



# Bluebird Monitor

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

Spring 2023



## The Bird Magnet - Heated Birdbaths

By Heather Harris, OBS Board Member



Spring is now just around the corner for Ohio, but for many of us winter will linger on well past March 20th. While some bluebirds go south in fall, some will remain in Ohio throughout winter. A lucky searcher will find them quietly going about their business in the woods and in open fields near tree lines and power lines. Year-round, bluebirds eat spiders, caterpillars, crickets, and other small

insects that they find on the ground. In winter they will eat a lot of wild fruits and berries, such as red cedar berries, pokeberry, and sumac to name a few. They will often visit bird feeders that offer seeds like safflower, unshelled sunflower seeds, and even chopped peanuts and suet. Although not all bluebirds will come to feeders, they do need water. When other water sources are frozen over during our very cold and bitter winter months, a heated birdbath is a sure way to attract a variety of great birds to your yard. Despite the name, heated bird baths do not “heat” the water to a hot water temperature, but rather warms the water enough to keep it from freezing by keeping the water temperature between 40 and 55 degrees.

So what type of heated birdbaths are there? There are several choices of heated birdbaths that you can buy from the market. Some heated baths are deck mounted, some sit on or are attached to a pedestal, and some sit right on the ground. Some birdbaths have the heater built in, or you can buy de-icers to convert your existing bath into a heated one.



De-icers are relatively inexpensive, but may not be very handy for some because you have to ensure it is compatible with the size of your birdbath. Since birdbaths are mounted outside, you'll also need to consider the length of the cord and where your power outlet source is. During severe cold temperatures I have found that some of the de-icers I have tried will create only a small area of open water in the center of the bath bowl, not thawing all of the water completely. This seems to only allow a bird or two to enjoy the bath at a time, rather than a larger group of birds all together.

Many birdbaths on the market have built-in heaters in them, with varying features like either a long or short electric cord, an on/off switch, and some turn on automatically as soon as the unit is plugged in. Again, energy consumption, outlet sources and the use of extension cords may make this style of heated birdbath undesirable to some people.



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Solar powered bird baths are a great option for those who wish to save money and use something that does not rely on electricity to operate. Solar powered options are environmentally friendly since they conserve electricity and are not costly to run. However, several cloudy days can affect how long the solar power lasts, and you could end up with a frozen bird bath until it can recharge from the sun again.

Regardless of the style of heated bird bath you choose, it is important to remember the safety of the birds. Birds are cautious near deep water because they can drown in it. Never fill your birdbath to the brim, but instead keep it a little shallow—around two inches or less is ideal. Adding a few rocks can also help to give birds a place to perch as they drink and bathe.

A clean birdbath with fresh water will not only attract a variety of birds, but will also give them a clean, disease-free place to drink and wash. Bath water can get dirty quickly from bird droppings and algae, so it is a good practice to change the water every few days in the winter, and daily in the hot summer months. It's equally important to clean your birdbath regularly

every two to four days using a vinegar and water solution. Avoid cleaning your bath with soap or detergent since the chemicals can potentially strip a bird's feathers of essential oils, as well as be toxic to the birds drinking the water if the birdbath bowl is not rinsed well.

Birds are always looking for easily accessible and safe places to drink and bathe, but also need the ability to escape quickly to cover should a predator like a Cooper's hawk or the neighborhood cat come near. Placing your birdbath near a bush or a pine tree so that birds can have somewhere close by to fly to in case of emergency can make it even more attractive to them.

Heated birdbaths can be expensive, but investing in one and offering water is a very important resource you can give the birds in winter, and in return it will provide you with a lot of bird activity and enjoyment. No matter what time of year, birdbaths are a great way to observe and enjoy many of the different bird species in your yard! So, if you've never included a source of water in your landscaping before, now is a great time!

## Spring Into Action By Paula Ziebarth



As I write this, I am looking out my window at an accumulation of 4 inches of snow. My heart yearns for bird song, warmer weather, Eastern Bluebird wing waving and nest building. Eastern Bluebirds have remained with me throughout the winter, eating homemade suet mixes and enjoying the heated bird bath, used solely as a clean water source during winter months. On sunny days, they check out the nest box in my backyard. As the birds get ready to spring into action, so should we.

Being prepared for nest season should involve a proactive, rather than reactive state of mind. On internet Facebook posts and people reaching out for help, I see too many pictures of unsafe nest box mounts: boxes nailed to trees; boxes mounted on posts or poles without predator baffles; too close to people structures, stiff needled evergreens, brushy areas; people housing Bluebirds with "outdoor cats". All of these nest box set-ups are inviting Eastern Bluebirds and other native cavity nesters into an unsafe housing situation. When you set out a nest box, you are responsible for the lives of the birds you entice to use that box and it is a responsibility that should not be taken lightly.

### **Eastern Bluebirds will begin to nest in March. Proactive steps to help the birds include:**

- a. Have a well designed nest box ready on free standing pole with stovepipe predator baffle in relatively open area.
- b. Keep cats indoors.
- c. Control nonnative House Sparrows. Don't feed them or house them. Actively control them by trapping using inbox Van Ert traps and/or repeat bait traps as soon as possible if they try to use nest boxes.
- d. House Sparrow deterrents such as Sparrow Spookers or monofilament line can be effective.
- e. Monitor boxes at least once per week and keep good data.

If you have questions or need help, don't hesitate to contact OBS. They will put you in touch with the Area Contact for your county and they should be able to help you with any problems that arise. OBS and NABS are great sources of knowledge for helping Eastern Bluebirds. My favorite educational website is [www.sialis.org](http://www.sialis.org).



# Preserving the Legacy of Mr. Dick Tuttle

By Robyn Bailey, Project Leader for Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Nestwatch program



When I heard the news that Dick Tuttle passed away in July 2022, my first thought was that another legend has fallen. Although I did not know Dick well, his reputation preceded him, and I knew

that he had been collecting data on cavity-nesting birds since before I was born. We met in 2019 at an annual meeting of the Ohio Bluebird Society where I had been invited to speak, and Dick mentioned to me all of the work that he had been doing on Prothonotary Warblers and other box-nesting species. By that time, he had already received multiple achievement awards from Ohio Bluebird Society, Columbus Audubon, Ohio Department of Natural Resources Hall of Fame, and others. So despite only having met him once, I recognized the loss of a tireless champion for Ohio's birds.



## By Any Means Necessary

Dick Tuttle was known for his unusual methods, and he had his own way of doing things!

