



Bluebird Monitor

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

Fall 2024



A Labor of Love By Lisa Reimenschneider



I am not a quitter. That is the mindset one must have as a beginning Bluebird landlord, especially after a tragic house sparrow invasion last summer with my first undertaking.

I doubled down this year, again carefully cultivating a return by routinely offering mealworms over the winter accompanied by a lovely, heated birdbath - essentially rolling

out the red carpet. I held my breath as the house hunting began in February, researching even more methods to keep the dreaded house sparrows from crashing the party. Though no one with an animal-loving heart "likes" to do it, it was necessary to start trapping and dispatching house sparrows to give the blues a chance at success. The image of those beautiful babies after the HOSPs invaded last spring spurred me on and I truly think that was what tipped the scales in our favor this year. Not to mention the male bluebird had a serious attitude. Finally, the courting pair decided my house, situated beside my driveway was acceptable after what seemed like an interminable length of time. I deployed fishing line around

the entrance and weighted lines hanging on either side leftover from a magic halo. After the first egg was laid I dutifully dodged dad and put up the sparrow spooker. I was given Darlene Sillick's name as an expert and reached out to her. She whisked over a dummy box for the backyard to trap more HOSPs, which worked quite well. Mama started



incubating five eggs April 14th and I doubled-down and added pinwheels to the growing list of deterrents. Not only that, but Amazon Prime swiftly delivered a heavy duty water gun, and a new Ring outdoor camera. I blasted any house sparrow even contemplating stopping nearby and was ready for war every time something looked amiss on camera. Once the babies hatched, my wonderful neighbor Kristen allowed me to add the piece de resistance and I placed mesh netting over her nearby bush to ward off any staged attacks. The cardinals approved of everything because they were progressing with their own hatchlings about 15 feet away. And the chickadees were busily incubating their six eggs in the Gilbertson box in the backyard. So I was fortunate to have reds, whites, and blues all find my little property worthy this year. The five bluebirds eventually successfully fledged May 15th, and I removed the "adornments" and cleaned out the box.

Dad kept the house protected though, continuing to keep an eye on his territory and lo and behold four more eggs were laid for round two on June 9th. An exciting development was that my 85-year old neighbor up the street was also hosting his first bluebird pair after having a box out for a few years. I educated Ben on the importance of a sparrow spooker, which he immediately ordered, and he sat in his garage every day for hours feeding mealworms and watching his little family as they grew. I think it was bittersweet for Ben when his five babies fledged as it provided him such entertainment.

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Well, the work wasn't done yet, temperatures were climbing, and the heat and humidity were oppressive. It was time for Amazon Prime to come to the rescue again with a parasol for the box - those babies weren't going to bake on my watch. I was dedicated (though not appreciated) to adjusting the tile three times a day as the sun moved. Imagine a house with fishing line, weighted lines, a sparrow spooker, pinwheels and a partridge, oops parasol, on top...next to a large bush covered with netting! It surely cemented my neighbors' belief (twice) that I'm a little eccentric. The formula worked again, and four more healthy babies fledged July 9th about a week after Ben's brood. Such a joy for us to help contribute 14 new bluebirds to our little street, and have neighbors regularly comment on seeing bluebirds so frequently now on their walks.

It was not easy, it both challenged and agitated me at times, and even made me anxious on those early mornings before a breeze started the Mylar swinging. I'm thankful for the advice of my unofficial mentor Darlene, and Kristen for humoring me by allowing her landscape to be covered. After all the work and worrying it was so worth the labor of love resulting in sweet success this summer.



Changes at OWC By Heather Tuttle, Ohio Wildlife Center Executive Director



My name is Heather Tuttle and I am the new Executive Director of Ohio Wildlife Center. I began my career as a wildlife rehabilitator working with Mona Rutger. Mona introduced me to the wonderful world of bluebirds by including me in nest monitoring missions, banding operations, and English house sparrow evictions. In the beginning, I had a lot of sympathy and compassion for house sparrows and starlings. Today? I still have a lot of sympathy for these birds. They didn't ask to be here and their behavior towards our native cavity nesters is not malicious. They are doing what is natural to them but, unfortunately, in a place where they don't belong.

As conservationists, we have a duty to protect our native species. English house sparrows, European starlings, and many other invasive plants and animals have devastating

impacts on our native flora and fauna. As such, I've made the difficult decision to no longer accept invasive species into our rehabilitation program at Ohio Wildlife Center. With limited resources, we must prioritize our native wildlife. By focusing our efforts exclusively on native species, we can better support the health and biodiversity of our local environment. This policy shift underscores our commitment to conservation and the protection of native wildlife.

While I understand that this decision may be met with mixed feelings, we, as an organization, must do what is best for the long-term health of our native wildlife and wild spaces. We greatly appreciate the support of our amazing community as we continue to work with injured and orphaned wildlife and public education. We truly cannot do it without you!

When Cavities are Crucial: Brown-headed Nuthatch

By Rob Thorn



We often think of nestboxes as a tool to bring wild birds close to us, boosting numbers in suburban and even urban areas. But they can also be enormously useful in helping a species weather human-induced changes, even far from us. Could they be crucial for a bird to maintain its range? Let's look at one possible instance, the Brown-headed Nuthatch.

Nuthatch? You're probably thinking, I didn't even realize they used boxes. Most nuthatch species will readily use boxes, especially if they're designed with extra-small holes. White-breasted and Red-breasted Nuthatches are the ones with which we're most familiar, and they readily accept boxes. Their funny antics and variety of odd calls and sounds make them a favorite among birders, so people feel especially pleased when these birds accept a nest box. But they're not the only Nuthatches – they have smaller cousins, the pine-loving Brown-headed and Pygmy Nuthatches.

