



Bluebird Monitor

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

Winter 2024-2025



Dry August Blues By Julie Zickefoose, Washington County (Excerpted from an upcoming article for BWD Magazine)



I can't lie. 2024's drought in southeastern Ohio has gotten to me. Oh, it got to me in June. And now it's August 21, and the sun has risen in a cloudless sky for so many weeks I can't count them. The ten-day-forecast shows sun, sun, sun, ten-day chunk after chunk. Somehow even worse, when rain is predicted, it never happens. It'll

cloud up and those clouds will lower, and it might sprinkle for two minutes, not enough even to float the dead bugs in the rain gauge. I lie awake in the wee hours every night, wondering what will happen if it never rains again this summer. I know that sounds dumb, but it's where my mind goes, having fought this drought since late May. And I needn't wonder what will happen. It is happening. Has happened.

Against all expectations, bluebirds are having a banner year. What?? Five of the pairs nesting in my boxes are going for three broods, when they're usually done after two. More than that, I've had more five-egg clutches (10 out of 28 laid) than I normally see. I realize keenly that bluebird egg production and nesting

success has everything to do with their ability to find enough food. And while severe drought would seem to inhibit insect abundance, what insects there are in a drought can be easily seen and pounced on, and that is the key difference. In a year with normal rainfall, the hayfields are far too lush and thick to permit bluebirds to forage in them. I get early nests when the grass is short, but nesting trails



Three 15-day-old female bluebirds
on September 18, 2024



Bluebird on three -day-old chicks, September 7, 2024

off when the hay gets thick and long. Thin grass and hay that doesn't grow is bad news for farmers. Good news for bluebirds, though! It is little surprise to me to find that all four of the three-clutch boxes are situated on the edge of hayfields.

One insect that didn't prosper was the bluebird blowfly. For the first time, I found none in any of my boxes in the summer of 2024. Chicken mites carried on as usual, as chicken mites will.

Another anomaly: Most of the bluebird nestlings in my 15 occupied nest boxes are females. As in, overwhelmingly. I sex the nestlings by checking the color of their flight feathers after Day 12. Lots of bright cobalt blue indicates a male. A little dusty cerulean blue means it's a female.

I had 106 bluebirds hatch in 15 boxes in 2024. Although I strove to sex them all, summer travel prevented me from sexing 26 of them. (Drat those summer weddings and family reunions! Don't they know what's really important?) Of the 74 nestlings that I was present to sex in the drought of 2024, I counted 51 females to 23 males. In other words, females comprised 69% of all nestlings surveyed. Holy cow! I've got to think that the extreme drought has something to do with the badly skewed sex ratio. Yes, it was hot this summer, but unlike reptiles, ambient temperature has not been shown to determine the sex of any bird embryo, except those of Australian mallee fowl, which incubate their eggs in moldering compost.

Continued on page 2

The sex allocation theory developed by Trivers and Willard in a 1973 paper is often presented to explain such extreme sex ratio deviations. By this theory, a female (of whatever organism) who is in poor condition will benefit from producing more female offspring. This is because female offspring of low quality are more likely to be successful in obtaining mates than would their low-quality male siblings. Producing females would represent a bigger fitness gain to the mother. No one has suggested the mechanism by which sex is determined. And it doesn't really jibe with my findings, because female bluebirds in poor condition are not going to lay five-egg clutches or try to raise three broods in a season. The frustrated scientist in me longs to test my hunches, but all I am realistically equipped to do is gather data and wonder out loud about it.

I chew over all these data anomalies as I drive and ride the miles between my boxes, recording data in small, blocky notebooks. Because I think like a scientist, I know that what looks like good news – lots of clutch initiation, lots of fledglings may not actually be good. I have to entertain the possibility that bluebirds are initiating third broods because their first two broods may not have survived past fledging. I am anxious for the post-breeding flocks that queue up on power lines along my route in fall. I want to assess them for the presence of juveniles. It's an imperfect sampling method, but it's the only one I have. That chance came to me on the glorious evening of August 29, 2024, when I pulled out my eBike and took off to check boxes.

Checking boxes is almost always a mood-lifter for me, as long as it's not snowing in April. It's a 10.5 mile round trip, but the eBike makes it much easier to pull off in these rolling Appalachian foothills. As I rode and felt the cool air on my arms, I felt my heart expand. The gentle hum of the motor on my bike, that boosts my progress going up steep hills, empowers me and makes me smile. Sometimes, on particularly steep hills, I cackle as I glide up.

I started an eBird list, something I hadn't bothered with during the long and bird-bereft drought. As I approached the spot where we always came to watch red-headed woodpeckers, Bill's favorite bird, two swooped over my head, one an adult, one bearing the gray head and black bars on the secondaries indicating a recent fledgling. They churred and drummed, making a huge ruckus with three other birds. I slowed, then stopped my bike.

