



Bluebird Monitor

OBS encourages good stewardship
by **Monitoring** our Trails
Summer 2024



OBS Awards Given to Two Very Deserving Individuals

At the OBS conference on Saturday March 2, 2024 the coveted Blue Feather Award was presented by OBS Treasurer, Molly Wilsbacher, to Mary Lee Minor. Congratulations Mary Lee!

Molly's presentation of the award included the following commendation: "Mary Lee Minor is the ultimate volunteer-compassionate, caring, and selfless. Over the past 30 years Mary Lee served Ohio Bluebird Society in many different capacities, serving on the Board of Trustees and as an officer multiple times over three decades. Most recently she served as Secretary when I was elected to the Board of Trustees in 2017.

Mary Lee is also a member of the Earth, Wind and Flowers Garden Club (which she helped found 37 years ago), an accredited master gardener, and a flower show judge for the Ohio Association of Garden Clubs. Mary Lee and her garden club supports OBS annually by creating beautiful centerpieces for each

conference table. Last year they created 20 such centerpieces that lucky attendees took home as door prizes. Additionally, as long as I have been Treasurer, Mary Lee personally donated at least 10 items and gift baskets for the conference Silent Auction every year. (in 2024 she donated 15 auction gift baskets)

Mary Lee also writes a regular column for the Bucyrus Telegraph-Forum (for free) called "Over the Garden Fence" that frequently includes articles on how to create the ideal habitat to attract bluebirds and promotes the Ohio Bluebird Society and our conference several times a year. As we all know, Gardeners attract and support bluebird and other cavity nesting species that devour many insects.

No matter what project she is involved with for OBS or her garden club, Mary Lee's organizational skills and energy levels are elevated with enthusiasm, passion, and zeal!



Mary Lee Minor received the Blue Feather Award which was presented by OBS Treasurer Molly Wilsbacher

The second major OBS award, The Wildlife Conservation Award, was presented at the OBS conference by OBS trustee Judy Semroc to Tim Biscoff. Congratulations Tim!

Robyn Bailey of Cornell Nestwatch had these words of praise for Tim Biscoff:

"Tim is the quintessential citizen scientist. He worked tirelessly to preserve all 17,362 nest records from Dick Tuttle's estate. He painstakingly transcribed records from notebooks, attended Zoom calls with NestWatch staff to sort out the particulars of the massive dataset, spoke with other

trail coordinators, and even went to find some nest boxes in person to verify their numbers. At the conclusion of this heroic effort in January 2023, a long-term priority dataset for Ohio was preserved for posterity. But it's important to note that Tim also participates in the Nest Quest Go!

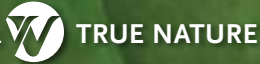


Tim Biscoff receiving Wildlife Conservation Award from Trustee Judy Semroc

project which helps to save other historical paper nest records from obsolescence. As part of this endeavor, Tim has submitted more than 72,974 classifications, helping to digitize old paper cards from the 1960s-1990s into useful data for scientists. In fact, Tim was instrumental in the development of the Nest Quest Go! project, serving as a tester and helping to refine the workflows. Tim is one of those rare people who enjoys working with data and understands the value of preserving it. Many people like to watch birds, but few people would take on the thankless computer tasks that are necessary to turn bird observations into lasting, structured data that scientists can use in perpetuity. For that, Tim deserves high praise for recognizing the value of data preservation, for contributing to quality datasets, and for being a stellar NestWatcher."

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By Julie Zickefoose, Advising Editor and columnist for the new, large format full color BWD Magazine. Subscribe at bwdmagazine.com.



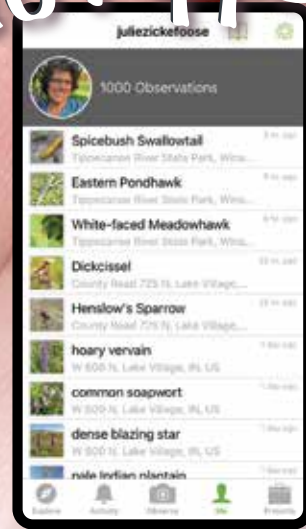
This snake-mimicking spicebush swallowtail caterpillar was the author's 1,000th observation on iNaturalist.

JULIE ZICKEFOOSE

From Scraps to Apps

Becoming a Useful Birder

BY JULIE ZICKEFOOSE



I have been slow—very slow—to embrace the technological, data-gathering marvel that is eBird. I submitted my first checklist via this popular mobile app on Feb. 15, 2016, and I'm embarrassed to admit that I sent not another until Feb. 12, 2021. But after that, I was off and stumbling.

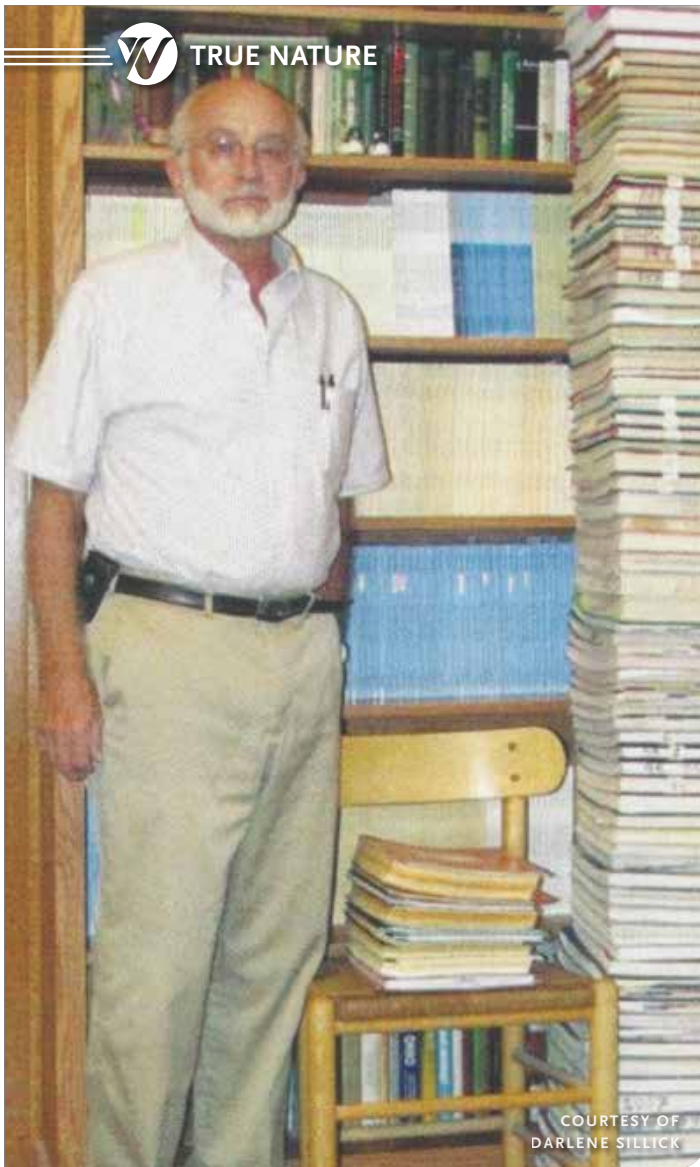
I'm very good at giving rationales for eBird avoidance. Some of them are valid. First and foremost, I don't want to spend my time outdoors with my nose in my phone. I want to be looking at plants, birds, animals, insects, and sky. Second, I don't love the process of listing birds as much as I love watching them. Third, eBird eats my phone battery.