Dick worked to restore cavity-nesting birds wherever he could, collaborating with everyone from middle school students to incarcerated people in his endeavors. He was known throughout his community of Delaware, Ohio for his many bird projects, including bluebird box installation, Osprey pole maintenance, and Chimney Swift surveys. He was also a prolific writer, authoring more than 86 articles for Columbus Audubon. For 53 years, he compiled data from ~411 nest boxes accommodating 10 species of native birds. Thanks to Dick, at least 58,119 fledglings left those boxes.

However, at the time of his death, the data were in jeopardy of being lost forever because they were contained mostly on paper and had no clear custodian.

Concerned about this precarious situation, I contacted Darlene Sillick, longtime NestWatcher, president of the Ohio Bluebird Society, and leader of the Ohio Young Birders Club. She was familiar with Mr. Tuttle's many projects and even told me about a book that he had been writing. Darlene was just the person to facilitate the archival of this lifetime's work. Within a few short months, she had marshaled one of the most productive volunteers I have ever met.

## NOT ALL HEROES WEAR CAPES

Tim Bischoff is the heroic recent retiree who agreed to enter all 17,362 nest records on Dick Tuttle's behalf. He painstakingly transcribed records from notebooks, attended Zoom calls with me to sort out the particulars of this dataset, spoke with other trail coordinators, and even went to find some boxes in person to verify their numbers. He handled all of this with a quiet humility. Tim is the quintessential citizen scientist, and also participates in our Nest Quest Go! project which helps to save historical paper nest records from obsolescence. Darlene Sillick told NestWatch, "I am glad to have had Dick for my mentor, and I know in my heart how he changed my life. I am still in awe that Tim was able to sort all this out."



## Stacks of Data

Dick Tuttle stands beside his stack of data books, a lifetime's worth of citizen-science data.



## Public Banding Demonstration

In August 2021, Dick Tuttle bands American Kestrel nestlings and records data at a public event.

## A DATASET PRESERVED

NestWatch is now the proud home of Dick Tuttle's nest monitoring data. His 17,362 nest records spanning from 1969 to 2021 are safely preserved in our database, available to scientists for generations to come. We hope to honor his legacy by stewarding these data. We are grateful for the supporters who made this happen (with special thanks to Tim Bischoff, Darlene Sillick, and Sandra McBrearty). Last but not least, we say a

final "Thank you" to Dick Tuttle for your conservation work, your mentorship in your community, and your vision to start this work well before the term "citizen science" was coined to describe it.

*Robyn Bailey manages the research, education, and communication initiatives for NestWatch, the Cornell Lab's citizen-science project focused on nesting birds.*

# The Art of Planning a Nature Hike

By Molly Wilsbacher, OBS Treasurer



I'm always impressed with those who can prepare and lead nature hikes. I've been on several hikes over the years and truly believe that there is an "art" to it. In planning, organizing, and ensuring the subject matter is appropriate for the audience. As Earl Nightingale once said, "All you need is the plan, the road map, and the courage to press on to your destination."

For this article, I interviewed conservation specialist, field biologist, and naturalist Judy Semroc who has over 25 years of experience offering hands-on exploration based learning programs. As a former Petroleum Geologist and science teacher, Judy loves to learn about and share her passion for the natural world through hikes, interpretive programs, and photography.

**Can you please describe how you plan for a field trip?** There are many ways to plan for a field trip. Sometimes the topic may focus on something that might be seen at a certain time of year, or on a certain type of natural interest, such as birds, fungi, dragonflies, plants or even geologic features such as stream bank cuts, ledges, waterfalls, wetlands, etc. With nature providing so many GREAT items of interest, I am never at a loss to find things to show to people.



Sometimes people will contact me who would like to have me take their club, organization or family on a field trip to a certain location to view any type of available nature or a given focus on one topic. If the location is on private property, I make all the necessary arrangements ahead of time so that the landowner knows I will be there with a group at a certain time on a certain day. If the field trip takes place at a public location, I make sure that everyone knows where to park and what to bring, and especially what to wear. Sometimes the planning can take a great time, especially if it is a trip that will encompass multiple days at an out of town location.

**What type and variety of field trips do you plan?** If I get to choose the field trip, I will select types of trips and locations that will show people multiple things in nature and how they are all connected. To me, connectivity is extremely important as I want people to learn that nothing in nature exists on its own. There are always connections that bind one type of nature to all others. For example, walking through a forest I will show



people why certain plants are important so that birds can use particular materials to make their nests, or for what they can eat such as seeds, caterpillars and more. If the topic is slated to be highlighting a certain group, say insects or trees, etc., then I also show relationships between those in that group with the habitat where they live and why it is important for them to live there. As far as "type & variety," I will take anyone anywhere in order to show them more nature so they can hopefully become involved in helping Mother Nature to survive all that we humans put her through. Human interaction or intervention in nature is another topic I will highlight on field trips. I will physically show people how our actions can negatively impact the species and the areas where we walk.

**Where do you go on your field trips?** Everywhere! Whether it be public locations or private

properties, nature preserves or urban locations, I am thrilled to take people to a variety of locations to show them all that might be important in nature at any of those sites. I also like to show people areas that may be somewhat devoid of the typical nature we think about so that maybe there will be some efforts by people to engage in restorative actions with a park district, land conservancy or other groups that are working hard to protect our nature, whether it be the rarest or the most common. When I take groups out such as students, professors, or others in the educational sector, I often find that kids and young adults really take to what they are seeing or having the opportunity to handle a real life insect or amphibian, etc. It is sometimes all the impetus they need to become involved in some way to help to protect nature for the future. Some of my best interactions have been with retired folks who now have the time to go back to nature as they did as a child, but had to put all of that aside once they had a full time job for many years of their adult life.



**Do you have a favorite park or area to lead your trips?** It is hard to pick a favorite, but I especially like "wet" areas such as stream corridors, wetlands, vernal pools etc., because they are among our most critically imperiled areas due to human interactions and development, and as a result, we lose a lot of the rarer species that need these areas to survive. The microscopic species that live in and around water can be absolutely beautiful! I also love rock ledges, waterfalls, and forests that have had very little logging and all the nature that makes those dynamic sites their home. Seeking out dead trees and tree cavities is another "habitat" type that holds great interest for me as the "residents" that live in these are smaller and often overlooked, really interesting, and not often observed. Nature adapts to many different habitats and it is always a joy for me to find something special using these sites.

If you are interested in learning more, please visit Judy's website, Nature Spark at [www.naturesparkohio.com](http://www.naturesparkohio.com).



# Winter Owling

By Judy Semroc, OBS Trustee

Even though Winter is upon us, you can take this time to search for our native Owls in many habitats in and around our area.