Brown-headed Nuthatches are denizens of the pine forests of the southern and eastern U.S. Like their western cousins, they often forage in large family groups that constantly converse with each other, and you'll hear their squeaky calls long before you see them high up in the tips of pine tree branches. They're not particularly strong fliers and have developed a reputation as sedentary birds. When I've seen them in Florida and Georgia, I would go to particular pine woods where they've been seen for decades. This is not a bird that wanders or migrates.

Brown-headed Nuthatches will use other cavities if they are available, much like many other non-woodpecker cavity nesters. Since they live in pinewoods with limited trees, however, cavities are at a premium. Their small size means they can be ousted by other birds, so they often have to dig their own small nest cavity. A long-term study in Florida is testing how and why they choose different territories and nest trees (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kR8VliypwoE>). They can be lured into using nestboxes if the boxes are placed in or near their pinewoods habitat (see <https://70birds.com/bird-species/brown-headed-nuthatch/>)

The problem for these Nuthatches is that their pinewoods habitat is not particularly stable. Firstly, it's a 'fire-climax' habitat, which means it needs regular burning to persist. Otherwise, oaks and hickories will eventually come in and shade out the pines. Native Americans seemed to grasp this and would often burn pine areas to keep them open. European settlers, however, took a different view, coming from northern Europe that lacked these types of forests. They viewed burning as wasteful and dangerous, and worked to suppress fires. Only after they realized pines could be grown for their timber and turpentine did some adapt to a regular burning regime. Now, however, harvesting the pines often completely alters the habitat of these homebody birds. Brown-headed Nuthatches formerly had a wide range that extended from



Texas all the way around to southern New Jersey and even out to isolated pine stands in south Florida and the Bahamas. Now much of that range is broken up, and the edge populations in New Jersey, south Florida, and the Bahamas are dwindling or gone.

Enough people have noticed the decline of these birds that it has raised alarms. They're now under some sort of watch in most states. Because they don't migrate or wander, they have a difficult time re-colonizing old range areas where they disappeared. They've actually been re-introduced to several areas: the Missouri Ozarks (see <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/brown-headed-nuthatches-return-to-missouri-ozark-mountains-after-100-years/>) and the pine rocklands of South Florida (see <https://www.nps.gov/ever/learn/nature/brownheadednuthatch.htm>)

This is where (drum roll, please) nest boxes come in. The main problem for these nuthatches appears to be a lack of dead nest snags or trees. Foresters, unsurprisingly, take a dim view of dead or dying pines and usually try to quickly remove them. With most of the pine woods in private hands and managed for timber, the supply of snags has been cut back significantly. Other pine wood areas, like in south Florida, coastal Carolina, and the Bahamas, have been diced up for home development, so that only fragments of original habitat remain. The decline has been noticeable enough that Carolina Audubon has launched a program to induce folks to put up nest boxes for nuthatches (see <https://nc.audubon.org/conservation/make-little-room-brown-headed-nuthatch> or https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMoo0wDk_c). So nest boxes may become crucial to maintaining this species' population.

Rob Thorn lives in the Columbus area and is an avid birder, field trip leader and writer for Columbus Audubon. He is also a National Audubon CBC compiler and it is a real treat to go for a bird walk with Rob. He is a true walking avian encyclopedia and has a large following.

Wood Ducks By Rob Swindell J.D., M.B.A., B.S.

Executive Director, Black River Audubon Society I “Birding” Columnist, Chronicle Telegram

Photos by Gina Swindell

When one considers the history of the wood duck, it seems appropriate that they often start their lives with a courageous death-defying leap of faith. Their survival as a species has been just as tenuous. This widespread, fast-flying resident of swampy woods is also called the Carolina duck, swamp duck and squealer duck. Some simply call them “woodies.”

The male wood duck is perhaps one of nature’s most beautiful birds with its crisp and colorful markings—an iridescent mix of green, red, white and chestnut. A moment in its presence and it is easy to drift off and wonder how such a striking and defined duck ever evolved. There are many spectacular waterfowl that possess wonderful color, such as the popular and often painted mallard duck, hooded mergansers, harlequin duck and one of my favorites, the spectacled eider. But the wood duck, with its colors and design is remarkable to most.

Poet Isaac McLellan Jr. (1806-1899) wrote, in part, about the wood duck and its beauty:

*“Most beauteous of all the race
That skim the wave or soar in space,
With plumage fairer than the rays
The bird-of-paradise displays,
A mottled purple gloss’d with green,
All colors in the rainbow seen;
No tropic bird of Indian skies
May rival thy imperial dyes.”*

When most people think of ducks, they think of seeing them in the water, not up in trees. But the wood duck is a cavity nester and is often found in trees—which can be a bit of a shock when you are expecting to see raptors and songbirds perched high among the branches. It is not unusual to hear a casual passersby stop, notice and chuckle, “Look, there is a duck in that tree!”

The American Bird Conservancy notes, “Unlike most waterfowl, the wood duck is at home high in the trees. Its webbed feet are tipped with sharp claws that allow for easy perching, and its broad wings and tail allow it to easily navigate as it flies through dense, swampy woods.”

The wood duck nests in trees in cavities as high as 65 feet where the comparably-drab but elegantly-beautiful female will



lay between 9-14 eggs. However, it also needs water, such as hardwood wetlands, beaver ponds and rivers, to survive. This dichotomy presents some nesting and habitat challenges. Due to this habitat demand, and unregulated hunting, the wood duck almost went extinct in the late 19th century and early 20th century.

“Destruction of bottomland hardwood forests—the bird’s primary breeding and wintering habitat—and market hunting were the two major factors that contributed to the species’ decline. Because of their extensive breeding ranges in eastern North America, where most people lived in the early 20th century, wood ducks were probably the most hunted waterfowl species prior to 1918. Wood ducks were hunted from September to April. In 1918, however, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act prohibited the hunting of wood ducks nationwide,” noted J. Brian Davis, Ph.D., of Ducks Unlimited.

Hunting didn’t return until 1941 (most states didn’t permit it until 1959), and the wood duck’s resurgence is the result of hunting regulations, as well as efforts to preserve their habitats and the implementation of nest boxes.

