



Bluebird Monitor

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

Fall 2016



Fencepost-nesting bluebirds

By Jim McCormac



In the days of yore, Eastern Bluebirds nested primarily in cavities of dead and dying trees, either those formed naturally, or holes created by woodpeckers. Occasionally rogue bluebirds will do something very different. Alexander Sprunt, Jr. published a note in Volume 63 (1946) of the Auk, describing a pair of bluebirds that had built and saddled a cup nest to the horizontal limb of an oak in Clemson, South Carolina. The only

Eastern Bluebird population outside of the core eastern North American (including Mexico and Central America) range is on the island of Bermuda – nearly 700 miles east of North Carolina. Bermudan bluebirds have also been documented building open cup nests in shrubs and trees. Other atypical nests sites include the innards of an electrical junction box, under the eaves of buildings, and in hanging flowerpots. A personal favorite in the weird bluebird nest site category is the pair that appropriated a Cliff Swallow nest in New York, as described by Ralph Preston in Volume 55 (1938) of the Auk. These are but interesting outliers – the vast majority of bluebirds nest in cavities in wood, although most sites are now artificial.

Following the conquest of North America by Europeans, enormous and rapid changes to the landscape were wrought, much of which benefited bluebirds. As pasture land expanded, so did the fences that hemmed in cattle. Old-school fences were typically strung on wooden fence posts, and as these posts aged, cavities often formed in the punky wood. Such holey posts were ideal for bluebird nests, and at one time were an important source of nest sites. Eventually steel posts largely replaced the wooden ones, and the thrushes lost an important albeit accidental nesting structure. Fortunately, bluebirders such as the readers of this journal have since erected mountains of nest boxes, negating the loss of bluebird-friendly fence posts.



Nowadays, it is not common – at least in my experience – to encounter bluebirds using old fence posts for nest sites. Thus, Saturday, June 18 was a notable day. I was co-leading a field trip near the Wilds in Muskingum County as part of an Ohio Ornithological Society grassland bird workshop. Fortunately for the group, past Ohio Bluebird Society president Doug LaVasseur was along. While birding an idyllic gravel country lane skirted by old-style wooden fence posts hung with barbed wire, Doug spotted an active bluebird nest within a post. Not long after, I found another post nest less than one-quarter mile away. For a photographer like me, the situation was perfect: seldom used road, picturesque backdrops, and perfect morning light. As the duties involving the group precluded photography, I resolved to return.

I was back at first light the following Friday. In addition to obtaining nice images of the post-nesting bluebirds, I greatly

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enjoyed spending several hours watching their comings and goings. The nest that I chose to photograph had recently hatched chicks, and the adults brought in food regularly. The fare was varied: crickets, many caterpillars, some periodical cicadas, even a huge female twelve-spotted skimmer dragonfly! To minimize disturbance, I parked a ways down the road, and set up my tripod and telephoto lens in the roadside grasses about 50 feet away. My tripod chair was nestled in the vegetation, and a remote shutter release allowed me to trigger the camera from the chair when a bird neared the nest.

While watching and photographing the bluebirds was my main mission, it was rewarding to observe the other wildlife in this pastoral landscape. Bobolinks created gurgling mechanical R2-

D2 songs. Several Dickcissels stuttered out their songs down the road. A Blue Grosbeak delivered its rich warbled melody from a telephone line. Yellow-breasted Chats hooted and squawked from shrubby copses. Both Black-billed and Yellow-billed cuckoos gave their junglelike calls from nearby woodlands. At one point, something small moved through the grasses near my chair. As I wondered what was rippling the vegetation, a long-tailed weasel suddenly popped from the weeds to regard me with keen eyes from a few feet away!

Spending time in this spot was akin to being teleported back to the age of pre-industrial agriculture, and the bluebirds in their old-fashioned wooden fence posts were a big part of the experience.

Birth of the Blues: A Short History of OBS

Part 1, By Dick Tuttle

We (Bob Orthwein and Dick Tuttle) were at the first Malabar Farm State Park Bluebird Sunday planned by Reid and Teresa Caldwell in 1982. During the 1980's Bluebird Sunday became an annual event and Bob's pictures and expertise "hatched" many bluebirders. Follow up dinners at the Quaker Inn, with the Caldwells, Jim Hieser, and Don and Diana Plant were good times. A Barn Owl box for Jim's barn and one for Malabar barn were conceived at these gatherings. And when Reid and Teresa founded the Ohio Bluebird Society, Bob was their strongest supporter. Since then, whenever he could, Bob attended OBS board meetings until his passing on June 10, 1999.

Part 2 : OBS First Statewide Meeting, By Reid and Teresa Caldwell

Reprinted from the Bluebird Monitor Winter/ Spring 1988 issue

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

On tap was a full day of bluebird programming highlighted by informative presentations on the effective conservation of our native cavity nesters. This was followed by demonstrations on bluebird box building and mounting techniques including many tips for successful trail management. After an exciting open forum where participants shared some of their experiences in

bluebird fostering, the meeting concluded with some discussions concerning the development of goals and strategies for guiding this new society. Even though we ran out of time before we did ideas, much was accomplished and the meeting was unquestionably a rousing success. The OBS had finally fledged! If there were ever any doubts as to whether the bluebirders in Ohio were ready for their own society, then those doubts were certainly laid to rest that day last autumn in Mt. Vernon.