## WHERE TO START

**Follow the alarm calls from other birds:** Owls prefer not to be seen during the day so they tend to “hide” in areas of dense tree, shrub or vine cover. In most cases when other birds such as blue jay, crows, titmice, chickadees and nuthatches detect a roosting owl, they will sound the alarm and make a cacophony of noise to try and drive the owl from its “hiding place.” If you are out in the woods or along the woods edge, you might hear the alarm calls of these birds which can alert you to the presence of owl or another raptor such as a Cooper’s Hawk. If you quietly make your way over to where the noise is coming from, you may get lucky enough to spy an owl sitting or flying away from the bothersome birds.

**Check cavities and broken treetops of all sizes and shapes:** Some of our owl species prefer to roost or nest within tree cavities, broken off tops of trees or other openings typically found in the forest habitats. Eastern Screech and Barred Owls in particular, seek out ready made cavities found in dead or dying trees, or even when a large branch has fallen from a tree and left a suitable hollow for their occupation. Check out the variety of cavities that can be used by our Eastern Screech and Barred Owls by searching among the larger American Beech, Sycamore, Oaks and Maple trees. Owls can use the cavities in these large trees either as nesting or roosting sites or both. Don’t forget to check out duck boxes as Eastern Screech Owls will use them as a roosting site, especially in tough winter weather. Great Horned Owls can use broken off treetops for both nesting and roosting especially if the tree is big enough to support their large bodies.

**Check previously made nests of large birds such as Great Blue Herons, Red-tailed Hawks, Red-shouldered Hawks and upon occasion, Bald Eagles.** Since owls cannot construct their own nests, they must rely on open cavities, ready-made nests of larger birds, and broken areas of dead or dying trees. Check out the examples of Great Horned owls using Great Blue Heron nests and Red-tailed Hawk nests. Since Great Horned Owls nest (Jan-Mar) well before the other birds, there is little competition for use of the “borrowed” nests. Look for the “ear tufts” of the Great Horned Owl that will be visible above the rim of a larger bird nest that they may be using as a nest site.

**Check areas of dense coniferous woods:** These areas are favorite sites for Owls, particularly Barred and Great Horned Owls. The cover of the pine and spruce branches can be a perfect hiding place for individual owls to roost during the day, hopefully avoiding the sharp eyes of the other smaller woodland birds. Check for a larger, bulky shape against the tree trunk or in the densest part of the overlapping branch cover. Sometimes you may only get a glimpse of a head, back or tail of the owl, especially if it is well hidden. If you are lucky enough to find an owl, please don’t post its location to social media so that the owl(s) can be left in peace.

There is nothing like the thrill of finding an owl in the wild and I wish that excitement to each and everyone of you sometime in your life! Happy Owling!

Barred Owl



Barred Owl



Eastern Screech Owl



Great Horned Owl



Barred Owl in Pine Tree



Barred Owl



Great Horned Owl



Eastern Screech Owl



Great Horned Owl





## Ask Madame WingNut

# HOSP History

By Paula Ziebarth



### **Why did they bring the English House Sparrow to the USA?**

**Thank you,  
John Bigham jr., New Paris, Ohio**

Dear John,

Such an excellent question! It makes one want to throw their hands up to the heavens and loudly proclaim, "Why?! Why?! Why?!"

There are a couple of rumors as to why the House Sparrow was brought to this country, but I could find no definitive citation. In documents I have read, some believe they were brought here to enhance the lives of city dwellers of the time. Immigrants from Europe may have missed that incessant, delightful "CHEEP" call they remembered from their homeland. Deforestation of land for city development drove away many native birds from urban areas and the House Sparrow was known to thrive in the proximity of human dwellings. Perhaps they just missed seeing birds in the city.

It is also rumored that caterpillars and other insects were wreaking havoc on the foliage of the remaining trees in the urban landscape and some well meaning people may have believed the House Sparrow might help control insect pests in their beloved cities. We know today that the diet of the House Sparrow is predominantly seeds, but they may not have known that back then. Regardless of the motivation, the little brown plague was released on the continent at multiple locations in various cities throughout the United States and Canada. Legislation was actually enacted in many cities to protect the bird.

An excellent history on the dissemination of House Sparrows throughout the United States can be found on Bet Zimmerman's website: <http://www.sialis.org/hosphistory.htm>

Apparently, the introduction of House Sparrows was a concerted effort by many different groups to many different cities. The first birds were introduced in Brooklyn, New York in the fall of 1850 and many other cities followed suit for the next 25 years or so. Apparently, House Sparrows became an American fad. It was not until the late 1870's that people began to realize their mistake. By the late 1880's, protective legislation was rescinded and large scale efforts were undertaken to try to eliminate House Sparrows.

Regarding the proper name of the bird, I discovered an interesting side note when delving through the tome, [The English Sparrow in America](#) by Dr. C. Hart Merriam and

Walter B. Barrows, published in 1889 (pg. 17). "The true name of this bird is the 'House Sparrow.' The name 'English Sparrow' is a misnomer, as the species is not confined to England, but is native to nearly the whole of Europe. The fact that most of the birds brought to America came from England explains the origin of the misleading name by which it is now so widely known that any attempt to change it would be futile." As to why the authors then used the improper name in the title of the book, Madame WingNut just sits here scratching her head in wonder...

I delved into the WingNut library and will quote a couple references for you that should help to further explain the reason for introducing these birds to our continent, as well as some history on early attempts to then eradicate them. From these references, it seems as though House Sparrows were introduced so people could enjoy birds in the cities. As native cavity nester conservationists, we are all familiar with the aggressive habits of the bird toward native birds. Additionally, the House Sparrow turned out to be quite the destroyer of crops in agricultural areas and the desecrator of city buildings and landscape due to its roosting and defecating habits. The mistake was realized, but attempts to stop the ensuing scourge were for naught.

USDA Farmer's Bulletin 493 "The English Sparrow as a Pest", originally published on April 20, 1912, states that the English Sparrow was introduced into America in 1851.

"An ill-advised endeavor, about the middle of the nineteenth century, to populate a few parks with nonmigratory birds resulted favorably as an enterprise but very unfortunately for the general welfare of this country. Among several kinds of European birds introduced, one was the house sparrow, commonly called the English sparrow. From a few centers this bird has spread in vast numbers from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the Gulf of Mexico well into Canada.

The English sparrow defiles private and public property, fights and dispossesses useful native birds, replaces their songs with discordant sounds, and destroys fruit, grain, and garden truck.

At first it was confined to towns, but its rapid multiplication has caused it to push out into farming communities, and thus to extend its pernicious activities. The fact that in isolated cases the bird has been found doing useful work against insects barely saves it from utter condemnation."

The bulletin goes on to recommend trapping and other techniques to eliminate and discourage House Sparrows. Finally, it encourages people to eat them, explaining how to dress and prepare them.





