



Bluebird Monitor

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

Spring 2020



Adventures of Bluebird Box Monitoring

By Hannah Thomas, Photos by Hannah and Brad Thomas, her father



My name is Hannah Thomas and I am a junior in high school. I started as a bluebird box monitor at Deer Creek State Park this past spring 2019. As a bluebird box monitor, I collect data on the nests in the boxes and watch for invasive species, such as House Sparrows. House Sparrows will kill other birds, take up all the nesting space, and ruin other nests to build their own. By monitoring

the nests we can prevent invasive species from using them and gather information about our native species.

I learned a lot this past year from monitoring the 24 boxes and 2 open-nest species. At Deer Creek State Park, we get House Wrens, Tree Swallows, and Eastern Bluebirds in the boxes. They all build a different style of nest; House Wrens use sticks and grass, Tree Swallows use coarse grass and lots of feathers, and Bluebirds use grass and pine needles. Bluebird and Tree Swallow boxes can also become mite infested and if there are young in the nest then the mites can weaken them. The only time a nest had to be replaced was when the cold set in near the end of summer for a bit. The babies are not fully feathered and since they have an insect-based diet they would get undernourished and cold. We lost several boxes of tree swallow young, but we had one box where there was still one live young. We had to remove the baby, clean out the nest, use some dried grass, pine needles and feathers we had collected earlier in case something like this happened, and built a new nest. That baby did end up fledging and was the last to fledge from that nest. Many of the feathers in the Tree Swallow nests were Pekin Duck feathers. A pair lives at the pond at Deer Creek State Park.



The House Wrens were the last to use the boxes and know how to protect their nests. We had a nest where the House Wrens had wrapped a snake skin around it to scare off other predators. It works well on people too when they're not expecting it!

Collecting data isn't hard to do with the Cornell NestWatch app. Nestwatch gives you options to choose from as you enter data. The app asks for the date, species, the state of the nest, the number of eggs/ young, if a parent is at the location, any maintenance activity, and any extra notes. NestWatch is a citizen science activity done through Cornell so all the data is available for scientific studies.

Nestwatch Trail data for 2019

TRES 99 eggs and 84 fledged

EABL 12 eggs and 12 fledged

HOWR 18 eggs and 18 fledged

Killdeer 8 eggs and 8 fledged

Barn Swallow 4 eggs and 4 fledged

Continued on back page

Tree Swallows Need Toeholds

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



In 1975, I enrolled in a summer course, Environmental Interpretation 610, taught by Dr. Gabe Cherem at the Ohio State University. For one of my assignments, I authored the bluebird pamphlet *Hit the Trail for Bluebirds*, and after the completion of the course, I took my creation to the Ohio Division of Wildlife's office

in Columbus. There, I was introduced to Denis Case, state administrator in charge of nongame management, and Denis introduced me to Jim Glover, the wildlife artist that would ultimately do the final layout of the pamphlet.

Denis encouraged me to be patient since it would take him time to run the pamphlet through a system of required committees before it could be printed. I received my first printed copies in the mail in late December 1976, and I was very happy with the results.

Among the Hints section on the pamphlet's backside, the following important points are listed: "Roughen the inside surface of the front piece so young birds can cling to it for feeding and to exercise their wings before their first flight. A surface can be roughened by sawing slots 1/8" deep, punching shallow holes with a screwdriver, tacking on a strip of 1/4-inch hardware cloth or gutter screen, or gluing small scraps of wood." After all, the original nest sites for bluebirds were whittled by woodpeckers that left a cavity with multitudes of toeholds for any cavity nester.

My pamphlet's hints had been collected from what I had read in *The Purple Martin* Capital News from Griggsville, Illinois. Not only were there numerous letters and hints from Purple Martin conservationists, but also bluebirding pioneers such as Larry Zeleny, Ohioan Joe Huber, and many others offered their ideas and methods to help bluebirds.

I will admit that my first 22 nestboxes that I made in December 1967 had no toeholds for bluebirds and other birds at the time. By the time I had spent my first season monitoring trail boxes in 1968, I became aware of the Dick Irwin nestbox, a front-opening box that was raising bluebirds in Kentucky. As my projects expanded to other farms in Marion County, I used my stepfather's table saw to make new front-opening boxes, and after the 1969 season, I started replacing my original boxes with new ones.

The original boxes did not go to waste. They were used to keep the workshop warm during cold winter days, thanks

to a classic wood-burning stove. My original boxes had too many unique features such as a removable floor that was the only way to access the nest cavity along with metal brackets used to attach the box to its pole, etc. It is valuable to learn what doesn't work in order to discover what does work.

Even though I was trying to attract Tree Swallows at several locations with farm ponds, swallows didn't nest until 1977 when one pair raised five. Their numbers increased each year, and for 1987, the first year of the Ohio Bluebird Society, swallows were able to fledge 615 young. During the last 43 nesting seasons, from the first swallow nest in 1977 through 2019, my swallows have raised 29,762 bug-snatchers, many from nestbox grids where boxes are spaced 22-25 yards apart to mimic the spacing found in historic beaver ponds.