“Today, it is estimated that 300,000 wood duck nest boxes produce 100,000 ducklings annually in North America. The use of nest boxes varies among regions, and basically is influenced by the availability of suitable natural tree cavities, the proximity of wetlands valuable to wood ducks, and other factors,” Davis said. “Wood ducks need a cavity in which to nest, and an adjacent (one to three miles) wetland habitat that contains some trees, shrubs, or dense herbaceous vegetation that provides quantities of aquatic insects for ducklings. Generally, where such a substantial food base occurs and natural tree cavities are sparse, there may be significant use of nest boxes.”

Wood ducks are the only North American duck that regularly produces two broods a year—a lot of work for the mating couple, who often pair up in January. They will also practice “intraspecific brood parasitism” in which female wood ducks will sometimes lay their eggs in the cavity nests of other wood ducks to be raised by them. As many as 29 eggs have been found in a single nest.





Hatched from their tree cavities after about a month, the ducklings use their clawed feet to climb out of the cavity and then jump out of trees within a day of hatching. (There is a great YouTube video of this “Ducklings jump from nest 50 feet in the air,” with over 1.5 million views). They “bounce,” when they jump onto land, if you are wondering. Then they make their way to the water, where they will be raised. It is common to see a dozen or so ducklings in the water with their mother. Unfortunately, they have a high mortality rate and those in the wild typically live only a few years.

Their diet includes a variety of seeds, such as acorns, fruits like blackberries and wild cherries, insects such as flies, beetles and caterpillars, and even clams and snails. They are revered as strong fliers, reaching 30 miles per hour and often hang out in small groups. Their webbed feet make them excellent swimmers, and their sharp claws allow them to travel well on

the ground and to perch in trees—a bunch of evolutionary adaptive features rolled into a beautiful duck.

Wood ducks are common in this area and one of my favorite places to see them is Sheldon Marsh State Nature Preserve in Huron. In 2019, we were treated to a leucistic female wood duck (an animal with a partial loss of pigment). A birder gave us the top-secret information, and we were excited to see and photograph it.

The tale of the wood duck is a familiar one—victims of habitat destruction and overhunting; fortunate beneficiaries of government regulation and conservation efforts. They stood on the brink of extinction for food and sport, victims of their beauty, and leaped from a ledge from which other species have not been so lucky. It is an evolutionary trait that put wood ducks in trees, but their survival ultimately depended on the efforts of conservationists.

House Wrens Adapting? By Mel Bird, OBS Trustee



This year, on our trail we have experienced the most HOWR (House Wren) nesting attempts in our 30 years of monitoring boxes. Consequently, we have been going often & removing the starting of HOWR nests. On our last round of monitoring, we found three nests that looked like EABL nests except that they had a few feathers and foreign material that was not consistent

with EABL nests. Two of the boxes are on my one acre lot so I was able to identify what bird built these nests and to our amazement it turned out to be HOWR. The one box next to a window in my workshop let me have a good view of the HOWR carrying grass & pine needles in to the box verifying that the nest was being built by HOWR. There are no sticks typical of HOWR nests, I am positive they are not Carolina Wrens which do build a nest similar to a bluebird nest but use leaves & leaf stems. These nests are a duplicate of typical EABL nests. My questions are: Have any other monitors witnessed this on your trails or have the HOWRs adapted to nests that they often build over to keep us from removing their stick nests. To the right are pictures of the nests with eggs & after they hatched.



Again, consecutive year pair bondings have been limited to 2, occasionally 3 year unions. A most remarkable exception was the record was set by female PROW 1880-46621. By virtue of nesting in the same general area from 1996 to 2002 this 7+ year old bird had the same mate for 3 consecutive nesting seasons succeeded by another male for her remaining 4 years. The year 2000 was an exceptionally challenging one for the pair. They were usurped 4 times by house wrens before nesting successfully on their 5th attempt. When she didn't show up in May of 2002, her mate paired and nested with another female. However, in early June the missing female finally showed up. Her long-time mate immediately took up with her and took on double nesting duty. She laid a clutch of 5 eggs. Unfortunately, she was not seen again after mid-June. Her disappearance was not noted soon enough and two dead nestlings were found in her nest jar. Perhaps a wren raid ended the nesting and she abandoned. We'll never know.

Sex	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
M	unbanded			1880-46667	1880-46667	1880-46667	1880-46667
F	1880-46622			1880-46621	1880-46621	brd-stat-unkn	2140-00708
M				1880-46541			
F				brd-stat-unkn			
M	unbanded	1650-27553	1650-27552	1880-46667			
F	1880-46636	brd-stat-unkn	1880-46621	1880-46621			
M				1880-46667			
F				1880-46621			
M	1650-27552	1650-27552			1880-46667	1880-46667	
F	1880-46621	1880-46621			1880-46621	1880-46621	
M			1650-27552	1880-46668	1880-46667		1880-46597
F			1880-46621	1650-62059	1880-46621		brd-stat-unkn
F							

Examples of multiple year pair bondings have been documented, more so in the first 2 decades of our prothonotary warbler nesting project. Changes in the swamp forest habitat of the Upper Cuyahoga River in recent years have obscured the pairing of PROWs. A greater frequency of spring high water events since the mid-2010's have caused a tree die-off eclipsing the combined effects of Dutch elm disease, emerald ash borer and beaver. Out of the banks, high water inundating the swamp forest entices PROWs back from the river's edge into the remaining shade where an abundance of decay or woodpecker cavities awaits. Consequently, PROWs use of our bird houses has diminished in recent years.

Although the PROW population level remains stable, our nest monitoring capacity has been severally curtailed as natural cavities, if located, are inaccessible for egg and nestling counts, fledgling rates, and hand-netting incubating females for banding. Without the individual female identity provided by color bands, we have pretty much lost the ability to track the pair bonding of females except for those color-banded females caught in previous years or those that choose to use our provided housing and we are able to hand net exiting the nest jar. We still mist net and color band males over the entire mile-long stretch of river with hopes of someday being able to equip them with geo-trackers that produce far more location data than bird bands ever could.