Part 3, By Dean Sheldon

According to Webster, the word "germ" means "the rudimentary form from which a new organism is developed." And so it has been for OBS.

In the beginning, the germ/concept was developed at the kitchen table in the farm home of Reid and Teresa Caldwell adjacent to Malabar Farm State Park in Richland County. At that time, Reid was a Ranger at the park; Teresa served as Park Naturalist. It was they who made the Bluebird Sunday at Malabar Farm into an extremely successful public program. In addition, Teresa conducted many bluebird workshops in the basement of the Big House at the farm. The popularity of Bluebird Sunday brought together a group of bluebirders, meeting informally, at Quaker Inn which is adjacent to Malabar. It was there that mere concepts began to develop into a productive organization.

From Malabar, the Caldwells moved on to Stroud's Run State Park (near Athens) where Reid became Park Manager and Teresa joined the staff of the Athens SWCD as Conservation Education Coordinator.

It was from their Athens Country kitchen table that the processes and communications took place which really led to the creation of the Ohio Bluebird Society.



Getting in Touch with an OBS Trustee, Dale Rabung

Bluebird trades in flying for teaching at Raptor Center

By Bob Finnan

Reprinted with permission from the *Medina Gazette*

Two years ago, Dale Rabung received a call from a Medina family who had found an Eastern bluebird in its driveway. The young male bird had been hit by a car.

Rabung, a member of the Ohio Bluebird Society since 1987, told the Fralick family to take the bird to Laura Jordan of the Medina Raptor Center.

“(Jordan) took the bird to a veterinarian and his wing was badly damaged,” Rabung said.

After about a year’s rehabilitation, Jordan called Rabung and told him the bluebird was ready to be released.

Rabung was going to set the bluebird loose at Bunker Hill Golf Course where he has built 13 nest boxes. He kept the family informed on the bird’s progress.

“I called (Amy Fralick) and asked if she wanted to go with me to release the bluebird,” he said. “She got so excited.”

Their plan was aborted when they discovered the bluebird wasn’t able to fly well enough on its own.

“He couldn’t fly up,” Jordan said. “With the amount of predators in one’s backyard, he wasn’t going to make it.”

The bluebird’s inability to fly opened up a new door.

“He became an educational bird,” Jordan said.

Jordan said the bird they call Blue is one of 21 educational birds at the Raptor Center.

“He can be enjoyed by other people,” she said. “He stays in the cage.”

Jordan said he’s mostly an “insectivore” and eats meal worms and wax worms. She also whips up his favorite snack — a special peanut butter mix.

“He loves that,” she said.

Rabung does bluebird seminars for grade schools and civic groups and has participated in the Medina County Park District’s Earth Day celebration since its inception.

Rabung, a retired insurance agent who lives in Medina, gave an exhibition Thursday to fifth-graders at Eliza Northrop Elementary School, 950 E. Reagan Parkway, Medina.

Knowing that Henry and Amy Fralick attended school there, he stopped at the Raptor Center and brought Blue with him. Henry, a second-grader, and Amy, in third grade, were excited to be reunited with the bird.

Not to be confused with blue jays — which are a different genus and species — bluebirds are native to the eastern part of the United States and are part of the thrush family. Predators of bluebirds include snakes, cats and raccoons. The birds usually have a three- to four-year lifespan. Jordan estimated Blue’s age to be about 2½ years. Researchers say the birds can live six to 10 years.





Blue Feather Award Recipients *Then and Now*

Foreword: The following article was originally published in the Summer 2003 issue of the Bluebird Monitor and describes a very special early member of the Ohio Bluebird Society, Arlene Kunkel. Arlene was at the first gathering in Mount Vernon leading toward the creation of OBS. She was the very first recipient of the Blue Feather Award. And (as of our most recent conference in Ashland), she was the first OBS member to be selected as a Legacy Ohio Bluebirder with an engraved plate mounted on an active bluebird box... the box to be tended and monitored in her honor.

Arlene Kunkel 1910-2003

The moment Arlene Kunkel entered the room was a signal event in my life. There she was, with her wicker picnic basket in hand. And she just plain “glowed.” The warmth of her radiant smile flowed over the whole group assembled that day for the charter meeting of our new Ohio bluebird group. It was a warm October day in 1987 and we were in Mount Vernon.

Funny how some dates and situations remain constant in one's mind....maybe it was the picnic basket with the checkered gingham cloth tucked in all around. Maybe it was the warmth and beauty of her simple presence... her lovely smile. But, whatever it was, it was felt by everyone on that memorable day... and that same presence has continued to abide within the Ohio Bluebird Society ever since.

For years, her special spark and sparkle kindled the efforts of the North Liberty Garden Club as it maintained a marvelous bluebird trail in Knox County. “Now this is the way we do it,” she would say. “Boxes up in the last of winter to catch the early arrivals... down in the fall...cleaned and scrubbed and stored for the winter months... and right up again after the snows leave.” That wonderful glow...that warmth...that smile moved that group along as well.

And of course, it wasn't just bluebirds either. She loved all birds. Years ago, we spent a cold, misty spring morning together at Knox Lake on a birding trip put together by the folks at the Mohican Outdoor School. The focal point of that outing was a pontoon boat trip to the Great Blue Heron rookery which was situated at one end of the lake. Hundreds of dead trees in the shallow water provided the scaffolding for the communal nesting platforms of the heron colony.