Ohio's state parks started adding bluebird boxes after *Hit the Trail for Bluebirds* became available. The first boxes donated to Delaware State Park did have toeholds along with ten boxes that were provided by the Ohio Division of Parks. Two donations followed and were mounted by the contributors. The boxes looked great and I had begun to monitor all boxes for the 1977 season.

Swallows first nested in Delaware State Park in 1979, and dead Tree Swallows were found in a few boxes that I finally discovered lacked toe holds. The unlucky birds had defecated and had empty crops, signs of starvation caused by an inability to exit the box. Yes, cold weather was a factor since the birds were found in early spring when cold snaps will ground flying insects, causing swallows to weaken. When sunny weather returns, the swallows would be too weak to jump six inches up to the entrance hole with wings that are restricted by smooth walls of a small cavity that becomes too much of a challenge for short legs and small feet.

So, once I was aware of the problem, I used a staple gun to add strips of plastic gutter screen beneath the entrance hole on the inside surface of the front panel. In modern times, I have read the term "swallow ladder" when referring to toe holds, a good term to describe the essence of what swallows need for a safe nestbox.

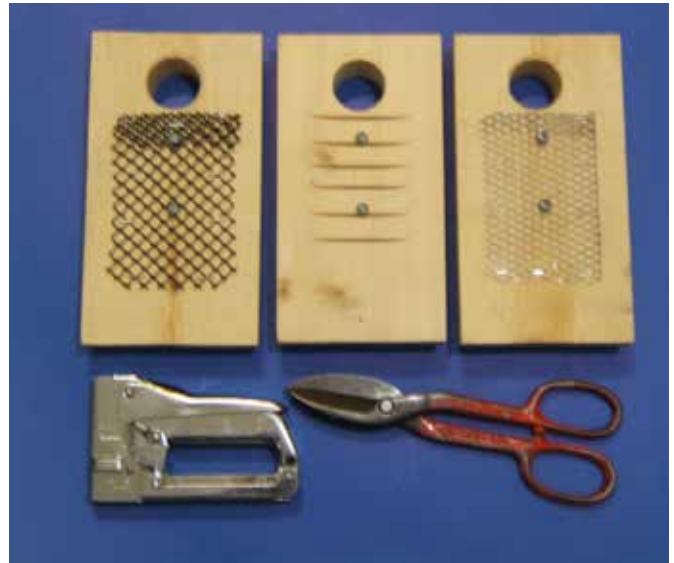
I have submitted a photo with this article that shows the inside surface of three front panels. The pairs of screw heads are for Van Ert Universal Sparrow Traps. On the left is a panel with a plastic gutter screen while the right panel

has an aluminum screen. Both screens are attached with staples “shot” by the staple gun shown below the panels. The red tin snips is used to cut and trim gutter screens. I always fold less than an inch of the plastic gutter screen under the main patch so the birds’ feet don’t make contact with sharp edges.

If you find boxes without toeholds, it is easy to retrofit nestboxes with toeholds in the field. Side-opening boxes might offer a nightmare but that’s another story.

I should add that I have used a variety of adhesives to glue patches of plastic gutter screen inside four-inch drainpipes when I make nestjars for Prothonotary Warblers and swallows. I even use staples to add plastic screens below the three-inch entrance holes in kestrel boxes. It is better to be safe, than sorry.

Many times in late winter when I enter a department store, a bird theme store, a nature center, or any other facility with nestboxes for sale, I always check for toeholds. If I find no toe holds, I take the box to the nearest person in charge and explain to them that they are selling swallow death traps, and the conversation goes from there.



I find too many smooth front panels and I will not mention the guilty stores, or the nestbox manufacturers. I will encourage you, dear readers, to do your own criminal investigations, and GOOD LUCK!!

Conserve on by doing the right thing for our avian friends.

Ohio Bluebird Society Presence at Young Birders Conference

By Molly Wilsbacher, OBS Treasurer and Trustee.

The Ohio Bluebird Society was well represented at the Ohio Young Birders Conference on November 9, 2019, held at the Toledo Zoo & Aquarium. OBS was honored with being only 1 of 4 table demonstrations. Treasurer Molly Wilsbacher was on hand to answer questions, pass out informational flyers, and recruit new members. The beautiful tri-fold poster was created by Membership Chair Pat Dutton and other table props such as gently used bluebird, tree swallow, and house wren nests were provided by Vice President Darlene Sillick.



An Unusual Year

by Diane Devereaux, member of Black River Audubon Society



2019 was my sixth year of providing bluebird housing and, as the season began, I was expecting the usual two or three broods from the pair who had taken up residence in my bird house. But I was in for a surprise. Following is my story of a very unusual year.

I don't name the birds from year to year. I just refer to the males as "Blue Boy" and the females as "Pinky". Their plumage during the spring breeding season is incredibly beautiful. The male has deep, vibrant blue feathers on his head and backside and the female has more subtle shades of blue and pink.



The bluebirds are here all winter but I don't see them regularly until about March. That is when they start coming in to perch on the birdhouse and check it out as a potential nesting site. They go in and out of the nest box inspecting it and they fly to and from the trees that surround it measuring the distances the babies will have to fly when they fledge. They're very vocal, particularly the male. They greet each other with soft, beautiful sounds and lots of wing flapping.



Sometimes they make more than one nest before they decide on a final location. This year, I saw Pinky gathering pine needles and flying out of my yard numerous times before she turned her full attention to constructing a nest in my birdhouse.