The following excerpt is from The Birds of Ohio by William Leon Dawson, published in 1903.

“WITHOUT question the most deplorable event in the history of American ornithology was the introduction of the English Sparrow. The extinction of the Great Auk, the passing of the Wild Pigeon and the Turkey, - sad as these are, they are trifles compared

to the wholesale reduction of our smaller birds, which is due to the invasion of the wretched foreigner, the English Sparrow. To be sure he was invited to come, but the offense is all the more rank because it was partly human. His introduction was effected in part by people who ought to have known better, and would, doubtless, if the science of ornithology had reached its present status as long ago as the early fifties. The maintenance and prodigious increase of the pest is still due in measure to the imbecile sentimentality of people who build bird-houses and throw out crumbs for the ‘dear little birdies’, and then care nothing whether honest birds or scalawags get them. Such people belong to the same class as those who drop kittens on their neighbors’ door-steps because they wouldn’t have the heart to kill them themselves, you know.

The increase of this bird in the United States is, to a lover of birds, simply frightful. Their fecundity is amazing and their adaptability apparently limitless. Mr. Barrows, in a special report prepared under the direction of the Government, estimates that the increase of a single pair, if unhindered, would amount in ten years to 275,716,983,698 birds.

As to its range, we note that the subjugation of the East has long since been accomplished and that the conquest of the West is succeeding rapidly. It is only a question of a few years until it becomes omnipresent in our land.

It requires no testimony to show that the presence of this bird is absolutely undesirable. It is a scourge to the agriculturist, a plague to the architect and the avowed and determined enemy of all other birds. It is, in short, in the words of Dr. Coues, ‘a nuisance without a redeeming quality.’ Altho we assent to this most heartily, we must confess on the part of our race to a certain amount of sneaking admiration for the Sparrow. And why, forsooth? Because he fights. We are forced to admire, at times his bull-dog courage and tenacity of purpose, as we do the cunning of the weasel or the nimbleness of the flea. He is vermin and must be treated as such, but – give the Devil his due, of course. What are we going to do about it? Wage unceasing warfare as we do against mice and snakes. There is no ultimate issue to regard. The House Sparrow is no longer exterminable, but he can be kept within limits. No doubt there will be English Sparrows in cities as long as there are brick-bats, but the English Sparrow in the country is an abatable nuisance. He can be shot, and he ought to be. There are no English Sparrows about my present home, in a suburb of

Columbus. A sensible and determined neighbor has plied the shotgun for several years and as a result Bluebirds, Chipping and Field Sparrows, Woodpeckers of all kinds, Warblers, Robins, Blue Jays, etc. are plentiful hereabouts. I prefer Bluebirds myself.

The Sparrow exhibits a most cosmopolitan taste in the matter of nesting sites. The normal half-bushel ball of trash in the tree-top is still adhered to by some builders, but the cavity left by a missing brick, a Woodpecker’s hole – deserted upon compulsion – or a throne upon the scale-pan of Justice – done in stone upon the County court-house, and mercifully blind – will do as well. Of late the choicest rural sites have been appropriated, and the cliffs once sacred to the gentle Swallow, now resound with the vulgar bletherings and maudlin mirth of this avian blot on nature.”

*If you have any questions, contact Paula Ziebarth at: [paulazbird@gmail.com](mailto: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.*

## Treasurer’s Report by Molly Wilsbacher

- 1. Thank you to everyone who made (or anticipate making) donations for our upcoming silent auction at the annual Bluebird Conference on Saturday, March 4, 2023.** With the conference just a few weeks away, if you would like to donate anything, please bring it with you the conference and drop it off at the silent auction table. I’ll have plenty of blank forms with me for the silent auction and tax deduction forms, if you’d like one. Credit card use is accepted for any transactions with OBS
- 2. If you would like to preserve the memory of dedicated bluebirders and bird enthusiasts, while providing nest boxes for the cavity nesting birds you love and enjoy, please visit our website here for information on our Legacy Box Program: [ohiobluebirdsociety.org/about/obs-legacy-program/](http://ohiobluebirdsociety.org/about/obs-legacy-program/).** A big thank you for the following Legacy Box donations that were received within the past quarter: Paula Ziebarth made a donation in memory of Allen Gaines, and Stephen Habash made several donations for the following loved ones: in memory of May Lou Dick, in memory of Camryn Artz, in honor of Francis Julian (Frankie) Habash, in honor of Mary Lou and John Habash, and in honor of Jim and Doris Arim.
- 3. Our anticipated expenditures over the next quarter include our Bluebird Conference on March 4th at Ashland University, publishing and mailing the Spring Newsletter, and awarding a few grants for the Spring nesting and planting season.** If you are interested in applying for a small grant, please visit the website for the grant application and instructions: [ohiobluebirdsociety.org/about/grant-information/](http://ohiobluebirdsociety.org/about/grant-information/)

# What about These “Polar Vortex” Events and How Do They Affect Bluebirders and Bluebirds? By Bernie Daniel, Ph.D.

Thank you for permission to republish this article which originally appeared in the Winter 2022-2023 North American Bluebird Society Journal



*Bernie Daniel is a retired environmental research scientist who lives in Symmes Township of southwestern Ohio. Bernie joined NABS in 1999 and is a life member of the Society. He has served as President, Editor of Bluebird, and chair of the grants, development, and education committees and other duties as assigned. He is a life member, and past president of the Ohio Bluebird Society and has been bluebirding (off and on!) when he can find some appropriate habitat since 1953.*

*During his professional career, he published some*

*140-research peer-reviewed papers in environmental science and has participated in the North American Breeding Bird Survey since 1996. He enjoys the study of bird song and the challenge of “birding by ear”. His current scientific interest is understanding the population status of the three bluebird species. [bdaniel@nabluebirdsociety.org](mailto:bdaniel@nabluebirdsociety.org)*

In late January of 2019, a large mass of frigid air escaped from the Arctic and descended upon the middle and eastern portions of North America. During this event many cities recorded historically low temperatures. For example, Chicago reported a brief period of  $-45^{\circ}\text{F}$ , reportedly making it colder than Antarctica on that day.

Many other parts of the Midwest experienced temperatures below  $40^{\circ}\text{F}$  accompanied by mind-blowing wind chill factors of  $75^{\circ}$  below zero. Most weathercasters called this a “polar vortex” event. The term polar vortex is said to have entered the lexicon of local weather forecasters after a similar cold weather event in 2014. Many believe that these frigid air masses that sweep over the middle of the country are the polar vortex—but that is not really correct.