It was as if a congress of birds had been summoned to meet me this glorious evening. Ten chipping sparrows flew up from the roadside. Fourteen cedar waxwings topped the dead white ash snags. Then here came six beautiful common nighthawks, tip-tilting over in the golden light. Labor Day nighthawks, among my favorite autumnal phenomena. But it was the bluebirds, so many bluebirds, flying up to the wires and the tops of dead ash trees, that got me off my bike and standing, open-mouthed, counting aloud. With unbelieving eyes, I'd logged 35 bluebirds in just 1.7 miles of road, the vast majority of them right here, calling and



Deer drank their saucers dry everyday in the author's Whipple, Ohio yard.

fluttering on the wires over my head. And almost every one that I got in my binoculars was a juvenile, spangled with white spots about the head and back, bright rusty patches coming in on the mottled upper breast. They were all switching places so fast I couldn't determine their sex, but I saw only six adults on the whole ride.

There, on the wires, was as good an answer as I'd ever have to silence my pessimistic inner scientist, who'd suggested bluebirds were triple-brooding to make up for loss of the first fledglings. Young bluebirds with rust-spangled chests are in excess of 60 days old, so the early broods hadn't died. Clearly, they had thrived. The evidence was written on the lines overhead.

Sitting on the hillside in the shade, watching the fruits of my labors fuss and play, I felt an unaccustomed peace wash over me. My bluebirds and I were somehow making it through the worst drought in 36 years. I'd had the latest ever bluebird broods fledge: one on Sept. 13, and one on Sept. 21—all females! I had documented a phenomenon--the female-skewed sex ratio of bluebirds-- for which I have no answer. I had learned a lot about water, wildlife, survival, and my own tenacity. And there would be better times ahead, starting now. I didn't touch the brakes going down the huge hill heading home. I just let the bike fly, and me with it.

Julie Zickefoose is an author, artist, and Advising Editor of *BWD Magazine*. Subscribe at bwdmagazine.com

The Upper Cuyahoga Prothonotary Warbler Nesting Project Summary of the 2024 Breeding Season

By Dan Best, OBS Trustee



Male Prothonotary.
Photo by Sam Ianiro

Like so many natural events this spring, our Prothonotary Warbler (PROW) nesting season got off to a fast start. PROW arrival time frame was the usual end-of-April/early May. Normally, territory establishment and pair establishment has nesting seldom gets underway before mid-May. This year, pairs started right into nesting. Perhaps due to the availability of caterpillar food with hatch synchronized with leaf out, which was early this year?

Anyway, we had 7 nest jars for PROWs and 3 for Tree Swallows (TRESs). PROWs nested in 4 of the 7, making for a pretty good occupancy rate of 57%. TRESs only occupied 2 of their 3 nest jars. As with PROWs, the high water-attributed tree die-off of the last decade and apparent increase in the woodpecker population – we once again had all 7 Ohio woodpecker species present within the riparian swamp forest of Eldon Russell Park – there was an abundance of natural cavities available for both PROWs and TRESs as both woodpecker cavities and hollows left by broken limbs and trunks.

The other unusual aspect of this year's nesting season is the absence of PROWs in July. We usually have PROW presence, though diminished, through August up until as late as mid-September. On July 7, I only saw or even heard a single male PROW and no PROWs on July 22. Given the 1-2 week earlier start of the PROW nesting season, there was ample time for second nestings. All PROWs using the nest jars were single-brooded unless they opted for natural cavities for an undetected second nesting. Nor were there any unsuccessful first nestings that would have triggered re-nesting.



Prothonotary warbler
hatching day- June 4, 2024.
Photo by Dan Best"

Wrens "behaved" this year, not inflicting any egg loss beyond two missing eggs for which they are suspected of removing. Nor were there any usurping of PROW nests. HOWRs occupied 2 of the former PROW-utilized nest jars as well as 3 nest jars unused by PROWs.

Our monitored PROW population also included a stretch of river upstream from Eldon Russell Park where we had quit installing nest jars several years ago due to heavy

house wren pressure, aka: "wren wrecking". This came to a total of 10 pairs plus 3 other male PROWs whose breeding status remained uncertain as they were not seen in the company of a female nor had exhibited other indications of breeding behavior beyond territorial singing.

