



Bluebird Monitor

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

Fall 2019



Christian Missionary Alliance Bluebird Trail

By Diana Steele

My first bluebird nest box trail was not only great for bluebirds, but also turned out to be a perfect place for casual birding while walking the trail. When I started as a monitor on this trail four years ago, I had little idea of the impressive bird list I would rack up—approaching 90 species without ever really doing an intensive survey.

The 12-box trail lines a paved driveway leading back to a once-grand residence on a 90-acre estate just north of Oberlin. The house boasted an indoor swimming pool and sauna, five bedrooms and a handful of bathrooms. When I first started monitoring the trail, the house and land were owned by New Russia township trustees, who converted the bedrooms into office and meeting space. Once they built a large new facility down the road, for all intents and purposes, they abandoned the building.

Eastern phoebes and barn swallows nested under the eaves. Groundhogs dug holes under the foundation, and, peering into the windows, I could see that the pool was filled in with rocks. Curtains hung askew and file boxes were strewn across the floor. The house seemed unloved, except by wildlife. But the land was rich.

Most of the 90 acres is open and prairie-like, rather than mown grass or sown fields. The property is ringed by wet woods, and contains a pond and a small wetland. The variety of habitats is a bird magnet. In addition to the eastern bluebirds and tree swallows using the nest boxes, during migration I spotted a wide variety of warbler species, the largest flock of rusty blackbirds I've ever seen (probably over a thousand birds), and an American bittern. At dusk, American woodcock and Wilson's snipe entertained me with sky dances. A pair of northern harriers attempted to nest in the marshy field.

When I regularly saw a pair of American kestrels flying over the open fields, I suggested to Black River Audubon that we install a kestrel nest box. A kestrel box in a nearby park had failed to attract a nesting pair in years, but within three weeks of installing our box in April 2018 we had eggs—and fledged five chicks.

I lobbied the township trustees to conserve the land and fantasized about converting the house into a nature center. But after five years of letting it sit vacant, in late 2018, the trustees sold the house and land to a church, which invested heavily in renovating the building, converting the former pool into its sanctuary.

Black River Audubon doesn't typically place bluebird nest box trails on private property, so we faced a conundrum—take the boxes down

Diana Steele shares the wonder and beauty!



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or see how receptive the church would be to having monitors regularly visit their property? Fortunately, after a few conversations with members of the Oberlin Christian Missionary Alliance Church, we found that they were not only enthusiastic about having us maintain the nest boxes but also curious to learn about the other birds they hosted.

Once the tree swallows and bluebirds returned this spring and nesting activity was apparent, the church invited me to teach a Sunday School class about their birds. Enthusiastically, I enlisted my two daughters (10 and 14) to join me in making a presentation. We chose seven bird species (along with spring peepers) that kids could easily see or hear on the property: in addition to the nest-box birds, Wilson's snipe, eastern meadowlark, American woodcock, and sora.

Then the children and I walked the trail together, peering into all the boxes. Some were empty, some had the beginnings of

nests. The kids delighted in the iridescent blue-green of the Tree Swallows who were staking their claims on the boxes. They were in awe when my daughters pointed out the pair of kestrels flying around.

I sent my weekly nest-box reports to the Sunday School teachers, and once we had some eggs, they invited me for a return visit. The kids were eager to tell me about the birds they had seen and ask questions about ones they couldn't identify. "What's that black bird with the red on its wings?" "I saw that yellow and black one you talked about!" Once again, we walked outside and opened the boxes, peering through the piles of feathers for a glimpse of the eggs. "They're soooo tiny!" they exclaimed.

It's a privilege to share my love of birds with such a receptive and curious audience. And it's the start of a beautiful partnership, passing on the love of nature to the generation who will be entrusted with its care long into the future. "If we are having this experience called life, in this astonishingly diverse and beautiful world, merely because of random accidents of physics or chemistry—then we are insanely lucky," writes Kenn Kaufman in *A Season on the Wind*. "If, instead, this is part of the plan of some supreme being, then we are incredibly blessed. Either way, I will revel in the wonder and the beauty of it all for as long as my life lasts."

2019's Truncated American Kestrel Nesting Season

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



Nesting seasons involve many things such as the arrival of adult birds, courtship, selecting and winning nest sites, laying eggs, feeding nestlings, fledging events, etc., but for most conservationists that offer nestboxes to birds, they describe a nesting season as the period when their nestboxes are active with eggs and young.

The Delaware County Health Department launched the American Kestrel Nestbox Project prior to 1993. Elementary and Middle School students were encouraged to donate money from recycled aluminum cans and other material to support the construction of ten kestrel boxes by the Delaware County Bird Club. The Ohio Department of Transportation granted permission for the boxes to be attached to traffic signs along major highways that ran east and north from the city of Delaware, Ohio. In 2000, boxes from the expanded program were moved from traffic signs to seventeen utility poles owned by Consolidated Electric Company and one free-standing pole at Gallant Woods Park.

Since the project's first kestrel nest in 1995, detailed data on every nest has been recorded, and by the end of the 2011 nesting season, data from 164 kestrel nests was analyzed to better describe Central Ohio's nesting seasons. March 14 became the earliest first-egg-date for kestrels, and August 26 was the latest fledging date, to make a possible season of 166 days.

Two other dates emerged from the 2011 calculations that are very important when planning management procedures; the latest first-egg-date was June 25, and if kestrels start their first clutch of eggs by April 12, then there is enough time for their nestbox to raise two families during the same season.