Arlene was late...she missed the boat...and she sought us out as she drove around the lake in her automobile. From the boat, we all saw her, glow in tow, standing on a boat dock... picnic

hamper in hand...waving a warm greeting to us all. We pulled up to the dock, eased her on board and continued on with our exploration. It was a happy time.

On yet another lovely October afternoon in 1991 at Dawes Arboretum, Arlene was presented with the very first Blue Feather Award by the Ohio Bluebird Society for her leadership in bluebird conservation... and she had already been bluebirding for thirty years at that time. In a very real sense, Arlene is honored, annually, by the Society as it continues to recognize others who have made their unique contributions to bluebirding in Ohio. The glowing spirit of Arlene Kunkel is an inherent part of that award.

Everything seemed to brighten up when she arrived at the Ankenytown Cemetery (next to the Owl Creek Church) on that perfect May afternoon. The iris, the poppies, the columbine, the lupines and all of the pasture flowers in the hayfield next door were at their most brilliant best... and the Bobolinks exploded from the tall grasses and gurgled as never before. And why not? Life had a new meaning for all of them. A new light...a new glow had been brought especially to them. And, the best part...that light, that warmth, that glow will continue to illuminate the lives of all of us who knew her as no other light, save One, could.

And beyond all of that... no matter how long the bluebird meeting ran... Arlene would have been more than willing, empty wicker basket in hand to “talk your ear off” about...hostas. Is that a life lived?

Bless her and bless us all who were privileged to know her... and bless all of those whose lives will be richer because we were the lucky ones.

“We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.”

– Winston Churchill

Submitted by Dean Sheldon

Tom Barber – Blue Feather Award Recipient 2016

Thirty two years ago Tom Barber was first inspired to help bluebirds survive and he has been an avid Bluebird person ever since. In 1983 he placed his first nest box on a tree next to the woods in back of his yard. Unfortunately it failed to produce Bluebirds but that did not impair his new found enthusiasm.

Tom heard that our own Doug LaVasseur was giving a presentation and slide show at the Guernsey County Library entitled “Where have all the Bluebirds Gone?” Tom attended and participated in the question and answer session following the presentation. Thus, his addiction to Bluebirds began and continues to this day.

The following year, 1984, he installed two nest boxes in his yard and 2 at the elementary school where he was a teacher. These 4 boxes fledged 23 Bluebirds. This inspired Tom to bring Bluebirds into the classroom science class which he taught. He brought bluebird pellets and owl pellets into the classroom for his students to dissect to determine what they had been eating. Another teacher at the school became involved. The children were so interested that Tom invited Doug to visit the classroom and teach them more about bluebirds. They also constructed nest boxes so that each student had his own box. One young lad was so inspired that he eventually became a veterinarian.

Currently Tom is mentoring a young lady who has expressed interest in becoming an Ornithologist. The 4 starting nestboxes have now grown to a trail of 57 active nest boxes. Now retired, Tom monitors his trail weekly during the nesting season and maintains excellent records. To date Tom has fledged 4944 Bluebirds and 1158 Tree Swallows with a success rate of 2.76 per successful nesting.

Helping Bluebirds survive became such a passion that Tom felt compelled to tell others about Bluebirds. He became the OBS County Coordinator for Guernsey County and began doing seminars with talks and displays and slides. He also did programs in Muskingum County which had no County Coordinator. Joe Huber and Doug Lavasseur were involved in his presentations. Some presentations he did include the following:

1. The Kennedy Stone House- Salt Fork Park in Guernsey County. Program for students in grades 3 through 6.
2. Zanesville Soil and Conservation District Nature Center. Tom did a presentation and slide show.
3. Tom assisted a young lady, Caylee Olivier, with her 4H project on Birds by assisting her with a nest box and information for her presentation.
4. At Tunis Far, Zanesville, Ohio Tom was the speaker in a 200 year old barn dedication.
5. Privately Tom is constantly promoting Bluebirds. He is a member of ABCA (American Birding Conservation Association) where he also submits his annual report and is a frequent nest box donor to prospective birders.
6. Tom Barber, Joe Huber, and Danny Engle put together a 3 hour program about Henslow Sparrows, House Sparrows and Bluebirds. This program had 60 attendees.

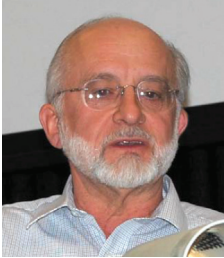
Another of Tom’s accomplishments is the articles he has written about Bluebirds. NABS has published in their Sialia journals five articles he has written. “One Box can Make a Difference” is the title of the article he wrote 32 years ago when his bluebird addiction began. Tom’s one box has certainly made a difference to him personally and to many, many others in the past 32 years! Congratulations on being the 2016 Blue Feather Award recipient Tom! Thank you!

Mel Bolt nominated Tom Barber for the Blue Feather Award and helped present it to Tom at the 2016 OBS conference in Ashland, Ohio.