Fourth, I was heavily influenced by my late husband Bill's aversion to tying himself down to data gathering while birding. He was a goal-oriented birder, and that goal was generally trying to rack up as many species as possible, whether he was birding on foot, by car, or from our tovertop. He liked to tick off species on a checklist, not enter data into his phone. I'll admit, that attitude seeped into me, too. But unlike Bill, who traveled the globe, I like to hunker down in one area and bird the tar out of it. And that propensity was the key.

Things change. People change. I have changed. For one thing, I'm getting older, and I'm starting to sort and pare down my possessions. And I realize that scribbling my bird lists on tiny pieces of paper in a wee notebook as I ramble doesn't make much sense. I would generate these lists nearly every day, and then I'd sit down and transcribe many of them into a document I keep on my computer. By transcribing them, I put the data in searchable form, which is handy for me. But there it ended—no one else would be able to access it.

And the scraps of paper? Superstitiously, I save them, knowing there's useful data there. But who in the world cares about it but me?

In July 2022, Ohio lost one of our ornithological stars, a kind, driven, capable and brilliant gentleman named Dick Tuttle. Dick, who lived in Delaware, Ohio, took citizen science to heights undreamt, building, mounting, and monitoring nestboxes for everything from wood ducks and kestrels to bluebirds, tree swallows, chickadees, and prothonotary warblers. He put up osprey poles and conducted chimney swift surveys. Along the way he brought in ordinary citizens: middle school students and incarcerated people; he stopped to educate folks wherever he went, whether at metroparks or nursing homes.



If Dick Tuttle stated something as fact, you could take it to the bank. I'm remembering an Ohio Bluebird Society meeting many years ago where we both had come to speak. We fell to talking about starlings, as one does. Dick said, "If a starling has not laid eggs by June first, it's not going to nest that year. You won't find a starling in Ohio laying eggs after the first of June." This may seem an arcane observation, but it is an extraordinarily useful one that gets at the basic nesting biology of starlings.

As a rehabilitator, I field an absolute flood of photos and pleas for help for mystery baby birds found on sidewalks in late May through June. Almost all of them turn out to be European starlings. And then the seemingly endless shower of such foundlings simply dries up. Dick's simple proclamation, doubtless linked to seasonal food

availability and the uniquely long nestling period of starlings (23 days by my observation) helped me make sense of that phenomenon.

Wherever Dick could gather data on nesting birds, he did it. For 53 years, he entered data in notebooks for his 411 nestboxes, which hosted 10 species of native birds. Successful fledglings from his boxes numbered 58,119. All of them, recorded on paper, in notebooks, spanning 1969–2021. I'm shaking my head. I was 11 when Dick started his life's work of helping cavity-nesting birds, recording data on every nest he monitored.

Robyn Bailey is the project leader for Cornell Lab of Ornithology's NestWatch program. I've garnered much of Mr. Tuttle's story from her NestWatch blog post "Preserving the Legacy of Mr. Dick Tuttle." It was Robyn who, upon his passing, sounded the alarm about Dick's life work. What would happen to the stack of notebooks, taller than he, that contained this precious retrospective of more than five decades of nesting data?

Enter Darlene Sillick, president of the Ohio Bluebird Society, and a dear friend of Dick's (and mine). Darlene is a beloved connector and motivator of people, who led Ohio Young Birders' Club for 17 years and has mentored 35 Eagle Scouts in conservation projects.

She approached Tim Bischoff, a plant pathologist who participates in the Lab's NestQuestGo! project, aimed at saving historical paper nest records from obsolescence. And with that, this stalwart individual agreed to enter all 17,362 of Dick's nest records into NestWatch, the Lab's nest record database.

Robyn writes, "He painstakingly transcribed records from notebooks, attended Zoom calls with me to sort out the particulars of this dataset, spoke with other (bluebird) trail coordinators, and even went to some boxes in person to verify their numbers. He handled all of this with a quiet humility. Tim is the quintessential citizen scientist."

Thanks to this prescient push to preserve Dick's legacy and Tim Bischoff's tireless work, Cornell Lab's NestWatch now has stewardship of Dick Tuttle's priceless data. When I think of the data on population trends, eastern bluebird sex ratios, clutch size, parasitism, phenology of nesting, and, by extension, the handwriting of climate change that is encapsulated here, it makes my head spin.

And that's just the tip of an enormous iceberg of useful information that can be gleaned from

Left: Richard Tuttle with a stack of his field notebooks, representing 53 years of nestbox observations.

Inset: Dick Tuttle places bands on his last brood of American kestrels in the summer of 2022.