So, how did the 2019 season compare to the 2011 calculated standard? Dick Phillips and I always start checking the project's boxes in mid-March to make sure all nest cavities are ready to accept our small falcons. On March 17, we found kestrel cups in 14 of 18 boxes. A kestrel cup is an oval shaped indentation in the white pine bedding that fits a kestrel's body. We added bedding to four boxes that had been excavated by European Starlings, and we added bedding to two boxes where kestrel cups had exposed wooden floors.

Our second box check took place on April 7 and we found five kestrel nests with eggs. Three boxes had starling eggs. We remove starling eggs but not the nest. If kestrels want a box with a starling nest, they will reshape the starling's round nest cup to fit their own body. Starlings don't lay first eggs after the first week of June.

Once it is determined that a kestrel's clutch is complete, we no longer check the nest until the young will be between 14 and 24 days old, the time to apply U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service leg bands while being able to sex the young. Then after we revisit the nest for banding, we no longer check the nest until at least one week after the projected fledging date.

We banded our first nest of five males on May 20, followed by three families on May 26, six families on June 2, three families on June 15, and five Preservation Parks staff members and one of their mothers helped with banding the last family on June 26.

When we monitored Delaware County's eighteen kestrel nestboxes for the ninth time on July 13, we expected to find several new clutches of kestrel eggs. We found no new clutches, and yes, we were disappointed, but we were also impressed. An analysis of 2019's data revealed a memorable season.

Of 14 nest attempts, all nests were successful, and all but one nest started with five eggs. Of the 13 nests that started with five eggs, 12 nests hatched and fledged all five. Only one nest of five eggs, hatched four and fledged three. A lone nest of four eggs managed to fledge three of its four eggs. The overall statistics for the 67 eggs laid is that 97.1% hatched, 95.7% of the eggs developed to fledge, and after eggs hatched, 98.5% fledged. These are the highest percentages during the 25-year history of the project.

Sixty-six kestrels were banded and fledged during the 2019 season making the grand total of 1,230 falcons fledged since the project's first successful nest in 1995.

The first-egg-date for 2019's kestrels was March 31, which was worrisome at the time. Also, finding no second clutches to mark the end of the season on July 13 was also a concern. The

On May 20, 2019, this female kestrel had been brooding or feeding her five nestlings.



2019 kestrel season was only 100 days long once the last fledging date of July 8 was calculated. The recent season was more than two months shorter than the historic length of 166 days calculated in 2011. What could be the reason for such a short, but successful, season? Could it be rainy weather?

I had to wear knee boots to keep my feet dry during most of my bluebird trail monitoring trips since I had to walk through standing water. Weather forecasters were reporting that 2019 was the wettest year on record in Central Ohio and the previous fall was so wet that cover crops could not be planted and the spring was so wet that many farmers could not plant their corn or soybeans.

Bare fields and standing water forced many of the kestrel's prey items to seek cover and concentrate along roadsides and other places where cover still existed. Also, as I checked my bluebird boxes, I saw floating earthworms and bare infant rodents in the fields that had experienced the fatal bad luck of saturated soil and standing water. So, the kestrels found food after a late start to their season, then they had sufficient food to support healthy egg clutches and successful broods, but as the season progressed, the concentrated food supplies were harvested down to a level that could not support second clutches.

On our last monitoring trip during the nesting season on July 13, we saw eight kestrels on the utility wires near one of our boxes. The eight most likely formed from two families that had united. Parents will watch over their fledglings for several weeks then the siblings tend to stay together after the parents set them free. Young kestrels will join other families to form flocks. So, when you see a kestrel in late summer or fall, look around and you might see more.

Also, on our last trip we found two kestrel boxes that were occupied by bluebirds, the species that led us into the world of nestboxes. One kestrel box had three bluebird eggs and a second box had three bluebird nestlings about eight days old. I screwed hole restrictors made from old bluebird nestbox fronts to both kestrel boxes that reduced the three-inch openings to 1-1/2-inches so the bluebird families will not become lunches for curious kestrels. While helping kestrels, we cannot neglect our bluebirds. Raptor on!



A 1-1/2-inch hole restrictor covers the three inch entrance to protect a bluebird family from hungry kestrels.

Helping Purple Martins: Poop, Parasites, and More!

By Elizabeth Kanzeg, Ohio Young Birders Club and Youth Advisor Board member



The youth advisors of the OYBC Central Chapter joined Darlene Sillick on July 1 at the Safari Golf Club to check up on the more than fifty Purple Martin nest gourds located there. Our group consisted of young birders like myself, and longtime veterans of conservation in central Ohio such as Sue Guarasci, who went to the trouble of bringing her own mealworms

to feed any runt nestling Purple Martin's to help them fledge safely and healthily.

We assembled one sweltering afternoon to help with one of these precautionary tasks; replacing the nesting materials inside the nest gourds. This deters parasites and provides a perfect opportunity to record important data about the babies, such as their age. Purple Martins are very susceptible to parasites, and their nests are often overtaken by blowfly infestations which feed off of the nestlings until they either weaken or possibly die. Often, people are afraid that by removing the parasites and "meddling" with the nest materials, they will in some way deter Purple Martin parents from returning. Not only is this false, but studies by the Purple Martin Conservation Association demonstrate a forty percent increase in fledgling survival in parasite-free nests. This is why dedicated volunteers return every year to clean out these nests and give the nestlings a better chance at survival.