Once the bluebirds are committed to the nest site, the battle with house sparrows and starlings begins. The house sparrows are about the same size as the bluebirds and will take over the nest box if allowed to. The starlings are interested in stealing eggs but they're too large to get into the box so they seem to take out their frustration by watching over the house and swooping down on the bluebirds periodically just to annoy them.



April 1 – Nest building began today. The female does most of the work while the male stands guard and looks into the box occasionally to offer his approval or disapproval of what she's doing.

One year, I watched all morning as a female brought pine needles into the box and then, as soon as she left, the male would go in and get them and throw them on the ground. I checked the box at noon and there was nothing in it! I can only surmise that he didn't approve of that nesting site. He did eventually give in, however, and they successfully fledged two broods.

I have a lot of white pines in my yard and pine needles seem to be the building material of choice. The female arranges them in layers until they reach almost up to the entry hole of the box. Then she tops off the base with a small round cup made of grasses. Sometimes she just makes a little indentation with her body in the pine needles instead of weaving a cup on top.

Most of the work is done during the morning hours then the couple leaves and doesn't return until late afternoon.



April 9 – I didn't see any more nesting materials being brought to the box this morning so it appears that nest building is complete. Blue Boy was hanging on the door peering into the opening and both birds were chattering to each other as if having a little conversation about the task being completed.

April 11 – I saw something interesting today. When sparrows get into a bluebird house, they will bring in feathers and all kinds of junk to build their nest. I've seen the bluebirds throw those feathers out before they start making their own nest. Well, apparently, the presence of any kind of a feather near their nest box is something they don't like. Today Pinky was sitting on the house and Blue Boy was up in a tree when I noticed two white belly feathers from some bird drift down through the air toward the bluebird house. Blue Boy swooped down and caught one of them in mid-air and flew off somewhere to dispose of it. The other feather landed on the ground and Pinky dropped down, picked it up, and flew off after Blue Boy.

April 17 – I was wrong about the nest being finished. Pinky was hard at work all morning bringing in long pieces of dry grass. She must have taken a break between phase I and phase II of nest building. This year, we will have a little cup of woven grass to top off the pine needle base.

Blue Boy was a bit peevish today, no doubt because he's getting tired of being harassed by starlings and house sparrows. I saw him chase away birds he normally ignores. He also drove Pinky to the ground in what looked more like a disciplinary action than part of the mating ritual. Maybe he was chastising her for taking so long to finish the nest. He even showed up with some beautiful long grasses for the nest, again, out of character for him to help with construction. He did this several times demonstrating his urgency to get the job done!



I like to sit in my house and take photos of the bluebirds from my kitchen window. The bluebirds are well aware of this and have been coming closer and closer to see what I'm doing. They seem to like the sound of the camera clicking.

I have a garden hook right outside my window that they like to sit on. It serves a dual purpose. They can keep an eye on the birdhouse but they can also keep an eye on me from



that vantage point. I can sit with the window open and take photos of them and they don't seem the least bit bothered by it. In fact, Blue Boy likes to sit on the hook and stare into my house. I wonder what he thinks?

April 24 – First egg! Blue Boy swooped over me several times when I was working in the yard. I wasn't even close to the bird house. It's good to see he takes his sentinel duties seriously.

May 5 – Today I checked and we have four perfect blue eggs. Four to five eggs seems to be the norm for most bluebirds.

I tried to find a time when I could look in the nest without being noticed. That didn't happen. When I tried to take a peek today, both parents immediately began to swoop over my head. They came very close and made clicking and chattering sounds to warn me to stay away.

May 6 – Blue Boy is on high alert. He's been attacking a red bellied woodpecker who comes to a suet feeder on a tree that is actually quite a distance from the bluebird house. I also saw him chase a grey squirrel away from that same tree.

May 24 – Well, something unusual has happened this year. The four eggs were not viable so, after waiting way past the normal hatch date, I finally removed them from the nest today. I'm leaving tomorrow for a ten-day vacation and hope to find a new clutch when I return.

June 3 – I returned from vacation today and found four more little blue eggs in the nest. Working backwards (since they lay one egg a day), I will guess that the first egg was laid on May 31. I hope these develop.

June 4 – Pinky slipped one more egg in on me. Now we have five!

June 5 – I don't usually talk to the birds other than by trying to mimic their sounds but today, instead of whistling to Blue Boy as he was sitting in the tree overhead, I said, "Hi Blue Boy. Hi Pretty Boy." He jerked his head up and acted surprised like, "Are you talking to me?". Then he stretched his wing out, fluffed up and acted like he was a little embarrassed by the attention.

June 9 – I spent most of the morning weeding the garden next to the bird house. Blue Boy and Pinky watched over me the whole time. They perched on the birdhouse and chattered softly to each other. I guess Pinky was a little nervous about me being there and Blue Boy was reassuring her that it was ok as long as I didn't get too close. He's becoming much more tolerant of me. Sometimes he fluffs up his feathers and seems very relaxed while I'm taking photos of him.

June 26 – I'm sad to say that none of the eggs in the second clutch hatched. Apparently, this pair has some reproductive issues. I removed the nest and eggs today.

