



Bluebird Monitor

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

Summer 2020



The Beauty that is the Bluebird

By Rob Swindell, previously published in the *Chronicle Telegram* on April 10, 2020, reprinted with permission



The beauty and song of birds have long moved some of the world's most prolific poets. Among those inspired was Eben Eugene Rexford, a nineteenth century American writer and poet, who often wrote about the joys of gardening. On this occasion, however, he wrote about spring and "The Bluebird" (Year Unknown):

Listen a moment, I pray you; what was that sound I heard?

Wind in the budding branches, the ripple of brooks, or a bird?

Hear it again, above us! and see! a flutter of wings!

The bluebird knows it is April, and soars to the sun and sings.

The Eastern Bluebird, with its bright blue head and wings, and rusty chest, is often associated with the coming of spring. Although many bluebirds live here year-round, they are a welcomed reminder that the cold winter is about to give way to the budding of trees and blooming of flowers.

One of the most popular bird species, bluebird populations have been increasing since the 1960s thanks in part to the work of dedicated volunteers who feed them and create nestboxes. The challenge for bluebirds and their reproductive success is the decrease in natural nesting spaces and increased competition for them. Known as cavity nesters, bluebirds often lose their nests to aggressive invasive species such as the European Starling and House Sparrow (which may also kill the bluebird, its chicks

and destroy the eggs). They face many other threats as well, including raccoons, black snakes and blowflies.

Locally, the volunteer effort to ensure there is available housing for the bluebirds is led by Fritz and Penny Brandau. Members of the North American Bluebird

Society and Ohio Bluebird Society, they head up the bluebird program for the Black River Audubon Society—building boxes, training trail monitors and keeping records of the fledglings.



Birds have been a lifelong passion for Penny, "I don't remember a time when I wasn't interested in birds. I grew up in a home where we watched my dad, Ford Smith, build bird feeders and bird houses, and had early field guides and binoculars for identification and references."

Her interest in bluebirds began when her father gifted them a homemade bluebird box, "He built it from a hollowed-out log section and mounted it to a fence in our backyard. I honestly thought we would never see bluebirds since we live in the small town of Amherst, but was amazed to see a bluebird pair build a nest in the box within weeks! Unfortunately, that nesting was predated by climbing raccoons and in my distress over the loss of the bluebird eggs, I started to research ways I could help them nest more successfully. It had become personal!"

The Brandaus had some of their questions answered locally from Jack Smith, co-founder of Black River Audubon Society. In 2011, Penny asked Smith to put up a new bluebird trail at a nursing home close to their home. "I still remember helping to build the new bluebird boxes in the basement of his home in Elyria and the thrill of the day my husband and I helped Jack Smith, and experienced bluebird monitor Mike Smith, actually install 15 new boxes on the grounds of Golden Acres Nursing Home," she said.

In 2012, the Brandaus were asked to take over the bluebird program.

The program entails coordinating volunteers who engage in a training program at the beginning of the spring and monitor the assigned boxes from April until mid-August. Every four



Continued on back page

OBS 2020 Conference

By Mike Watson, OBS President



The Ohio Bluebird Society held our annual conference on February 29th, returning to Ashland University's John C Myers Convocation Center. This year the theme was "Let's Open the Box", focusing on a variety of species that call nest boxes home and why and how we monitor those nest boxes.

Attendance this year was excellent: 214 people from 43 Ohio counties (and 4 from out of state). This includes 116 OBS members and 83 non-members; it was great to see so many new faces at our conference and we hope they learned a lot about bluebirds and OBS.

The day started with a members' meeting, which covered important OBS business including the membership report, Treasurer's report, review of priority projects and a brief update on 2019 nest box data. Pat Dutton's and Molly Wilsbacher's reports show that OBS is in good membership and financial standing. Total number of members increased by 63 in 2019, marking several years of growth in our membership size. Increased revenues are attributed primarily to increased sponsorships and grants, a slight increase in membership dues and excellent fundraising at the 2019 Silent Auction.

Presentations covered a wide range of topics, from Bethany Gray's basics of bluebirding which addressed the issues that bluebirders experience on the trail, typical challenges, and best management practices to Dr. Donald Althoff's fascinating talk about flying squirrels. Speakers also covered some cavity nesting birds that use cavities very different from the ones that bluebirders are familiar with - Joseph Lautenbach (Division of Wildlife) presented on barn owls and Judy Semroc (Cleveland Museum of Natural History) covered Chimney Swifts. Dr. Chris Tonra (OSU) discussed the importance of understanding the full annual life cycle of migratory species, focusing on Prothonotary Warblers. There were also presentations on wildlife rehabilitation (Becky Crow from Brukner Nature Center), the growth of conservation efforts at the Columbus Zoo (Michael Kreger) and Matt Shumar (Ohio Bird Conservation Initiative) discussed efforts to better understand threats and impacts to birds outside of the breeding season.

There was also an array of educational display tables: bees, local and regional conservation efforts, best practices and a peek inside prothonotary warbler nests at Mosquito Creek. We also welcomed displays and information from Troyer's Birds' Paradise and Robert Hershberger's Time and Optics, both long-time partners and supporters of OBS.

As always, OBS presented our two annual awards: The Blue Feather Award and the Wildlife Conservation Award. This year's Wildlife Conservation recipient was Lisa Brohl who has a long history of conservation and research on the Lake Erie Islands, ranging from insects to plants to a variety of bird species. Lisa is affiliated with the Lake Erie Islands Conservancy and has been integral to conservation of the unique habitats of the islands.