When I arrived to help, I was greeted by the formidable Darlene Sillick, who had come still dressed to the nines from work, delegating instructions while zooming around in a property golf cart. She is the best! I was tasked with keeping the little birds in a large plastic bucket, out of the blaring sun and 90-degree heat. As a birder, always looking at birds through binoculars and camera lenses, physically handling them gave me a chance to appreciate the wondrous detail of their feathers and miniature beaks. These tiny wings will grow tremendously over the next ten days, and in just a few months they will migrate 2,000 miles across the Gulf of Mexico.

Physical handling and close-up appreciation of baby birds doesn't come without its share of excitements; everyone was pooped on at least once. Those of us there for the first time quickly realized why the stack of charts used to measure the birds were laminated! We carefully worked through the gourds one at a time, measuring and aging the birds before returning



them to their proper gourd, now filled with fresh dry White Pine needles. Once we placed all the gourds back in their proper spot, Purple Martin parents immediately returned with beakfuls of bugs to feed the chicks. What a rewarding finale to our day of conservation efforts!

Helping Purple Martins: Part Two

By Darlene Sillick, Ohio Bluebird Society trustee and central Ohio Young Birder Club co-advisor

As we monitor our bluebird and tree swallow nestboxes and record weekly data, we do the same for Purple Martin's, up high in their swinging gourds. Weekly, the baffle is uncoupled, the winch is cranked down and the excitement begins as we open each of the 24 gourd caps to look at and record the contents. On July 1, the monitors at Safari Golf Club thought it would be fun to make the nest changes a special event. We invited the central Ohio Young Birders Club members of which 6 came to help and as Elizabeth fondly stated, everyone got pooped on. Technique was important to take the young birds out of the gourd and hold them so they could emit the fecal sac and then go in the large 5 gallon bucket filled with pine straw then put a towel over the bucket and keep them quiet and out of the direct sun. Doing the weekly checks helps to problem solve and have a healthier colony. Aging the chicks helps with Cornell Nestwatch citizen science data and PMCA data on their Martinwatch form. Totals are also submitted to Ohio Bluebird Society for their annual fledge reports.

At Safari Golf Course, we have 3 rigs with 24 gourds each. The monitors this year were Paula Ziebarth, Josue Sanchez and his wife Inez and myself, weekly peering into 72 gourds. Here is a little background on this martin site. In 2011 the first two rigs went up and the zoo funded them through their conservation fund via a grant I wrote. A few years later, Ohio Ornithology Society funded a third rig through their conservation funds. Then this past year we removed the metal house and replaced it with the third 24 gourd rig funded by Golf Course Supervisor Ted Hunker. We have tremendous support by Ted and his team. The course volunteers and staff help with many aspects of preparing 72 gourds for spring activity then fall cleaning and storage.

Ted and course staff have been busy making this a 'green course'. In the spring of 2018, the course became certified as an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary course. Safari Golf Club is now a conservation leader among golf clubs. This took three years to complete. Ted worked on and achieved certification in six categories – environmental planning, wildlife and habitat management, outreach and education, chemical use reduction and safety, water conservation, and water quality management. And the birds in their boxes and gourds contributed to the certification process.

In the last two years during the martin nest changes, we have had the help of Michael Kreger, VP Conservation at the Columbus Zoo. He has rolled up his sleeves and gotten his hands dirty all for a good cause to have healthier martins fledge. But he was having a lot of fun too holding the birds. To borrow a quote from him from the summer 2018 Beastly Banner, " In 2017, 81 bluebirds and 147 purple martins fledged from nest boxes and rigs (artificial nest cavities)



Boy Scouts have put up 17 rigs in central Ohio north to South Bass Island

constructed just outside the fairway. Since the program was initiated in 2008, the Safari Golf Club has fledged 563 purple martins and 452 bluebirds".

I would like to thank Ted Hunker and Michael Kreger for believing in our conservation work at The Columbus Zoo and the Safari Golf Club. The volunteers peeking into nestboxes and gourds are not staff. The teens and our friends helping with nest changes don't get paid to deal with ticks and chiggers and dirty nest material sticking to sweaty arms. What do we get? We get to help the largest swallow in North America safely raise their young and make a 4,000 mile round trip migration to the Amazon River Basin in South America. We are a little sad when they are gone but the excitement next April isn't measured in words but in the sweet chortle of the amazing Purple Martin as their numbers swell long into May. Too fun! They return to do it all over again!! I am lucky to do this with Paula Ziebarth, my conservation sidekick. We have so much gratification teaching and sharing with anyone who will stop, look and listen to these purple gems.

House Wrens Make Me Happy

By Gina Swindell



We built our home in a development almost 20 years ago but were lucky enough to secure a property that backs up to an undeveloped wildlife pathway. We put up a couple of feeders, eventually a small pond, and some birdhouses. We placed two bluebird boxes in the backyard and hung a wren box from a tree that was just under our bedroom window. It wasn't

long before we had bluebirds checking out the new digs as well as a male wren that sang his little patootie off from what I swear was dawn until dusk. I had no idea what I was asking for and he clearly did not care that when I got off work at 7 a.m. it was bedtime for me. I learned to love that lively song and awaited the return of this little wren every spring.

