



Bluebird Monitor

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

Winter 2019-2020



House Wrens at Holden

By Mike Watson, OBS President



Love them or hate them, the House Wren is a native cavity nester and falls within the purview of the OBS mission statement to support “the Eastern Bluebird and other native cavity nesting birds in Ohio.” At the Holden Arboretum in northeast Ohio (about 30 minutes east of Cleveland) we have been collecting data from any nest in our roughly 200 nest boxes since 1965. Over that period,

we have seen some impressive gains in Eastern Bluebird and Tree Swallow numbers (our two focal species for this program) but have also seen interesting patterns in the numbers of House Wrens using our nest boxes.

As a direct and often aggressive competitor, house wrens can present a serious challenge to the success of bluebird and tree swallow nesting attempts. I think people generally fall into one of two categories when it comes to house wrens. The first considers the wren to be a species that is doing just fine without our help and that presents a real threat to more sensitive species. I think it's safe to say that some in that group really dislike, even hate, the little brown bird. The second group argues that as an energetic and interesting insectivore, the house wren is a great little bird that deserves our support. I fall somewhere in between these groups. On the bluebird trails at Holden, house wrens do present a real management challenge. But in my backyard (where I don't dare to attract bluebirds due to the huge House Sparrow population in our neighborhood) I'm thrilled to have nesting house wrens, especially when I see them catching insects in my garden.

The history of house wrens at Holden starts with hundreds of fledglings per year in the late sixties through mid-seventies (with a high of 254 fledged in 1970). Then from 1975-1994 the numbers were very low, always below 50 and often 0 fledged per year. These very low numbers are due to some overly aggressive management of their nesting and does not indicate wider house wren population changes. After the mid-nineties the fledgling numbers bounced back to around 100 per year until fairly recently. In 2008 I began analyzing the nest site preferences and success of wrens at Holden and found that they were much less successful in nest boxes more than 50 meters from a treeline and showed a strong preference for boxes less than 25m from a treeline. This fits with wrens'



well-known preference for denser vegetation and pointed to an obvious management option. In 2009, we began moving any nest box that was less than 50 meters from a treeline out further into our fields (if the field was large enough to do so). The subsequent years showed steady declines in house wren nests and fledglings until 2018 when we had zero eggs laid at Holden (Figure 1).

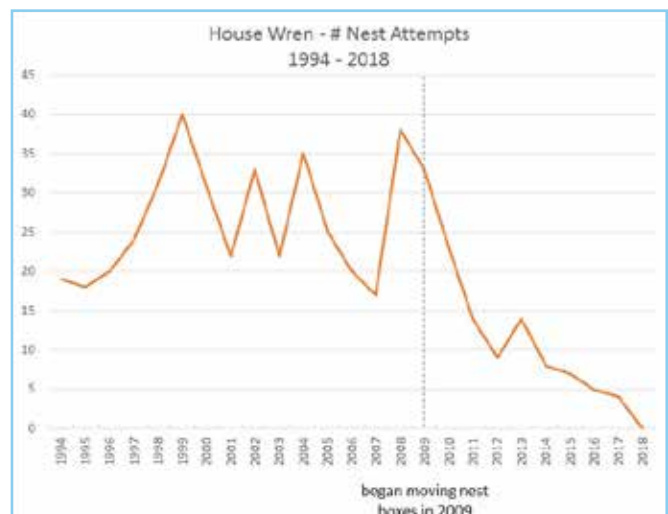


Figure 1. Number of House Wren attempts in Holden nesting boxes from 1994-2018. Total number of nest boxes at Holden were stable across this period. Note the declining number of attempts since 2009, when trail re-arrangement began.

Continued on page 2

Although our goal was to reduce house wren nesting in our bluebird program, I never expected to reach a point where we had no active nests. This begs the question: Are the declines at Holden linked to the changes we made on our trails, or is there a larger problem with the house wren population? Ohio Breeding Birds Survey data and OBS fledgling report data both suggest that house wren populations in northeast Ohio (and in Ohio more broadly) appear to be stable (Figure 2). This strengthens the argument that the declining activity at Holden is due (at least in part) to the changes we made on our trail system.

One interesting additional note is that the earlier analysis showed that although wrens have a lower preference for the more distant nest boxes, they did still use them regularly. The success rates in these boxes, though, were substantially reduced. The steady declines at Holden suggest a decline in the local population; i.e. fewer young produced each year, rather than the birds just choosing to move elsewhere.

Although I don't have the final numbers for 2019, I can say that we had several house wren nests which fledged 15-20 young. This is still very low by historical standards and well within what I consider an acceptable range of activity (i.e. low impact to bluebirds and tree swallows). What the future holds for our house wren population is difficult to predict, but I am happy to see them back...as long as their numbers stay low on our bluebird trails.