Right: Intrepid, inventive, and fearless. Dick Tuttle uses his bicycle to gain altitude as he checks a bluebird box mounted on a traffic sign.



his records. A data set spanning 53 years, like the individuals who set out to gather that data, is beyond priceless. It's baseline data for the rapid climate and phenological changes we are experiencing now, and it is a way of calling back some of the immense wisdom that left us when Dick Tuttle passed away.

Seeing this heroic save of Mr. Tuttle's data makes me wish I'd been reporting my data to NestWatch all this time. Lord help me, I've been scribbling bluebird data from my 26 or so boxes in little spiral-bound notebooks for 30 years. Where are they all? I think I saw some in the basement... Such is the predicament of paper. It finds its way onto shelves, then into boxes in basements, and there it sits, locked away from the light of science.

Maybe entering my nest records in NestWatch can be a retirement project, if there is such a thing for a peripatetic naturalist who can't sit down except to write or paint. Another Ohio Luddite, paging Tim Bischoff!

Though I've been recording bluebird nestbox data and doing informal breeding bird censuses for decades before there were digital portals to receive that data, I do wish that I'd gotten serious long ago about using eBird to record my birdwalks. Out with the rationales for avoidance, and up with data sharing.

Something clicked in me with the latest eBird app update, which makes it quick and easy to annotate each species record with codes that serve as confirmation of breeding. A little purple dot accompanies each confirmed breeding record, and that simple bit of eBling lit a fire in my primitive brain to put dots next to as many species as I can. (If you don't see purple dots when you select a breeding code for your obser-



vation, update your eBird app.) Now that's a game I can get behind! As I rack up the confirmations of birds that breed on my sanctuary this year, I am giddy that my little corner of Ohio will be one of the best-documented anywhere, because there's another passion growing in me.

At the same time, in another app called iNaturalist, I've flown past my 1,000th observation of insects, flowering plants, fungi, animals, reptiles, and amphibians, the vast majority of them made on this property. Anything I can photograph with my phone, I can identify and record instantly in the iNaturalist databank. I'm finally looking seriously at grasses and sedges, with the helpful boost of iNaturalist's identification function.

Take a photo, and the app suggests IDs for it. If the app gets it wrong, other naturalists swoop in on your record to correct it. It's like having

A pair of blue grosbeaks, feeding young a mile from the author's home, was a rare and delightful July 9th surprise in 2023.

JULIE ZICKEFOOSE

experts in every taxon, tagging along for each morning walk. I am learning so much!

Between eBird and iNaturalist, I am generating a database, accessible to anyone, about just what is here. And there's a whole lot of "what" here. No longer am I birding and botanizing just for pleasure. I'll be making my observations for posterity. A chance sighting, a rare breeding record—they all go into the database, and who knows what useful information will come of it?

I was meandering slowly through a hillside waist-high with blooming butterfly weed on July 9, 2023, when I heard a song that first recalled warbling vireo. My brain lit up, fired—and told me there is no water for at least a half mile. Warbling vireo, which always nests along water: ruled out.

The next place my thoughts landed was on blue grosbeak, that giant, sexy, huge-billed indigo bunting-on-steroids. Sure enough, as I walked toward the wandering, hoarse song, the bird emitted a loud, metallic *chenk!* note. A pale tan female fluttered into a sumac, with a shower of *chenks*. The male, resplendent in ultramarine with chestnut epaulets, joined her. They were in an absolute tizzy, and I knew they had to have newly fledged young near, to be that excited about little old me, poking through the butterfly weed. I grabbed a few shots for documentation and quickly withdrew; the light was harsh and the birds were backlit.

Later that evening, I pedaled up on my bike, parked it in the grass, and stealthily crept up the

back side of the hill. When Providence placed the male and female together on a multiflora rose stalk against a dark backdrop of trees, I got a handful of shots that made me squeal with delight. They were distant and a little soft, but they were diagnostic, and they were mine. What a feeling!

The next evening, I saw both male and female, bills stuffed with insects, on the powerline right along the road. Those fledglings were up and flying hundreds of yards now. Entering the record on eBird put a confirmed breeding dot on the map for blue grosbeak, a rare breeder in southeastern Ohio, that hadn't been there before.

I'd seen a subadult male singing at this spot in June, perhaps six years earlier. I can't tell you for sure, because that observation never got transcribed. Sigh. Had they been hiding in plain sight all this time? I was weak in the knees to have such a longed-for species feeding fledglings just a mile from my home. I found another male singing two days later about three miles northeast of there. This is how range maps are made, point by point.

I had a little epiphany as I walked the orchard, eBirding, on the morning of July 22, adding breeding codes for 16 species on my property. And that was just that morning's list! I was birding, yes. But I was also solidifying the scientific status of my 80-acre property, creating a record of everything that's living here. And, without even trying, I could be participating in the next update to the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas. A map sprang into my head, populated with

confirmed breeding records for dozens of species on Indigo Hill and in the surrounding area. I thought of the army of eBirders who are adding their observations to eBird, and hence to their state's next Breeding Bird Atlas.

With its codes (the purple dots of which I am so enamored), eBird makes it easy to record breeding confirmations as you go. Each one, a feather in your cap, and an easily located data point for researchers. If you already eBird, be sure to add them!

Rooting around, I learned that state breeding bird atlas teams establish portals within eBird, through which observers can easily submit their data during the atlas period. But the state teams may also be able to mine the larger body of data submitted during the atlas period from countless random eBirders, to add greater detail to the picture.

What a boon and a game changer, to go from relying on a small corps of dedicated volunteers in each state, to potentially accessing the breeding bird observations of *anyone who uses eBird* during the atlas period! As of May 2023, around 880,000 people, worldwide, have collectively made 1.4 billion observations of birds!

Alone in the orchard, I beamed, knowing that the next Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas would be the best, with the finest-grained data, ever. My blue grosbeak family, if they're still breeding nearby in 2028, could make the species range map. And who knows what other discoveries I will make by then?

Birding with a purpose feels good. Sharing records does, too. Accessing neat electronic archives of one's own data—and everyone else's: a huge win for data permanence. And contributing our observations to scientific studies and conservation efforts for posterity—that's best of all.