I didn't know much about wrens, but I did notice that year after year there were twigs in our wren box, but never any evidence that it was actually used. I once witnessed a wren trying to get an oversized twig into the box. It was so comical—I literally laughed out loud. It tried every which way to get that twig to fit through the small opening. It eventually figured it out. I felt so proud. Thanks to the Google, I learned

that “it” was the male that I was watching. He will place twigs in several cavities. Once he meets up with a willing female, he will show her his work and she will choose her favorite. She will then finish it by adding more twigs and she will then sculpt a cup made of small feathers and grasses. I must admit, this practice was quite familiar to me. I remember when we were trying to decorate our new house. My husband tried to decorate and I would always come along and change things around. Since it seems that men are built to tolerate our “crazy,” he was typically okay with it. He finally put his foot down when I kept trying to redo the basement. He let me know that the basement was his domain. He ultimately did have the final say and I was okay with that.

Anyway, while our wren came back year after year, the bluebirds slowly disappeared from our yard. While the house sparrows are likely the main culprit, it seems that these unused twig-filled cavities, also known as dummy nests, take nesting space away from bluebirds. And, if bluebirds or any other bird set up shop too near a wren nest, it's not uncommon for the wren to do a little “house cleaning” by removing entire nests from a neighbor's cavity. They have also been known to poke holes in the eggs of nearby nesting birds.

While these song-belting, sometimes homewrecking cuties can be a difficult yard bird, they are covered under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act—making it illegal to disturb their

nest once it's complete. If you are not a fan of insects, spiders, beetles and so on, you may want them around since they are insectivores. Their diet consists almost entirely of insects. My friend Matt would likely categorize the wren as a LBB (little brown bird). Though they are not much to look at color-wise, their feather pattern is really something to admire. They are fun to watch and I would argue that their song is addicting.

Unfortunately, this is the third year that we have not been visited by our wren. My logical side thinks something must have happened to him, but my heart hopes that he has realized that his gal just doesn't

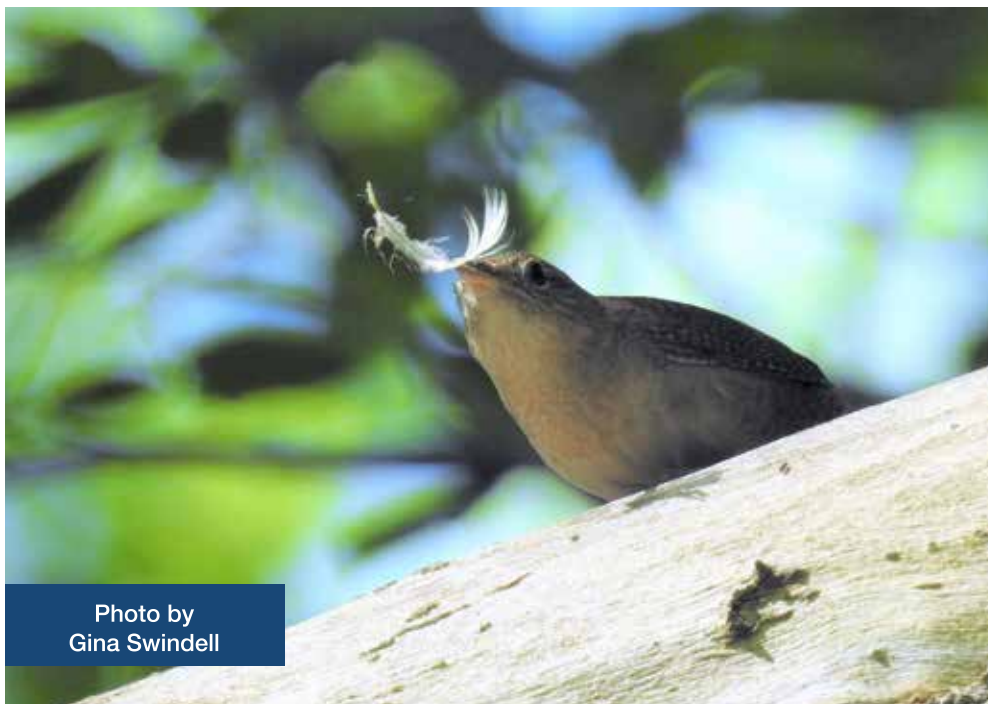


Photo by
Gina Swindell

Photos on this page by Ken Bush:
kenbuschphotography.smugmug.com



like our nest box since it is in a place where it doesn't have much privacy from our neighbors. But then I remember why it is named House wren—because this species is okay with breeding near our homes and in the boxes that we provide them. They don't seem too picky, really. According to Audubon.org, a wren's "nest site is in any kind of cavity, including natural hollows in trees and stumps, old woodpecker holes, crevices in buildings, often in nest boxes. May nest in almost any kind of enclosed space (flowerpots, parked cars, shoes, drainpipes, etc.). Site is usually low." Therefore, I am going to figure that he found his gal the perfect old Nike shoe that just felt like home.

Home to a House wren depends on the season. Ohio is typically their home spring through fall with the breeding season lasting from March through July. House wrens may have two broods per year but if they do raise a second family they will do so in a different "shoe." They do not reuse their first nest. It is not uncommon for a wren to place spider egg sacs into their nest. When the sac hatches, the spiders will munch on any mites that may be attacking the nestlings. It takes about a month from the time the eggs are laid until the nestlings fledge. Upon the arrival of fall, wrens will begin their migration south to the southern U.S. and into Mexico.

House wrens, a species whose members (male, female & babies) all look alike, share the contiguous United States

with eight other wrens—Carolina, Winter, Sedge, Marsh, Rock, Pacific, Cactus, Canyon and Bewick's, all of whom can be found somewhere in the United States at some point during the year. But, only four species breed in Ohio—House, Carolina, Sedge and Marsh. And, of those four, only one is a year-round resident—the Carolina wren. That surprised me to learn, since the only wren that I've seen at our property in northwestern Lorain is the House wren. House wrens are super plentiful and they "occupy the broadest latitudinal range of any native passerine in the New World, breeding from across most of Canada down to the southernmost part of South America, and into the West Indies."