So, in conclusion, what factors determine PROW pairing for the nesting season? Males returning from their tropical wintering areas usually return to the same territorial areas. Success in holding their annual territories against challenges of new males is one factor. Another is the seemingly staggered arrival of females with the later arrivals finding less available mates unless they entice a mated male into a two-timing relationship. And of course, there is the courtship abilities of the males in attracting a female. To my knowledge, there is no evidence to support the notion that pair bondings remain through the arduous travels of migration and a long winter in the tropics. I believe it's "Same place next year, dear? If you make it back?" So, it's "who's with who this year?" as the mating game starts each year with a re-shuffled deck. No mating/dating reality show holds a candle to the mating machinations of prothonotary warblers in their steamy swamp surrounds.

SAVE *the* DATE

VIRGINIA BLUEBIRD SOCIETY'S BIENNIAL CONFERENCE

NOVEMBER 1 & 2

Friday Evening 6-10pm | Saturday 8am-4pm

Location: Virginia Crossings, Glen Allen, VA

Registration opens early Sept. Contact Valerie Kenyon Gaffney with questions. vbs@virginiabluebirds.org

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: MYRNA PEARMAN
Biologist, Author & Nature Photographer

www.virginiabluebirds.org





The Art of Sending Holiday Cards

By Molly Wilsbacher, OBS Treasurer



With thoughts of "Christmas in July" I humbly submit my art article featuring holiday cards.

In the early 2000's, a neighbor of mine informed all of us that he was no longer going to send Christmas cards due to the rising costs of postage. Instead, he was going to send digital greeting cards to all of his friends and neighbors. Sadly, the digital card was unimpressive and I swore that I would never send such e-cards.



Verse: Many good wishes for the holidays and the coming new year

Now that I'm retired, I appreciate the thought of saving money. However, I also enjoy immensely receiving Christmas and Holiday cards from my friends and former neighbors that I rarely get to see in person. I view it as a chance to catch up and to check in to see how everyone is doing. It goes without saying that if I want to keep receiving such updates and greetings, I must also keep sending snail mail cards, which is a small price to pay for keeping my valued friendships going through the years.



Verse: Wishing you a delightful holiday season and a magnificent new year!

Regardless, my favorite type of holiday cards to send and receive are those that feature nature, and especially those of my beloved bluebird. The example with an Eastern bluebird sitting on a branch is a stunning representation of nature and beauty. This particular photograph won a photography contest held by the National Wildlife Federation. [All three cards included in this article were obtained from the [National Wildlife Federation website](http://www.nwf.org).]

Another card features a Gathering of Songbirds, which sends a message of peace and hope during the holiday season. The artist is James Hartman who is one of the artist brothers that I featured in a previous art article. And finally, I included a more whimsical example of a happy snowman visited by his feathered friends by artist Dona Gelsinger.



Verse: Wishing you a season of light, hope and friendship that continues throughout the new year!

With modern time constraints and family obligations, I average sending Christmas cards twice out of every three years. Besides the card, I usually include a short letter of what's happening in my family's life. I always try to keep my updates positive and leave out all medical ailments. I haven't quite figured out when to stop including news of my grown children, who are now raising families of their own.

I sometimes wonder what Sir Henry Cole would think about the modern Christmas card after he first sent hundreds of postcards during the holiday season in 1843 to his closest acquaintances in Victorian England. If you would like to learn more about The History of the Christmas Cards, I encourage you to read a 2015 article from [The Smithsonian Magazine](http://www.smithsonianmag.com), which includes how Hallmark was arguably the first company to print the modern day holiday card back in 1915.

I leave you with one final thought by famed political satirist P.J. O'Rourke: "Don't send funny greeting cards on birthdays or at Christmas. Save them for funerals when their cheery effect is needed."

Bach and Bluebell

By Guest Author Lisa Maas



We all find Carolina Wrens to be delightful little birds. I would like to share mine with you. Other than a dash of obviously fictional Wren dialogue, this account is absolutely true.

A glorious song resounded through the forest and fields surrounding my home. It was powerful, it was rich, and it sounded like the singer was supremely happy, as if he was rejoicing just to be alive. I'd stopped walking, and had almost stopped breathing, I was listening so intently. "I wonder what bird that is?" I said out loud, but mostly to myself. "That's a Carolina Wren," my eight-year-old son informed me. Oh. Someone had been listening to the tapes I'd bought to learn bird songs, and was learning them better than I was.

When the weather turned chilly, I put a nut cake in the basket on the side of my feeder. A small cinnamon-colored bird came and nibbled at it. He stood on his tiptoes and stretched up to reach a favorite nut. "What a darling little thing!" I remarked. "It's a Carolina Wren," my son said (again). Hmm. Someone had been studying our bird book. After getting his fill of nut cake, Carrie Wren nestled into a corner on the feeder's south side and took a nap in the sun. It became a daily ritual. Some days I heard his magnificent song ringing through the sub-freezing air, loosening the grip of winter on my soul and assuring me that spring would keep her promise.

After that first encounter in 1997, I became more aware of the Carolina Wrens' presence. It seemed like those two were everywhere. I'd see them zipping from one place to another, usually just a foot or so above the ground. When I stepped out the back door onto the patio, one would pop out from inside, under or behind something and dart past my knees. When we went into the garage, there would be a scuffling noise and a Carol would glide past and out through a gap in the old walls. We'd catch sight of them in flower pots, boxes, old feeders and birdhouses, watering cans, under chairs, behind trash cans, upside down under the eaves, disappearing up into a raccoon baffle, in the shed, the wheel well of our car, you name it. What in the world were they up to? "They're constructing a 3D map in their brains of your entire property," said Nelson, my ornithology professor friend. "They are highly intelligent, and store all that information for possible future nesting sites." It looked to me like they were having a lot of fun doing it. My friend agreed. I rummaged around for more toys for them and added them to all the other curios: Short lengths of PVC pipe and furnace ducts, concrete blocks with holes in the middle, a terra cotta planter and more. I hid a dish of mealworms in one of the toys and we christened our patio "The McCarrie Wren Restaurant and Playground." I don't know who had more fun; them playing or me watching.