I gaze, smiling, at a photo of my talented friend, balanced on his bicycle to check a high box. Dick Tuttle, your vast body of data lives on, with deepest gratitude to Robyn, Darlene, Tim, and Project NestWatch. 

Julie Zickefoose is a writer and artist who lives on an 80-acre nature sanctuary in Whipple, Ohio. After writing and illustrating five books, she has transitioned to magazine work, but may have a couple books in her yet.



Nests – Not Always Perfect

By Jeff Blosser, OBS Trustee

So what does a Bluebird nest look like? Ask any Bluebird enthusiast and they will tell you it is a very neat nest made from grass or occasionally pine needles like the one pictured below. It will be of one material and it will be very neatly put together with a perfect cup in the middle. It will also typically be about 3 inches high and will hold together if removed from the nestbox it is built in.

That was my knowledge as well until last year when monitoring a trail at Delaware State Park. As Spring approached and the weather began to warm up I would find nests in various stages of development and of course they were all built with grass and all looked nearly identical and true to form of the typical Bluebird nest. That was until one day when I opened nestbox number 35 and found the haphazard nest pictured below. This nestbox was in a very mature wooded area where the lowest branches on the trees are at least 20 feet off the ground and the trees are no closer than 15 to 20 feet from each other. Had I not seen the female Bluebird leave the box as I was approaching I would not have imagined this was a Bluebird nest. The first brood had 5 eggs, which all hatched and fledged. I cleaned out the nestbox after the brood fledged and came back the next week to a nearly identical nest with an egg in it again. The second brood was 6 eggs, all of which fledged. I once again cleaned the box and came back the following week to another identical nest with



Usual nest



Unusual nest in Nest box #35

an egg. The third brood was 4 eggs and again they all fledged. Regardless of how different these nests looked or the fact that I never once saw the male Bluebird, this pair fledged 15 young from the same box.

So don't make it a habit to clean out any nest that doesn't appear perfect at first. Make sure you observe the species first to confirm that it wasn't just a Bluebird making use of a material that they deemed fit to make a nest out of.

The Art of Forging in Fire

By Molly Wilsbacher, OBS Treasurer



When planning this year's silent auction, former OBS Director Carrie Elvey contacted me with her donation of a steel moth that she forged herself. I was immediately struck by how beautiful it was and knew it would be one of the top sellers at the auction (it finished only behind the new Vortex Optics Binoculars). I also knew that my next art article would feature Carrie's amazing creations.



As a naturalist, Carrie is passionate about connecting people of all ages and abilities to the fascinating natural history stories happening in their own backyards. "My art is inspired by the form, function, colors and textures of the natural world. I strive to use my art as both a teaching tool and a catalyst to spark wonder and forge lasting connections with nature. I believe the childhood joy of discovery is worth holding on to, and hope my art helps others rediscover their joy and find connection with the beauty around them."



Carrie is a former senior naturalist at The Wilderness Center and she created Darwin's Dream and forging bugs as a way to help supplement her natural history programming. "I'm most passionate about sharing the weird natural history stories unfolding in our own backyards - and there are so many (look up acorn weevil/ants, ichneumon wasps, or tortoise beetle larvae)."

When she creates a steel bug, Carrie looks at collected specimens and photos, then makes a wire and paper model. She uses the model to make pattern pieces, which she cuts out of steel. Then, each piece is heated in the forge and shaped and textured. After assembly, additional colors and patinas are added by brazing copper or brass, forcing rust, copper plating, and waxing. Carrie created Darwin's Dream to foster connection with the natural world through education, exploration, and art. Its name was inspired by Darwin himself and his constant search for connection in nature, which is not only good for our mental and physical health, but vital to our lives on this planet. Because she spent her childhood walking in the woods, bringing frogs and snakes home in her pockets, she hopes more individuals - both young and young at heart - will experience a similar love of the great outdoors.



Carrie hopes that her pieces of art spark interest and curiosity about the natural world and serve as a catalyst for important conservation messages like [dark sky conservation](#), [leave the leaves](#), and [planting native](#). [If you receive an email copy of this newsletter, click the links to learn more about each of these initiatives.]

If you are interested in learning more about Carrie's art work at Darwin's Dream, please visit her website at: <https://www.darwins-dream.com>. If you are interested in watching how Carrie and other blacksmiths forge steel, I recommend watching an episode or two of the popular History Channel show, Forged in Fire.



Ask Madame WingNut

House Sparrows Revisited

By Paula Ziebarth



Pickleball Rocks! That is what the sign declares on the pickleball court at Smith Park in Delaware, Ohio. The birds using the paired station near the pickleball court seem to agree. This is my second season monitoring this 26-box trail. Eastern Bluebirds have consistently inhabited one of the boxes in that paired station, starting before any other birds on site and ending after all others are finished. They are fierce and they need to be...



Pickleball Rocks!

In the box paired with theirs, about 15 feet away, resides the dreaded House Sparrow (HOSP). Actually it is a parade of different HOSP because I trap and dispatch them as quickly as I can. Last

year, I removed 9 adult HOSP and 10 eggs from that one box. This year with a month into the nest season, I've removed 5 HOSP so far from this single nest box. Meanwhile, 15 feet away, a Bluebird broods her 5 eggs.

How can this be?! "Take down the trail!" many would say. But the Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows are doing well here. I have experimented with different HOSP management techniques throughout the years and have stumbled upon a strategy that seems to be working very well on this HOSP infested trail. You can call it the WingNut Protocol if you like...

My strategy includes using monofilament HOSP deterrent on the front of a nest box intended for Eastern Bluebirds and pairing it with a nest box that has a 1-1/4" hole reducer and no HOSP deterrent. I learned many years ago that deterrents like monofilament and sparrow spookers are not very effective at all IF you do not give the HOSP an option to "try" in. HOSP are intelligent, tenacious birds. You will NOT chase them away by removing nests, or screaming at them, or using sparrow spookers or monofilament deterrents. They remain in the area and they figure it out. They will go around that deterrent unless you give

them an attractive option and trap them there with a Van Ert universal sparrow trap. When you do that, they don't have time to discover how to circumvent the deterrent because they are gone.