The 2016 Alum Creek Prothonotary Warbler Project

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



Disappointment, success, and new ideas made my efforts to help golden swamp warblers challenging in 2016. As I have reported before, my project of 45 nestjars and nestboxes is located in Alum Creek Lake along its northern and western shores opposite Hogback Road in Delaware County southeast of the small village of Kilbourne. Pipe

posts stand in the lake all year while nestboxes are mounted on five-foot-long sleeves made from 1-1/4-inch water pipe and are stored at my home in-between nesting seasons. In most cases, nestboxes with 1-1/8" openings for warblers are paired at least five yards from nestboxes with 1-3/8" entrances for Tree Swallows. As swallows guard their own nests from egg-piercing House Wrens, they inadvertently protect prothonotary nests at the same time. At least, that is my wildlife management objective.

Five warbler nests successfully raised 20 fledglings after seven nests started with 26 eggs. All nestlings fledged wearing U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service aluminum leg bands. All successful warbler nests had nesting Tree Swallow neighbors and House Wrens caused two other nests to fail. One warbler nest failed after a successful swallow family left the area.

Most disappointing was that no warbler eggs were laid past June 30 and that nest fell victim to wrens. In 2013, warblers laid initial eggs for three nests on July 11, 12 and 14, respectively, but only the latest nest became successful. I waited past mid-July this year before I started pulling boxes to store them for the winter.

The earliest warbler egg appeared on May 15. The latest first-egg for a productive nest was laid on June 1, and that nest was great news since it occurred in an experimental nestjar made to exclude predatory woodpeckers. In 2016, prothonotary nests were active with eggs or nestlings for 47 days from May 15 through June 1. The 2013 season was nearly twice as long at 92 days from May 7 through August 9. Since 2013, I have offered prothonotaries four experimental nestjars that are designed to stop Red-bellied and Red-headed Woodpeckers from leaning into nest chambers. Both woodpecker species use their barbed tongues to spear eggs and nestlings of other birds so they can have an avian feast for themselves and their young. At Alum Creek, all of my anti-

woodpecker nestjars are fitted with "1-1/2 inch male adapter fittings (plumbing terms)" with enough 1-1/2" PVC water pipe glued in place so that a 2-1/2 inch tunnel sticks out from the nest chamber after being glued in place with epoxy. Each fitting offers a tunnel 1-1/2 inches wide on the inside and I smear epoxy unevenly to the tunnel floor to promote traction for the birds. For two of the four jars, I made flat plastic restrictors with 1-1/8" openings and 1-1/2" diameters, and I glued them to tunnel ends to create smaller entrances, and it was one of these nestjars that produced three warbler fledglings this year. (See the photo below.)

I point all boxes intended for swallows toward the lake since they approach their boxes from open water. In the past, I might have inadvertently encouraged wrens by pointing warbler boxes toward the forested shore, thinking that warblers would be approaching nestboxes from the land rather than the lake. If I continue my project next year, I will point all boxes toward the lake until I band warbler nestlings, then I will aim their boxes so nestlings will be able to see land before their first flight.

As I write this report at the end of July, 11 boxes still stand in the lake. Six hold wren eggs or nestlings, a Tree Swallow family occupies one, a complete prothonotary nest keeps my



hopes up in another box, two boxes are empty, and a clutch of bluebird eggs awaits hatching.

If the last three Tree Swallow nestlings fledge, then their season will have been 80 days long from the first egg on May 7 to the last fledging on July 25. Swallows attempted 24 nests and 20 (83.3%) raised young. Swallows laid 120 eggs, 85 (70.8%) hatched and 83 (69.2%) fledged. Most astounding, 97.6% of hatchlings grew to fledge.

At this time, wrens are still developing in six nests, but I can say that only one nest has failed after 12 attempts. Thirty-nine wrens have fledged and 24 more are possible. I obey the law and will pull boxes only after families fledge, but if I

did not pull boxes after the prothonotary/swallow seasons, wrens would add more nests to fledge young into the first days of September.

The growing popularity of kayaks and canoes dampens my desire to move boxes further out from the brushy shore. Nonetheless, that is a reality that I must live with. I would like to learn how far prothonotaries will nest from shore but the gamble is not worth it since a glancing blow from a boat will shatter eggs.

My effort to raise golden swamp warblers at Alum Creek Lake remains a physical challenge, but one that is worth it.

Paddle and conserve on!

Tips for Talks About Bluebirds

By Carrie Elvey, OBS trustee

If you are reading this newsletter, it's a pretty safe bet that you love bluebirds. It's also a safe bet that you want to share that passion with others and encourage them to take up the bluebird banner. Talking to a group at a library or school is different than talking to your friends over a cup of tea. Here are a few simple pointers to help you create and offer a quality program to the public.

- 1) **Decide on the theme of your program** – will you talk about bluebird life history, putting up bluebird boxes, or monitoring an existing trail? You can't cover everything you know about bluebirds in one program, so don't try. Some examples might include - from most basic to more advanced:

How Citizens Saved the Bluebird – a look at the history of bluebird conservation

Getting Started with Bluebirds – discover the wonderful world of bluebirds and learn what you can do to help them in your own backyard

Backyard Bluebird Boxes – learn the specifics of putting up a bluebird box in your own yard – discover the types of boxes, location, predator guards, and

Creating a Bluebird Trail – move beyond the single backyard box and create a bluebird trail

Monitoring Your Bluebird Boxes – learn about the predators and parasites that can plague a bluebird box and how to deal with these issues

Remember, these are just suggestions – just don't try to cover it all, in-depth, in one program!