The Blue Feather winner this year was Paula Ziebarth, known to readers of this newsletter as Madame Wingnut. Beyond the great advice she has shared over the years, Paula's on-the-ground conservation in central and NW Ohio are impressive. Her reports account for ~10% of all bluebird data reported to OBS and she is the single largest data submitter to Cornell Lab of Ornithology's NestWatch program. She also presents talks on best management practices and is especially knowledgeable about house sparrow management.

This year OBS also presented a special Founders' Award to Reid and Teresa Caldwell for their efforts to create OBS and foster grass roots conservation efforts on behalf of Ohio's native cavity nesters. OBS started in 1987 after a call from the North American Bluebird Society to develop regional support for conservation. The Caldwells had already been hosting bluebird educational programs at Malabar Farm State Park, so were well known among people interested in conservation. They hosted the first OBS meeting in the fall of 1988 and published the first issue of the Bluebird Monitor from their home. More than 30 years later, OBS has inspired and supported countless bluebirders who have contributed hundreds of thousands of native birds to Ohio's populations.

OBS would like to thank everyone who helped make this conference possible. This starts with the board, under Darlene Sillick's leadership (as conference chair), who began planning in early 2018. But the board alone could not have created a conference of this size. We had support from a number of sponsors (see page 5), the many volunteers helping everything run smoothly, nearly 20 educational displays, wonderful speakers and an excellent venue.

Thank you to everyone who helped with this year's conference and to all who attended, and we hope to see you next year: March 6, 2021 at Ashland University.

The Birth of the Ohio Bluebird Society

In 1978, Dr. Lawrence Zeleny founded the North American Bluebird Society that started a national movement to help three species of bluebirds. Bluebirders across the continent started to help their bluebirds directly which led to the formation of many bluebird organizations where bluebirders could exchange ideas to develop the best trail methods to help their trail species.

At Malabar Farm State Park in Ohio, Ranger Reid Caldwell was also a bluebird that brought nestboxes to the park, and naturalist Teresa Caldwell enjoyed showing the visiting public their first bluebirds. Starting in 1982, the Caldwells started Bluebird Sundays, public festivals that celebrated bluebird conservation at Malabar. The annual festivals grew in number and nearly 300 attended the seventh bluebird festival on June 12, 1988.

Regular presenters that displayed photos, nestboxes, and led hikes along bluebird trails included Bob Orthwein and Jim Heiser that grew up near Malabar, and Don and Diana Plant that lived nearby. Dick Tuttle was also a regular, having joined Bob Orthwein in presenting programs. Again, the North American Bluebird Society was having yearly conventions that Ohioans were attending and there were many discussions as to when Ohio would have their own state organization.

The Caldwells answered the need for a state bluebird organization when they announced their formation of the Ohio



Bluebird Society in 1987. The first meeting took place on October 10, 1987 when 75 bluebirders representing 28 Ohio counties gathered at the Mt. Vernon Country Club Retirement Center.

During early stages of any organization founded by a married couple, there's a lot of work involved until the organization matures with other volunteers stepping forward to help with organizing a Board of Directors, a newsletter, planning field trips and meetings and annual conventions, etc. The first Bluebird Monitor made its debut in early March 1988.

OBS had a fantastic start and we all need to thank the Caldwells for the efficient conservation effort that we enjoy today.

Blue Feather Award – Paula Ziebarth



I would like to thank OBS for awarding me with The Blue Feather Award. I was sorry I could not be at the conference in person, but wanted to let everyone know how much the award means to me.

Like the Eastern Bluebird, I am native to Ohio. Born in Cuyahoga County, I later moved and settled in Powell, Ohio with my family after graduating from the Ohio State University. As a

young girl, I enjoyed exploring in the woods on our property and the Cleveland Metroparks. Surprisingly, I never saw an Eastern Bluebird until I moved to central Ohio. I fell in love with this avian jewel when I saw one for the first time, set out a nestbox in my backyard, and experienced the loss of my first Eastern Bluebird

young to House Sparrows. I met my good friend and mentor Darlene Sillick and she told me "if you have House Sparrows, you won't have Bluebirds". That was over 18 years ago. I monitored my first Bluebird trail in 2002 and remember that my one goal for that year was to become smarter than a House Sparrow.

Over the past 18 years, native cavity nesting bird conservation has become a passion of mine and almost a fulltime hobby during the 5 months of nest season each year. I have helped numerous homeowners get started with Bluebird, Tree Swallow and Purple Martin conservation in Delaware and Ottawa Counties. I have trained monitors and helped to reclaim or start quite a few Bluebird trails in the state. I have also actively monitored many trails during that time, monitoring over 400 nest sites in 2019.

I would like to extend a special thank you to each and every one of you – for what you do every day to help Eastern Bluebirds and other native cavity nesters thrive in Ohio.

Please enjoy these photos from the 2020 OBS conference.



Mike Watson



Bethany Gray



Dr Donald Althoff



Joseph Lautenbach



Judy Semroc



Becky Crow



Michael Kreger



Lisa Brohl



Matt Shumar



Anna Rose



Pat Dutton and Kate Bedor



Mary Lee Minor, Molly Wilsbacher, Darlene Sillick



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Tree swallows- A matter of Perspective

By Gina Swindell



Would it surprise you to know that some people view tree swallows in the same light as they do house sparrows? It's true! Some bluebird lovers find tree swallows to be a nuisance. These masked faced, bluish, brownish, purplish birds with the striking white underside are beautiful to me however. The expression on their face is mesmerizing, and their air acrobatics can command my attention for as long as time will allow.