June 28 – Well, they didn't wait long. For the last two days Blue Boy has been putting forth his most beautiful vocalizations and seems to have talked Pinky into going for round three. He even took some pine needles into the box to encourage her and they're busy working on a new nest. I hate to think it's all for naught but it's good to know they'll be here for a while longer.



July 2 – We have an egg! Boy! That didn't take long. It's only been six days since I removed the old nest.

July 5 – Four eggs!

August 3 – Well, third time was not the charm. Four little blue eggs which should have hatched about two weeks ago sit sadly in the nest.

Blue Boy is still guarding the nest and Pinky still sits on the eggs but she's away from the nest more and more and it's obvious they know something is wrong. Today I saw Blue Boy bring nesting material to the birdhouse and poke his head in and out repeatedly as if trying to encourage Pinky to make some change that would remedy the situation. He's also vocalizing a lot more than he normally does.

August 15 – This saga isn't over yet! I thought they had finally abandoned the nest so I removed it a couple of days ago but they're back at it! I was awakened this morning by Blue Boy singing his most beautiful songs of courtship and encouragement. He has convinced her for a fourth time! They worked together all morning on construction of a new nest.

August 17 – The nest is complete with a little indentation in the center ready to receive eggs.

This morning I heard poor little Pinky squealing as if in distress and looked over to see Blue Boy chasing her from

the tree to the ground. She escaped and flew past me squealing all the way with him in hot pursuit. He is intent on making this happen before summer is over!

August 25 – There are four more eggs in the nest. It's probably futile to get my hopes up but you never know. If nothing else, it's giving me more time to get acquainted with this pair and to take more photographs of them.

September 16 – It's a week past the expected hatch date and there are no hatchlings. I think Pinky has abandoned the nest. I heard Blue Boy singing a plaintive little song this morning. It sounded like he was trying to call her back.

September 22 – All has been quiet for the past few days. I haven't seen Pinky at all. I heard Blue Boy calling from the pines one evening but he hasn't been coming to the nest box. I removed the nest.

And so, sadly, the story ends for this season. I look forward to next spring and hope it will be a better year for bluebird babies in my back yard.



My last photo of the pair before they abandoned the nest.

Treasurer's Report by Molly Wilsbacher

- Please consider making a donation to our silent action at our annual Bluebird Conference on February 29, 2020.** 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 OBSTreasurer@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!
- I'm happy to report that our Amazon Smile donations totaled almost \$50 in the last six months!** 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 (<https://smile.amazon.com>) and it doesn't cost you anything and doesn't increase your cost at all for items purchased. [PLEASE NOTE: Only purchases made at <https://smile.amazon.com> (not www.amazon.com or the mobile app) generate donations].
- The Ohio Bluebird Society's bank accounts currently reflect that we enjoy \$27,812.04 in all accounts as of January 30, 2020.** Our anticipated expenditures in the current quarter include designing, publishing, and mailing this Newsletter, as well as expected expenses associated with our annual conference, which is our largest expense. Our goal with every conference is to bring together and educate as many bird lovers as possible, and hopefully, you'll make a few meaningful connections (if not friends) in the process.
- 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.

And We Were Welcomed by Bluebirds

By Darlene Sillick, OBS trustee, central OYBC co-advisor, OOS Conservation committee, OCVN



Saturday, July 13, 2019 was a beautiful blue-sky day and for once I had a free day to do what I wanted. As I headed out on errands, I realized I was going toward Hilliard and needed to pay attention. Twelve years ago, today, my family said our tearful goodbyes to my mom. She was laid to rest in a peaceful area overlooking the western part of the Wesley Glen Cemetery. I pulled in,

parked and got a new folding chair from the car, placing it by mom's grave. It had been a challenging spring and I needed to spend some time talking to mom. Just as I sat down, I heard a familiar sound. It was a soft bluebird warble – like a bluebird locator call. I looked around and there, about 25 yards away, was a family of 4 or 5 bluebirds! It seemed like they too were enjoying the beauty of the day and it felt like a special gift to have their company. It was comforting to know the bluebirds spent time there near my mom.

My mom's favorite bird was the bluebird. She remembered them as she was growing up and was delighted when I started working to help them in central Ohio. I used to go to people's houses to help them with their bluebird questions or problems. She would go with me and hold the bluebird babies while I changed nests or made box repairs or fashioned a baffle. She loved to hold the babies and keep them warm and quiet in her worn and loving hands.

There is something I can't explain about the bluebird in my life. Is it perhaps because I am a bird watcher that I tune into their hunched silhouette on telephone wires and fences? Perhaps that is also why I look all around until I spot them whenever I hear them singing? The timing of when I see them is also unexplainable to me. It seems they are there when I least expect them, especially when I need cheering up. It seems very special to see or hear them at these times and I find comfort in knowing they are nearby. It is indeed a special azure gift that I call divine intervention.

The Ohio Bluebird Society has recognized the comfort which can be found in bluebirds and the Legacy Program was created as a way to honor or preserve the memory of dedicated bluebirders and bird enthusiasts, while providing nest boxes for the cavity nesting birds we love and enjoy. Detailed information about this meaningful program can be found at the following link on the OBS website. <https://ohiobluebirdsociety.org/about/obs-legacy-program>.