Monofilament House Sparrow deterrent installed on front of box on Smith Park Trail. I chose not to put it on the roof and it is working well on front of boxes here.



Paired box with 1-1/4" hole reducer prevents Eastern Bluebird from entering but House Sparrows and Tree Swallows can access box.

The Smith Park Trail has 13 paired box stations (26 nest boxes total) for Tree Swallows/Bluebirds. There is a large population of Tree Swallows using this trail so pairing nest boxes about 15 feet apart ensures that Tree Swallows can have a nest box and keep others of their species from using the one intended for Eastern Bluebirds. If you get both species using a paired station simultaneously, it is a beautiful thing because they will work together to defend against any threats that come their way... such as HOSP.

With The WingNut Protocol underway, as of this writing on April 21, 2024 the thirteen nest boxes with monofilament HOSP deterrent have 8 Tree Swallow nests and 5 Eastern Bluebird nests. Bluebirds are on eggs (22 so far) and Tree Swallows are finishing up their nests. Eleven of the 13 boxes with 1-1/4" hole reducer and no HOSP deterrent have been continually occupied by HOSP so far this season. I have captured 26 in these boxes. Tree Swallows recently took up residence in one of the nest boxes with a hole reducer, sharing their station with a Bluebird.

I have only had one HOSP get into a monofilament protected box so far this season. They seem truly deterred by the monofilament

and happy to scoot into the paired box. Bluebirds have no choice but to nest in the monofilament box because they will not fit through the smaller hole on the paired box. Interestingly, if the monofilament box is unoccupied, Tree Swallows are choosing it over the box with the smaller hole. They will fit through a 1-1/4" entrance, but I imagine all that HOSP activity is daunting and they realize the benefits of the monofilament.

If Tree Swallows nest in the box with the monofilament, it is a simple thing to remove the hole reducer from the paired box, now making it available for Bluebirds to use if they want. In some cases, I would not consider this because the HOSP attempts in some boxes are so great.

The WingNut Protocol is working very well on this trail because I trap and remove House Sparrows from the paired box as soon as possible. If House Sparrows were allowed to remain for a time, a new pair looking for a box could easily depredate the nest box with a native cavity nester or the existing House Sparrow couple could do that. There is no need to wait for House Sparrows to finish nesting or to lay eggs, but do wait until you see evidence they have been in there (sparrow droppings or a little nest material). Trap as soon as possible. All nest boxes should have Van Ert mount screws installed on the front inside face of the box so the trap can be slipped in quickly. These birds are smart and watch you so do not make eye contact. Slip trap in (with nest modification as needed) and walk away quickly. Very often, I hear the trap snap shut as I walk away.

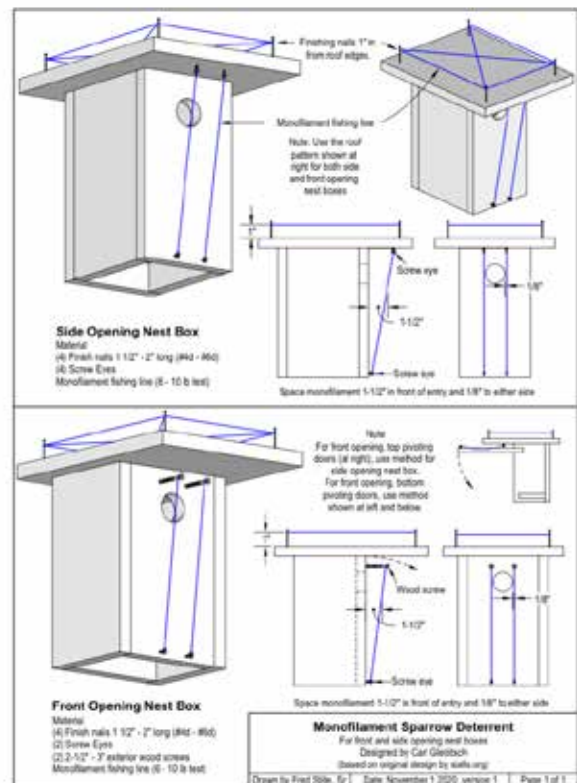
You can adapt this strategy for a residential yard that does not have Tree Swallows nesting. Simply install monofilament deterrent on your Bluebird box and install box with 1-1/4" hole a good distance away from their box if you can – near a spruce tree, your people house, a tree or bush you have seen them hanging out in. Only install a Van Ert trap in a box when HOSP has claimed it. That means you have seen him/her in or on it, HOSP droppings in box, or HOSP nest material added to box. Reduce any nest to the top inch and replace it in the box before setting the trap. Scatter some of that nest material on the ground in front of the box and add a couple of fluffy white feathers to it. The HOSP will want to take this material back in the box and will be trapped quickly, often in minutes. Once trap is sprung, I put a large mesh laundry bag over entire box before opening. Smack box to get him/her moving into the bag and humanely euthanize bird if it is a HOSP. Never remove entire nest until you catch the male or you may drive him/her to depredate nearby native nesting bird. If you don't have your quarry in a reasonable time frame, remove trap, leave a partial nest and try again in a few days. Once you do capture the male, nest can be removed and box is ready for next occupant.

Happy spring everyone! Pickleball Rocks! The sun got mooned! Wasn't that eclipse mind blowing?! Birds are busy, busy, busy...

If you have any questions, contact Paula Ziebarth at: paulazbird@gmail.com or 614-323-7566. An experienced monitor of over a dozen Bluebird Trails in central and northern Ohio, Madame WingNut enjoys all creatures that fly, regardless of their stage of development.

Madame Wingnut trail field notes of Smith Park. Boxes are labeled 1 through 26. Boxes in the left column have a monofilament sparrow deterrent. Boxes in the right column have the 1 1/4 inch hole reducer and no sparrow deterrent. EABL equals eastern bluebird . TRES equals Tree swallow. HOSP equals house sparrow.