There has been a movement to help increase bluebird numbers by building nestboxes and inviting them to backyards around the country. Thanks in part to the explosion in bluebird nestbox numbers the tree swallows have benefited also as well as the Mountain, Western and Eastern Bluebird populations. "Globally, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature lists the tree swallow's status as least concern, with the worldwide breeding population estimated to be about 17 million. However, between 1966 and 2014, populations went down by 49 percent and was especially steep in eastern Canada." Aerial insectivores like tree swallows are part of a general population decline possibly due to loss of nesting habitat and insect prey loss so bluebird boxes can be a real help in their survival.

It is recommended that bluebird boxes be spaced about 300 feet apart or more because they defend a large feeding territory. If bluebird boxes are placed too close together it may invite tree swallows to take up residence since they require much less real estate- only about 100 feet between boxes. To help these two species enjoy manmade nesting cavities in harmony people have discovered that "pairing" boxes about 20 feet apart will often allow a pair of swallows to nest in one box while a pair of bluebirds can nest in the other. Once the two species work out who will inhabit what box their unintended partnership works out well. These paired boxes should be about 300 feet away from the next set of paired boxes. Black River Audubon Society has had success with pairing nestboxes. Last year they saw 1212 tree swallows and 721 bluebirds fledge from a total of 470 nestboxes, most of them paired. As is the case with almost everything in life, pairing doesn't always work but it is worth a try if you find your bluebird boxes being invaded by tree swallows.

Tree swallows are fearless when defending their nestboxes. This may also help the bluebird according to some. Swallows will dive bomb and call out endlessly. It is really quite startling if you are near their territory when they prefer you not to be there. They will fly straight at you, veering off only inches from your face. This protective defensive behavior makes sense though since it is typical for them to raise only one brood of young per year.



Tree swallows may mate year after year but it is not uncommon for them to "step outside" of their union. The female, who is more of a brownish or muted blue color, typically gathers the nesting materials over a period of two days to two weeks. She will form a nest with a cup about 2-3 inches wide and around 2 inches deep, made mostly of grass and lined with feathers of other birds. After about 15 days the eggs hatch. Both parents feed the nestlings an insect rich diet but will also feed some berries. These nestlings should fledge 17-23 days after hatching.

If you are able to participate in the man-made cavity (nestbox) process remember that both the bluebird and the tree swallow are protected under the Migratory Bird Act. It is legal to manage house sparrows and starlings by eliminating them but you will have to find another way to manage the tree swallows. If you're having trouble, give nestbox pairing a try! Happy birding!

www.natureconservancy.ca/en/what-we-do/resource-centre/featured-species/birds/tree-swallow.html

www.treeswallowprojects.com/tresvsbb.html

www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Tree_Swallow/id

Gina Swindell is a lifelong animal lover who shares her contagious compassion with all animals. She loves being outdoors, learning about nature and taking pictures of birds and landscapes. She has been involved with horse and dog rescue organizations. Currently, she is the secretary for the Black River Audubon Society in Lorain County, Ohio.

Two Different Habitats

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



Wildlife habitats vary greatly and will ultimately determine how a parcel of our earth is used and by whom. I will describe two different habitats and how they were used once I installed bluebird nestboxes to mostly attract Tree Swallows while knowing that bluebirds would still claim nestboxes at their instinctual distances from members of their own species.

The habitat that is the most amazing to me is my Panhandle Road Grid (PRG) on the Delaware Wildlife Area north of Delaware, a public hunting area along the eastern shore of Delaware Lake. I am an official volunteer with the Ohio Division of Wildlife and the division has always been supportive of my grid projects by supplying U-posts for the boxes and blending management needs for the grid with what is needed to promote good hunting, mainly for pheasants and rabbits in the same five acre lot that is home to 55 nestboxes. A pair of boxes near the area's parking lot completes the project's total of 57 boxes. Most of the grid's boxes are spaced 25 yards apart, but in order to avoid brush, a few boxes are spaced at 22 yards which is close to 20 meters, the distance revealed by ornithologists to be the minimum distance that Tree Swallows will peacefully nest from their own species.

I believe that my birds historically nested in habitats created by *Castor canadensis*, the North American beaver, the furry rodent that is obsessed with building dams to silence the sound of trickling water. The popular PBS documentary "Leave it to Beavers," now on YouTube, states that 45 to 55-percent of the topsoil in North America was produced by the workings of beavers.

When beaver activities flood a young forest, tree trunks stand to attract cavity carving woodpeckers and their cavities become active with nests occupied by the species of birds that I work with today. Beavers are back in many areas across North America to reveal what was erased and missed after the fur market arrived more than four hundred years ago.

Nestboxes standing in multiple rows in a grid design mimic a beaver's world. My grid along Panhandle Road stands in a prairie managed for pheasants. Areas within the grid are wet and soggy for much of the nesting season. Across the road to the east, 75 acres of wetlands provide cattails and other wetland plants that surround ponds and lakes that makes habitats that support populations of flying insects that enabled the production of 249 Tree Swallows from 57 boxes during the 2019 nesting season.

The grid's swallows attempted 71 active nests with eggs from the first egg on May 6 to the last fledging event on July 28 for an 83-day season. Unfortunately, 13 (18.3%) nests failed, but successful nests followed six of the failures. Most amazing is that all 57 box locations produced swallow fledglings.