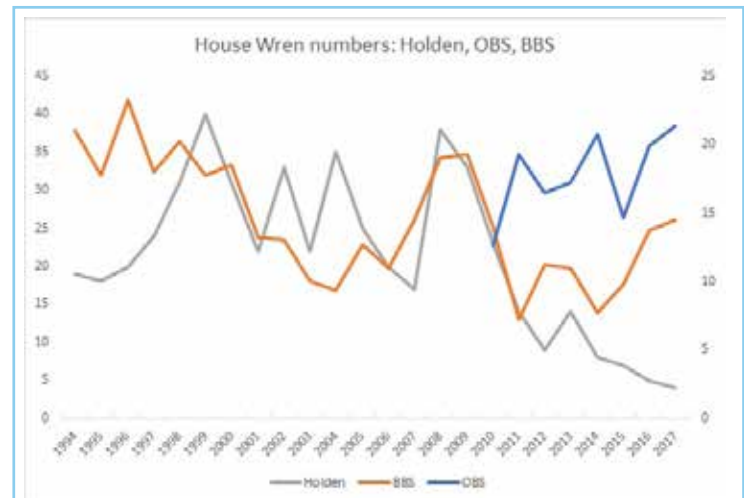


Figure 2. Number of House Wrens from three data sources. Holden data are number of attempts. BBS data are number reported from five northeast Ohio routes (reported as number per route). OBS data are number of house wrens fledged per report from seven northeast Ohio counties. Note that OBS and BBS data suggest stable to increasing populations in NE Ohio since 2010, whereas Holden data show a steady decline since 2009.

Heavy Rains Become a Challenge for Tree Swallows

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



As I left my bluebird trail of twenty nestboxes and two nest burrows at Alum Creek State Park in Delaware County on June 14, 2019, I had been greatly disappointed since I had found 18 dead Tree Swallow nestlings in five nests among 17 boxes claimed by swallows. Two of the five nests had families that were entirely wiped out. I knew that the state park had not sprayed for

mosquitos, so my number one suspicion went to the weather and its effect on insect populations, mainly small, flying insects that are crucial in supporting Tree Swallows.

That afternoon, my spirits were raised somewhat when I checked 57 boxes that make up my Panhandle Road Grid on the Delaware Wildlife Area where I found only one dead swallow nestling among 56 active nests.

On June 16, I received a communication from fellow bluebirder Darlene Sillick who reported that three rainy days with one day of cold temperatures grounded flying insects to cause greater than normal death rates among Tree Swallow nestlings. I agreed with Darlene's explanations and during the following days more and more trail monitors were reporting similar bad news detailing swallow deaths.

With bad news on my mind, I went about checking my 166 boxes in Delaware State Park. During two days of monitoring, I counted 90 boxes that had been claimed by swallows, and I recorded 88 swallow nestlings that had died among 32 nests.

By the end of any nesting season, the influence of habitats becomes visible as I process and analyze my data from my data books. I transfer data from data books to master data sheets for each species that lists each nest's box number, the date when its first egg is laid, along with its number of eggs,

hatchlings and fledglings. Using master data sheets enables me to easily do the math to describe the season's results.

During past years of normal weather patterns, I could, with confidence, announce that once eggs hatch, 90% of the young will live to fledge. Not anymore! Tree Swallows nesting on eight of my trails fledged 843 young in 2019 after 1371 eggs were laid. Of the season's eggs, only 77.2% hatched, and only 61.4% of the original eggs developed to fledge young. The number related most to the adverse weather that grounded flying insects is the percent of hatchlings that grew to fledge: 79.5%. The more significant news is that more than two (20.5%) of every ten hatchlings failed to fly from their nest, a truly tragic reality.

The best overall production rate among the swallows was from nearly half of 45 boxes and nestjars making up the Alum Creek Prothonotary Warbler Project. The paired nest structures stand above lake water along the northwestern shore of Alum Creek Lake. Half of the boxes have 1-1/8 inch entrances to admit the prothonotaries while the remaining boxes have 1-3/8 and 1-1/2 inch holes for Tree Swallows and bluebirds. Swallows laid 109 eggs, 105 hatched and 88.5% of their hatchlings grew normally to fledge 89 young.

The worst reproduction rates for swallows surfaced in Delaware State Park where 538 eggs were laid, but only 52.6% of the eggs developed into 283 fledglings that represented 71.6% of the hatchlings.

I have maintained and monitored nestboxes in the park for 43 seasons since 1977. In 1977, the park was in early stages of succession from farmland into a forest. Since the beginning of bluebird trail management in the park, its maintenance crews have maintained mowed areas and used brush hogging to preserve bluebird and swallow habitats while House Wrens have profited the most as most of the park's acres grows into a forest with many brushy edges. The wrens pay their rent by eating ticks.

So, how did House Wrens do during the wet 2019 after laying eggs on all but one of my trails? Wrens laid 1052 eggs, 77.7% hatched, and 73.7% of eggs developed to fledge 775. Once their eggs hatched, parent wrens successfully fledged 94.9% of their hatchlings. I have always called wrens "super bird," so the past season was no surprise. I think the wetness of the season caused insects to climb up the brush to escape the saturated soil below. Such an event would make it easier for super bird to capture its prey.

...and bluebirds? They nested on six of my trails to lay 314 eggs, only 75.5% survived to hatch, and 73.7% of the original eggs fledged 216 young. (Super bird evicted 25 bluebird eggs among seven nests.) Most impressive is the fact that once bluebirds hatched their eggs, 94.9% grew to fledge. Bluebirds feed from the ground. They drop from a perch to snatch their prey, then fly from the ground with



Four healthy Tree Swallow nestlings, soon to fledge.

their mouthfuls. Again, maybe the heavy rains made the insects on the ground more visible, etc.