Smith - March - April 20, 2024
 MONO
 1 - TRES 2 - ♂♂
 3 - EABL (SE) 4 - ♂
 5 - TRES 6 - ♀♀
 7 - TRES 8 - ♀
 9 - TRES 10 - ♂♂
 11 - EABL (SE) 12 - ♀♀
 13 - TRES 14 - HOSP
 15 - EABL (SE) 16 - ♂
 17 - TRES 18 - ♀♀
 19 - EABL (SE) 20 - TRES
 21 - TRES 22 - ♂♀
 24 - TRES 23 -
 26 - EABL (SE) 25 -
 8 TRES 26 HOSP
 5 EABL (SE) trapped in
 in monofilament box 1 1/4" hole box



House Sparrow monofilament deterrent developed by Carl Gleditsch

A Welcome Return for the Purple Martin

By Ann Bugada of Lake Metroparks



Purple martins are North America's largest swallow and a wonderful cavity nesting bird. Social, vocal, aerobatic - lots to love! Purple martins in the eastern United States depend entirely upon man made housing to survive and thrive.

Populations have been in decline over the years, initially due to the loss of natural nest cavities and competition from those non native cavity nesters,

house sparrows and European starlings. As with other insect-eating birds, purple martins are also vulnerable to the effects of pesticides and environmental toxins. Mercury contamination acquired in their wintering range in South America appears to be a significant factor in martin decline.

Nine years ago, a little team of bird enthusiasts came together to manage a small purple martin colony in Lake County, in northeast Ohio, along the shore of Lake Erie near the mouth of the Chagrin River; Chagrin River Park. One Park site became two, and currently five distinct colonies keep us busy monitoring and managing. All colonies are on public park lands; Lake Metroparks Chagrin River Park and Lake Erie Bluffs, City of Mentor Lagoons Nature Preserve, and Edward R Walsh, and City of Willoughby Osborne Park. Although other colonies in Ohio are certainly older and more productive, our banding efforts here are helping us better understand the interdependence of these lakeside colonies.

Working under federal permits thru the US Bird Banding Lab, we have banded as many martins as possible, 36 adults, 1,335 nestlings, (1,371 birds total) since 2015.

Upon perfecting their flight skills, juvenile purple martins gather with adult martins in preparation for their impressive long-distance migration. Across the United States, the entire population departs at summers end, flying roughly 4,000 miles to winter roost sites near Amazon tributaries in Brazil.

By early April, first martins begin returning to Ohio. Courtship, nest building and egg laying accelerates through May, with first hatchlings by late June. Because our colonies utilize retractable



Nesting martins await banding



Securing adult martins for a band check



Nestling martin receiving band

poles, we can access the plastic gourd cavities, monitor nest successes and access the young for age-appropriate banding.

Martin research indicates site fidelity for returning adults, and we often see banded adult birds within the colonies. Did they hatch here? With sharp eyes, fast feet, a ladder, and a long extension paint roller, we have been able to target banded adults within their cavities, block the doorway with the roller, lower the gourds, gently extract them, and record their band numbers. What we suspected turns out to be true. These recaptures from within our four lakeside sites and two further inland site are returning to their natal colonies, or to a neighboring colony to continue breeding.

Of nine adults we were able to recapture from three of our sites in 2023, seven were from within our colonies, one was from Erie, Pennsylvania, and one was unknown. The other unbanded adult birds remain a mystery. And those that are banded but have not (yet!) been caught will be clearly in our sights in 2024! We look forward to continuing to work with these delightful birds and sharing what we learn about their local behaviors.

Ann Bugada is a naturalist and birder, born and raised in Ohio; retired from a satisfying career in education, interpretation, and conservation for Lake Metroparks where she was chief of interpretive services for LMP.

She enjoys citizen science opportunities, including purple martin management in the summer and saw-whet owl research in the fall. During the winter months, she has been known to morph into a Fortunate Snowbird.



Adult purple martins at nesting gourds

Wren Guards 2024

By Pamela Routte, OBS Trustee



In NE Ohio, the House Wrens return from their winter migration in the southern US and Mexico, in early to mid-April. Their return is a time of mayhem for other native cavity nesters because the House Wrens are scoping out cavities to call their own. If they enter a nest box with eggs, they will pierce the eggs and if there are young nestlings (younger than day 7), they will also get pierced and tossed from

the nest. This is not to say that House Wrens are evil, it is simply how they have evolved. With a fine bill, not made for excavating holes, like a woodpecker, for instance, House Wrens must search for and snag cavities to nest in, regardless of another bird already using it. Not to be confused with the House Sparrow, House Wrens are native and protected.

So how do we protect Bluebirds, Chickadees and Nuthatches from their marauding ways? In addition to not placing our nest boxes in preferred House Wren territory (edge of tree lines or scrubby foliage), we install homemade wren guards on the nest boxes, in hopes of blocking the sight lines to the hole. I like to block the front hole(s) and the periphery as well. A wren guard can be made from any material. Some use cardboard, some use

wood. I use Vinyl gutters and gutter caps, (available at any home improvement store) measured to fit the face of my nestbox and then some, and attached with small "L" brackets. I make sure that there are 2.5-3" of space between the wren guard and the hole. Like the Sparrow Spooker, the wren guard should not be applied until the first egg has been laid and unlike the Sparrow Spooker, should be removed around day 8 for Bluebirds and day 11 for Chickadees and Nuthatches. It can be used in conjunction with the Sparrow Spooker. The wren guard does make it more difficult to visually monitor the nest box and it's more of a challenge for the adults to feed the nestlings. Its presence would also impair fledgling, so it is of critical importance that the wren guard be removed in a timely manner. Please visually make sure the parents will accept the guard after installation. Also know that Wren guards may not work once a wren has discovered the nest box hole or may not even work at all. It is a layer of nest box protection from House Wrens, but to say it is 100% effective would be an exaggeration. Knock wood, I've had good luck using them, but collective knowledge says that once House Wrens have "discovered" a hole, the wren guard will no longer act as a deterrent. In addition to using a wren guard, I have about 6 wren houses strategically placed around the property to give them nesting options other than my nest boxes.