Our 23 PROW tally included:

- 11 banded males and 3 unbanded males that could not be lured into the mist net with decoy and audio PROW song.
- We had 5 banded females and 5 unbanded females for which mist net capture is rare and incidental. Of the 16 color-banded PROWs, 12 were color-banded in previous years with only 4 new adult birds banded this year. This is, to the best of my knowledge, a remarkable and unprecedented 75% return rate.
- Of these 12 previously color-banded adult birds, 5 were banded in 2023 (at least 2 years old); 1 in 2022 (at least 3 years old); 3 in 2020 including a female that was initially banded as a nestling in 2019 (5 years old) and 2 males at least 6 years old; and 1 male banded in 2018 (at least 7 years old.)

Of the four PROW nestings that took place in our nest jars, clutch sizes were the typical 5-6 eggs. Both of the nestings with a 5 egg clutch all hatched, the young banded and presumably fledged. However, the remaining two nestings suffered very poor hatch rates. One had a clutch of 6 eggs, of which only two hatched with 3 remaining unhatched eggs and one egg gone missing. Wren raid was suspected, but if so, successfully deterred by the PROW home defense against further removal. The remaining nesting had a clutch of 6 of which only 1 hatched, with 4 remaining unhatched with 1 egg missing; wrens again suspected. To summarize, 4 nestings produced a total of 22 eggs of which 13 hatched for an overall

hatch rate of 59%. With no nestling mortality, the presumed fledgling rate was 100%.

Lastly, I had the joy of having our 4 year-old granddaughter and our daughter Emma out for banding the aforementioned lone hatchling of a clutch of 6 eggs. Nature photographer Sam Ianiro happened by and tagged along providing memorable photos of the event as well as an absolutely remarkable photo of the male PROW. Band colors identify this guy as one banded as an adult in 2019 making him at least a 6 year old warbler.



Four-year-old Mairin
McCullough's first canoe float
and prothonotary warbler
experience.
Photo by Sam Ianiro

The Osprey Spark

By Kristi Krumlauf, Osprey Monitor

On a Tuesday evening in March following one of the Columbus Audubon monthly speaker talks, I was talking with Darlene Sillick, when she mentioned that she still needed a volunteer to help fulfill one of the Osprey nest watch roles at the Alum Creek Hogback road location. I was going through a list of people in my mind that I could ask to help fill the void, when the thought came to me that I could be that observer. Darlene was determined to help continue on the conservation endeavors of the late Dick Tuttle, who had put so much effort into providing nesting boxes and platforms for various species including Prothonotary Warblers, Kestrels, Osprey and more. Being a huge fan of Dick's conservation efforts and the infectious personality that he embodied, I was inspired to carry on his legacy.

My first visit to the Osprey outlook was on April 30. I became acquainted with the location and the four nesting platforms called Hogback 1, 2, 3 and 4. Hogback 1 is the northernmost platform and the most difficult to view, even with a scope as it the farthest from the viewpoint and even at the closer viewpoint, is too high to view from above. The second nest is clearly visible with a scope, and the third nest has the best view from the overlook, being straight out from the viewpoint. The birds in this nest can easily be viewed with binoculars, though a scope provides a more detailed viewing. The fourth nest, I can only imagine, is occupied by the lowest Osprey in the pecking order or the last one to arrive on the scene. This nest platform went from leaning at probably a 35 degree angle to 45 by the end but the birds continue to nest on the side of the platform, quite an impressive feat. I'm hoping that this platform can be removed or replaced this year, as this puts these birds in a slightly precarious position.

With each visit I would enter all of my observations on the Cornell NestWatch app, where I would record the nesting activity that started with just adult Osprey on the nesting platforms and quickly progressed to adults on eggs, then

Osprey on leaning nest



alien looking hatchlings, and eventually fledgling Osprey, in the likeness of their parents but with a more scalloped pattern to their plumage. Like watching a suspenseful thriller, I would be holding my breath with each visit as I would count the offspring in each platform, hoping the numbers would hold from the week before...one, two..."move mom I can't see"... three! It is amazing that these birds can withstand the blazing, scorching sun with nowhere to hide unless you are lucky to be the offspring and can tuck under a shady, soft wing. Interestingly, Hogback 2, 3, and 4 to the best of my sighting, all hatched and each produced 3 beautiful fledgling Osprey. I believe the first nest was also successful, from what I could observe, but I could not easily count the bounty.

I was like the proudest mom seeing her kid ride a bike for the first time when I saw one of the first few flight attempts by the youngsters in nest 2. I watched as two fledglings sat next to each other on the perch adjacent to the nest, looking as if they were saying to each other "you go first", no "you go first". And

Osprey young and mom huddle



Three young Osprey



then, as I took my camera down after waiting for what seemed like an eternity, one lifted off the perch and made a short circular flight, landing safely back on the platform. I don't know who was more thankful that the flight was a success, between the Osprey mom, me, and the other two observers present. Though many of my visits to the nests were experienced in solitude, sometimes I would find another person or persons at the lookout also watching the birds.