In fact, the term polar vortex is the name atmospheric scientists give to a powerful, counterclockwise-spinning jet stream that usually traps frigid Arctic air keeping it safely isolated in the stratosphere some 10–30 miles above the earth’s surface. This mass of trapped cold air typically becomes smaller during the warm seasons and grows larger in the colder months. It is a good thing when this polar vortex is stable and intact because it prevents those masses of Arctic air from blowing over us and becoming part of our weather.

So, calling a winter cold snap a “polar vortex” is a misnomer. In fact, these sudden frigid weather events are caused by the breakdown of the polar vortex, in other words a “polar vortex disruption.” To better understand this, take a look at the two diagrams in Figure 1. The left-side drawing shows a normal or intact polar vortex, and the right-side drawing depicts a disrupted polar vortex. When the polar vortex is disrupted it can allow the trapped cold air to escape, and then be captured by the jet streams some 5–10 miles below the troposphere. It is these winds that then blow the icy air over the middle of the continent.

So, a more important question then seems to be: What causes these polar vortex disruptions in the first place? Well, the “what”

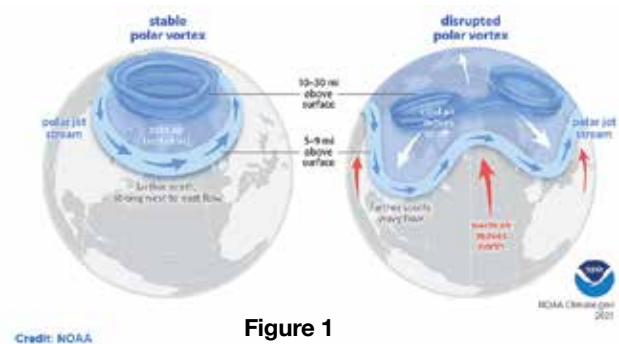


Figure 1

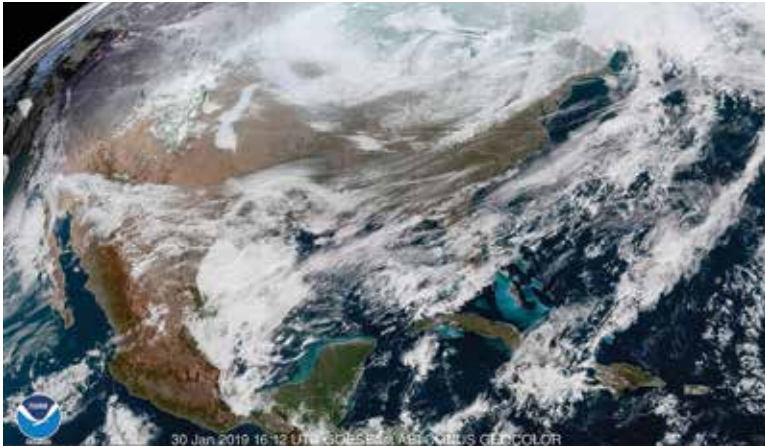
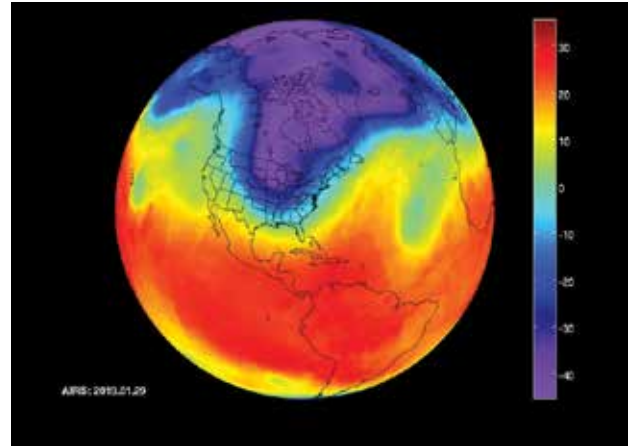
part seems clear. There is general agreement that polar vortex disruptions are triggered by events called Sudden Stratospheric Warmings (SSW). SSW are, just as the name indicates, periods when the polar vortex meets a warm air mass causing it to weaken dramatically—in extreme cases even reversing the direction of the polar vortex winds. This in turn leads to a situation as shown in the drawing on the right side of **Figure 1**. As the polar vortex is disrupted (or breaks down), the frigid Arctic air it was trapping escapes and, being cold and therefore dense, drops to lower altitudes. When this cold air reaches the troposphere it can be picked up by the polar jet stream (i.e., “the jet stream”) and driven south. Of course, this begs the question: What causes SSW events? Unfortunately, as near as I can tell, there seems to be no conclusive agreement on the cause of SSW. In fact, it seems likely that maybe there is more than one cause of these events. This is a field of active research. At this time, it seems that we can anticipate SSW occurring at a rate of about six times each decade. It is not clear that every SSW will result in a polar vortex disruption, however.

Just for completeness, it seems that one other area of confusion is the terminology used to describe “jet streams.” The polar vortex is a jet stream—but as noted earlier it exists in the stratosphere and is not something usually talked about in a typical weather report. When a weather forecaster talks about the “jet stream(s)” they are referring to the two weather-controlling winds that blow in the troposphere (5–10 miles above the surface and below the stratosphere). These two tropospheric jet streams are called the “polar jet stream” (in the north) and the “tropical jet stream” (in the south). Those two jet streams in the troposphere are the primary drivers that control most of the weather conditions we experience during most of the year in North America—but they are blowing some 5–10 miles below the polar vortex winds.

Figure 2 shows the image recorded by the GOES-East weather satellite on January 30, 2019. The streaking cloud patterns are produced by the same jet stream that is driving the Arctic air mass south across the continental land mass.

In Figure 3 you see a satellite image taken by a heat-sensitive infrared camera from approximately the same time (January 29,



**Figure 2****Figure 3**

2019). In this image you can see that the frigid air was driven south with temperatures as low as  $-40^{\circ}\text{F}$  in the Midwestern states to  $-10^{\circ}\text{F}$  in Louisiana and northeastern Texas.

The second part of this article's title asks why bluebirders might be interested in polar vortex disruptions and how they affect bluebirds. Obviously, these weather disruptions are consequential to all living things—even human beings. At least 21 people died because of that 2019 winter anomaly. In conditions of such extreme cold frostbite will occur on exposed skin in a matter of minutes, and prolonged exposure leads to hypothermia (i.e., the body losing heat faster than it can produce it). But what happens to humans in these situations pales in comparison to what happens to other living organisms—particularly wildlife that have no shelter. Thus, the next spring after the cold snap, NABS received reports on hundreds of dead Eastern Bluebirds (EABL) being found in nestboxes across the middle of the continent to as far south as Tennessee, Arkansas, and even Texas. The birds had sought shelter from the harsh conditions—but often to no avail.