If you are a fan of movies or television, pay attention to just about any outdoor scene. I have noticed that there is almost always a wren singing in the background. This may be one of the first migratory birds that I was able to easily identify by song.

After years of birdwatching I still call myself a novice because there is just so much to learn. The more I learn, the more I want to learn. Lucky for me, I could keep busy with the wrens alone since there are 88 species worldwide.

PS... I had two House wrens flittering around in my trees this morning. One was singing his heart out. The other was a baby or female (I don't know which) but I sure did have a smile from ear to ear! Happy birding!

<https://www.wildlifehc.org/there-are-wrens-in-my-bluebird-boxes/>

<https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/house-wren>

<https://www.birds-of-north-america.net/wrens.html>

<https://www.wild-bird-watching.com/House-Wren.html>

<https://birdsna.org/Species-Account/bna/species/houwre/introduction>





Ask Madame WingNut To Infinity and Beyond

By Paula Ziebarth



Last week, I was enjoying the company of my good friend and mentor, Darlene Sillick. We were sitting on her back patio enjoying a gorgeous summer evening and observing the antics of a male American Goldfinch. A family group of Eastern Bluebirds flew high overhead emitting their plaintive call. Our thoughts and discussion turned to these blue feathered wonders, as it so often does. We had

a lengthy discussion about the establishment of bluebird trails and the problems we have both seen with improper trail habitat, box spacing, and nest box and baffle design.

Many of the trails we monitor today were originally established by scouts (Scouts BSA) that achieved their Eagle Scout rank through the completion of the project. Unfortunately, many of the scout bluebird trail projects I have seen were poorly planned and/or executed, resulting in the need for trail dismantling and replacement. This problem stems from scout and their advisor(s) not knowing questions to ask and who to ask. There is a lot of contradictory and bad information on the internet. OBS Area Contacts can help individual scouts in their counties and I hope OBS can add a tab on their website with step by step instructions for scouts wishing to establish bluebird trail projects. I am currently helping a scout plan a trail in the City of Powell and will help him do it right.

I am in the process of writing three articles regarding the establishment of successful Bluebird Trails. In this first article "To Infinity and Beyond", I hope to cover how one goes about finding a good site for a trail and planning for the life of that trail. The second article "Build it and They Will Come" will discuss good nest box and baffle design criteria and where to find nest box plans or the boxes themselves. The third article "The Eagle Has Landed" will discuss the importance of good monitoring and data collection once the trail is established.

There is no way to further bluebird conservation without providing nest boxes for them to use. A suburban lot may have room for one or two, but your local park may have space for a large trail of nest boxes. Here are things I believe must be considered when establishing a bluebird trail, in order of importance:

1. Assign Trail Monitor

Although this is the last thing you need, it is also the first thing you need. If you cannot find a trail monitor, you should not undertake the project. If you are an experienced monitor and plan to monitor the trail yourself, you are all set. If, however, you are a scout that plans to work on nest box installation only, it will be necessary to work with the owner of the trail to line up a good monitor before you get started. If trail owner does not have a volunteer in mind, Ohio Bluebird Society (OBS) Area Contacts should be able to help find and train good monitors in your area. At a minimum, trail monitor will be required to check nest boxes weekly, manage invasive House Sparrows, maintain nest boxes, keep good data, and report annually to the trail owner and OBS. If volunteer decides they no longer wish to monitor trail, they need to let trail owner know and help find a new monitor to take over this duty.

2. Potential Partners

Finding a large tract of land, public or private, is your next step. Approach officials at township, city, village, county and state parks. Other potential sites include cemeteries, golf courses, school yards, church yards, libraries, farm lots, etc. You are looking for large tracts of land with mostly short mowed grass.

3. Location, Location, Location

Time to board Google Spaceship Earth and look for appropriate trail sites in your area. Google Earth is a wonderful online tool to help find good locations for trails. Proper habitat is key to a successful bluebird trail. Short mowed grass habitat with solitary trees is ideal. You will not attract Eastern Bluebirds to nest in heavily wooded areas, or in predominantly tall grass prairie. Setting up a trail in wood edge or brushy areas, or in areas earmarked for succession will place nest boxes in House Wren habitat. House Wrens depredate eggs and young nestlings of other species so keeping trail out of their habitat is very important. Nest boxes need to be sited at least 40 yards (120 feet) from wood edge or brushy areas. Keeping nest boxes away from human structures and stiff needled evergreen trees is also important as this is the habitat of the non-native aggressive House Sparrow.

4. How Many Nest Boxes?

Once you have found your site and a willing partner (trail owner), you can use Google Earth to do some preliminary

sitework, but you need to get out in the field and estimate how many boxes you will need. The first question I ask is “How will people use this site?” Although Eastern Bluebirds will be happy to use a nest box in your local park in the middle of an open field, the children that play football or fly kites in that field may find it an unfortunate obstacle. Look for areas near solitary trees and make sure to keep away from House Wren habitat. If possible, choose site just outside of area that is mowed to avoid mower hits and make it easier for ground maintenance staff. I like to use flags to show trail owner where boxes are best suited. They can tell you whether or not this placement works for them. Individual nest boxes can be sited for Eastern Bluebirds every 100 – 150 yards apart. If the birds will have view of each other, choose the larger spacing. If there is a pond or other water source near site, Tree Swallows will be looking for nest sites also. Be prepared to install paired nest boxes (add box 15 feet from the original box) if over 50% of your nest sites are used by Tree Swallows.