- 2) **Keep it under an hour** – including time for questions. Participant will get restless if you go longer. If you are doing a full or half day workshop, be sure to give breaks every hour.
- 3) **Don't use too many slides.** We know you love your bluebirds, but remember it is easy to overshare! A good rule of thumbs is no more than 30 slides for a 1 hour program. That's less than 2 minutes of talking per slide. If you have too many slides, don't try to cram 20 slides into the last 5 minutes!
- 4) **Don't tell too many personal stories.** It is okay to tell people why you are passionate about bluebirds, but don't overdo it. People came to learn about bluebirds, not hear your life story. Only use personal anecdotes to highlight a specific point. Example – “When I was first starting I made the mistake of not monitoring my boxes, and lost 5 nests to sparrows. Don't let this happen to you – monitor your boxes from day one.”
- 5) **Make sure your slides/powerpoints are legible and the photos are of good quality.** You may be tempted to use a photo you took, even if it is fuzzy. Don't. With the wonderful resources on the internet – including the Ohio Bluebird Society and NABS sites – there's no excuse to use bad photos. If you have text on your slides, keep it to the key points – don't add everything you will say. Too many words are distracting.
- 6) **Relax!** You know more about bluebirds than your audience – that's why they are coming to your program.

To help get you started, we have created a 25-slide powerpoint and script that is available for download on the OBS website. Feel free to use it in its entirety or use it as a base and add your own photos.



Member News

"Sometimes you belong so you can give, not just receive. The membership dues to OBS allow us to do so much to help birds, our communities and ultimately ourselves."

~ Chuck Jakubchak

Welcome to New Members

Patricia & Siegfried Kurz

Steve and Linda Rath

Gareth Ridout

Mr. & Mrs. Andrew M. Troyer

Thank You to Our Donors

L. David Mirkin, M.D. – \$300

Jordan and Bethany Gray – \$10

Patricia A. Soehnlen – \$30

Jim Mueller – \$50

Charles and Bernadette Bonsell – \$10

Mr. and Mrs. Siegfried Kurz – \$10

The Greater Mohican Audubon Society made a Legacy Fund gift of \$125 in memorial to Irvin R. Oslin, Sr.

Amazon Smile

With the holiday shopping focus in the weeks ahead please remember that you can help OBS whenever you purchase on Amazon. Simply sign up to purchase through Amazon Smile instead and designate the Ohio Bluebird Society as your charitable choice. A portion of your purchase will be given to OBS and won't cost you anything – what a deal!

OBS 2017 Conference

The OBS Conference will be held next year on March 4, 2017 at the Ashland University Convocation Center. Since OBS will be celebrating our 30 year anniversary please plan to attend and help us celebrate! Mark your calendars now!

OBS Annual Meeting 2016

The annual business meeting of the Ohio Bluebird Society voting members will be held on Saturday Oct. 1, 2016 at the Wilderness Center, Wilmot, Ohio from 11:00 to 12:00. The meeting will include the election of new Trustees, Treasurers Report, membership report and applicable committee reports. Please plan to attend this important meeting. The annual members business meeting will be followed by a meeting of the board of trustees and officers for the election of new OBS officers.

According to the current OBS bylaws all active members of OBS can vote by ballot for trustees either in person at the annual meeting (held this year on Oct. 1) or by mailed-in ballot prior to the opening of that meeting. If you chose to vote by mailing in your ballot it must be placed in a sealed envelope with a legible return name and address. The envelope should be addressed as follows: "Election, 2016" followed by "OBS PMB 111, 343 W. Milltown Rd., Wooster, OH 44691-7214"

The ballot to be used for mailed in votes is shown below. Simply fill out and mail this or vote in person at the meeting on October 1.

OBS ANNUAL ELECTION FOR THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES – 2016

I hereby cast this ballot for the candidates listed as nominees in this issue of the Bluebird Monitor as follows:

____ I vote for both candidates for the trustee positions

____ I vote for only the following candidate:

Candidate: _____

Signed: _____

Print: _____

Date: _____

NOMINEES FOR OBS TRUSTEES



PATRICIA DUTTON

Nominated by Carrie Elvey, Patricia Dutton is an avid nature enthusiast and has a special interest in Bluebirds. She is a graduate of the College of Wooster, Wooster, Ohio, and since retirement has pursued certifications through the Ohio State University Extension service. She has completed certification for the Ohio

Certified Volunteer Naturalist program and is in the process of completing certifications as a Master Gardener Volunteer and Pollinator Specialist Volunteer.

Her working career was in Manufacturing with the last position being Inventory Manager at Akron Brass, Wooster, Ohio from which she retired in 2008.

Since retiring, she has pursued her interest in the natural world by volunteering at The Wilderness Center as a docent and with an after school Explorers program sponsored by the Fredericksburg Library for fourth through sixth grade students. She has presented several nature programs to elementary age school children. In addition to presentations she has volunteered at Shreve Migration Sensation and programs for children at various venues focused on the natural world.

In the past, she served as a community volunteer for the United Way Campaign Allocations Committee for Wayne and Holmes County, visiting the various community programs that the campaign supports and allocating funds by reviewing measurable program outcomes.

She is currently a board member for Ohio Designer Craftsman, a 501 c 3, organization focused on promoting quality craftsmanship throughout the state of Ohio and surrounding states. She started as an Area Representative in 2008 and is currently a Trustee.