Carolina Wrens are not very cold-tolerant, and I worry about them when we have severe winter weather. The winter of '13-'14 was brutal. It went down as the snowiest and fifth coldest where I live in Indiana. That was the first time I'd heard the term "Polar Vortex", and they came one after another. I thought about people who live in colder climates than mine—Minnesota, upstate New York, Canada—and I shuddered. Our long driveway drifted



completely. My good husband bought groceries and many 50-pound bags of bird seed and hauled them uphill to our house on the half-century-old Flexible Flyer sled. He and I tipped two cafeteria tables onto their sides to make a wind shelter for the birds. I spread seed right on the snow next to the tables. Many birds braved the feeders in the vicious wind, but a couple hundred ate next to the tables, in the sun, but protected from the wind. All the birds looked cold, except the Juncos and Tree Sparrows, who are very winter-hardy. A few Cardinals took refuge in the garage and shed. I'm sure many old and weak birds succumbed to the temperatures. One morning I found a Mourning Dove who had died during the night. It was down inside the five-inch-deep depression of my boot, trying to shelter from the wind. Some days that winter I cried for all my birds. I couldn't help it.

Neither Carolina Wrens nor Bluebirds are well-suited for the temperatures we were experiencing that winter. They looked miserable, all fluffed out, crouched low, and tucking first one leg and then the other up into their feathers. I did everything I could for them. The heated bird bath did its job, amazingly, and I made mountains of crumbled peanut butter suet mix. Mealworms were on the menu twice daily. I offered these foods in The Bluebird Café, a covered, open-sided tray feeder. I put clear plastic up on three sides of The Café, which sheltered the patrons from the wind, but let in the sun. 1½-inch wire mesh went on the fourth side to restrict larger birds.

It appeared that the food in The Café was the primary sustenance for the Bluebirds and Carolina Wrens. My flock of a dozen Blues roosted all day in a Walnut tree on the east side of our house, sheltered from the wind. Every fifteen minutes or so they flew down for a meal. The Blues looked so graceful as they glided to The Café, but when they went inside, those beautiful birds turned into little barbarians! The food was in small dishes here and there. Never mind. The Bluebirds trampled through the dishes, clambered over each other, and stomped on any heads that were in the way. They gobbled greedily, choking down suet crumbles so large they could barely swallow them. Food flew everywhere. No other birds dared go in if the Blues were dining. It was total anarchy when they visited The Café, but they sure made me laugh! My gorgeous Bluebirds with their great-big, lovable personalities warmed my soul.

When Carrie Wrens eat, they remind me of well-behaved children with their favorite meal set before them. They are very tidy, even picking up and eating food that others have scattered (namely, the Bluebirds). They are peaceable, never fighting with, pecking at, or chasing anyone out of The Café, as others do (namely, the male Bluebirds). Also, they seem happy. Their tails twitch from side to side as they nibble. When they eat mealworms, they look euphoric. After he's had his fill, the male often flies up to a branch to sing a jubilant song.

That dangerously cold winter, the Carols were still polite and peaceable, but they did not look cheerful. They were suffering profoundly, just trying to stay alive. It was heartbreaking. Their roosting place was in our shed, where they sheltered day and night, other than regular visits to The Bluebird Café and bird bath. The two always came and went together.

One day, I noticed that the female did not look well. (I knew it was the female because I saw the male singing as I observed them both.) She was extra fluffed out and lethargic. She shook her head frequently, and let it hang down low. A couple of days later, the male came alone. I feared the worst. Then, I noticed that the male took food with him when he returned to the shed. Could he possibly be taking it to his mate? Was she still alive? Was he taking care of her? It seemed unlikely, but I hoped and I prayed.

After about a week of this pattern, the male came one day... with his little lady fluffball at his side!! She didn't look completely recovered, but she did look better. However, there was one thing about her that had changed, albeit temporarily. She'd lost her jaunty little tail, poor thing. Ah well, he obviously loved her.

Carolina girl improved daily and completely recovered. Her mate was rewarded for his faithful care for her. When the frozen world melted into spring, she built a nest in an old newspaper box behind our garage, and she and Papa raised four baby Carries. The day they fledged, the parents led their offspring to our front porch where all four lined up on a holly branch, wing to wing in a neat row, like tiny soldiers. There they patiently waited for Dad and Mom to bring treats, their eyes bright and their heads turning this way and that in joyful anticipation. Goodness they were adorable! That night was going to be cold, so the parents led the little darlings into a Phoebe nest on top of the porch light, a perfectly sculpted nest that had been completed a month earlier but was never used. I could just see their wee heads poking above the edge of the nest, looking curiously all around. When it was bedtime, Mom flew to the nest and lay down on top of them, spreading her wings out to make a warm, feathery blanket for her cozy circle of babies. Dad settled himself on a holly branch to keep watch over his lovely family.

Not many days after that, Carrie Wren and I kept bumping into each other in the garage. "Ope, sorry," Carrie apologized. "Let me just sneak on past you". "No, you're fine," I assured her. "What'cha got there?" "Moff," which I interpreted as "moss". She had a beakful.

So, a second nest—in the garage. She built it in a small cardboard box in a pile of clutter on a table. We could easily sneak a peek whenever we walked past, but we stayed away after the nestlings were eight days old, lest they fledge prematurely. When they did fledge, they were fluttering around in the garage and bumping against the permanently closed window. We thought it best to lend a hand. My son grasped a Carol. When he opened his

hand, she stood on his palm, gazing around in wonder and softly cheeping. Maybe she was looking at the jumble of odds and ends, and was happily prattling about the day she would explore it all! We carried them outside and set them under a nearby cedar tree, where Papa and Mama promptly tended to them.