After one box fledged six Tree Swallows, bluebirds nested to fledge two from three eggs. The berm of the road had been mowed for the summer and provided the best hunting habitat for the bluebirds.

From two nestboxes that had raised swallows, two House Wren nests fledged three and four, respectively. In other words, the swallows were so dominant at chasing wrens and bluebirds from the grid's boxes that the two other species could only nest after the swallows were done raising their families.

The habitat at Smith Park is quite different from the habitat at PRG. The park is located along Troy Road on the westside of Delaware. A nice asphalt bike trail leads to the park for easy access for bike riders, runners, and walkers with or without dogs. The habitat includes a drainage ditch accented with cattails that leads to a pond. Red-winged Blackbirds nest in some of the cattails as do other wetland nesters. Plenty of mowed grasslands and young trees bordering parking lots make it easy for bluebirds to hunt insects from the ground. During the last four years, I have added and maintained twenty nestboxes in the ditch, all spaced at twenty-five yards.

Unfortunately, suburban homes sit from one-third to one-half mile from the park and backyard bird feeders could be supporting non-native House Sparrows that annually invade the park's nestboxes. During the 2019 season, I trapped and dispatched 38 sparrows. The deceased were stored in sealed plastic bags in my freezer and were later presented to the Tetrapods Collection of the Museum of Biological Diversity, The Ohio State University to be used by student curators practicing their skills in making study skins and professors needing props for their lab classes. None went to waste.

House Sparrows were collected between March 29 and July 12 before any of their eggs hatched. Before the villains were removed, they managed to kill two adult swallows along with two families of five nestlings each.

Smith Park's swallows attempted 12 nests with eggs in 11 boxes, and ten nests (83.3%) were successful. Sixty-eight eggs were laid, 60 (88.2%) hatched, and 44 (64.7%) fledged. Once hatched, only 73.3% fledged. Failures were due to sparrows and rainy weather that grounded flying insects.

Bluebirds attempted eight nests in eight boxes. Seven nests successfully fledged 27 young. Once 33 eggs were laid, 29 (87.9%) hatched and 81.9% fledged. Once hatched, 93.1% of the young fledged for an excellent rate. Heavy rains may have caused insects and other life forms to be extra visible on the ground for hunting bluebirds.

In the four years of the park's nestbox trail, House Wrens have never appeared. Not one stick has ever been found in a nestbox due to the absence of woody bushes and other habitat favored by wrens.

If you visit Smith Park, or walk or drive by the grid along Panhandle Road, both locations require dogs to be leashed. Panhandle can be accessed from Rt. 23 north of Delaware. Visits to these habitats are usually comfortable since the swallows do a good job of controlling biting insects. In 2019, since the effective swoopers consume at least 300,000 insects per 45-day period that each family uses a nestbox, those at Smith Park consumed three million insects, while those at the grid along Panhandle Road eliminated 17.4 million.

Conserve on for a more comfortable world!



Ask Madame WingNut

Spring Has Sprung

By Paula Ziebarth



For this issue of the journal, I had intended to write about the importance of good monitoring and data collection, but with the advent of Covid-19, I decided to share what this spring nest season brings, in light of the special challenges we all face this year. I already shared this with OBS Area Contacts, but thought other members might find it helpful.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic most of us are sheltering in place as much as possible. Schools and restaurants are closed; meetings and trainings are cancelled; local parks in central Ohio have trails open to the public but our county parks and city parks have shut down bathroom facilities. I am sanitizing all the hard surfaces in my house; it even devolved to sanitizing the groceries I brought home today. "Social distancing" is being employed as much as possible and most of us are fearful.

BUT... The birds are busy. Nesting season for our native cavity nesting birds has definitely begun. House Sparrows are out there full throttle and I have been busy on my City of

Powell (central Ohio) trails already, capturing 20 in nestboxes during the second week of March. It is important to trap and remove as many of them as you can early in the season before Eastern Bluebirds get really serious about claiming nestboxes. "Trap early and trap often" as my online Bluebirder friend, Bob Walshaw, used to say. My good friend and mentor, Darlene Sillick, also told me "if you have House Sparrows, you won't have Bluebirds." I have taken both these things to heart, especially in the spring. Both species are hard wired to breed and as their hormone levels increase in March, Eastern Bluebirds enter nestboxes claimed by House Sparrows. House Sparrows become more aggressive and often kill them if not intercepted before given the opportunity.

Eastern Bluebirds are starting nests in a few boxes and the territorial disputes are in full swing. There is actually the earliest Eastern Bluebird eggs I have EVER seen on Meadowview Park Trail in the City of Powell. First egg was on March 17! Tree Swallows are returning also. I saw my first ones on March 12.

To reduce spread of the virus nationwide, I am staying home as much as possible and keeping distance from people that



From Left to Right: Eastern Bluebird roost, Carolina Chickadee roost, House Sparrow roost and Downy Woodpecker roost

do not live in my household. This time of year, I normally am out visiting people who need help with nestbox siting or House Sparrow trapping and training new monitors. This spring I am only corresponding via telephone, text message and e-mail. I am monitoring trails solo where volunteer monitoring is allowed. If you have a trail on public grounds, check with the trail owner to make sure they are comfortable with you on the property right now. Keep in mind that bathroom facilities are probably closed.