Her interest in bluebirds has led to the establishment of an eighteen box bluebird trail on her property. The trail is monitored and the statistics are reported to Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Her outdoor activities also include maintenance of perennial gardens, a small outdoor railroad garden along with an herb and vegetable garden.



MEL BIRD

Dean Sheldon nominated Mel Bird for a OBS trustee position and writes the following about him: "I last saw Mel and his wife Mona, at the most recent conference of OBS at Ashland College. Both of the Birds have an extraordinary interest in bluebirding. They maintain a trail of more than 40 boxes in a residential

area near Edison High School on SR 113 just east of Milan in Erie County. They have been very successful in their efforts and have maintained detailed records of their work.

Mel is a box builder and has been successful with experimenting with many different nest box designs. Based on my long-standing OBS experience, I would say that it would be hard to find anyone who could do a better job on the board than Mel would.

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

OBS Board Changes

Ohio Bluebird Society has been very fortunate to have had the leadership of Jay Brindo as President for the past two years. His term ended in July and he decided to step down from the board and officer position at that time.

Vice President Mike Watson is assuming leadership of OBS in the interim. We thank both of these leaders for their unselfish and dedicated work on behalf of OBS and wish the best for Jay in his future bluebirding endeavors!



House Sparrow Control Myths

By Kathy Freeze, Licking MO

Reprinted with permission from *Purple Martin Update* 22(3) Summer 2013



Since 2007, I've hosted Purple Martins, chickadees, bluebirds, Tufted Titmice and Tree Swallows on my 23 acres in Licking, MO. I currently host 75 pairs of martins. In my years of hosting all these birds, I've become acutely aware of the damage that European Starlings and House Sparrows (HOSP) can inflict on our native birds, not just from the research I've done, but also from the

up-close and personal encounters I've had in dealing with the aftermath.

Starlings are much easier to deal with than HOSP because of the use of starling-resistant entrance holes (SREH) for Purple Martin housing and the fact that the entrance holes on bluebird and other nest boxes are small enough that a starling cannot enter. Unlike starlings, however, HOSP can enter any entrance hole larger than approximately 1.25". It has been painful dealing with dead and injured Tree Swallow nestlings, broken bluebird and Purple Martin eggs and watching the narrow escapes of both adult chickadees and bluebirds from certain death by a male HOSP determined to steal their nest boxes.

I've learned to shoot and trap them very effectively and have worked with the 60+ Purple Martin and bluebird landlords that I mentor to eliminate HOSP from their yards so the native birds could nest safely. During the course of having to deal with HOSP in different environments and varying circumstances with numerous landlords with different opinions on how to handle the non-natives, I've learned what works and what doesn't work. I've tried a lot of the suggestions shared by posters on the PMCA forum and became frustrated when I found that many of them, while they may have worked for the poster, do not consistently work for everyone. Some of these myths and their potential impacts are addressed below:

HOSP and starlings can nest alongside martins with no problems.

I can see where people who don't do nest checks would think that this is true. They wouldn't know how many eggs were laid, how many were destroyed by the HOSP, or how many nestlings were killed by HOSP. Then one day, they post on a Purple Martin forum and wonder, "Why didn't my martins come back this year?" and when quizzed often reply, "Yes, my house is full of HOSP/starlings, but they've never bothered my martins."

Martins will/should/why don't they?/fight off the HOSP and make them leave.

While the Purple Martin is indeed a larger bird and they may tussle and knock the House Sparrow to the ground, the martins are not often successful at getting the tenacious HOSP to leave the site. The HOSP may leave the site in the short term, but once the martins leave to feed, he/she will return to try to claim a nest cavity, often puncturing martin eggs or killing nestlings and throwing them from the nest.



I have also watched my bluebirds and Tree Swallows drive the HOSP off the site, only to find the HOSP has claimed their nestbox the next morning and killed either

the adults or the adults and their young. These birds are physically not suited for battle inside a nest cavity when matched against a HOSP, whose conical finch beak can crush like a miniature vise and who has a strong desire to kill all nest competitors.

This study by a group from Fargo, North Dakota found that HOSP stay within 2.5 miles of their natal site.
<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/nwrc/publications/08pubs/linz088.pdf>.

With their explosive birth rates (they can breed up to four times a year), there will be intense competition for nest sites if they are allowed to breed.

Providing separate housing for starlings and HOSP will prevent them from invading the martin housing.

Starlings and HOSP are super-competitors and will compete for housing and territory. They know that increased populations of other cavity-nesting birds means increased competition for them. I have had 5-day old Tree Swallow nestlings killed and thrown out of their nest by a male HOSP when there were three empty nest boxes he could have chosen, and I have seen this phenomenon over and over at other landlords' sites.

Providing them with housing only allows them to increase their numbers and create more super-competitors for your nest cavities.

Closing all rooms not used by martins will send HOSP elsewhere/or, blocking off any rooms the HOSP try to use will make them look elsewhere for a nest site.

New landlords often ask if closing off any rooms not being used by martins will send House Sparrows in search of nest sites elsewhere. Instead, this approach will almost certainly send House Sparrows into active martin nests to destroy eggs and young, to claim a cavity for their own nest.

Relocating the HOSP will get rid of your problem.