Heavy rains during the nesting seasons affect our birds' ability to feed their young. But I am also concerned about what warmer weather does to our nesting birds, starting with winter weather. For instance, for the last three or more years, I have argued that when we can stand outside in February, and we are comfortable while not wearing a coat or jacket, some insects are wiggling out of hibernation. Then, a polar vortex, or other cold front, returns to wipe out or stress the exposed creatures to lower their populations prior to spring.

During recent seasons, Tree Swallow egg clutches are becoming smaller, and of course, so are the numbers of fledglings. Compared to past years, I am convinced that the number of insects have been lowered by warmer winter temperatures that made it easier for June rains to afflict havoc on our birds.

I will conclude with a very relevant observation. When I clean out a nestbox after its occupants fledge, I always remove the used nest, and before I return it to the surrounding environment, I methodically pull it apart to search for past histories, including evidence of blowfly infestations. For 2019, I found no blood-sucking blowfly larvae or pupae in any nests. No blowflies!

What might be good for the nesting birds, is a good indicator of what is going on out there in the world we share with the birds. I am convinced that recent weather trends are lowering insect populations that result in lowering bird populations. After good or bad news, continue to do your best for our birds. Happy bluebirding.

The Prothonotary Project at Mosquito Lake

By Loyd Marshall, OBS Trustee

Mosquito Creek Lake is a man-made reservoir in Trumbull County, northeast Ohio. It is the second-largest inland lake in Ohio with a surface area of 7850 acres for summer pool. Construction of the dam that created the lake was completed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1944. It was built to support the war effort by providing a regulated water supply downstream for the steel plants. Most of the depth averages 8 to 15 feet (depending on season), but the southern end, towards the dam, averages 20 to 25 feet. The lake is owned by the Army Corps of Engineers with a lease to the ODNR State Park Division for recreation and a lease to the ODNR Wildlife Division as a designated waterfowl refuge. There is a lot of recreational activity around the lake in the form of camping, fishing, hunting, and various water sports, such as skiing and swimming.

The lake has several bays and inlets on the shoreline that create calm water, along with trees and brush that provide the perfect habitat for the Prothonotary Warbler. The Prothonotary Warblers are cavity nesting birds that like the swampy, shady areas where willows and other brushy plants grow. This habitat also provides a good food supply to them with a surplus of spiders, beetles, flies, caterpillars, and mayflies.

In the spring of 2009 the local Soil and Water Conservation District offered a training program on environmental stewardship with the support of local organizations and agencies interested in promoting nature projects. The Army Corps of Engineers had set aside an area at Mosquito Lake. I was mainly interested in cavity nesting birds, but did help with other projects. In the fall of 2009 I started volunteering with the Corps and in the spring of 2010 I started volunteering with the State Park. In 2010 I started monitoring two bluebird trails. The one on the state park side was established and well maintained, while the one in the Corps area had not been monitored for at least five years prior to my arrival. It was an excellent training program since I had the help of an experienced trail monitor on the state park side, but I was on my own to reestablish the trail on the Corps side. There are forty nest boxes in the State Park Area and 36 nest boxes in the Corps area. After ten years both trails are doing well and maybe I'll save that story for a future article.

In 2010, while doing the bluebird trails, I heard about a warbler that was the only cavity nesting warbler east of the Mississippi and it liked the habitat around Mosquito Lake. I soon found some of these birds in the shady bay areas around the lake. This was the start of my fascination with the Prothonotary Warbler. After a little investigation, I discovered some projects were using a plastic, quart-sized jar for the nesting box. Later I found out the system was started by Dan Best, Senior Naturalist at Geauga County Parks, who had been working with the Prothonotary for well over 20 years at that time.

The first year, 2011, I put out three jars in the area where I had seen the birds. Bingo!! I had one nest in a jar and, later, six



eggs appeared. Six eggs hatched into six nestlings and later fledged as six young Prothonotary Warblers. I was hooked.

In 2012, I put out seven jars and had a good season. In 2013 and 2014 I used 13 jars and the success was still there. After that I went up to 15 jars for the next four years, which is about all I could handle since they were in six areas and I had to move by car between each location. This was not as easy as doing a bluebird trail since I had to check the jars by using waders and walking some distance to get to their location. In the spring of 2019, I met Steve Craiger who was interested and wanted to help; so we added four jars and two locations and split the territory. This turned out to be the best year yet with the most eggs laid. The more important measurement was the very high percentage of birds that fledged.

For the 2019 nesting season 19 nesting jars were placed over the water on PVC pipe supports in eight different bays at the south end of the lake. Sixteen jars had activity in the form of eggs laid and 15 of those jars had nestlings that fledged. There were 16 attempts for first brood and 3 attempts for a second brood. From the 19 total attempts, there were 98 eggs laid, 85 hatched into nestlings and 83 of the nestlings fledged. This was the best nesting seasons since the program began.

I put the jars out by the 3rd week of April since the males arrive in our area toward the end of April and will start building dummy nests. It takes a little bit of guess work on my part to locate the jars since there are no leaves on the trees and they like the shady area with minimal direct sunlight. When the females arrive in early May, the males will display in the area and enter and exit the jars. The female will select the jar and build the actual nest used. Several days after the nest is complete, the female will lay eggs. She lays one egg per day and usually has 4 to 6 eggs in a nest. Incubation, which is only done by the female, starts as soon as the eggs are laid and will last 12 to 14 days. The male will bring food to the female while she is on the nest. The nestlings only stay in the jar for about 11 days and will fledge. This is rather a short time compared to bluebirds, which stay in the nest for 18 to 21 days. Once



the nestlings fledge they will hide in the brush along the shoreline where the parents will take care of them. I have had several second broods each year.