When people in my counties contact me for help with Bluebirds, I always direct them to www.sialis.org. It is the most comprehensive website out there, in my humble opinion. North American Bluebird Society also has some wonderful informational sheets on their website at www.nabluebirdsociety.org. For nestbox plans or to order quality nestboxes, I direct people to www.nestboxbuilder.com. Repeating sparrow traps and sparrow spookers can be purchased at www.sparrowtraps.net. Van Ert inbox traps can be purchased at www.vanerttraps.com. Many of you are already using Cornell's NestWatch database to compile trail or backyard data. I am a NestWatch Coordinator and can help get you started if you have any questions: www.nestwatch.org.

To help some of you with your first nest check encounters, I have included some pictures for you. Bird droppings or box excavation are telltale signs of species that have been sleeping in a nestbox over the winter. First picture is Eastern Bluebird roost - pretty nasty. Second photo is Carolina Chickadee roost (you can tell how small these droppings are by looking at Van Ert mount screw for scale). Third is picture of

House Sparrow roost: white, 1/4" long chow mein like noodle droppings... When you see these, time to set that Van Ert trap! Fourth photo is Downy Woodpecker roost evidence. Although they never use nestbox to nest in, they use it for shelter during cold nights and while in there, they have to excavate a bit. It's just what they do. When you see entry hole enlarged, simply install a hole reducer on front face of nestbox to bring hole back to original size. This is important to keep European Starlings and other avian predators out of nestboxes.

I have also attached photos of the Carolina Wren nest that is completed on my front porch. These great little birds overwinter with me in central Ohio and love this large slot box design mounted in most sheltered corner of my front porch. Plans for box can be found on www.nestboxbuilder.com.

And finally, to brighten your day, a picture of my 31-year old son Greg. Greg has autism and loves to build nestboxes for Darlene Sillick's Zeppick nestbox conservation project. He has a great empathy and love for all animals and has always been a little saddened that dinosaurs were extinct UNTIL he discovered that birds ARE dinosaurs. He has always signed his nestboxes with his name and date, but now he labels them "dinosaur homes".

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.



Carolina Wren nest in large slot box on front porch



Greg Ziebarth with "dinosaur homes"

Ring Nestbox Camera – A New Way of Looking at Nesting

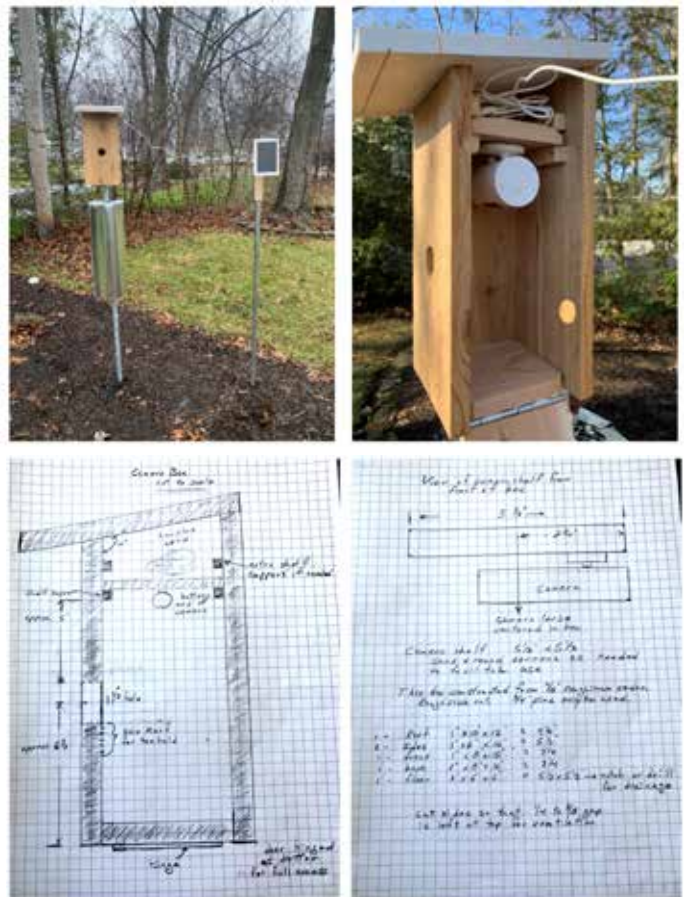
By Penny Brandau, Area Contact for Lorain County, Ohio

For several years I have been fascinated with the idea of monitoring the activity inside a nestbox with an inbox video camera but the complexity of the set ups and the cost of maintenance seemed more than I could justify. However, after reading an article, "Nestbox Mysteries", in the North American Bluebird Society's Winter 2019-20 journal, **Bluebird**, I changed my mind and took the plunge! Authors Nancy Fraim and Marilyn Michalski wrote about their experiences with a RING camera system, it's relatively simple set up and reasonable price. Their descriptions of several instances when the camera video helped them understand nesting outcomes that would have been a mystery otherwise was fascinating. When my youngest daughter heard of my interest, she bought a Ring stick up cam and accompanying solar panel for me for Christmas for around \$150. It is all weather, HD 1080 video, has a 2-way audio and night vision. We have chosen to cover the blue light of the cam to reduce interior night lighting with a small piece of tape but otherwise have made no changes to the camera itself. It has been one of the best gifts I have ever received!

A RING stick up camera is small (roughly the size of an empty toilet paper roll) and is installed in the "attic" area of a modified nestbox. The video is activated by motion and sent by WIFI to an Iphone app or computer for viewing. The RING stick up cam I received had a rechargeable battery included but the addition of a RING solar panel for energy has provided enough energy to keep the cam working well without the need to remove the battery for charging. Any events which trigger a motion alert on the phone Ring app or computer can be viewed immediately by clicking on the RING app. It is possible to also choose to look inside the nestbox for a "Live" view whenever you just want to check in real-time what is happening in the box. By paying a nominal fee of \$3 month or \$30 year the video clips can be viewed anytime for a rolling 60 day period and even downloaded from the Ring cloud storage. The cam automatically records up to 30 seconds of activity video at a time then pauses for a minute before starting to record another clip if motion continues. The clarity of the video and the sound quality is much better than I could have imagined.