5. To Infinity and Beyond

Every year, monitor should perform nest box maintenance as needed. Cracked or broken box pieces should be replaced. Entrance holes widened by roosting Downy Woodpeckers during winter months need to be fixed. Every three years, the trail owner and monitor should evaluate nest box placement and condition. If habitat conditions change and House Wrens are moving in, time to move or remove some nest boxes. If boxes are falling apart, time to replace them. If predators are circumventing baffles, time to replace those with a better design. Reporting data online in Cornell’s NestWatch database is another way to help with citizen science today and for future generations. If properly monitored and maintained, a bluebird trail will outlast all of us.

If you have any questions, contact Paula Ziebarth at: paulazbird@gmail.com or 614-323-7566

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.

These young boys regularly help their dad Tim McDaniel check his bluebird trail in Lorain County. They are learning a lot about bluebirds and tree swallows and since the trail is at a golf course they even get to ride a golf cart with their dad to each nest box! Happy smiles!



Treasurer’s Report

by Molly Wilsbacher

1. **SAVE THE DATE: Saturday, February 29, 2020.**

Plans are already underway for the next annual Ohio Bluebird Conference. We will return to Ashland University’s Convocation Center in 2020. The Conference Planning Committee is already lining up excellent speakers and topics, so stay tuned for more details in our next newsletter. We are also already accepting sponsorships, donations, and of course, silent auction items! If you would like to be a sponsor or make a donation, please contact me or any Board Member with details.

2. **The Board of Directors are happy to report that we are once again accepting donations for the Ohio Bluebird Society Legacy Fund.**

You can honor a specific individual with a \$125 donation. OBS will build, erect, maintain, and monitor a quality bluebird box on the closest trail available containing prime habitat for bluebirds. Each box will be tagged with a decorative plaque containing the honoree’s name and you will be notified when the box is officially placed on an existing bluebird trail. Stephen Habash was the first to donate this year to the Legacy Fund honoring Donald Dunn.



3. **The Ohio Bluebird Society’s bank accounts** currently reflect that we enjoy a checking account balance of \$5,531.72 and a savings account balance of \$19,637.28, for a grand total of \$25,169 in our accounts for the period ending June 30, 2019. Our anticipated expenditures over the next quarter include publishing and mailing the Fall Newsletter, and finalizing updates to our new website.

4. **Finally, please do not forget that the Ohio Bluebird Society participates in Amazon’s Smile Program.**

Please sign up to purchase through Amazon Smile (<https://smile.amazon.com>) and designate the Ohio Bluebird Society as your charitable choice. We receive a small percentage and it won’t cost you anything. [PLEASE NOTE: Only purchases made at smile.amazon.com (not www.amazon.com or the mobile app) generate AmazonSmile donations].

A Tribute to Dean Sheldon

In Memory of OBS Advisor, Area Contact, and one of the founding members of OBS, Dean E. Sheldon, Jr.

He will be missed but not forgotten. Our deepest sympathies to his loved ones and dear friends.



1934-2019 The Passing of an OBS Conservation Hero

“In July, we lost a dear bluebird hero, Dean E. Sheldon, of Greenwich, Ohio. He was one of the founders of Firelands Audubon, Erie Metro Parks and Ohio Bluebird Society. His family owned the land known as Sheldon’s Marsh State Nature Preserve. He was a winner of the Blue Feather Award and he wrote countless articles for OBS. He had a big heart and a very giving nature. My heart goes out to his wife Carol and their grown children.

I met Dean very early in my bluebird years and we became fast friends. Dean introduced me to OBS and quickly pulled me into the workings of this organization. He saw the potential in others and he nurtured and nudged them to step out of their comfort zone and help in conservation projects. You will sorely be missed my friend...thank you for all you taught me.”

– Darlene Sillick

“My first meeting with Dean was while attending a Boy Scout adult leadership training event. Scout masters and assistants gathered for a pioneering camp out at what was dubbed Sheldon’s “Folly”, now Sheldon Marsh Preservation in Huron, Ohio. The land was formerly the old entrance to Cedar Point, being a paved highway that was washed away by lake erosion. The entrance was abandoned and later put up for sale. The land consisted of a marsh with a man-made causeway that went nowhere. The road ended at the shore of Lake Erie. Local people joked as to why anyone would buy such a piece of property and dubbed it Sheldon’s Folly.

Our training included an overnight camp out with tents, compass trials, pioneering use of making tools, shelter, and fire



“Came across this photo from this year’s OBS Conference in March where Dean had fun spending time with his friend Julie Zickefoose and so many other OBS friends. This photo put a smile on my face. Had to share it.”

– Carol Sheldon (wife)

from natural materials found on site. We cooked a meal from scratch, using raw meat, fresh vegetables and eggs and flour.

More recently I invited Dean to Wakeman Township’s Dalton Park Preserve to give me advice on the newly revamped bluebird trail. It was about 2014 when he and I met at the 4934 Townsend St., Wakeman location. We toured the site and he gave me pointers of what improvements may help and suggested reading material that I should buy. All in all his advice helped me to grow as a trail monitor. He told me to not be afraid to make changes, to experiment by relocating nest boxes and how important proper box spacing was.

I will miss him and his silent grin... RIP.”