This method does not work. It has two drawbacks. The HOSP will typically arrive back at your site before you do. In the small chance that they don't, you are simply dumping your problem in another area to attack other native birds, where someone else will either have to deal with the problem, or will ignore the problem, letting them kill at will and breed.

Pull their nests and they will leave.

This is probably one of the most dangerous myths, especially when your martins or other birds have eggs. The first thing you will see after pulling a nest is the HOSP vigorously rebuilding his nest within a few hours and possibly a few martin, bluebird or other native bird's eggs/nestlings destroyed. Continuous pulling of their nests only serves to frustrate the HOSP, since the male bonds with the nestbox. House Sparrow Revenge syndrome has been well documented and experienced by many landlords that have tried to control HOSP by pulling nests, in the interest of using only passive methods.

Smash the HOSP eggs in the nest cavity and the pair will leave.

This strategy has the same risk as pulling HOSP nests once they have eggs, sending the HOSP on a rampage through your colony. The HOSP will perceive that the other nest competitors at the site (Purple Martins, bluebirds, etc.) were the culprits that destroyed their eggs and will begin fighting back against the perceived threats.

Sparrows won't nest in a swinging gourd.

This is one myth that makes me chuckle as I do site visits with people whom I'm mentoring and we try to pull HOSP nests out of those small, old gourds that don't have access caps on them. Some of these landlords have just strung them along cables, freely swinging and they're barely hanging on anymore, yet they're packed with HOSP nests.

HOSP won't nest in a light-filled cavity.

This theory led to the use of open-topped nestboxes, which caused bluebird nestling deaths due to exposure to heat, rain, etc., and which are no longer recommended. HOSP will nest anywhere they can build a nest. One of the characteristics of their nest construction is that it creates a dark cavity.

Shoot the male and the female will leave.

Time after time I've tried this one and time after time, it failed. The only guarantee that HOSP won't harm your other birds, their eggs or their nestlings, is to provide frequent monitoring and when a HOSP is spotted, either shoot it, or trap and euthanize it.

Continued on page 12



Martins won't enter a unit that has a complete HOSP nest inside, meaning it would be safe to use a glue trap or mouse trap, if you leave the intact nest in front it.

Martins will indeed enter a unit with a House Sparrow nest in it, so use a hole reducer on any unit with any kind of trap in it, to make sure martins cannot enter. Reduced entrance holes should be smaller than 1-1/2 inches to also exclude bluebirds and Tree Swallows; 1-1/4 inches is a good size, but remember, wrens [and chickadees?] could get in, since they are smaller than House Sparrows.

The evidence is clear and there is no question as to the negative impact of allowing these non-native birds to breed. The decision for many Purple Martin landlords comes down to choosing between active measures and eliminating them, or employing passive measures. For the

landlords that wish to use only passive (no kill) measures, a few landlords have found that HOSP tend to become docile when their wings are trimmed and this will keep him/her out of their nestboxes for the rest of the season. Keep in mind that the birds' feathers will regrow within 6 months and during the next nesting season, the HOSP may become trap-shy and more difficult to trap. For more information on wing trimming, visit the Sialis.org website.

Even if you have used one of the above methods and you believe that it has worked, the war has not been won. Just because you have evicted the HOSP from your yard does not make him any less lethal to other native birds outside your back yard. You have only moved the battle out of your view. The HOSP will continue to breed, increase its numbers and continue their assault on all our native birds.

I understand some landlords' desire to not kill one species so that another may thrive and survive, and everyone must make their own personal choices that work for them. However, in the case of the House Sparrow and the European Starling, landlords need a workable solution, or our native songbirds will undeniably be the ones to suffer the consequences.

For online information about trapping and humane control of House Sparrows and starlings, see: <https://www.purplemartin.org/purple-martins/competitors/64/non-native/>



External Trap-Blade On My Bluebird Box

By Richard Herman, OBS member

Always searching for the optimum device or technique to help our Bluebirds in their battle with the invasive English sparrow, my Bluebird nest box with an externally mounted trap blade has a lot to offer.

Over the 30 plus years that I've had Bluebirds in the yard, English sparrow control was a necessity. In-box traps were a tremendous help and sometimes a little worry.

Early on, I designed my boxes to have internal trap mechanism with a visual feature that would show the trap's blade in the disarmed position. The blade extended beyond the edge of the box and was visible from a distance. If the trap was "set", visually, the absence of the extended blade indicated so. However, viewing the box from a distance, one could not always tell if the trap was sprung, only that it was not in the disarmed position. Whether or not a capture was made required a closer inspection; the trap's blade across the entry hole was sometimes difficult to determine from a distance.