In January my husband designed a modified bluebird nestbox and installed the Ring webcam. Advice and suggestions from the NABS co-author Nancy Fraim were very helpful to him as he built our nestbox. She willingly answered many of my emailed questions. Some new modifications which my husband added to his plan though included placing the solar panel on a separate mounting pole instead of on the nestbox roof (we use sparrow spookers on the roof of our nestbox when there is an active bluebird nesting and thought the panel might be in the way of a spooker). Having the solar panel nearby but on a separate pole actually has given the bluebirds another place to perch near the box to guard it.

Even the solar cord has been used for perching. The solar panel can also now be pivoted if needed to face the sun more directly. Another idea was to attach the RING cam to a sliding board which could be adjusted to two different heights inside the nestbox for different viewing depths. We know that some bluebird females like taller nests than others and wanted the option of moving the camera a little higher if needed for better viewing. The nestbox was mounted on a 1-inch EMT pole and an eight-inch diameter Kingston stovepipe predator guard was installed under the box to help protect against ground predators like raccoons, snakes or chipmunks.



Since the new nestbox was installed in our back yard we have seen several different birds enter it. Eastern Bluebirds checked it out early in January along with a pair of curious black capped chickadees. Our overwintering pair of Carolina wrens were seen inspecting the interior, and downy woodpeckers entertained us several nights in March and April as they individually roosted in the box (minimal remodeling by the male downy). More recently house sparrows tried to claim the box but having the Ring camera alerted us to their activity and made it easier to trap and dispatch the male house sparrow before they actually nested.

We were actually checking a bluebird trail about 8 miles from our home last week when the Ring motion alert activated on my phone. When I checked, I was appalled to see a house sparrow entering the Ring box at our home several miles away and feared that he might catch and kill one of our bluebirds who had been building a nest that very morning in the box. It suddenly occurred to me that I could possibly use another feature of the camera which I had been careful to avoid up to that point. The webcam has a microphone feature which is defaulted to be off but can be turned on in order to speak through the webcam inside the nestbox. When the motion alert sounded the second time a few minutes later I opened the Ring app, activated live feed and I saw the unwanted house sparrow in the box again! I turned on the speaker and loudly ordered him to leave! He scrambled quickly out of the house and probably wondered what in the world had happened! I actually laughed out loud! At least the bluebirds were safe temporarily until we could return home and set the Van ert trap. (We did catch the HOSP the next day when he returned once more).

Having a Ring nestbox camera can enrich our knowledge of what happens inside a nestbox exponentially. I have been able to share clips of downloaded video to my Facebook page and have made some of them public when requested. Others are finding it as interesting as I am. It is fascinating to see the activity of different bird species inside a nestbox and I'm hopeful that we will have a bluebird nesting soon to share with others. The opportunities for education are limited only by our imaginations.

More experienced Ring cam users like Nancy Fraim have installed Ring cameras inside bluebird nestboxes located on

school grounds in order to introduce students to views of nest building, egg-laying, and nestling feeding, as viewed from their Smartboard, iPad or computer. Retirement communities are another group who would probably love the responsible viewing of bluebirds or other native cavity nesters in action. It could be a tool to increase private bluebird landlord nestbox monitor's early awareness of problems inside a nestbox. Most of us have wished we knew why certain nests failed or perhaps what we could have done better or differently to improve the nesting success of our beloved bluebirds. Use of a Ring cam with Wifi video can be one potentially useful tool. I'm definitely loving the things I am learning. It has opened up a whole new way of viewing a nestbox!

For more information about Ring webcam equipment check the website www.ring.com.



Treasurer's Report by Molly Wilsbacher

- 1. A big THANK YOU goes out to everyone who donated and purchased items for our silent auction at the Bluebird Conference.** As those who attended can attest, we had more items than table space! We raised \$2,675 from the silent auction, which is more than double what we made last year. Believe it or not, it's not too early to start thinking of next year. If you're engaged in a little spring cleaning or even downsizing, please consider donating new or slightly used items for our auction next year. If you would like someone to pick up the donation, please email me OBS Treasurer@gmail.com or another Board Member. Thank you again!
- 2. SAVE THE DATES! We are optimistic that COVID-19 and home isolation will be a thing of the past and are moving forward with plans for the next two fantastic conferences.** Our next two annual Bluebird Conferences are already calendared: Saturday, March 6, 2021 and Saturday, March 5, 2022. Our theme for the 2021 Bluebird Conference is "Back to Basics." Ohio Bluebird Society's goal with every conference is to bring together and educate as many bird lovers as possible, and hopefully, you'll make a few friends and meaningful connections in the process.
- 3. With such a successful conference, the Ohio Bluebird Society's bank accounts are healthier than in recent memories.** OBS bank accounts currently reflect that we enjoy \$34,022 as of March 31, 2020. Our anticipated expenditures in the current quarter include designing, publishing, and mailing this Newsletter, as well as expected expenses associated with maintaining insurance, website maintenance, and hopefully, awarding a few grants and sponsorships.
- 4. Amazon Smile donations totaled almost \$30 last quarter!** I know that seems small, but if every member who made purchases from Amazon made them through the Amazon Smile website (<https://smile.amazon.com>) and designated the Ohio Bluebird Society as your charitable choice, we would receive twice, if not triple, that amount. For those that do not know, the Ohio Bluebird Society receives a small percentage of all purchases made through Amazon Smile 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.