In a couple of weeks, the fledglings began venturing out from the shelter of foliage where they had been safely hiding. Time to play and explore the world! First came the Shania Twain dust bath game. The entire family danced in unison. "You got to shimmy, shake, make the earth quake!" There were six little depressions in our unpaved drive when they were done shaking their booties. Then it was follow-the-leader around the cedar, and hide-and-seek in the brush pile. Finally it was fun time at the McCarrie Wren playground on the patio. I watched in fascination as a small plastic watering can laying on its side jiggled and wobbled as if it were alive. Out popped a Carrie Wren! He clambered all over the can, examining it thoroughly, then hopped back in, and the can came to life again. Another Carrie was enthralled with a stepstool, which had a hand slot in the middle for carrying. Carol slipped down through the slot, examined every inch under the stool, popped up through the slot and stood on top to survey the world around her. Then back down through that irresistible slot to begin again. And again. And again.

After joyfully exploring the playground, the Carols drifted on, except for one who was captivated by all the toys. Oh! Here was something he hadn't noticed—a wet spot on the concrete from a recent shower. There was barely any water left, but he happily made a bath of it, wiggling with zeal. When he was sufficiently clean, he peered all around for the next venture, and saw to his left something to play with. But when he turned to examine it, it moved away from him. So he turned to follow it, but it withdrew again. Carrie Wren kept pursuing the intriguing toy, but to no avail. Soon he was turning round and round in circles, chasing...his own tail!!

A couple weeks later, I was lying in bed listening to one of our juvenile Carolina Wrens learning to sing. An adult male has a repertoire of up to forty distinct versions of his song. When he sings, he repeats one version several times before switching to a different version, or pausing. On the other hand, juveniles string several phrases together into a babbling medley. It sounds like a toddler jabbering in baby talk. The young Carols seem quite happy and excited as they chatter on, jumping from one song to another, sometimes switching mid-phrase. It is delightful to listen to them.

As I listened, I saw from the corner of my eye some movement outside. It was in a wooden nesting shelf mounted under the eave. It had been there for years, but had never been used. My, there was a lot of plant material in that shelf. And then I saw a little cinnamon-colored bird slip in. No wonder Papa Carrie had been singing his heart out. They were undertaking a third nest—in a nesting shelf of all things! What a luxury having my own bed as the front-row seat to watch this wonder unfold again.

2014 was our gold mine year of Carolina Wrens, a blessed reward after that ferocious winter. Thankfully, we are almost certain to have at least one brood of Carrie Wrens each year. And whenever Carols are around, there is sure to be some drama going on—usually a comedy, a love story, or a combination of both...

Carolina Wrens never appear to outgrow their playfulness. Even when the adults are “working”, it all seems to be fun and games. One day I saw a dozen birds of various species loudly scolding in unison as a chipmunk scrounged around under the shrubs for a meal from a bird’s nest. A few minutes later I witnessed the chipmunk tearing across our yard at full speed, his tail straight up in the air. Carol was inches behind him, flying just above the ground, her long, pointy bill aimed directly at the chipmunk’s hiney. It looked like Carrie Wren was having a grand time! I think I heard her laughing.

A few years ago I concluded that the Carols needed their own feeder. Bluebirds and Carolina Wrens are both rather fond of live mealworms. In light of the fact that they cost about ten times more by weight than fillet mignon, I don’t serve many. The few I was putting into the Bluebird Café were mainly being snatched up by Bluebirds. Well, it is their Café, after all. Poor Carrie Wrens. One was even pecked on the head once by a Bluebird who caught her in the Café snacking on a mealworm. So, I bought a feeder and altered it by putting a hole in the bottom just large enough for a Carolina Wren to pop through. That hole is the only way into the feeder, and the Carols are the only ones who have figured that out. The Carrie Wrens love having their own Carol Café.

One balmy Spring morning, both Carols were visiting their Café. Papa was hopping in and out of the feeder, bringing with him each time a worm for Mama, who stood on the ground below, happily waiting for her treat. After about eight or so, the worm Papa put in her bill fell out. He picked it up and poked it back in to Mama’s bill. Plop. He tried again to stuff it in. Nope. After several attempts, she began hopping away when he came at her with that tiresome (and probably by now, tired) worm. “Come on, Sweetheart. I know you have room for just one more. Here.” “Oh please. I can’t even look at it. Why don’t you eat it? You haven’t eaten any yourself. You’re going to make me fat!” And she flew off. He picked it up and followed her. “I’ll love you no matter how plump you are! Besides, it always ends up in all the right places!”

Last winter, a pair of Carrie Wrens roosted each night in our porch light. I loved watching them slip in every evening and cuddle up together. The light is next to our bedroom, and I fell asleep thinking about that darling couple, just a few feet from me. When spring arrived, Papa awakened me each morning with an exquisite song.

Before long, we had a little party of fledgling Carrie Wrens frolicking all over the bird garden, patio and yard. They were hard at it from sunup to sundown. One night I was doing my regular chore of tidying up the feeders by softly blowing away the accumulation of shells from the perching area. I leaned in close to a feeder and shown my flashlight onto it. I screamed and jumped back in horror! A furry creature was crouched up there! Oh what was it? It somewhat resembled a chipmunk, but they are not nocturnal. Oh ick! Could it be a rat? We’d never seen one on our property, but what else could it be? I’d had my face right next to it, and it had looked at me with a beady eye. How vile! And yet, something seemed familiar about it. I bravely shown my flashlight towards it again and peered at it from a safe distance. It turned a sleepy eye towards me and I recognized...a baby Carrie Wren! Four of them, in fact, all snuggled up in a cozy, fluffy row. The one looking at me closed his eyes and dropped back into a deep sleep, the kind of sleep that children crash into after a long day of hard play.