The advantage of mounting the blade on the exterior of the box offers a visual clue of all three of these situations:

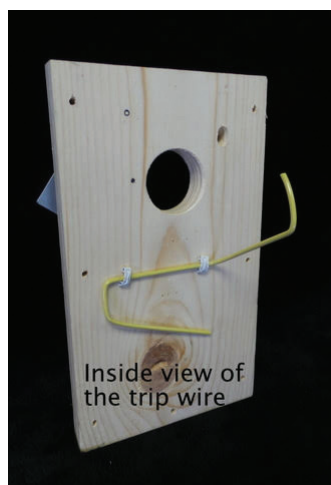
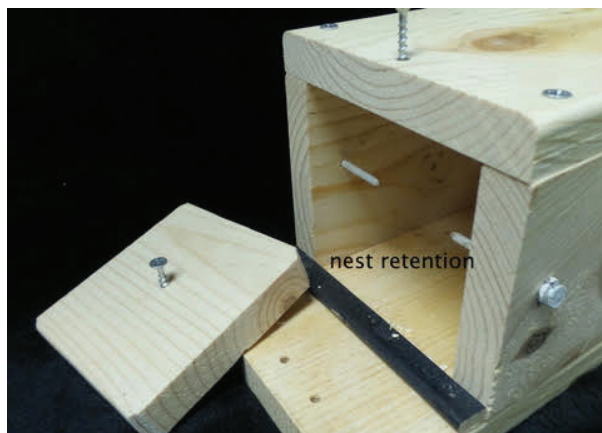
1. Disarmed.
2. Set and ready.
3. Tripped - indicating a capture.

In the disarmed position, the blade extends past the side of the box and cannot accidentally move to the set position as long as the top is secured in place.

The only negative to this design is the fact that a predator guard at the entry hole is not possible.

My trapping boxes are all "top open". I have yet to have an accidental egress of a nestling that was spooked out of the box when I open it as they always "hunker" down. This is an advantage over a front-open or side-open box, which can offer a quick lateral exit to an "almost ready" nestling.

The photographs are self-explanatory and show the three blade positions plus the location of the trip wire and the hole it protrudes through to set the trap's blade. Additionally, the photo of the box bottom depicts the nest retainer nails through the sides of the box above the bottom plate. The nails hold the nest in place while dropping the bottom of the box to check for infestation.



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A Nest of “White” Bluebird Eggs

By Bethany Gray, Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist (OCVN) and an Ohio Bluebird Society Area Contact for Clark & Greene counties.

I have been monitoring nest boxes on several trails since 2010 and have worked with park districts and land trusts in Franklin and Greene counties. This year for the first time, I discovered a nest of “white” bluebird eggs on a trail at Russ Nature Reserve in Beavercreek, Ohio. At first glance I thought the bluebirds had been kicked out by Tree Swallows, since they appeared similar to Tree Swallow eggs. However, there was no evidence of nest intrusion and no Tree Swallows in the area of this box. Additionally, Tree Swallow eggs are slightly smaller and slightly more pointed. The full brood of 5 nestlings fledged successfully in early June, and the pair started a second brood yielding 5 white eggs shortly afterwards. These 5 nestlings also successfully fledged in July. Upon further research, I learned that 3-5% of bluebirds lay white eggs, and the females who do will usually continue to lay white eggs.

In 2012, “Madame Wingnut” wrote about this phenomenon for this newsletter. To summarize some highlights from that article, the white shells are caused by a lack of pigment. (The color pigment usually comes from the cells/glands in the wall of the female’s oviduct.) White eggs are equally fertile, and the nestlings are not “albinistic,” even though in 1935 Dr. Musselman described them as such. Some evidence has suggested it is a genetic trait that can be inherited by offspring through

the female. However, according to Bet Zimmerman, there does not appear to be enough evidence to prove this. She states, “If laying white eggs were genetic, it would not be unusual to see them repeatedly over time in the same geographic area, as some studies have shown that 30% of bluebirds return to previous nesting sites the following season, or conversely to hardly ever see them in a certain geographic area.” (<http://www.sialis.org/whiteeggs.htm>). In a review of some blogs by various trail monitors, those that have a bluebird laying white eggs for the second year in a row personally believe it to be the same bluebird returning. I will now wait eagerly for the 2017 nesting season to see if there are white bluebird eggs again on the trail!



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Mission Statement

The Ohio Bluebird Society was formed in 1987 to support the return and the perpetuation of the Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) and other native cavity nesting birds in Ohio. To this end, the Ohio Bluebird Society will strive for the best methods to use, conserve and create habitat for the protection of these species.

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Tree Swallows Foster Black-capped Chickadees

By Dan Best

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Deadline for Submitting Articles:

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



March and April, 2016 was a period of unrest among would-be tenants of nest boxes maintained by Chagrin Falls (Ohio) area bluebirders Pete Pistell and Jim Mathews in Cleveland Metropark's South Chagrin Reservation.

Eastern bluebirds, tree swallows and black-capped chickadees all showed interest in one particular nest box. The bluebirds were first to build a nest in mid-April with chickadees and swallows still contending for the avian abode. By the end of April the bluebirds had apparently had enough and moved on without laying eggs. The chickadees commenced remodeling, layering moss over the bluebird nest and lining their nest with rabbit fur.

Before the first week of May, 2016 was out, the chickadees had a clutch of six speckled white eggs. The eggs were incubated by the chickadee with 5 of 6 eggs hatching, but no adult birds were seen. By hatching time in

late May, no adult birds had been seen in, on or near the nest box. By the end of May, tree swallow(s) were occupying the nest box which contained 4 chickadee young. By the end of the first week of June, 2016, the four chickadees had fledged – one was witnessed fledging - with a tree swallow exiting the nest box during next box inspections. The post-fledging nest box cleanout revealed 1 unhatched egg and 1 dead chickadee nestling.

Pistell and Mathews could only conclude that a tree swallow (individual or pair) had raised a brood of black-capped chickadees.

This series of events was reported to Geauga Park District naturalist Dan Best who in turn authored this account.