I will be donating to the Legacy Program in memory of my mom, Vera Leach. Perhaps you have someone you would like to honor also with this type of gift? The funds from these

donations not only support new bluebird boxes which are monitored by experienced bluebirders, they also are used to support educational OBS events and scholarship funds for young high school students who have demonstrated an interest in ornithology and habitat conservation.

Later in July 2019 I was asked to help a coworker in Gahanna, Ohio. She had a very big front yard and had lost her earlier nesting of bluebirds due to house sparrows. She needed a predator baffle and a quick Bluebird 1:1. When I arrived, her pair of bluebirds were busy nestbuilding! I told her they would soon lay eggs again. I looked for the house sparrows that had caused the loss of the earlier nesting attempt and noticed that they were busy building a nest in a neighbor's newspaper container on a mail post. I said a little prayer that they would leave the 2nd nesting bluebirds alone.

Since my coworker did not live close to where I lived, we decided to stay in touch by photos and texting. Mr. Stephen Habash of Dublin, Ohio had donated to the Legacy Program in honor of Mr. Donald Dunn and OBS had created and placed a memorial plaque on this particular nestbox earlier in the summer. My friend in Gahanna kept us updated with photos of the 4 young bluebirds that successfully fledged from that box later that summer. We were delighted to send these photos to the donor, Mr. Habash, along with the wonderful news of this successful bluebird nesting. What a beautiful legacy!

Written in memory of my mom, Vera Leach



Ask Madame WingNut

Build it and They Will Come

By Paula Ziebarth



In the Summer 2019 issue of the *Bluebird Monitor*, I wrote an article entitled “To Infinity and Beyond” which outlined steps to find a good site for a trail and plan for the life of that trail.

“Build it and They Will Come” discusses good nestbox and predator baffle design criteria and where to find good nestbox plans or the boxes themselves.

It is important for the Ohio Bluebird Society and their members to take an active role in establishing bird trails and/or reclaiming existing trails that are poorly designed or managed. When I see unsafe housing or predators invading nestboxes, I feel duty bound to offer help through education and training. Over the years I have seen many unsafe nestboxes for birds: boxes with the wrong size entrance; shallow or narrow boxes with inadequate space for birds to build a proper nest; nestboxes that are not watertight; nailed shut or have no closure at all; no kerfs; constructed of thin or warped lumber; little or no roof overhangs, etc. I have also seen a multitude of ineffective predator guards: 2” PVC “baffles”; milk jugs cut in half and mounted upside down; rusted stovepipe nailed to mount post; etc. The following pictures are examples of a poorly designed and constructed nestbox.

Example of what not to do: Shallow nestbox with no kerfs and no screw or nail to hold door shut



Example of what not to do: Milk jug “baffle”



NESTBOX DESIGN

There are many important criteria that go into the construction of a good nestbox. I recommend everyone read the North American Bluebird Society’s (NABS) fact sheet on Nestbox Recommendations. I will highlight some of the more important points here.

A good bluebird nestbox should have watertight seams, be easy to monitor, and easy to clean. Ventilation is important during warmer months. When the bird is entering the box, having some light enter is important for a bird to be able to see (good to know if a snake or House Sparrow lie in wait), and ventilation holes also provide a little window into the gloom.

When choosing material for a nestbox, $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch thick cedar or redwood are ideal and require no additional finishing. Pine and other types of wood can be used if the outside of boxes are painted. A light color is preferred to control heat. Treated lumber should never be used due to chemical toxicity.

Galvanized screws should be used for construction of the nestbox itself. This allows for easy replacement of parts that become cracked, broken or warped over the years. Nestboxes constructed with nails, staples or glue make disassembly for repair very difficult.

If using a round hole entrance for Eastern Bluebirds, the diameter of the hole should be 1-1/2" to 1-9/16". I do not recommend oval holes as they are easily entered by European Starlings, an aggressive non-native competitor. Slot boxes are readily used by Bluebirds, but I do not prefer them as they are not a House Sparrow deterrent in my experience (as claimed) and it is difficult to set a Van Ert Universal Sparrow Trap in them. The Gilwood entrance seems to be the favorite of the Eastern Bluebirds I work with; this entrance provides great backlighting as the bird sticks its head in, gives them extra shoulder room upon entering, and provides all the ventilation the nestbox needs.

Plans for a number of different nestbox designs can be found on Fred Stille's website www.nestboxbuilder.com. Whether you prefer side opening or front opening; round hole, slot box or Gilwood entry; PVC or wood – you will find great plans here. The North American Bluebird Society also has plans on their website <http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org>.

If you prefer to buy a nestbox you can find some good ones online. Fred Stille sells several designs of quality nestboxes (including the Gilwood and Xbox) on his www.nestboxbuilder.com website. Wild bird retail stores also carry nest boxes. Make sure the hole size is right for the species you are housing and always check for kerfs (horizontal slits made by cutting with a saw) on inside front face of box. Kerfs or a climbing ladder is very important for Tree Swallow safety. When box is empty, this species, with its short legs and long wings, may be unable to exit nestbox without kerfs and become trapped. Avoid most nestboxes sold at discount stores and garden centers; they are generally made of thin wood and not well constructed.