– Bob Bement, OBS member

As many of you may know, Dean Sheldon passed away last week. He was the first director of Erie MetroParks, a founding member of the Firelands Audubon Society, and a namesake of Sheldon Marsh State Nature Preserve. He did an interview with Sandy and Beki a few years ago. Here are some excerpts from that interview.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykaU4ePxRhU&feature=youtu.be>

– Ethan Unzicker, IT Specialist - Erie MetroParks

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I knew Dean when he was Huron city manager & a neighbor. At the time I was not aware of his interest in Bluebirds & I had never seen one. I attended an OBS conference in Sunbury and ran into Dean and we quickly got reacquainted and discussed bluebirding seriously. At that point he became my bluebird mentor. He would occasionally drop by and educate me on Bluebirds & other nesting birds. He took me on his trails to show me how to monitor boxes. He then encouraged me to start my own trail which I did with his oversight. He was always available to answer any questions and was always ready to help me out. He will be greatly missed and certainly he will be missed by the bluebird community, such a sad passing.

– Mel Bird, OBS trustee and Area Contact

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Dean has been a personal friend to me and a great help in my position as editor of the OBS newsletter for the past several years. He often contributed articles and ideas along with his unfailing support. He always had time to chat about bluebirds, or kestrels, or OBS, or almost anything else! My family and thousands of others have been able to enjoy walks in a rare unspoiled treasure of preserved land bearing his name along Lake Erie in Huron, Ohio, Sheldon Marsh State Nature Preserve. Don't miss an opportunity to walk this area- it is rich in wildlife and peace. <http://naturepreserves.ohiodnr.gov/sheldonmarsh>

Dean has been associated with conservation measures and natural resources for most of his life. His love of bluebirds and work toward their conservation was one of his chief passions and joys. Three years ago, my husband and I traveled to Alberta, Canada to attend the North American Bluebird Society Conference which was held at Ellis Bird Farm. We were delighted and surprised to see that Dean had been busy doing bluebird conservation work and was honored even at this location 2200 miles away from his hometown in northern Ohio. He was like a pebble dropped in the water, creating ripples with far reaching effects for the good of so many. What a beautiful legacy!

– Penny Brandau

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Alberta, Canada at the NABS conference. Blue Feather award recipients and their bluebird houses displayed at the entrance of Ellis Bird Farm.



Dean's innovative bluebird box displayed in Alberta, Canada



Photo taken of the shoreline at Sheldon Marsh. Far reaching ripples!



Bluebirds and Memories

By Joann Kale, Area Contact for
Fairfield County and OBS Trustee



I am amazed at how quickly this year is flying by. My father always told me to never wish my life away, as the older one gets the faster time goes. He was so right. My dear mom has been gone a year now, leaving this earth July 1, 2018 at the age of 96. The sadness is still there, but I find that trusting in cherished memories helps fill in the large hole in one's heart.

Mom and Dad raised my brothers and I in Berea, a suburb of Cleveland. Mom was a dog lover, but enjoyed nature and wildlife, with a special fondness for wolves, whales, and all types of birds. Mom also had a green thumb and enjoyed gardening. She especially loved roses and liked when Praying Mantises would arrive to do battle with garden pests that loved them too. I have vivid memories of walking around with these fascinating insects on my head. I would search for them on the rose bushes every day.

My husband and I left Ohio in 1981 for career and raising our family. We lived in eastern Oklahoma from 1989 until moving back to our home state of Ohio in 2016. Mom lived with us part of that time, and enjoyed her days in the wide open space of the Sooner state.

I distinctly remember the day when my interest in Bluebirds began. Mom was relaxing in her room, looking out the window as she loved to do, and commented "there certainly are a lot of Bluebirds here." She purchased some books on the Eastern Bluebird and we started planning a trail of nestboxes. The trail consisted of 11 boxes encircling a 50 acre pasture. She loved checking nests, eggs and babies and enjoyed riding around the pasture on our little ATV with mealworms for everybody. Our last summer in Oklahoma, our boxes fledged 33 babies.

Fast forward to January 2018. Mom was suffering from dementia. She still enjoyed sitting in her Lazy-Boy, and looking out the window at the snow. So many times she mentioned how much she loved the four seasons; the beauty that is autumn, dog sledding with our Huskies in the winter along Lake Erie, bulbs emerging in the spring and feeding the hummers and Bluebirds in the summer. I believe she was happy to be back in Ohio. Her physical presence is greatly missed, but I feel her spirit every time I see the birds she loved so much. I am so grateful and thankful for the many, many years we had together. She taught me so much.

I now have a 2-year-old granddaughter. Some of Josie's first words were, Mommy, Daddy, Boobird, Cawdinal, Wobin, Peck Peck, Gwackle, Titmouse, Bwackbird. She would much rather

be outside, watching bird feeders, chasing insects, frogs and picking green tomatoes. Her Pa is teaching her how to fish. She is intrigued by the fish, and gets as close to them as possible, staring them in the eye and gently touching their scales, as Pa prepares to release them back into the pond. The activity we enjoy daily is tending to our Bluebird trail. She loves checking nests, eggs and babies and riding on the Polaris. I now get a chance to teach and share with her, as my mom did with me.

I am blessed beyond measure to have this little person in my life, and I hope that I can teach her to respect and love nature as much as I do. And especially as much as her Great Gaga did.



"Children learn what they live."

– Dorothy Law Nolte, PhD

"Teaching children about the natural world should be treated as one of the most important events in their lives."