Two years later, in the spring of 2021, another polar vortex event occurred, this time in early February. Before this event the national weather forecasters warned that the “coldest air of the season will be driven south, not leaving anyone out.” In fact, these forecasts were accurate and every state in the US—including Hawaii—saw below freezing temperatures during the following week. In the end, about 86% of the US, including about 235 million people, received an icy blast of Arctic air. In some cases, so cold that boiling water would flash freeze, and frostbite could occur within minutes. Again, in the spring of 2021 NABS received numerous reports from our members who reported finding dead EABL when they reopened their nestboxes for the new season.

So, what is going on? Is this a “new” thing or merely a normal weather event more severe or more frequent than those in the past? Well for certain it is not a “new thing”! Public awareness or not, the polar vortex and its disruptions have been in place for probably hundreds of thousands of years or longer. There is some thought that these events might be happening with greater frequency now, but both their frequency and their severity are still a topic of scientific debate.

Some atmospheric scientists contend that there is a link between climate (e.g., warming) and the polar vortex disruptions. But that relationship has not been established at this time. On the other hand, there is some solid evidence that (despite the brutal conditions just discussed for the polar vortex disruptions of 2019 and 2021) we might be experiencing “warmer cold snaps” than were recorded in the past. Kenneth Kunkel, an atmospheric physicist from the University of North Carolina who also works for NOAA, has studied the record of polar vortex disruptions that occurred in of the past (e.g., in 1936, 1970, 1977, 1983, 1989, and 1996) and he states that all of these were “much worse than the one of 2019.” He is also quoted as saying the current polar vortex disruptions have been “wimpy” compared to those of the past 100 years.

So, we are left with the hopeful hypothesis that even if climate change or warming is really triggering more of these episodic polar vortex disruptions, the cold weather they produce will be less intense—hence perhaps also less damaging to bluebirds and other wildlife?

Let's close this discussion by coming back to some speculation on bluebirds. Clearly most of these polar vortex disruptions that occur in the winter months will usually be more damaging to EABL than the other two species. I suggest this will be the case after inspection of the winter ranges of the three bluebird species (See Figure 4 on back page).

These range maps show that at least parts of the EABL population spends its entire life cycle in the path of the cold snap induced by polar vortex disruptions. Notice that nearly the entire area marked by the cold temperatures (Figure 3) are within the purple area or permanent range of the EABL. A significant part of the winter and year-round range of the other two species lies beyond the extreme cold area caused by the polar vortex disruption.

I think the harm done by these polar vortex disruptions is compounded by the fact that they frequently appear during abnormally warm winters. During these periods I expect that EABL are likely to be distributed more heavily in the northern latitudes. Thus, a large percentage of the population

*Continued on page back cover*

# Member News

## Welcome New Members!

Jessica Bostardi  
Tom Hutson  
Christy Mosier  
Nicholas Philiposian  
Milt Wentzel  
Elliott Wettstein

## Thank You to Our Donors!

Loyd Marshall

### Conference Sponsor

Laura Kerns,  
ODNR Division of Wildlife

### In Memory of Mary Lou and John Habash, Francis Julian (Frankie), May Ann Dick

Stephen Habash and Jean Luczkows

### In Memory of Allen Gaines

Paula Ziebarth

## Great Backyard Bird Count – February 17-20

**Webinar: Get Ready for the Great Backyard Bird Count.** Join our experts on February 15 at 1pm Eastern Time as we answer your questions about the Great Backyard Bird Count. This free webinar is designed for birders of all ages and experience levels. You'll leave feeling confident and ready to take part! Learn more and register.

**Great Backyard Bird Count:** Join a global event to celebrate the world's birds as we learn more about them! Count the birds in your neighbourhood for 15 minutes or more from February 17-20 and submit your data. Learn how to take part.

**Visit:** [www.birdcount.org/](http://www.birdcount.org/) and contribute to citizen science!

## Notes from the president – by Darlene Sillick



We have been working to bring you a very interesting OBS conference on March 4, 2023 from 9am to 4:30 pm with check in from 8-9am. It will be held in person at the Ashland University's John C. Myers Convocation Center, 638 Jefferson Street, Ashland, Ohio 44805. Directions are in this link: [www.ashland.edu/sites/default/files/2022-10/au\\_campus\\_map\\_summer22.pdf](http://www.ashland.edu/sites/default/files/2022-10/au_campus_map_summer22.pdf)

### Our speakers for the OBS conference are:

- Mark Dille – The Trials and Travails of Creating a Certified Wildlife Habitat in Suburbia
- Tim McDermott – Ticks and Lyme disease
- Diana Steele – Bluebirds 101
- Loyd Marshall – Conservation at Mosquito Creek
- Awards – To be announced
- Heather Harris – Bluebirds Across Ohio, Facebook
- OBS panel – To be announced
- Manon VanSchoyck – Tips from Ohio Nature Education

We are excited with this speaker line up. Mark Dille, the founder of MAD LLC and chief scientist, will talk about creating a bird habitat in your local patch. Have you heard that ticks are increasing? Tim McDermott of OSU Ex will talk about all ticks and how to keep yourself safe in the field. BTW, there are reliable reports of ticks already this Jan! Diana Steele is with OOS and has monitored many trails of nest boxes- she will talk about Bluebirding 101. Loyd Marshall, former OBS board member, will talk about his conservation efforts at Mosquito Creek. The work he has done with cavity nesting birds is amazing. Heather Harris, a new OBS board member, will discuss how she started the website and Facebook sites "Bluebirds Across Ohio". Manon VanSchoyck, founder of Ohio Nature Education, is bringing some live birds including a kestrel and screech owl and also a flying squirrel. She will give an update on helping cavity nesting species, from your backyard to your larger trails. The event and speakers will not be recorded.

We will share the winners of the Blue Feather Award and the Wildlife Conservation Award. Please bring your questions and we will get you answers during the OBS panel time!! Mary Lee Minor and her garden club will do our table centerpieces. They always do a beautiful job of creatively decorating our tables. There will also be some educational displays you can visit during the breaks and lunch time.

The Silent Auction is our biggest fundraiser of the year and we hope you will support this event which is run by Molly Wilsbacher, our treasurer. There will be some artwork from Dick Tuttle's estate as well as many other donations. You can email Molly at [OBStreasurer@gmail.com](mailto:OBStreasurer@gmail.com) if interested in also making an auction donation. Donations valued at \$25 or higher are tax deductible.

Mike Watson, former OBS president, will be updating us on the birds fledged in Ohio. Thank you to all who sent in their fledgling reports.