PREDATOR BAFFLES

I often see nestboxes mounted on fence posts or trees. Any self respecting raccoon will identify such a box as its lunch box. It can take several years (or more) for the predator to discover the nestbox(es) installed this way, but once they do, they may hit every one. Please do not invite native cavity nesting birds into a nestbox to be eaten.

I have experimented with many different nestbox designs and box mounts over the past 18 years. Climbing predators can easily circumvent any size pole or post you mount a nestbox on, including a 1/2 inch diameter pole. You can use a barrier of grease applied to the pole to deter predators, but this is messy and must be reapplied several times per season. Grease barriers will usually keep raccoons out, but snakes can climb right through them. A wobbly predator baffle is much preferred; a good predator baffle will keep climbing predators out of your nestbox(es).

The Kingston Baffle is the most effective (both in cost and function) in my experience. 8-inch diameter, 24-inch long galvanized stovepipe is recommended although I have used 6-inch diameter stovepipe without any problems (yet). These baffles are very easy to build and instructions can be found online. When purchasing stovepipe, use shiny galvanized steel. Never buy the black painted stovepipe as it will rust within a few

weeks. If you prefer to buy a baffle, Wild Birds Unlimited sells an attractive black stovepipe baffle that will not rust.

PVC baffles are often used and are fairly effective although I have had raccoons climb up 4-inch diameter PVC baffles a few times over the years. The minimum recommended dimensions for a PVC baffle are 4-inch diameter, 36 inches long. If you can find larger diameter PVC (6" or 8"), it will afford better protection from climbing predators. If you wish to paint PVC, use a high gloss spray paint made for PVC so that baffle retains smooth surface to keep predators from clinging to surface. Paint will have to be reapplied after a couple years in the field.

I follow the 5, 7, 9 rule when installing a nestbox. Top of baffle is 5 feet from the ground. Nestbox pole is at least 7 feet from fence, tree trunk or other object climbing predator could jump from. Nestbox roof is at least 9 feet below any branch predator could drop from. This rule also works very well for bird feeders when installing baffle to keep squirrels and raccoons out of your feeders.

"If you build it, he will come", wing waving his way into your heart. Make sure that when he does, he has safe housing with proper design and predator protection for his family. If you are working on reclaiming an old Bluebird trail or establishing a new one, you can build your own "field of dreams."



Greg Ziebarth has built over 260 nestboxes for Darlene Sillick's Zeppick conservation project.

NOTE: For OBS members establishing public trails, OBS Vice President Darlene Sillick has limited nestboxes available free of charge for trails that meet the following criteria: public entity purchases poles and baffles, qualified monitor checks trail weekly, active House Sparrow control employed, weekly data entered into Cornell's NestWatch, year end trail report submitted to public entity and OBS. Contact Darlene through OBS at ohiobluebirdsociety@gmail.com for more information.

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

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President's Report – January 2020

By Mike Watson

As we approach the end of winter, I'm sure many of you are starting to plan for the new nesting season. Here at Holden I'm planning nest box and predator baffle repairs, ordering supplies, and organizing volunteers in preparation. But it's also a good time to think about last year's results.

To date, we have received 45 reports from 34 counties. This is a nice mix of small and large programs; we have several reports representing a single nest box, and the largest comes from Sandusky county with nearly 700 nestboxes (Green Creek Wildlife Society). See page 14 for a table showing total numbers for all species reported so far. If you have not reported yet, please do so! Check the website for how to submit reports (and please remember that we no longer have a mailing address in Wooster; all mail should be sent to the Holden address).

Another thing that the board (and many of you, I hope) are looking forward to is the 2020 OBS Conference. If you haven't registered yet, please visit the website

for more information...and be aware that the registration deadline is midnight on February 18th. We have online registration, or you can register by mail.

Finally, please take some time to look over the bio information below for Carl Gleditsch, the candidate for the 2020 board of trustees opening. The board feels that he will make an excellent addition and hope that all of you will take the time to vote. This can be done via email, sent to ohiobluebirdsociety@gmail.com (simply state that you do or do not support Carl joining the board). If you are attending the conference, we will have in-person voting. You may also vote by filling out and mailing in the paper ballot included in this newsletter issue. All members in good standing are qualified (and encouraged) to vote. (If you have any questions about your membership status, please contact Pat Dutton at OBSmembershipchair@gmail.com).

Thank you for all you do on behalf of our birds!

Carl Gleditsch – Board of Trustees Candidate

Carl grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Upon graduating from Indiana University of Pennsylvania with Bachelor of Science degrees in both Wildlife Biology and Chemistry, he worked doing research in the Clinical Nutrition Department of Montefiore Hospital in Pittsburgh. After five years and with a house payment and growing family, Carl decided to jump ship and landed a job with USS Chemicals as an industrial chemist, a position he held for 31 years. While in this role Carl quickly moved up to a management position and, with the purchase of the company by Ashland Chemical in 1995, moved his family to Dublin Ohio. Along the way Carl and his wife Donna raised 3 boys. The entire family was heavily involved in Boy Scouts with all three boys attaining the level of Eagle Scout. Carl retired from Ashland in 2016 and knew he wanted to get back to the natural

sciences. In 2018 he graduated from the central Ohio OCVN (Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist) program and started volunteering with the Columbus Metro Parks, Stratford Ecological Center, Delaware County Preservation Parks and the City of Dublin. Carl has also been a beekeeper since high school and recently graduated from the OSU VPS (Volunteer Pollinator Specialist) program. Along with having a small apiary in his backyard, Carl loves to give talks about native bees in Ohio. Loving all things natural, he also has helped design, install and monitor bluebird trails at Columbus' Glacier Ridge and Highbanks Metro Parks. He's an active member of the Ohio Bluebird Society, as well as, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and helps with various citizen science projects involving bird, butterfly, plant and bee surveys.