I monitor the jars once a week, starting the first week of May and will continue until early in July when egg laying has stopped and all the birds have fledged. Usually by the first or second week of July the birds have left on their migration to the Caribbean or South America.

The nest jars are a quart-sized Metamucil jar with a 1.25 inch entrance hole, 2 vent holes on the side, four drain holes in the bottom, and four holes in the back for wire ties to mount the jars. Jars are fastened to a length of 1 inch PVC pipe. A 1.25 inch piece of PVC pipe is used for the base. The base pipe is driven into the lake bottom and the pipe with the nest jar is inserted into the base pipe which will allow it to telescope to set the jar height above water. There are two set screws in the base pipe to lock the position. The jars are set at three to four feet above the water surface. Jars have been painted various colors from solid gray or dark brown to various patterns of camo. They don't seem to care about the exterior colors as far as I have observed.

Everybody has heard the saying "a picture is worth a thousand words," then someone went on to say "being in the moment is worth a thousand pictures". I truly believe both sayings and especially enjoy the time in the water around the nest jars under the willows. The adult birds usually leave the jars when they see me approach or I tap the side so I can check the nest. The adults will stay in the area flitting from branch to branch while I quickly remove the lid and check the contents and occasionally snap a picture. Once I have checked the jar and return the lid,

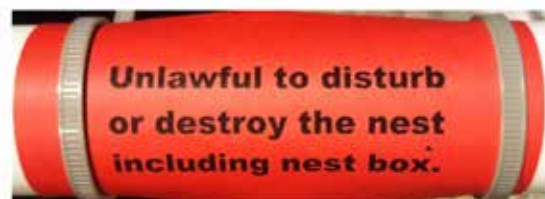


I can step back and watch. The birds are waiting on the branches with food in their beak to bring to the jar. They will enter and leave the jars as I watch from nearby. I have on a few occasions watched the nestlings fledge. The nestling positions themselves in the hole while mom and dad are flying around with food in their beak to try to coax the little one to take their first flight. If the baby bird lands in the water their natural wing stroke will help them get to shore. In the three or four first flights I have witnessed, the baby flew to a branch close by and then onto another branch. In the meantime the parents are right there with a nice juicy snack to reward them for succeeding. I have been lucky enough to get a video twice of the young birds leaving the nest jar. One other time I saw the babies climb out onto the jar lid and cling to a branch and walk the branch to shore. This probably means the jars were too close to the branches. Sometimes after watching this, I get a warm fuzzy feeling of joy because of all the activity by the adults or young birds.

One reason for the record nesting season this year was because the breeding season for the warblers was two weeks longer than previous years. I can't explain why the birds stayed around longer than usual, other than it was a warm summer or possibly related to climate change. The lake water level average for the season was higher than normal this breeding season, but doesn't seem to have an effect on the birds. Higher water adds difficulty for the monitors, since waders are used to get to the jars. Current and fast rising water are not a problem on the lake. Because the jars are located in the bays, they are somewhat protected from the wind and waves on the lake.

There has been very little problem with natural predators. I try to place the jars away from large branches to eliminate predators from reaching them. There have only been a couple of attempts by House Wrens to use the jars and I have yet to encounter any Tree Swallows in the jars.

Last year I observed several eggs were missing from the jars in two areas and I suspected the eggs were lost due to vandalism. (33 missing for 2018 vs 3 missing for 2019) At the beginning of the 2019 season, a small red warning sign was attached to all the jars. A direct comparison of the 15 jars (2018 vs 2019) shows for the same number of eggs, 50% more birds were fledged.



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Black-Capped Chickadees By Rob Swindell



As the sun struggles to find the horizon on brisk winter mornings, we make the daily trip out to the backyard to feed the birds. It is not unusual to find scores of birds anxiously anticipating our arrival as they fidget around looking for missed seeds from the day prior. Despite the excitement, most head for a nearby tree branch upon our approach—

their millions year old DNA instinctively seeking safety. However, one species with a brave soul, which will allow us to get within a couple feet of them, is perhaps the most unlikely of birds—the tiny song bird known as the Black-capped Chickadee.

Weighing only 11 to 12 grams, chickadees are typically found in mature forests. They eat insect eggs, larvae, ants, spiders, berries and seeds—particularly sunflower seeds. They nest in holes they excavate or in abandoned woodpecker cavities, usually four to eight feet above the ground. In spring to mid-summer, they lay between 4 to 12 eggs, incubated for about a dozen days. They grow rapidly and fledge in about two weeks. Tragically, the average life expectancy of a chickadee is only 1.5 to 1.8 years. They often fall prey to raptors, but also succumb to human activity such as automobiles, window strikes, cats and chemical poisoning (herbicides and pesticides).