Pat Dutton, our membership chair, will have a table so you can renew or join OBS. We always appreciate your support! [obsmembershipchair@gmail.com](mailto:obsmembershipchair@gmail.com) Your suggestions for future speakers for our next conference in 2024 are appreciated. You can email Darlene Sillick, OBS president at [dsillick118@gmail.com](mailto:dsillick118@gmail.com)

Looking forward to seeing you March 4 at Ashland University!!





## Safari Golf Course Nestbox Project

By Darlene Sillick

On Saturday October 15, a group of volunteers came out on a chilly morning to refresh and number the 32 nestboxes at Safari Golf Course trail. Thanks to all 9 volunteers who helped get the nestboxes replaced and numbered (thank you Carl), a couple boxes were moved and a new Nestwatch map is in progress.

I wish to thank Don and Jeri, their mother has a Legacy brass plate on a box beside my mom's. When I took them to see her box, a pair of bluebirds were perched on several of the boxes. What a thrill that was. Thanks to Steve Habash who ordered a number of the Legacy plates for family members. A report was sent to all those who purchased the 13 Legacy plates so they knew who nested in their boxes.

Many thanks to Carl Gleditsch, Blake Kyle, John Krieger, Jim Estep, Amy Girten, Kim Lascola and Carolyn Fannon. I am lucky to have such a great team of volunteers.

Thanks also to folks from the zoo who supported this project, Mike Kreiger, Ty Day and Kurt Boggs. Kurt, course supervisor, got us a Gator to use and it made a big difference with all 32 nestboxes.

I looked down at the name on the new box going up at box 13. The name on the bottom of it was Greg. It was Paula's grown son,

Gregory who had built that box. He has built hundreds for me and Greg is very special. He is autistic and loves to help other and he said he is helping dinosaurs who live in the boxes. Yep, he is right! There

is something special about the nestbox trails. It is those who built the boxes, put up the boxes, the birds who move in and raise their families and the monitors and the property owners. At Safari Golf Course, there is a bonus. The people who work there and play golf there are always asking about the birds. This project is such a win-win for conservation and nature and for our hearts. This trail of boxes is over 33 years old. It is something very special. and the report Paula runs on Cornell Nestwatch is awesome.

Many thanks everyone,  
Darlene Sillick  
Ohio Bluebird Society President and a Co-monitor at Safari with Paula Ziebarth



Blake with the last box



Carl and Carolyn



Don and his wife



SGC group





# OHIO BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

*Nesting in Nature!*

March 4, 2023

## SPEAKERS

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| <b>Mark Dilley</b>      | The Trials and Travails of Creating a Certified Wildlife Habitat in Suburbia |
| <b>Tim McDermott</b>    | Ticks and Lyme disease   |
| <b>Diana Steele</b>     | Bluebirds 101  |
| <b>Loyd Marshall</b>    | Conservation at Mosquito Creek   |
| <b>AWARDS</b>           | <i>to be announced</i>   |
| <b>Heather Harris</b>   | Bluebirds Across Ohio, Facebook  |
| <b>OBS panel</b>        | <i>to be announced</i>   |
| <b>Manon VanSchoyck</b> | Tips from Ohio Nature Education  |



Original artwork by Anna Rose, OYBC

## LUNCH HOUR BREAK

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

## 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**

If you become sick with Covid-19,  
please do not attend the conference.  
A full refund will be provided with  
proof of a positive Covid-19 test.

## COST

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

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

- ***Registration Deadline: February 17, 2023. Register Online at <https://ohiobluebirdsociety.org/conference/>***
- ***Or Mail to: Pat Dutton, OBS Membership Chair, 7747 Township Road 103, Millersburg, OH 44654***

Awards, displays, silent auction and much more!

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

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

**THANK YOU**



**SPONSORS!**







# OHIO BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

*Nesting in Nature!*

March 4, 2023

## REGISTRATION FORM

**Registration Deadline: Friday, February 17, 2023**

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

*(Please pre-register, space is limited, NO Walk-in's)*

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: w/broccoli salad, pasta salad, chips, apple, cookie and water:*

- \_\_\_ Smoked Turkey and Gouda
- \_\_\_ Roast Beef and Cheddar
- \_\_\_ Ham and Swiss
- \_\_\_ Italian Sub
- \_\_\_ Vegetarian Wrap

*Salads w/cookie and water:*

- \_\_\_ Chicken Caesar Salad,
- \_\_\_ Chef Salad with Chicken
- \_\_\_ Strawberry, Spinach, and Candied Cashew Salad



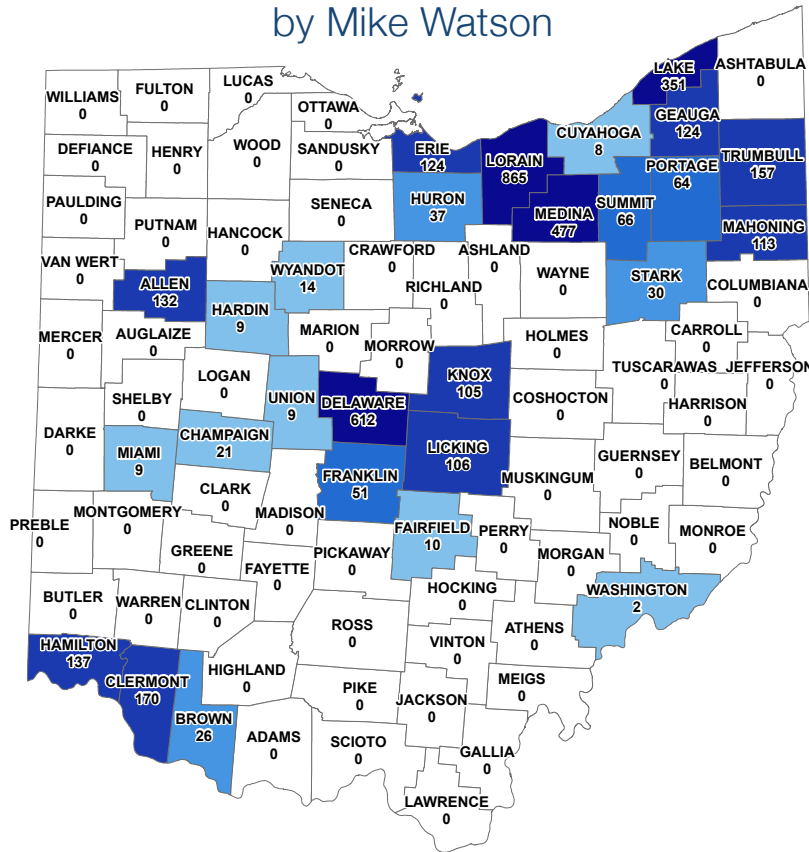
Photos by Katelyn Shelton  
OYBC Junior

## THANK YOU SPONSORS!



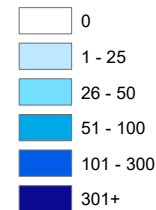
# OBS 2022 FLEDGLING REPORT

by Mike Watson



| Species                          | #Fledged |
|----------------------------------|----------|
| Eastern Bluebird                 | 3829     |
| Tree Swallow                     | 4824     |
| House Wren                       | 1754     |
| Purple Martin                    | 2149     |
| Black-capped Chickadee           | 70       |
| Carolina Chickadee               | 96       |
| Carolina Wren                    | 74       |
| Barn Swallow                     | 53       |
| Prothonotary Warbler             | 65       |
| Wood Duck                        | 33       |
| Great Crested Flycatcher         | 7        |
| House Sparrows dispatched        | 591      |
| House Sparrow eggs destroyed     | 909      |
| European Starlings dispatched    | 0        |
| European Starling eggs destroyed | 170      |