I told my husband and son, and we all three gazed in wonder at the sleeping babies. They were there every night for a couple of weeks. Each night I stood in the warm summer air to savor the sight. Their tiny bodies moved ever so slightly with their soft breathing. I very gently blew on them to make their downy feathers fluff the tiniest bit. They were so, so precious. It was a gift.

Sweetest dreams, sweet Carrie Wrens.

A Colorado native, Lisa headed east at age 20, alone in a VW bug, stopping first in Kansas to pick up a husband and a degree in Horticultural Therapy from K-State. She has now lived in Indiana for 40 years, enjoying the Midwest lifestyle, four distinct seasons, and myriads of birds!

Treasurer’s Report by Molly Wilsbacher

- 1. The Ohio Bluebird Society received a \$3,500 general purpose grant from the Cardinal Health Foundation in recognition of Board Member Lee Johnson’s volunteer commitment to our organization.** Cardinal Health appreciates “the good work that Ohio Bluebird Society Incorporated is doing, and is pleased to support its efforts.” Thank you very much Cardinal Health Foundation, and Lee Johnson!
- 2. It is hard to believe that we are only about 6 months away from the next Ohio Bluebird Conference.** It will be held on Saturday, March 1, 2025 at Ashland University. We are keeping the cost the same as it was in 2024: \$30 OBS member, \$40 non-OBS member, \$15 student (21 & younger), \$20 seniors 65+ (who are also OBS members). Please keep the silent auction in mind when cleaning out rooms, downsizing, or bargain hunting at thrift shops. If you have something to donate, please contact me or a Board Member.
- 3. As a reminder, the Ohio Bluebird Society offers a small grants program, which is intended to provide financial support to the creation and installation of new nesting habitat.** Because education is such an important component of wildlife conservation, we are particularly focused on projects that combine on the ground conservation with education. Please visit our website to learn more or to apply for a grant: <https://ohiobluebirdsociety.org/about/grant-information>.
- 4. In the 2nd Quarter of 2024, we received approximately \$1,191 in membership dues and renewals.** We also received \$150 in donations, plus the Cardinal Health grant mentioned above. Thank you to everyone who made a donation, as every little amount really helps! Anticipated expenses in the 3rd quarter include: (1) quarterly newsletter expenses, (2) website maintenance expenses, and (3) liability insurance premium payment.

Missing the Nesting Season?

By Darlene Sillick, OBS President | Photos by Penny Brandau



Here are some things you can do while waiting for spring.

As the seasons roll from summer to fall, I certainly miss monitoring and watching the bluebird trails. For me, this is a busy time of time of planning and reviewing what worked

well and what needs repaired or changed on the bluebird trails. I have a couple questions for you to consider.

Have you cleaned out your boxes?

- Some of us winterize our boxes with felt weather stripping to warm up before winter
- I sometimes add a layer of white pine needles to the floor of a few boxes
- I look to see if vines or plants need to be trimmed away from the pole to keep predators from slithering or trying to climb the pole
- Be sure that the baffle is 1 inch from the bottom of the box. Sometimes they slip down.

Are any repairs needed or do boxes need to be relocated if too close to a wood or shrub edge?

- Did House Wrens show up on the last nesting? If so, move that box at least 40 yards out.
- Remember, if the box has just sticks, they can legally be removed.
- If she forms the cup in the back box corner, then do not remove the House Wren nest.

Possible fall winter visitors to the boxes

- Downy woodpeckers love to roost in a bluebird box in the winter. They will chisel at the 1-1/2" hole or inside of the box because that is what they do! Watch a few boxes before dusk. It is so fun to watch how the downy will land on the side of the box and hop sideways to the box front and all the time watching his surroundings. Then a quick movement and he/she is in the hole. It is fun to observe their behavior! At least I think so.
- Many different critters may use the boxes for the fall/winter. Here are a few things found or seen entering or leaving a box other than a feathered friend: bats or frogs, chipmunks, flying squirrels or the big ugghh, mice! Have you ever cleaned out a mouse nest and had one jump out and land on your chest or legs? Not for the faint of heart!
- The birds are always teaching us. Well, these critters do too. Our newest board member Jeff Blosser happened to catch sight of a chipmunk leaving a nestbox he had hung in a tree. He did not intend for bluebirds to move into and they did. He checked after he caught sight of the chipmunk scurrying out. I learned from Jeff, they need more protein as they prepare for fall. He lost the nest of bluebird young to the furry creature. They will sometimes eat eggs or young in an open nest or in a nestbox if they can access.

Is all your trail data entered in Cornell Nestwatch? If you have a public trail of boxes, did you send a report to the



A Downy woodpecker and Eastern Bluebird check out a nestbox for possible winter roosting.

property owners? They appreciate your report and what has fledged from the boxes. Paula Ziebarth does a beautiful report which she sends out to trail owners. Cornell Nestwatch will run the numbers and you add some interesting trail notes or experience. Great PR work Paula!

Have you sent your totals to Mike Watson for Ohio Bluebird Society 2024 totals? Please do!

Planning new sites – I can't help myself. Paula and I worked together on many of the Dick Tuttle trails and trained new monitors this year. His legacy continues at so many sites in Delaware. Tim Bischoff has worked on many trails too. Some he accesses by canoe or kayak. Yesterday, Tim and I met with the Army Corps of Engineers, director, Vanessa Bishop. This site is at the 3.5 mile Delaware Dam. We learned they have a prairie and a few bluebird boxes. The plan is to set up a Tree Swallow grid and add some paired boxes. They will also install a 24 gourd Purple Martin rig.

There may be more to come, we all know, build it and they will come. Stay tuned for more information on the Delaware Dam project! The plan is in its infancy and first we need to find monitors then we will set up the trails.



Fall nestbox relocations and maintenance work being done by Black River Audubon Society members Fritz Brandau, Marc Amos and Marty Ackerman.