Black-capped Chickadees are both friendly and feisty—willing to take food from the hands of people, but a tough little bird if captured. Laura Erickson, author of *Laura's Birding Blog*, likewise notes, "Of all wild birds, chickadees are the ones who most readily bridge the chasm between humans and birds." However, this warm relationship will take a turn for the worse if they perceive danger. Erickson describes attempts to band chickadees,



Photo by Phoebe Scholl

"Chickadees have far less strength and power than corvids, yet from any position they bite, peck, and hammer their bill under fingernails and into cuticles and knuckles, often drawing blood . . . a chickadee will rage, rage against the dying of the light, and not go gentle into that good night."

As a non-migratory or seasonal migrant bird, chickadees endure winters often in small flocks (which may also include titmice and woodpeckers), relying on the food it cached and the preservation of its energy. Chickadees are intelligent and have exceptional spatial memory. Birdwatchers will often see them repeatedly grab a sunflower seed from a feeder and leave to stash it away for later. In a detailed study of caching in the *Encyclopedia of Animal Behavior*, researcher A. Brodin describes the energy needs of chickadees and other birds,

"Energy storing can occur both in- and outside an animal's body. Inside the body, energy will primarily be stored as carbohydrates or fat. In many cases, however, internal energy stores are not sufficient. Especially animals with well-developed cognitive abilities will also store food externally to buffer the energy need, a phenomenon called 'food hoarding' or 'caching.'"

In the heart of winter, chickadees can also save a significant amount of energy by lowering their body temperature at night, a process known as regulated or facultative hypothermia. They can reduce their body temperature about seven degrees during the night—though they are unable to move in this state and are susceptible to predation.

When you do see one of these precocious little birds though, how can one be sure that it's a Black-capped? Nearly indistinguishable without an extended look or a good ear, the Black-capped Chickadee is closely related to the Carolina Chickadee. Black-capped Chickadees occupy the northern United States and much of Canada, while the Carolina



Photo by Penny Brandau

Photo by Gina Swindell



chickadee is found in the southeastern United States. Where they meet, in a narrow strip that includes northern Ohio, the two species will hybridize. That the closely-related species would interbreed is unusual, but what is interesting from a scientific standpoint is that the hybridization zone has moved northward at a rate of .7 miles per year over the last decade.

A study conducted by Cornell and Villanova universities found that this northern movement of the hybrid zone matches winter warming temperatures. Lead author Scott Taylor, a postdoctoral researcher at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, said “A lot of the time climate change doesn’t really seem tangible, but here are these common little backyard birds we all grew up with, and we’re seeing them moving northward on relatively short time scales.” Researchers found that a testing site that had been in the middle of the hybrid zone was now almost all Carolina

Chickadees and area that was Black-capped Chickadees was now filled with hybrids. They then analyzed data to determine:

“The zone of overlap occurred only in areas where the average winter low temperature was between 14 and 20 degrees Fahrenheit. . . eBird records estimated where the hybrid zone had been a decade earlier and found the same relationship with temperature existed then. The only difference was that those temperatures had shifted to the north by about seven miles since 2000.”

“The rapidity with which these changes are happening is a big deal,” Taylor said.

Black-capped Chickadees are fun and interesting—bringing energy, song and moxie to our winter birdfeeders. It’s easily one of my favorite birds. They are fun to watch, easy to interact with and ridiculously cute. They make the cold, brisk morning trips to the birdfeeders worth it!

References

Warming temperatures push chickadees northward, Cornell Chronicle

Laura’s Birding Blog

Caching, Encyclopedia of Animal Behavior

The Virtual Nature Trail at Penn State New Kingston

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Adaptive temperature regulation in the little bird in winter: predictions from a stochastic dynamic programming model

Treasurer’s Report by Molly Wilsbacher

- 1. As reported elsewhere in this newsletter, our annual Bluebird Conference is on February 29, 2020.** We are actively seeking donations for our silent auction. If you have a new or slightly used item (i.e., framed artwork, figurine, etc.) that you believe someone else might appreciate, please donate it! Feel free to bring it with you to the conference and drop it off at the silent auction table when you arrive. If you would like someone to pick up the donation, please email me OBS.Treasurer@gmail.com or another Board Member. Please keep in mind that the value of all donations can be used as a tax deduction next year. Thank you!
- 2. SAVE THE DATE: Saturday, March 6, 2021.** Yes, you read that year correctly – 2021! As many dates were already booked 18 months from now, we decided to go ahead and place a deposit with Ashland University’s Convocation Center for our conference in 2021. Please mark your digital and paper calendars now for 2/29/2020 and 3/6/2021 as you will not want to miss out on either of our fantastic conferences.
- 3. The Ohio Bluebird Society’s bank accounts currently reflect that we enjoy \$25,795 in all accounts as of November 1, 2019.** Our anticipated expenditures over the next quarter include publishing and mailing the Winter Newsletter, as well as expected expenses associated with our conference in the 1st Quarter of 2020.
- 4. Finally, it’s holiday season!!** When purchasing from Amazon, please do so from Amazon Smile (<https://smile.amazon.com>). It’s extremely easy to designate the Ohio Bluebird Society as your charitable choice and Amazon retains this information for future purchases. We receive a small percentage of all purchases made through Amazon Smile 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].

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

By Mel Bird, former OBS Board Member



I have read many articles on where to place bluebird boxes for successful occupancy, however, I am sure the bluebirds have not read these articles. On my trail these urban/suburban birds have their own location requirements that do not conform to birds out in the wilderness.