## #Fledged per County



created by Mike Watson; The Holden Arboretum



## 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 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

Stephen Bischoff  
trswmooh@gmail.com

Dan Best  
56DanBest@gmail.com  
440-226-0589

Carl Gleditsch  
daddy\_g56@hotmail.com  
614.798.8748

Heather Harris  
bluebirdsacrossohio@yahoo.com  
440-264-3820

Lee Johnson  
mleedj@gmail.com  
330-284-4664

Anna Rose  
annarose7@att.net  
614.263.7479

Judy Semroc  
rainefox51@gmail.com  
330.612.0391

Darlene Sillick (President)  
dsillick118@gmail.com  
614.288.3696 (text preferred)

Molly Wilsbacher (Treasurer)  
OBS Treasurer@gmail.com

### ADVISORS

Mel Bolt  
mellen@sssnet.com • 330.262.0448

Linda Lang  
lindaflang@gmail.com • 419.651.4196

Loyd Marshall  
lmarsh@aol.com  
330.876.7895

### 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 would like to thank outgoing Trustees Joann Kale and Monica Klarer for the incredible work they have done as board members. We appreciate Monica's acceptance of the OBS secretary position and wish both of them bluebirds in their futures!*

## OBS Area Contacts (as of February 2022)

| County     | Name                    | E-mail  | County     | Name              | E-mail                   |
|------------|-------------------------|---|------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| ALLEN      | Mohr, Mark              | mohrbluebirds@hotmail.com                         | HOLMES     | Hawkins, Marcella | gofish710@gmail.com      |
| ASHLAND    | Lang, Linda             | lindaflang@gmail.com                              | LAKE       | Watson, Mike      | mwatson@holdenarb.org    |
| ATHENS     | Caldwell, Reid & Teresa | freidc@yahoo.com;<br>teresacaldwell@athenswcd.org | LICKING    | Joann Kale        | joann.kale@gmail.com     |
| AUGLAIZE   | Mark Mohr               | mohrbluebirds@hotmail.com                         | LORAIN     | Brandau, Penny    | pennybrandau@gmail.com   |
| CHAMPAIGN  | Rutan, Jean             | cpjrutan@gmail.com                                | LUCAS      | Seaman, Tammy     | erictammy@sbcglobal.net  |
| CLARK      | Gray, Bethany           | ohiobluebirder@gmail.com                          | MEDINA     | Rabung, Dale      | twodr@zoominternet.net   |
| COLUMBIANA | Short, Jason            | bigbirdnerd_j@yahoo.com                           | MIAMI      | Peters, Teresa    | tm_peters@yahoo.com      |
| CRAWFORD   | Minor, Mary Lee         | chickadee@columbus.rr.com                         | MONTGOMERY | Romeo, Sam        | sromeo@audubon.org       |
| CUYAHOGA   | Barber, John            | jcbarker27@gmail.com                              | OTTAWA     | Ziebarth, Paula   | paulazbird@gmail.com     |
| DARKE      | Luttmer, Bob            | bonnie561@roadrunner.com                          | OTTAWA     | Rock, Lisa        | snowbunting123@gmail.com |
| DARKE      | Smith, Tom              | bluebirdman@embarqmail.com                        | PICKAWAY   | Hill, Carrie      | hillteach@gmail.com      |
| DELAWARE   | Ziebarth, Paula         | paulazbird@gmail.com                              | PORTAGE    | Gammon, Darrell   | invisibleman53@yahoo.com |
| ERIE       | Bird, Mel               | mrbird90@aol.com                                  | ROSS       | Hill, Carrie      | hillteach@gmail.com      |
| FAIRFIELD  | Kale, JoAnn             | joann.kale@gmail.com                              | SANDUSKY   | Rock, Lisa        | snowbunting123@gmail.com |
| FRANKLIN   | Aldridge, Julie         | juliealdridge10@gmail.com                         | STARK      | Gammon, Darrell   | invisibleman53@yahoo.com |
| FRANKLIN   | Sillick, Darlene        | dsillick118@gmail.com                             | STARK      | Semroc, Judy      | rainefox51@gmail.com     |
| GEAUGA     | Brindo, Jay             | jbrindo@aol.com                                   | SUMMIT     | Grande, Marcy     | mgrandesign@yahoo.com    |
| GREENE     | Gray, Bethany           | ohiobluebirder@gmail.com                          | TRUMBULL   | Loyd Marshall     | lmarsh@aol.com           |
| GUERNSEY   | Barber, Tom             | klbarber62@roadrunner.com                         | UNION      | Darlene Sillick,  | dsillick118@gmail.com    |
| HAMILTON   | Romine, Jim             | jimdromine@gmail.com                              | WARREN     | Jeffries, Art     | gonebirding@hotmail.com  |
| HURON      | Bird, Mel               | mrbird90@aol.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](http://ohiobluebirdsociety.org)

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Affiliated with the North American Bluebird Society

### What's Inside...

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### Deadline for Submitting Articles:

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

Continued from page 9 . . . . .



Figure 4

would be exposed to the colder temperatures.

I think it is quite possible that a careful analysis of Christmas Bird Count and eBird data could perhaps shed light on the extent of EABL migration as a function of temperature in winter months. Perhaps this is a research area wherein NABS should request proposals?

Finally, I would like to again raise the question about the practical feasibility of providing more substantially constructed and more heavily insulated roost boxes for EABL. On the two

occasions that I have had winter bird kills on my trail I have never seen anything except dead EABL in the nestboxes. I have never found a Carolina Chickadee, Carolina Wren, or House Sparrow carcass in any of my winter roost boxes. Therefore, I suggest that if we provided winter roost boxes that are either insulated only (passively protection) or insulated and fitted with a small amount of heat we could selectively protect bluebirds. I would be interested in hearing about the experiences and the thoughts of others on these topics.