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President's Report – May 2020

By Mike Watson

Coronavirus is, of course, dominating our lives in many ways right now. As I'm writing this, Ohio is still seeing increasing numbers of cases and increasing deaths due to Covid-19. I hope that by the time this issue of the Bluebird Monitor is published and delivered to you, we will be past the peak and on our way to returning to something closer to normal. In the meantime, I hope all of you are staying safe, following guidelines to reduce the spread of the virus and are remaining healthy.

Being the first issue since our OBS conference, I wanted to take a moment to thank all of you who attended. We had a great turnout this year (one of the largest ever) and really appreciate seeing so many people who are interested in our native cavity nesting species.

Many of you responded to the post-conference survey that OBS sent and I want to share some of what we learned from that survey. First and foremost, I think we can say that this was by all measures a successful conference. After pooling all answers to the multiple-choice questions, we found that 90% of responses were positive and 66% were 'strongly agree'.

We also learned a lot from this survey that can guide our planning for next year's

conference. For example, most of you enjoyed the lunch but noted that the lack of signs made it difficult to determine which kind of sandwich to choose; an obvious oversight that can be corrected next year.

When asked about topics presented at this conference and topics for future conferences, your responses were consistently inconsistent. That is, people who attended the OBS conference enjoy and are interested to learn more about a broad range of topics (with a focus on bluebirds, of course). Again, this information is invaluable as we plan future conferences.

Here in northeast Ohio we're still very early in the bluebird nesting season. The trails at the Holden Arboretum have a handful of complete nests, but no eggs yet. I'm lucky to work at a location that allows continued monitoring of our trails, but I know that that is not the case across the state. There will, unfortunately, be a lack of monitoring and management at many trails this season. The coronavirus models seem to agree that Ohio cases should peak in late April or early May. Perhaps we can all return to our trails before the end of the nesting season.

Please stay healthy and thanks for all you do for conservation.

Welcome to Carl Gleditsch

We are happy to welcome Carl Gleditsch to the OBS Board of Trustees. Voting was finalized at the conference in February and Carl officially joined the board at that time. Carl has a background in research chemistry but has always been interested and involved in natural sciences. He has been a beekeeper since high school, volunteers with a number of conservation organizations, and is an Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist. He has also helped install and monitor bluebird trails at two parks in Columbus.



OBS 2019 FLEDGLING REPORT

OBS encourages anyone who installs and monitors nesting boxes to report their end-of-season results to us. This helps us better understand the status of Ohio native cavity nesting birds. We also encourage that this data be reported to Cornell Lab of Ornithology's NestWatch program, a citizen science project that collects data for all bird species across the globe.

The OBS data is typically presented in two forms:

1. Total number of fledglings for each species (Table 1). In 2019, OBS received 73 reports representing 12 native species. The top four species (Eastern Bluebird, Tree Swallow, Purple Martin, and House Wren) fledged several thousand each. Our top species in 2019 was Tree Swallow with nearly 8,000 fledglings, followed by bluebird with more than 6,500 fledged. In total, more than 24,000 fledglings from native species were reported to OBS. This represents an incredible addition to Ohio's bird populations as a direct result of the work each of you do.

2. Number per report for each species (Table 2). This second format corrects for the varying number of reports received from year to year (report numbers range from 62 to 95 over the 10-year period). Generally, long-term trends indicate that number fledged per report are increasing for our focal species, and we see more fledglings per report in recent years than at the beginning of the decade (for example, see Fig. 1 & 2). However, we do see a small drop in the past year or two.

The 73 reports that were submitted to OBS represent a wide range of program size, from single boxes in the yard to programs with hundreds of nest boxes. In a future article, I'll discuss differences between these very large and very small programs, how the size of reports have changed over time, and what (if anything) this means for bluebirds in Ohio.