My trail of 69 boxes is located

in a development with one to two acre lots and 17 boxes are located in the small village of Milan, OH, with very small lots. I have found over the 20 plus years of monitoring this trail that bluebirds will more than likely choose a box that is placed in a location that is definitely a no no. In the following I will give several examples of such cases.

On a one- acre lot with the back yard facing a cultivated field the owner placed two boxes about 400 feet apart facing the field with a tree within 60 feet of each. However, the owner has a decorative bird house five feet from their front porch which the woodpeckers had enlarged the hole but never used. You guessed it, the bluebirds have occupied this house for the past 5 years and have raised 2 to 3 broods each year. This porch is quite active and does not appear to discourage

the nesting. This year was the first in which one of the official boxes facing the field was occupied by bluebirds. The entrance hole actually faced the porch.

In the next example, (a one- acre lot), a home owner wanted to put up two boxes so I recommended that he place one on each side yard about 350' apart with the house between them and facing out to a wide open area. His wife insisted that one house be placed next to their patio so she could see the box from her kitchen window. Yep, the bluebirds selected the box next to the patio for two years before utilizing the side yard box.

Another interesting situation is a box that was properly placed 20 years ago and was now completely covered by pine tree limbs that have grown so large that the limbs are covering the entrance hole. The EABL had to go around the limbs to get into the entrance. This box had bluebirds every year, at least one brood. Two years ago, I suggested that he cut the limbs or move the box. He moved the box about 50' to a more desirable location, needless to say for the last 2 years not one bluebird attempt. The home owner is not too happy with my recommendations.

I can give you many more examples like these. All these cases demonstrate, to me, that the bluebirds will decide where they want to build and do not follow our recommendations. I believe that suburban/urban birds have developed different housing requirements than wilderness birds. The competition is tougher and food supply is different. I have at least 3 examples of bluebirds occupying non-standard boxes, (decorative, tiny boxes) that are for yard decoration only and have had the entrance hole enlarged by squirrels or woodpeckers and qualified bluebird boxes are available within 200 feet and not being occupied. It appears that the bluebirds prefer a smaller box when they have a choice.





Ask Madame WingNut

Native Bird Populations Declining

By Paula Ziebarth



On September 19, 2019 The National Audubon Society declared a “bird emergency.” The declaration was issued as the result of a study published in Science by a joint team of conservation biologists which reported a “steady decline of nearly three billion North American birds since 1970, primarily as a result of human activities. In other words, within one human lifetime, North America lost more than one quarter of its avifauna.”

David Yarnold, president and CEO of National Audubon Society stated “The connection between birds and humans is undeniable—we share the same fate. This is a bird emergency with a clear message: the natural world humans depend on is being paved, logged, eroded and polluted. You don’t need to look hard for the metaphor: birds are the canaries in the coal mine that is the earth’s future.”

On October 10, The National Audubon Society released another report, “Survival by Degrees: Bird Species on the Brink”. This report compounded the earlier bad news, stating that two-thirds of America’s birds will be threatened with extinction if global warming exceeds 5.4 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100. According to this report, 389 out of 604 species are at risk of extinction from climate change.

This is frightening stuff. Bluebird monitors make an amazing positive difference in local native cavity nester populations, but the provision of safe housing and responsible monitoring can only accomplish so much.

This spring, I observed smaller Eastern Bluebird clutches. First nest attempts usually have 5 or 6 eggs. This spring I found a lot of first clutches with only 4 eggs and no 6 egg clutches. Fewer Eastern Bluebirds fledged overall on my trails in central Ohio. I believe birds had difficulty finding enough food for themselves and adjusted their nesting attempts accordingly. Only time will tell if this was a one year decline or a new trend.

Pesticide use and climate change wreak havoc with insect populations. Pesticides reduce insect populations outright;

fewer insects are available as food and consumption of dying insects can poison birds and/or their young. Climate change can cause insects to emerge too early when we have extended warm weather during late winter or early spring. A more seasonal cold snap then hits, disrupting insect life cycles and populations. Climate change affects the insects themselves and the vegetation they rely on for food.

Climate change also affects weather patterns. With some of the warm weather we are experiencing during late winter and early spring, birds may be lured into a false sense that early nesting is a grand idea, only to have young die of starvation or hypothermia during subsequent extended periods of cold and/or wet weather.

As native bird conservationists, we already do a lot. Every homeowner can take the initiative to have native bird friendly plants in their landscape, reduce or eliminate pesticide and herbicide use, reduce window strikes, keep cats indoors, etc. Some will take that next step also to encourage lawmakers and policy makers to conserve avian habitat throughout the world and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

As I have advanced in years (and hopefully wisdom), I have come to embrace the fact that life is a little messy. I do not have the perfect lawn because I refuse to use pesticides or herbicides. Mole tunnels, mounds and patches of dead grass can be found in my yard. There are bird droppings under the nests of native birds I encourage to nest with me, often on my front porch (which causes my husband great angst). Insects are welcome in my yard and so are the birds. I have also come to realize that my yard is not MY yard at all. It belongs to the insects and birds that make it their home. I can try to be a good steward of my little corner of the globe while I am here and hopefully the birds will be here long after I am gone.

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.



