966 to 2015 Trend | 2005 to 2015 Trend | Average Number HOSP per Route |
|----------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| Iowa | 38 | -2.52 | -1.94 | 338 |
| Illinois | 102 | -4.21 | -4.36 | 541 |
| Indiana | 63 | -3.78 | -3.63 | 356 |
| Michigan | 84 | -2.97 | -3.07 | 81 |
| Minnesota | 72 | -4.08 | -4.29 | 84 |
| Missouri | 84 | -5.49 | -3.21 | 149 |
| Wisconsin | 91 | -2.48 | -1.49 | 148 |
| Ohio | 78 | -2.84 | -2.68 | 328 |
| | | | | |
| Alabama | 88 | -6.85 | -8.58 | 32 |
| Florida | 83 | -7.08 | -8.25 | 6 |
| Georgia | 79 | -6.23 | -4.42 | 15 |
| Louisiana | 85 | -4.23 | -3.7 | 51 |
| Mississippi | 47 | -4.67 | -4.98 | 18 |
| North Carolina | 86 | -4.56 | -4.49 | 45 |
| South Carolina | 37 | -6.79 | -7.18 | 15 |

Trends are for the average population changes per year in the state indicated

It is clear from Table 2 that the rate of decline for the HOSP populations in the eight Midwestern states (with an average of 236 HOSP detected per route) is noticeably less than in the seven Southeastern states (with an average of 26 HOSP detected per route). The rate of HOSP population decline over the latest time period shown (2005–2015) on the chart ranges from 4.4 to 8.6% per year in the Southeastern states but only 1.5 to 4.4% per year in the Midwestern states..

An important question is: What do these HOSP distribution patterns and population trends mean for bluebirds and bluebirding? First, the overall trend across the continent is down and certainly fewer HOSP are always better than more. That said, the numbers of HOSP are still very high compared to bluebirds over most of North America. Using the annual population loss shown by the BBS data (–3.6%) and Wing's estimate of 150 million birds in 1943, we can calculate the current HOSP population is about 98 million birds. Another estimate made by the Partners In Flight program suggests there are approximately 82 million HOSP in North America. These two estimates are in fair enough agreement so perhaps we can reasonably assume that today we have between 80 and 100 million HOSP to contend with on the continent. Unfortunately, that is still a large number but on the good side it is also probably much improved from the early 1900s.

It is also worth asking how do the numbers of HOSP compare to the number of bluebirds? The Partners In Flight program calculates that there are a total of about 35 million bluebirds (22 million EABL; 7 million WEBL, and 5 million MOBL) in North America. So on average, across North America, we can assume there are about 3 or 4 HOSP for every bluebird. However, for parts of North America, like the Midwestern states, that ratio could be much higher in favor of the HOSP

and perhaps 30 to 40+ sparrows per bluebird would be possible. Finally, another unfortunate observation from this examination is the realization that HOSP are often found at the higher number in areas of the continent that are very suitable for setting up a bluebird trails.

Conclusions: This article has dealt with the status of HOSP and the changes in their population and distribution across North America. It appears we can conclude that (1) HOSP numbers are decreasing across the continent in general; (2) this decrease is not uniformly distributed over the landscape, i.e., the population decrease is slower in some parts; (3) not unexpectedly, areas with the slowest decline in HOSP numbers still present the biggest challenge for bluebirds and bluebirding; (4) HOSP are probably still present in numbers from 4 to 40 times greater than bluebirds (location dependent).

A follow-up article discussing the reasons for the decline in HOSP, why their populations are so much higher in some parts of the continent; and what, if anything, we can do to hasten those declines is planned.

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- Partners in Flight** (2018) <http://pif.birdconservancy.org/PopEstimates/Database.aspx>



Member News

Welcome to New Members

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Leslie Mapes
Lauren Miller
Laurie Mobley
Barb Robinson
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Thank You to Our Donors

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NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Mike Watson

The nesting season is winding down and here at The Holden Arboretum in Northeast Ohio we are monitoring only a handful of active nests scattered across our 200+ nest boxes. My mid-season count, done in early July, indicated that our bluebird numbers are lagging a bit behind the 5-year average. However, we won't really know how 2018 stacks up until these last nests are finished and we calculate our year-end totals. I'm sure many of you are in a similar situation - watching your last nests and considering how your numbers compare to past years. Please remember to share those year-end totals with OBS. Our Fledgling Report form is available to download from the website.

The OBS Board of Directors is currently considering proposals from several companies for a website re-design. We hope to have online fledgling reporting incorporated into that re-design, as well as updated aesthetics and organization of our information.

I want to thank the North American Bluebirds Society (NABS) for sending us a box of their wonderful informational handouts. They are kind enough to cover the cost of shipping to their affiliates. If any of our OBS Area Contacts would like some of these, please contact me via the OBS email address (ohiobluebirdsociety@gmail.com).

Finally, I want to remind everyone that our 2019 conference will be held at Ashland University in Ashland, Ohio on March 9th, 2019. This is the location we used in 2016 and 2017. We will share more information with you as our planning proceeds. If anyone has items they would like to donate to the silent auction, please let me know. The silent auction has been a great success at past conferences and we were able to offer some amazing items thanks to the generosity of our members and a number of organizations.

Thank You!

Treasurer's Report by Molly Wilsbacher

1. The financial statement for the period ending 6/30/18 reflects quarterly income of \$2,221.66, due in large part to a \$1,000 grant from the Ohio Division of Wildlife. Expenses for the quarter were \$1,380.62, leaving us with a net gain of \$842.22. Thank you, ODW, for keeping us in the black this quarter!
2. Did you know that the cost of developing and mailing our newsletter costs about half of our normal monthly income? Last quarter our normal income for the 2nd quarter of 2018 was \$1221.66 and it cost the Ohio Bluebird Society \$552.72 (or 45% of our quarterly income) to develop, print, and mail out our newsletter. Please keep this in mind when choosing whether to receive our newsletter via print or email.
3. Hopefully you observed in the last newsletter that Ohio Bluebird Society raised our membership fees slightly effective July 1st, 2018. We estimated that we had not raised membership fees for over 15 years despite increased costs every year. Hopefully you agree that the Ohio Bluebird Society is a good investment and you will continue to support our Mission and remain a dues paying member!
4. When shopping for back to school items, or just anytime on Amazon, please remember to shop through Amazon Smile (<https://smile.amazon.com>) and choose Ohio Bluebird Society as your charitable choice. We receive a small percentage and it won't cost you anything. Plus you still receive all of your PRIME benefits!



OBS 2017 FLEDGLING REPORT

Reported As Of 7/31/2018: Eastern Bluebird - 7,545

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

| | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Tree Swallow – 8075 | American Kestrel – 185 |
| House Wren – 2053 | Barn Swallow – 64 |
| Carolina Chickadee – 161 | Osprey – 17 |
| Black- Capped Chickadee – 45 | House Sparrow Eggs Discarded – 1211 |
| Carolina Wren – 35 | House Sparrows Dispatched – 816 |
| Prothonotary Warbler – 80 | European Starling Eggs Discarded – 5 |
| Purple Martins – 4124 | # of reports – 66 |
| Eastern Tufted Titmouse – 21 | |

Send info to: info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org

Download fillable form - see FLEDGLING REPORT tab

OBS Officers, Board of Trustees, and Advisors

We wish to thank the many people working with and for the Ohio Bluebird Society. Without their help, we could never accomplish our mission.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational | \$40 | \$110 |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Life | \$300 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tax deductible gift to OBS \$ _____ | | |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> I am interested in participating in OBS activities | | |
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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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