VINYL WREN GUARD FOR BLUEBIRD HOUSE



Multiple Guard Notes: Measurements can be off slightly for each box. If you make multiple guards, it's a good idea to write the location of each guard mount on the inside with a sharpie.

Parts List (Home Depot)



5 in. x 10 ft. White Vinyl K-Style Gutter



5 in. White Vinyl K-Style End Cap Set



3/4 in. Satin Brass Corner Braces (4-Pack)



#8 x 1/2 in. Phillips Pan Head Zinc Plated Sheet Metal Screw (4-Pack)

STEP 1



Cut a section of gutter 1 1/2 inch wider than your bird box

STEP 2



Measure 3/4" from each end cut out the back of the gutter (leaving 3/4" of gutter on the ends)

Continued on page 14



Member News

Notes from the president – by Darlene Sillick

As we near the busy month of May, it is so great to be out on the trail again and see nature in all its Glory!! If we put up a box, then that is our promise to help our native cavity nesters. I am still stunned when I see boxes on trees and fences and put up with no baffle. There is a lot of great information to be found for helping bluebirds. I hope you take the time to search it out! If you run into questions as you check nestboxes there is a Facebook group called “Bluebirds Across Ohio” which is managed by OBS trustee Heather Harris. She is doing a great job helping new and seasoned bluebirders. Please also feel free to call your Area Contact or an OBS board member if you need help dealing with sparrows. Be proactive and review www.Ohiobluebirdsociety.org and Bet Zimmerman’s www.sialis.org amazing website. She recently redid the site – please take a long look. Or send your questions to OBS. Also www.northAmericanBluebirdsociety.org has some special educational handouts you can view, print out or order. If you have ideas for information you would like to see added to the OBS website, we hope to hear from you.

Many of you attended the March 1, 2024 OBS annual conference in Wooster. The speakers and educational demonstrations made it an excellent conference and a full long day. Special thanks to the board and volunteers who helped make it exceptional!! Molly Wilsbacher did another excellent job organizing and running the Silent Auction fundraiser with help from a few other volunteers. Retiring Membership Chair, Pat Dutton, helps the conference run like a well oiled machine from the name tags to the membership to the silent auction. Thanks to Judy Semroc and Anna Rose for keeping the conference running smoothly. Stephen Bischoff was a hero to run the presentation laptop. Yea Team!! So many others came early and stayed late to help with the dozens of details to make a successful conference. Thanks to each of you!

Our speaker panel was exceptional!! From our keynote, Jim McCormac, who gave us a session on the importance and beauty of moths to Chrisula Stone who gave a fact filled and passionate talk about Bluebirds and Matt Shumar who talked about the declining aerial insectivore problem it was a fast paced and information filled morning!

Mary Lee Minor was the recipient of the beautiful Blue Feather Award. She is so deserving, as she has done so much and given so much to OBS for several decades.

Tim Bischoff was the Wildlife Conservation Award winner. He was nominated by Robyn Bailey from Cornell Nestwatch. Tim has given countless hours taking over work done by Dick Tuttle. He was able to convert Dick’s data notes to Cornell Nestwatch where his data will forever rest.

Afternoon speakers included Bet Zimmerman who drove here from Connecticut and spoke in the afternoon on “All about Tree Swallows, the Aerial Acrobats”. We learned new data about the wonderful Tree Swallows and how fun and fascinating they are. Bet donated some special items to the Silent Auction and was at a table to talk about North American Bluebird Society, where she serves on their board. Marne Titchenell also was an excellent afternoon speaker with her talk on the woodland secondary cavity nesters -from chickadees to titmice to wrens to great crested to nuthatches. This conference was indeed special with our speakers and educational displays. Many thanks to the Division of Wildlife who awarded us with a \$1,000 sponsorship grant. And Jamey Emmert and her display saw a lot of visitors! We were pleased that the Troyer’s again spent the day at our conference, coming from PA. Andy Troyer and company donated many things to the silent auction and we so appreciate them spending the day with OBS.

Our March 1, 2025 conference is in the planning stages. We would love to hear your ideas for speakers and educational displays. To give you a peek at our keynote for March 1, 2025 at Ashland, Ohio: Julie Zickefoose will be our speaker extraordinaire, writer, and artist and we will be thrilled to have her back at an annual OBS conference.

A huge thanks to all the other volunteers and past and present board members who helped to make the 2024 OBS annual conference so special. Again, we hope to hear from you and sincere wishes for a great season full of little fledges and lessons learned.

Several terms are up for some OBS board members, myself included. My 2 year president term is up this October. We are looking for folks interested in volunteering to serve on the board. Please contact myself or another board member if you want to learn more about this opportunity to help bluebird conservation at a state-wide level. We can’t do this without you! Please contact me at dsillick118@gmail.com. The birds so thank you too!!



On page 8 of the Cornell Lab Nestwatch Digest (for the Nesting Season 2023) it was thrilling to read that two groups from Ohio were the second and third highest top contributors overall of nesting attempts into Nestwatch for 2023. Congratulations on the recognition of your hard work both on the trail and also entering data into Nestwatch!

Welcome New Members!

Teresa Backstrom
Charlene Baker
Thomas Baldosser
David Balestrino
Mark Blumeschein
Ty Bryant
Cynthia Bulechek
Linda Burns
Harry Condry
Gary Cowell
Donna Davisson
Luke Donahue
Denise Falzone
Nathan Forsthoefel
Linda Gilbert
David & Libby Glade
Vicki Rae Harder-Thorne
Patty Harvey
Charlie & Lora Heiss
Mark & Awnhee Hoberecht
Christine Holmes
Danny Lanham
Tim & Paula Lavey
Sue Newcomb
Robert Ridzon
Lisa Riemenschneider
Tina Russell
Jack & Cynthia Scanlon
Matt & Amanda Sloan
Caron Stein
Melinda Stevens

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The Blackbaud Giving Fund
PPG Industries Foundation
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Jim Bouscher
Harry Condry
Susan Cook
David Cordner
Gary Delost
James Estep
Charlie & Lora Heiss
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Don & Diana Plant
Dale & Diana Rabung
Maura & Dave Rawn
Lisa Riemenschneider
Jack & Cynthia Scanlon
Darlene Sillick
Ron & Carol Swart
Wild Birds Unlimited, Sawmill