Note from OBS trustee Judy Semroc:

"In case you are not aware, there is a push for the Ohio division of forestry to collect comments and opinions on forestry practices. Now is the time for us to make our voices heard as this could potentially shape the direction that Ohio Forestry uses for future decisions. The deadline for responses is March 1, however the State is already planning to issue a preliminary plan on February 1st."

This is a huge opportunity for birders like us to make our conservation voices heard!

The Division of Forestry wants your opinion.

It is as simple as filling out a brief forestry survey found at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/P5NQQN9>.

Voting for the recommended trustee candidate Carl Gleditsch can be done in any one of three ways. By email to ohiobluebirdsociety@gmail.com (simply state that you do or do not support Carl joining the board). Alternatively, the ballot shown below can be used for voting at the members meeting during the OBS conference Feb 29, 2020 or filled out and mailed to:

OBS Election 2020

The Holden Arboretum

9500 Sperry Road,

Kirkland, Ohio 44094

OBS ANNUAL ELECTION FOR THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES – 2019

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

____ I vote for the nominee Carl Gleditsch for the trustee position

____ I do not support Carl Gleditsch joining the trustee board

Signed: _____

Print: _____

Date: _____

Swarm on Nestbox

by Carl Gleditsch OCVN, VPS, Beekeeper,
Bluebird monitor at Glacier Ridge Metro Park

Looks like a new cavity nester is using our cavity nesting box. But in this case, it is just hanging out until they can find a new cavity to build their hive. This is a honey bee swarm that has selected one of our nesting boxes in a tree swallow grid at Glacier Ridge Metro Park.

When a honey bee hive gets over crowded, the bees will create a new queen. The hive will split in half and half of the bees will leave the hive with the old queen. They find a spot close to the hive to gather. This is called a swarm. In this case they picked our nest box which is close to a row of trees that might contain the original hive. Once they get a little organized, they will send out scout bees to find a new home. Might be a cavity in a tree, an opening in a house or a beekeeper's swarm trap. The scout bees will use their waggle dance to tell the other scouts about the location they found. This is the same dance they use for communicating nectar and pollen sources. This swarm is rather small and has maybe 15,000 to 20,000 bees. The queen is in the center and is being protected and kept warm.

Once the scouts agree on a new place, they send out a signal to the other bees and, in mass, they all fly to the new cavity and start building a new beehive. It's really fascinating to watch.

For a good reference on bee swarms and bee decision making, Dr. Thomas D. Seeley from Cornell University has a wonderful book called "Honey Bee Democracy".



Photo by Pete Joodie

Honey bee swarm on a nesting box.



Photo by Robert Curtner

Author checking the box to see how the tree swallows were doing.



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

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)

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!



Original artwork by Anna Rose, OYBC

- **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

Reminder!!!! The deadline to register for the OBS annual conference is February 18. The headcount is turned into Ashland and we can't add more after that. The conference titled, Let's Open the Nestbox proves to be very interesting with the speakers and educational displays. Remember our mission statement supports all native cavity nesters. Our speakers this year will provide information about the beloved Eastern Bluebird and other species we may encounter as we open the nestbox.

We are very excited to have the engagement of students from central Ohio Young Birders Club. The speaker line up is again covering a number of native species in conservation projects by our members. The educational display tables add a bonus to the conference attendees and show how OBS is networking with other conservation non-profits to help people help birds and a few mammals!

Indeed, we hope to see you there and see who gets the Blue Feather award and help us make our Silent Auction a big fundraising success. Special thanks to our sponsors and all will be listed at the conference and in our next newsletter. We hope to see YOU there!!!!!!!!!!!!



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!!



THANK YOU SPONSORS!



Photos by Katelyn Shelton
OYBC Junior



OBS 2019 FLEDGLING REPORT

2019 TOTAL: Eastern Bluebird – 5372

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

| | | | |
|------------------------|------|----------------------------------|------|
| Tree Swallow | 6289 | Osprey | 14 |
| House Wren | 2124 | Barn Swallow | 138 |
| Purple Martin | 5307 | Prothonotary Warbler | 122 |
| Black-capped Chickadee | 54 | Wood Duck | 17 |
| Carolina Chickadee | 38 | House Sparrow eliminated | 1043 |
| Carolina Wren | 17 | House Sparrow eggs destroyed | 1184 |
| American Kestrel | 177 | European Starling eggs destroyed | 22 |

Send info to: ohiobluebirdsociety@gmail.com

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.