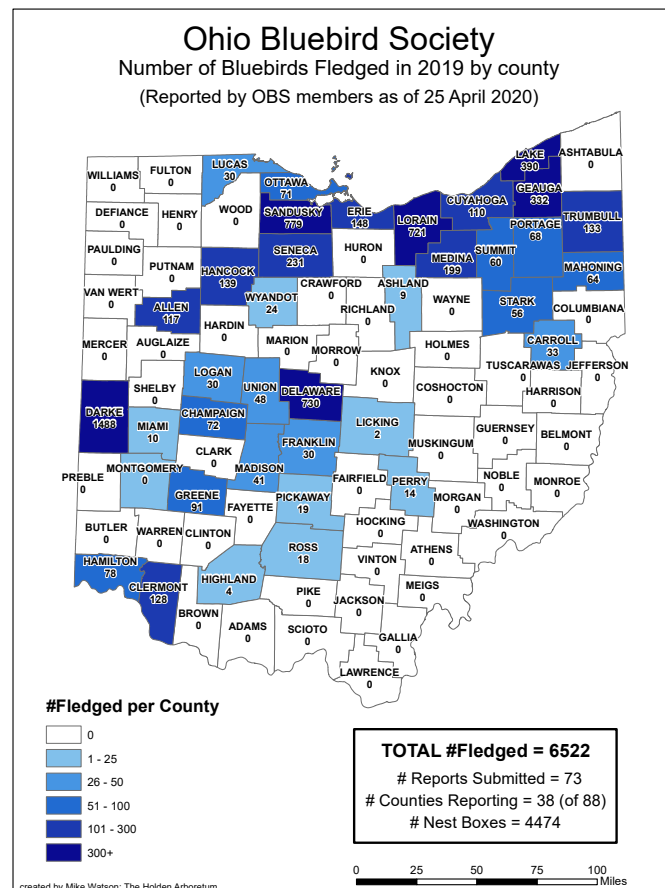
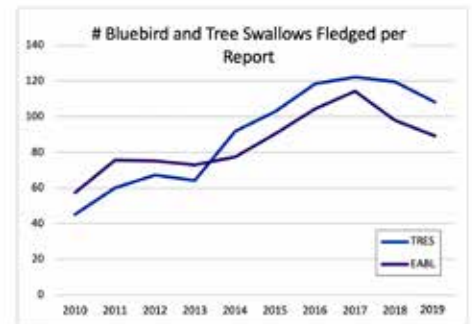
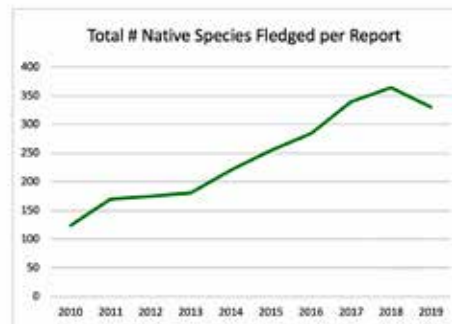
Thank you to everyone who submitted 2019 (and if you haven't submitted your data, we're still happy to have it).

	Total - 2019
#Reports	73
#Nestbox	4474
Eastern Bluebird	6522
Tree Swallow	7916
House Wren	2625
Purple Martin	6359
Black-capped Chickadee	54
Carolina Chickadee	123
Carolina Wren	25
American Kestrel	196
Osprey	14
Barn Swallow	146
Prothonotary Warbler	122
Wood Duck	17
Total Native Species	24119
House Sparrows dispatched	1305
House Sparrow eggs removed	1333

Table 1. Total numbers reported to OBS for 2019, as of April 25, 2020.

Species	# per Report		
	2019	2018	9-yr avg
#Reports	73	68	74
Eastern Bluebird	89.3	102.3	83.5
Tree Swallow	108.4	124.3	84
House Wren	36.0	33.7	23
Purple Martin	87.1	77.8	20.5
Black-capped Chickadee	0.7	0.8	1.6
Carolina Chickadee	1.7	1.5	2.1
Carolina Wren	0.3	0.5	0.5
American Kestrel	2.7	2.5	1.3
Osprey	0.2	0.2	0.1
Barn Swallow	2.0	1.8	1.2
Prothonotary Warbler	1.7	1.1	0.8
Total Native Species	330.4	346.7	218.8
House Sparrow dispatched	17.9	26.9	5.2
House Sparrow eggs destroyed	18.3	18.1	12.9

Table 2. Number of Fledglings per Report for 2019, 2018 and 9-year average.



Raccoon Attack of EABL Eggs

The video in this link shows how thoroughly a raccoon searches for the contents of a nestbox. Raccoons are amazingly agile and can easily reach into the 1 1/2 inch hole of a nestbox if they can access the box by climbing the pole or reaching into it from the roof. This graphic video should be a good incentive to always use stovepipe predator guards on nestbox mounting poles. Following this recommended best practice can save the lives of the female bluebird and her young.

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=mL8RKbpTxsg&feature=youtu.be>



OBS Officers, Board of Trustees, and Advisors

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

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Ohio Bluebird Society Membership Application

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	Annual	3-years
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Ohio Bluebird Society is a 501(c)(3) Organization

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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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Deadline for Submitting Articles:

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

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to seven days, monitors open the nest boxes to observe and record the type of nest, number of eggs and parental activity. Penny compares opening a nestbox to opening a Christmas gift, "You are often surprised and excited at what you will find!! To observe the miracle of nesting and the development of bluebirds from the first egg laid through the hatching, growth and eventual fledging is a miracle that always brings joy and amazement."

The information is collected at the meeting held at the end of the year where it is subsequently entered into Cornell Lab of Ornithology's website by another group of volunteers. The program now has 33 trails and over 470 nestboxes. Last year's total fledglings from those nestboxes and other private homeowners included 721 Eastern Bluebirds, as well as 202 House Wrens, 1,212 Tree Swallows and 19 Black-capped Chickadees.

Author Al Batt, said, "If you want to see and enjoy nature, a bluebird will open the door for you." The Brandaus encourage everyone to get out and enjoy nature, "What an incredible way to make a difference in the beauty of our world, one bluebird at a time!"



Interested in Volunteering?

Anyone interested in participating in the Black River Audubon bluebird program may contact Penny Brandau at pennybrandau@gmail.com.

A lifelong resident of Northeast Ohio, Rob Swindell and his wife Gina enjoy nature, wildlife, and photography. Rob has a Bachelor's degree from Baldwin-Wallace College where he studied environmental science. He also has an MBA from Tiffin University and a law degree from Concord Law School. He is currently the Deputy Auditor with the City of Lorain. He also wrote community features and new business stories for The Chronicle Telegram. Rob has been involved in many non-profit organizations, including currently serving as the treasurer for the Black River Audubon Society. Rob and Gina live in Lorain with their dog Bailey—and the birds, deer and other wildlife who visit their feeders.