Member News

OBS Trustee Nomination – Denise Falzone



Dear Ohio Bluebird Trustees,

I have included with this letter my Bio to introduce myself to you all, as well as inform the Ohio Bluebird Society that I am interested in becoming a trustee of your Board. I feel that as shown in my Bio that I am passionate about the outdoors and wildlife. Most of my wildlife experiences were in the San Luis Valley, Colorado and surrounding Mountain ranges.

I wish to be more active in conservation efforts in Ohio, and I feel being a trustee for Ohio Bluebird Society would be a nice start. Additionally, I have had Bluebird boxes on my property for 5 years, I have participated in Audubon counts in my area, and I grow native plants on my property. I would like to extend my efforts in a more widespread manner.

Thank you for considering me for this position and you can contact me using the information provided or my email address.

Denise M. Falzone
falzonedenise@gmail.com
(505) 321-5004

EDUCATION

BA Biology Secondary Education 1985, six credits short of Zoology
AA Veterinary Technician 2009

WORK EXPERIENCE

1987-1990: Sandhill Crane Powerline Study – University of Idaho, Biological Technician

1990-1992: San Juan Forest Service – Biological Technician – Mexican Spotted Owl Survey and other misc. projects. Biggest event – assisted in finding a Goshawk Nest

1992-1994: Biological Technician Colorado State Wildlife - Survey various wetland nesting birds, including: Eared Grebes, Snowy Plover, Avocets, Ibis, Snowy Egrets, and etc.

1995: Americorp volunteer for Mexican Grey Wolf Release Project

1996-2000: Substitute Teacher Long- term and short term for Albuquerque School District

2000-2006: Adventures in Alaska which included 3 month stint with Fish and Wildlife Federal Salmon survey in bush Alaska. Gisasa

2008-2010: Veterinary Assistant and Technician

2015-Present: High School and Middle School Substitute Teacher for Various School districts in Marion County and North Union School District.

OTHER QUALIFICATIONS AND TRAININGS

Hawk Watch Raptor Training – Can provide certificate upon request
OCVN Certification
Nest Watch Bluebird Certification

OBS Trustee News and Ballot

The Ohio Bluebird Society board recently approved the return of former Trustee Molly Wilsbacher for a new term as Trustee starting August 1, 2024. Molly has agreed also to continue her service in the position of OBS Treasurer. Thanks Molly!! Trustee Heather Harris also was unanimously approved for the OBS Vice President position. Thanks for your willingness to take on these additional responsibilities Heather.

The OBS Board of Trustees unanimously approved the nomination to accept a new board member, Denise Falzone. Voting by the membership of the Ohio Bluebird Society to accept or deny this nomination can now be performed by completing a paper ballot before October 1, 2024 and mailing it to: Mike Watson/OBS Election, Holden Arboretum, 9500 Sperry Road, Kirtland, Ohio 44094 or by emailing your decision to ohiobluebirdsociety@gmail.com.

OBS ANNUAL ELECTION FOR THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES – 2024

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

____ I vote for the following candidate:

Candidate: _____

Signed: _____

Print: _____

Date: _____

Welcome New Members!

WM Bell
David Billie
Donna Dean
Alisa Dematteo
Patrick Flanagan
Russ Gifford
Emma Hendrickson
Nina Love
Richard Mohr
Samuel Prosser
Rick Taylor

Thank You to Our Donors!

Ken Bowen
Catherine Chiovaro
in memory of Kathryn Geers
Susan Cook
Donna Dean
Connie & Terry Dolder
Bethany & Jordan Gray
Deborah Reed
Chalane & Charles Sheldon

2023 OBS Fledgling Report

Fall will soon be here and nesting season is almost over for 2024.

Please send in your individual 2024 fledgling reports to the Ohio Bluebird Society. You can find the form and detailed information at: <https://ohiobluebirdsociety.org/about-bluebirds/fledgling-report-2/>

The numbers from 2023 as submitted to and recorded by former OBS President Mike Watson are listed below. The report of fledgling numbers for 2024 may be even higher! Please let us know what fledged under your watch! We need your numbers!

Species	#Fledged	Species	#Fledged
Eastern Bluebird	5327	Prothonotary Warbler	37
Tree Swallow	5511	Tufted Titmouse	11
House Wren	1913	Wood Duck	23
Purple Martin	2089	Great Crested Flycatcher	5
Black-capped Chickadee	78	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	11
Carolina Chickadee	69	House Sparrows dispatched	694
Carolina Wren	44	House Sparrow eggs removed	980
American Kestrel	106	European Starlings dispatched	59
Barn Swallow	27	European Starlings eggs removed	28



Ohio Bluebird Society Membership Application

Membership Class	Annual	3-years
☐ Student (under 21)	\$10	\$25
☐ Senior/Sr. Family (over 60)	\$15	\$40
☐ Regular/Family	\$20	\$50
☐ Organizational	\$50	\$140
☐ Life	\$300	
☐ Tax deductible gift to OBS \$ _____		
☐ Membership renewal	☐ New membership	
☐ I am interested in participating in OBS activities		
☐ Email Newsletter OR ☐ 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.

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facebook

Like us on Facebook! Search for
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OHIO BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

The Holden Arboretum
9500 Sperry Road
Kirtland, Ohio 44094

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Mission Statement

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

ohiobluebirdsociety.org

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Deadline for Submitting Articles:

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

Nest Box Nuggets – from Richard Tuttle



“Occasionally, a nest box in Central Ohio will produce three broods of bluebirds in one season. Unless the parents wear leg bands, you cannot be absolutely sure who the parents are in order to declare that they were the ones that raised three families during the same season. Nonetheless, if a female bluebird lays three large clutches and does a good job raising the hatchlings to fledge, then the monitor develops a strong feeling that one female can claim credit for a job well done.”

*From: “A Prolific Female Bluebird”
– Bluebird Monitor, Summer 2017*