Treasurer's Report by Molly Wilsbacher

1. I am astounded by the generosity of those who made donations or grants to OBS in the 1st Quarter of 2024!

We received \$2,813 in donations, many of them made when renewing memberships. The following are those that made donations of \$100 or more: (1) ODNR Division of Wildlife made a \$1,000 grant for our annual conference. (2) Kathryn W Maddy made a \$500 donation in honor of Area Contact Bethany Gray. (3) The Johnson Lifegroup Christway Church made a \$300 donation in memory of Dorothy June Warner. (4) Debbie Smilek made a \$110 donation with her membership. (5) Susi Brown made a \$100 donation with her membership. (6) PPG Industries Foundation made a matching gift of \$100 in honor of Board Member Judy Semroc's husband.

2. A warm thank you to those of you who donated 115 items for the silent auction at our Bluebird Conference on March 2, 2024.

We enjoyed a record number of silent auction donations, which generated a remarkable \$3,028! That is approximately \$350 more than our silent auction record set at the 2020 conference, and over \$1,300 more than we made last year. Thank you from the bottom of my - and all of the Board Members - hearts!

3. Speaking of the conference, I wanted to mention a few financial aspects of hosting the conference that most of you may not know.

Although we raised conference registrations by \$5 for the 2024 conference, the total amount received from registrations alone did not cover the cost of the conference. We received \$3,550 from conference registrations alone, while our total expenses for the conference were at least \$5,823 (we still have a couple of speaker travel expenses outstanding). This is why the silent auction, your donations, and the ODNR grant are so important. I'm sure all those who attended agree that the Ohio Bluebird Conference is very cost effective for the quality of education that you receive by attending it. Fear not, I doubt the Board of Directors will increase the cost of conference next year, and we look forward to seeing you next year on March 1, 2025.

4. OBS awarded a few small grants and/or sponsorships in the 1st Quarter of 2024 to the following organizations:

(1) Friends of Mosquito Lake, Inc - \$250; (2) Ohio Nature Education (the group who brought the living birds to our conference) - \$300; William D Stull Endowed Fund at Ohio Wesleyan University - \$50. If your organization is interested in applying for a small grant, please visit the website for the grant application and instructions: <https://ohiobluebirdsociety.org/about/grant-information/>.

OBS Nest Boxes in Greene County

By Bethany Gray, Greene County Area Contact

Thanks to the support of nest boxes made by OBS members in Franklin & Delaware counties, Greene County (in the greater Dayton area) is home to many broods of Bluebirds this year. The boxes, made of reclaimed wood and materials, were utilized at sites for a newly merged bluebird monitoring program of the Greene County Parks and Beaver Creek

Wetlands Association. (The Beaver Creek Wetlands Association was the 2018 OBS Wildlife Conservation Award recipient.) As of April 30, at least fourteen nest boxes in this program were housing active Bluebird nests. Over 20 volunteer monitors who have attended training are actively participating in monitoring nest boxes at the networks' parks and preserves in Fairborn, Beavercreek, Bellbrook and Yellow Springs.



A tree swallow claims an OBS nestbox installed this year at Spring Lakes Park in Bellbrook.

STEP 3



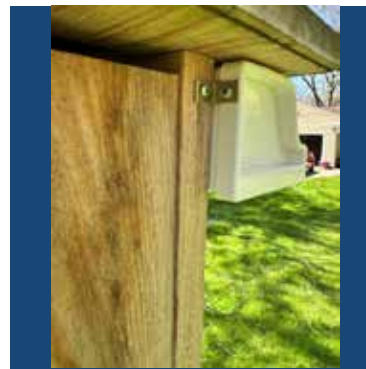
Install the end caps to complete the guard assembly.

STEP 4



Attach the corner brace with screw 1" from the top of the box and flush with the face of the bird box. Repeat for other side.
Note: You can use the screws that come with the corner brace, but predrilling will be required.

STEP 5



Center the guard on the bird box and attach the corner brace to the guard with screw. Repeat for other side.

STEP 6



When the guard is not in use, simply remove corner brace screws attached to bird box. Replace screws in bird box for easy screw storage.

2023 OBS Fledgling Report

Please download and send your 2024 fledgling reports to OBS.
ohiobluebirdsociety.org/about-bluebirds/fledgling-report-2

Species	#Fledged
Eastern Bluebird	5327
Tree Swallow	5511
House Wren	1913
Purple Martin	2089
Black-capped Chickadee	78
Carolina Chickadee	69
Carolina Wren	44
American Kestrel	106
Barn Swallow	27
Prothonotary Warbler	37
Tufted Titmouse	11
Wood Duck	23
Great Crested Flycatcher	5
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	11
House Sparrows dispatched	694
House Sparrow eggs removed	980
European Starlings dispatched	59
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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Like us on Facebook! Search for
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The Holden Arboretum
9500 Sperry Road
Kirtland, Ohio 44094

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Mission Statement

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

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What's Inside...

OBS Award Winners.....	1
From Scraps to Apps.....	2-6
Nests – Not always perfect.....	6
The Art of Forging in Fire.....	7
Madame Wingnut.....	8-9
A Welcome Return for the Purple Martin.....	10
Wren Guards 2024.....	11, 14
Member News.....	12-13
Treasurer's Report.....	13
OBS Fledgling Report.....	14
OBS Area Contacts and Contact Info.....	15

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



In regards to a remarkably long-lived and very reproductively successful 11 year-old female tree swallow, Dick concluded his article with the following paragraph:

“... I thank *Tachycineta bicolor* [Tree Swallow], a creature of only 20 grams, for inspiring me with its persistence, tenacity, and dedication to its families, and along with other bluebird trail species, for providing me with a good hobby that kept me in touch with Mother Earth so I could be a more effective teacher of middle school life science, and a more content human being during my retirement years. Bluebird on!”

From “An Impressive Female Tree Swallow” – Ohio Bluebird Monitor – Summer 2016