TRUSTEES

Pat Dutton -
obsmembershipchair@gmail.com
330.763.0474

Timothy Hubbell -
timothyhubbell35@yahoo.com
419.236.5312

JoAnn Kale -
joann.kale@gmail.com • 479.769.0574

Monica Klarer -
dmklarer@yahoo.com • 419.499.4425

Loyd Marshall -
llmarsh@aol.com • 330-876-7895

Judy Semroc -
rainefox51@gmail.com
330.877.3551

Darlene Sillick -
azuretrails@columbus.rr.com
614.288.3696 (text preferred)

Mike Watson (President) -
mwatson@holdenarb.org
440.946.4400 ext. 132

Molly Wilsbacher (Treasurer) -
OBSTreasurer@gmail.com
614.886.0372

ADVISORS

Mel Bolt -
mellen@sssn.net • 330.262.0448

Linda Lang -
lindaflang@gmail.com • 419.651.4196

Dick Tuttle - 740.363.6433

MEMBERSHIP CHAIRS

Dave Dutton: 330.674.7585
Pat Dutton: 330.763.0474
obsmembershipchair@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor

Penny Brandau
pennybrandau@gmail.com
440-670-3684

E-mail:

ohiobluebirdsociety@gmail.com

Phone:

440.462.9084

Website:

www.ohiobluebirdsociety.org

Address:

The Holden Arboretum
9500 Sperry Road, Kirtland, Ohio 44094

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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)

| County | Name | E-mail |
|------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| ALLEN | Mohr, Mark | mohrbluebirds@hotmail.com |
| ASHLAND | Lang, Linda | lindaflang@gmail.com |
| ATHENS | Caldwell, Reid & Teresa | freidc@yahoo.com; teresacaldwell@athensswcd.org |
| AUGLAIZE | Mark Mohr | mohrbluebirds@hotmail.com |
| CHAMPAIGN | Rutan, Jean | cpjrutan@gmail.com |
| CLARK | Gray, Bethany | ohiobluebirder@gmail.com |
| CRAWFORD | Minor, Mary Lee | chickadee@columbus.rr.com |
| CUYAHOGA | Barber, John | jcbarber27@gmail.com |
| DARKE | Luttmer, Bob | bonnie561@roadrunner.com |
| DARKE | Smith, Tom | bluebirdman@embarqmail.com |
| DELAWARE | Tuttle, Dick | ohtres@cs.com |
| DELAWARE | Ziebarth, Paula | paulasbirdz@yahoo.com |
| ERIE | Bird, Mel | mrbird90@aol.com |
| FAIRFIELD | Kale, JoAnn | joann.kale@gmail.com |
| FRANKLIN | Aldridge, Julie | juliealdridge10@gmail.com |
| FRANKLIN | Sillick, Darlene | dsillick118@gmail.com |
| GEAUGA | Brindo, Jay | jbrindo@aol.com |
| GREENE | Gray, Bethany | ohiobluebirder@gmail.com |
| GUERNSEY | Barber, Tom | klbarber62@roadrunner.com |
| HAMILTON | Romine, Jim | jimdromine@gmail.com |
| HANCOCK | Nye, Fred | evaferdy@tds.net |
| HURON | Bird, Mel | mrbird90@aol.com |
| HOLMES | Hawkins, Marcella | gofish710@embarqmail.com |
| LAKE | Watson, Mike | mwatson@holdenarb.org |
| LORAIN | Brandau, Penny | pennybrandau@gmail.com |
| LUCAS | Seaman, Tammy | erictammy@sbcglobal.net |
| MEDINA | Rabung, Dale | twodr@zoominternet.net |
| MIAMI | Peters, Teresa | tm_peters@yahoo.com |
| MONTGOMERY | Romeo, Sam | sromeo@audubon.org |
| NOBLE | LeVasseur, Doug | doug.levasseur@gmail.com |
| OTTAWA | Ziebarth, Paula | paulasbirdz@yahoo.com |
| OTTAWA | Rock, Lisa | snowbunting123@gmail.com |
| PICKAWAY | Hill, Carrie | hillteach@gmail.com |
| PORTAGE | Gammon, Darrell | invisibleman53@yahoo.com |
| ROSS | Hill, Carrie (Bishop Flaget School) | hillteach@gmail.com |
| SANDUSKY | Rock, Lisa | snowbunting123@gmail.com |
| SENECA | Coffman, Jim | jrussscoff@gmail.com |
| STARK | Gammon, Darrell | invisibleman53@yahoo.com |
| STARK | Semroc, Judy | rainefox51@gmail.com |
| SUMMIT | Grande, Marcy | mgrandesign@yahoo.com |
| TRUMBULL | Loyd Marshall | llmarsh@aol.com |
| WARREN | Jeffries, Art | gonebirding@hotmail.com |
| WAYNE | Bolt, Mel | mellen@sssnet.com |
| WOOD | Hamlin, Terry | tkhamlin@icloud.com |



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

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I am going to be a monitor at Deer Creek State Park next year and would recommend that others wanting experience also become a monitor. Darlene Sillick is the one who suggested I become a monitor, and I'm glad that I listened. She got me in touch with Bob Kruse, who is the Maintenance Supervisor for ODNR at Deer Creek, and he showed us where the boxes are located. Being a bluebird box monitor is not something that you'll ever forget doing and it's worth the time you put into taking care of the boxes.

Hannah is a member of the central Ohio Young Birder's Club, a member of the Kountry Kids 4-H club and also on the Pickaway County Junior Fair board.