– Thomas Berry



"If we want children to flourish, to become truly empowered, then let us allow them to love the earth before we ask them to save it. Perhaps this is what Thoreau had in mind when he said, 'the more slowly trees grow at first, the sounder they are at the core, and I think the same is true of human beings.'"

– David Sobel, Beyond Ecophobia



Member News

Thank You to Our Donors

John Barber
Sandra Jessen
Leslie Mapes
Lee Peart & Tim Mendiola –
Canaan Creek Organic Farm
Rebecca Price
Stephen Habash

Welcom New Members

Barbara Croskey
Chris Desarro
Pam Eichenauer
George Enevoldsen
Olivia Espinoza
Josphe Holtzmann
Dixie Hoskins
Sandra Jessen
Aaron Mcvay
Richard Mohr
Rylie Passerini
Rebecca Price
Stephanie Tiell
Edward Toll
Mike & Mary Wuescher

Hold your calendar for
Feb. 29, 2020 at Ashland
University where we will hold
the annual conference for the
Ohio Bluebird Society.

The theme is Let's Open the
Box!! Watch the website for
updated information.

– Judy Simrock and Darlene Sillick,
OBS trustees and event planners

President's report: Fall 2019

By Mike Watson

In early July of each year I review the data notebooks for the 200+ nest boxes at the Holden Arboretum to see how we stand compared to previous seasons. This year, the numbers were substantially (15-20%) below average, but I noticed many nests full of birds that were ready to fledge in the next week to 10 days. Although I haven't compared directly to previous years, the number of 'about to fledge' nests seemed notably higher than in past seasons. This fits with the slow start to this year's nesting season; nesting seems to have been delayed by about 2 weeks this year. We've seen that wet (and cold) early spring weather can delay bluebird nesting activity, and 2019 in north east Ohio has been very wet. I'm looking forward to year-end data to see whether bluebirds were able to compensate for this slow start with more nesting later in the season. I also wonder how the nesting season looks across the rest of the state. Of course, nest box reports from all of you are important to help us understand the patterns and trends. And this year, we hope to make it easier than ever. The new OBS website is expected to go live soon, and we're working on an online nest box reporting feature that allows you to submit your year-end data directly to the website.

Many of you already know that our new OBS information and membership brochure is now available. The first printing was earlier this year, shortly before the conference, and nearly all copies were distributed at the conference. We have since done a second run of brochures and they are available to any of you who might need them. These are great to have on hand if you are giving a bluebird presentation or if you regularly meet people who are interested in bluebirds and might like to learn more about OBS. And please note – the old brochures are no longer accurate! Mailing addresses, phone numbers and membership rates have changed in the past couple years; only the new (2019) version of the brochure is correct. If you have copies of the old brochure on hand, please recycle them and contact OBS to request new brochures.

Finally, I was sad to hear of the death of Dean Sheldon. Many of you know him or knew of him – he was a force in bluebird conservation, and conservation more broadly, for many years. He cared deeply about OBS; the organization, the mission, and the people who are part of OBS. He was a kind and generous person but didn't shy away from sharing constructive criticism and advice. I know that I benefitted from knowing him. He left his stamp on OBS and is part of the reason it has been a successful conservation organization for more than 30 years.

Starting Next issue...

"How did you get started in bluebirding?"

We would like to publish your stories in upcoming issues of our newsletter Monitor. Please email a JPG photo of yourself along with your story (500 words or less if possible) to pennybrandau@gmail.com. This could be an opportunity to recognize special people who helped you get started in bluebirding and to mention why you love it. Any funny or interesting trail stories? Please send them also!



OBS 2018 FLEDGLING REPORT

Reported As Of 1/31/2019: Eastern Bluebird – 5991

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

Tree Swallow	6775	Barn Swallow	122
House Wren	2169	Prothonotary Warbler	74
Purple Martin	1916	Tufted Titmouse	4
Black-capped Chickadee	51	Wood Duck	11
Carolina Chickadee	96	House Sparrows dispatched	970
Carolina Wren	34	House Sparrow Eggs destroyed	1142
American Kestrel	173	European Starling Eggs destroyed	8
Osprey	11	# of Reports	60

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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Like us on Facebook! Search for Ohio Bluebird Society to join our group.



Ohio Bluebird Society Membership Application

Membership Class	Annual	3-years
<input type="checkbox"/> Student (under 21)	\$10	\$25
<input type="checkbox"/> Senior/Sr. Family (over 60)	\$15	\$40
<input type="checkbox"/> Regular/Family	\$20	\$50
<input type="checkbox"/> Organizational	\$50	\$140
<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:
Pat Dutton, OBS Membership Chair
7747 TR 103
Millersburg, OH 44654

Ohio Bluebird Society is a 501(c)(3) Organization

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OHIO BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

The Holden Arboretum
9500 Sperry Road
Kirtland, Ohio 44094

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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

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Affiliated with the North American Bluebird Society

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Deadline for Submitting Articles:

- Spring Issue - February 1
- Summer Issue - May 1
- Fall Issue - August 1
- Winter Issue - November 1

MEMBER PHOTOS

The following four very cool photos are from Mike Smith, monitor for the Carlisle Equestrian trails in Lorain County and a fellow OBS member. He found a tree swallow nest with an extravagant egret feather inside. Quite a touch of class!! He also sent the photo below of an unusual misshapen egg which was found in another nest. Possibly a double yolk egg? Rarely do these unusual shaped eggs hatch. Mike reported that only four of these eggs did hatch. The last photo shows a beautiful bluebird nest made from pine needles instead of the more commonly found grass nests. Thanks for sharing these Mike!