Member News

Thank You to Our Donors

General Donations

Jean Krafft
Carolyn & Donald Mehl
Terry Meloy
Janice C. Petko
Jean Rutan

Welcome New Members

Steve Craiger
Sherry Daugherty
Carolyn & Donald Mehl
Brenda Meyer
Milan Garden Club

OBS is a proud affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society and would like to promote the national conference for NABS on March 11-15, 2020 in Kearney, Nebraska. Follow this link for details and registration information: nabluebirdsociety.org/conference

Legacy Boxes are a unique and thoughtful way to commemorate or honor loved ones on birthdays, anniversaries, or holidays. The OBS website gives details about this wonderful program at ohiobluebirdsociety.org/about/obs-legacy-program

A Reminder to Submit Your Data

A reminder to bluebird monitors to submit 2019 nesting data to the Ohio Bluebird Society. Here is the link with the form and instructions: ohiobluebirdsociety.org/about-bluebirds/fledgling-report-2

President's Report – November 2019 By Mike Watson

In the Fall 2019 issue of The Monitor, I noted that mid-season bluebird and tree swallow fledgling numbers were substantially lower than average (15-20% below average) here at the Holden Arboretum. This was due to the cool, wet spring in northeast Ohio which delayed nesting activity. I'm happy to say that nesting activity in July and August made up for that delay and our year-end fledgling totals appear to be right on average (data entry is ongoing).

It'll be interesting to see how bluebirds fared across the state. Many of you have already submitted your nest box reports (thank you!) – for those who have not, please remember to share your numbers so we have a better idea how these populations are doing. For now, reports must be emailed (to ohiobluebirdsociety@gmail.com) or mailed to OBS at the Holden address. We are still working on the online data entry interface, but the data volume makes this complicated. We're not sure if the system will be up and running this year, but we're working on it.

Related to that – we're happy to announce that the new OBS website went live in early October. Please take some time to explore the new site; as always, we welcome your

feedback. And please note that the link to register for the 2020 conference is live on the new website.

The board is busily planning for that conference – once again led by Darlene Sillick. We'll return to Ashland with a slate of excellent presenters who will address a wide range of native cavity nesting species (with a focus on bluebirds, of course). Look for more information in this issue of The Monitor and updates on the website.

As we approach the end of 2019, please keep in mind that we will accept nominations for the Blue Feather and Wildlife Conservation Awards until December 31. The Awards section of the website describes both awards and has a link to download the nomination materials.

Finally, the OBS board consists of 9 Trustees, each on a 3-year term, limited to 2 terms. In 2020, we will be replacing one Trustee. If you are interested or know of someone who might be interested in joining the board. Please reach out to me or one of the other board members.

Thanks for all you do to support and protect bluebirds and the other native cavity nesting species in Ohio.

"Between being trapped in a chimney, accidentally getting caught in a sparrow trap, the neighboring kestrels making daily flyovers, feral cats roaming the neighborhood, and incessant House Sparrow influxes, these bluebirds deal with a lot but have still graced me with their presence every year in the same nestbox for nearly 8 years without fail. They aren't rare, but they're mine. This morning, I'm thankful."

I digiscoped the photo at my dad's house in Vinton County this morning (10/28).

Alex Eberts

Alex studied Zoology at OSU and graduated in 2016. He bands birds for Black Swamp Bird Observatory and helps students at OSU with their bluebird trails at Chadwick and Waterman Farms. He loves working at his dad's home in Vinton County where they have nesting birds and also their beloved Purple Martins.



Ohio Bluebird Society Annual Conference – February 29, 2020

By Darlene Sillick, OBS Trustee and Area Contac



We are excited to announce the next OBS conference! Our theme is “Let’s Open the Box”. We might be a bluebird society but our mission statement supports all native cavity nesters.

We will be meeting again at the Ashland University in Ashland, Ohio. It is a wonderful space for our annual conference and is central for our members and guests to meet and

learn more about bluebirds and other cavity nesters. What happens when you open the nestbox? Do you sometimes wonder what or who has moved in? Do you understand the complexity with a variety of native species and their varied habitats? Do you want to learn from others in the field? This is a great day to learn from our knowledgeable speakers and visit bluebirders statewide and of all ages.

Inside our newsletter and on our new OBS website is our line up for next year. You will see the newly designed logo from Ohio Young Birders Club member Anna Rose. Anna is amazing with her art and conservation efforts and will be the emcee for our next conference. She is so excited to be back and support OBS. Our president, Mike Watson, will start the annual meeting at 8:30 and welcome everyone to a big day of speakers and new and old friends.

At 9 am, Michael Kreger, the Columbus Zoo’s Vice President of Conservation, will talk about starting with just one nestbox in your backyard and how it can lead to helping worldwide conservation efforts.

Some of our other speakers are our own Bethany Gray, area contact in Clark and Greene Counties, and a champion in her community working with schools and setting up trails. She will talk to us about bluebirds.

We are also eager to hear Chris Tonra, Ph.D., He is an Ohio State University professor who is doing research on Prothonotary warblers. His work and research have given some answers to their wintering whereabouts.

Becky Crow is a wildlife rehabilitator and educator from Brukner Nature Center. Do you know what to do if you find an injured or orphaned bluebird or tree swallow? Do you know what some of the laws allow or don’t allow? We will be delighted to hear Becky’s talk.

Matthew Shumar is the program coordinator of Ohio Bird Conservation Initiative and heads up Lights Out all around



Ohio. He will be talking about what you can do in your backyard to make it better for birds and pollinators.

Joseph Lautenbach, wildlife biologist with ODNR Division of Wildlife, will talk about Barn Owls and how they are doing in Ohio.

Judy Semroc, OBS trustee and Conservation Specialist with the Cleveland Natural History Museum, is an expert on Chimney Swifts and how you can help this declining species.

Donald Althoff, professor at the University of Rio Grande, will talk about his research with Flying Squirrels. They are the most common squirrel in Ohio. I have seen them around Ohio and even in my nestboxes in central Ohio. He has also worked with other native cavity nesting species.

Our biggest fundraiser of the year is the Silent Auction. If you have something to donate please reach out to Molly Wilsbacher, OBS treasurer. Again, this year we are inviting vendors and/or sponsors to set up an educational display for you to visit on breaks or over lunch.

We ask that you register early as we cannot take walk-ins the day of the conference. Visit our new OBS website for more information. We have a reserved block of rooms at the Holiday Inn Express. Mention OBS conference when you make your reservations. The annual conference costs include coffee and lunch and event registration. We are looking for sponsors. Please reach out to Darlene Sillick or Mike Watson if you want to learn more. A highlight is the awards and so is seeing old friends and meeting new bluebirders. We look forward to seeing you February 29, 2020 at the John C. Myers Convocation Center in Ashland from 8:30am- 4:30pm!



OHIO BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Let's Open the Box!

February 29, 2020

SPEAKERS

Michael Kreger	VP Conservation, Columbus Zoo
Bethany Gray	Bringing Back the Bluebirds
Chris Tonra	Prothonotary Warblers
Judy Semroc	Chimney Swifts
Matt Shumar	Conservation and back yard ...
Joseph Lautenbach	Barn Owls in Ohio
Becky Crow	Rehabilitation and Bluebirds
Don Althoff	Flying Squirrels and more

LUNCH HOUR BREAK

Silent Auction – Our biggest fundraiser!
Educational table demonstrations and posters
OBS display table – traps and boxes for sale
Area Contacts session



Original artwork by Anna Rose, OYBC

CONFERENCE LOCATION & TIME

Check-In: 8:00am

OBS Annual Members Meeting: 8:30 - 9:00am.

Conference: 9:00am – 4:30pm

Non-members plan to arrive by 9:00am main conference start time

Ashland University

John C Myers Convocation Center

638 Jefferson Street, Ashland, Ohio, 44805

COST

\$25 OBS member, \$35 non-OBS member, \$15 student (21 and younger)

Includes Conference and Lunch (please pre-register using attached registration form) (No Walk-ins)

- **Registration Deadline: February 19, 2020 Register Online at <https://ohiobluebirdsociety.org/conference/>**
- **Or Mail to: Pat Dutton, OBS Membership Chair, 7747 Township Road 103, Millersburg, OH 44654**

Awards, displays, silent auction and much more!

Visit our website for more information and to see program updates!

<https://www.ohiobluebirdsociety.org/>

THANK YOU SPONSORS!





OHIO BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Let's Open the Box!

February 29, 2020

REGISTRATION FORM

Registration Deadline: February 19, 2020

Register Online at <https://ohiobluebirdsociety.org/conference/>

(please pre-register, space is limited, NO Walk-ins)

Name: _____ OBS Member? YES / NO
Organization: _____
Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
E-mail: _____ Phone: _____

I AM REGISTERING AS

_____ OBS Member (\$25) _____ Non-OBS Member (\$35) _____ Student – 21 and younger (\$15)

MAIL REGISTRATION

Pat Dutton, OBS Membership Chair
7747 Township Road 103
Millersburg, OH 44654
OBSMembershipchair@gmail.com

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO

OBS or register online!

LUNCH SELECTION

Name on Name Tag: _____

Check Lunch Choice:

- ___ Smoked Turkey and Gouda
- ___ Roast Beef and Boursin
- ___ Ham and Swiss
- ___ Gluten-Free sandwich
- ___ Vegetarian Wrap

Please bring your own reusable coffee/tea or water container to help the planet and our goal of a zero waste conference!!



Photos by Katelyn Shelton
OYBC Junior



THANK YOU SPONSORS!



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

OBS Area Contacts (as of May 2019)

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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

Continued from page 9

The 2019 nesting season included an additional 4 jars this year, since there were two monitors (Lloyd Marshall and Steve Craiger). The results for the nine years of the program are shown in the following chart:

The chart shows we are increasing the population of birds in the nest jars. We have no way of knowing if the population is growing at the lake or if we are just providing more convenient housing and the birds are choosing this over nesting in cavities in the trees, their natural home. There is also no way of determining if any birds are returning from previous years or are changing partners since we don't do any banding.

The area only involves a small portion of the lake, 12%, which leaves plenty of territory for more nesting jars. There are two volunteers doing the project with no university association or nature organizations/agencies behind the project. I have been doing the cavity nesting project with some volunteer help at Mosquito Lake. The cavity nesting volunteers are aging and I would like to see a more formalized group with banding capabilities. With good leadership and direction, this would be a great educational opportunity for high school or college students.