Many of us have a spark bird, that one special experience or species, that pulled us into the birding vortex and we have never looked back. But one thing this experience has left me with is that for many people, it is a spark person, who just had that special electricity, that inspired us to care more about the natural world around us, and make us want to dig deeper. In talking with the other people that I encountered on the lookout, it turns out for some of these complete strangers, that person was Dick Tuttle. They had met Dick at the lookout in previous years, where he left them feeling inspired to care and do more for the voiceless animals and environment, and they kept coming back to this spot to watch the Osprey go through their motions on the platforms that he had constructed to help protect a species that was in need of recovery. It has been an amazing summer experience to watch at least 9 new Osprey come into this world, and to realize that one person can have such a profound impact on the protection of a species and also the people who are imperative to ensure their success into the future.



A Short Notice By Pat Dutton, Membership Chair

After 8 years of serving as Membership Chair, I will be resigning on December 31, 2024. Jeff Blosser, a current member of the Board of Trustees, will be taking over the responsibilities of membership.

I have enjoyed my time serving this community of birders with a special place in their hearts for Bluebirds. My interest in Bluebirds started with a single nesting box and grew to monitoring a trail of 18 boxes on my property. I am currently down to 10 boxes that had 18 nesting attempts, 78 eggs, 61 young and 45 fledglings this breeding season. I also have a nest box with a ring camera thanks to Penny and Fritz Brandau who shared their information and designs with everyone.

I want to thank everyone for the opportunity to serve as Membership Chair. I hope you stop by the membership table at the conference and welcome Jeff as the new membership chair.

Editor's Note: Pat Dutton has served as Membership Chair for the past 8 years and her selfless dedication to details and organization of vital membership information and conference work has made an incredible difference in OBS. We deeply appreciate her work! Jeff Blosser is welcomed to his new position with appreciation for his willingness to take on Pat's Membership Chair position. Thank you Pat and Jeff!!



The Delightful Art of Dona Gelsinger

By Molly Wilsbacher, OBS Treasurer



In last month's art article I was struck by the whimsical card featuring a happy snowman visited by his feathered friends by artist Dona Gelsinger. I knew then that I would feature her artwork in my next art article.

As noted on her website (www.donagelsinger.com): Dona Gelsinger is one of America's most celebrated

and collected living artists. She is inspired daily by the rugged beauty of the Rogue River Valley of Southern Oregon where she currently resides with her family. Her mission is to spread God's love and beauty through art.

Soon afterwards, she started working with Lightpost Publishing, Danbury Mint, and The Bradford Exchange. Dona felt that her art career was officially launched after she painted her first little angel for Bradford. This was her start in licensing and since then, she has provided art to over 100 companies worldwide.

The artwork provided in this newsletter were graciously sent by Dona's son, Jesse Gelsinger, and are used by permission. The titles in order of appearance are: Garden Gate, Spring Awakens, and Blossoms and Bluebirds. If you interested in ordering prints or other merchandise, please visit www.glowdecor.com. "The essence of all beautiful art, all great art, is gratitude." - Friedrich Nietzsche



Garden Gate

Dona studied art at California State Long Beach. "From a very young age, I had a love and appreciation for art. I'd sit for hours watching my Grandfather as he painted massive, rugged landscapes in oil. Each brush stroke told a story and created a memory. It was here that I first fell in love with art." Like her grandfather, Dona primarily uses oil paint as her main medium. Her first commissioned art was to paint the Stations of the Cross, 14 near life-size paintings depicting the Passion of Christ for her church, St. Denis Catholic Church, in DiamondBar, CA. The project spanned 2 years, consuming all of her artistic energies and involved everyone in her family. She felt very honored and humbled to receive this commission.

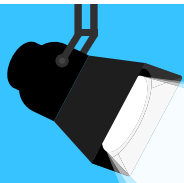
Dona and her family moved to Oregon shortly thereafter, drawn by small town living and the beauty of the Pacific Northwest. In the beginning, times were tough and she worked in a discount art gallery in the mall to make ends meet. However, she never stopped working on her portfolio and kept submitting her artwork. Her first publishing contract was with Arthur Kaplan to paint religious art for print over 30 years ago.



Spring Awakens



Blossoms and Bluebirds



NATIVE SPARROW SPOTLIGHT

American Tree Sparrow

By Heather Harris, Incoming OBS President



Sparrows can be some of the most challenging birds to identify, especially for a new bluebird landlord just getting into the hobby. Many sparrows have dark, muted plumages which make them appear similar to other sparrows without having many obvious identification features. Invasive house sparrows appear similar to native

sparrows even though house sparrows are technically in the weaver finch family and not really a true sparrow.



You will find the American Tree Sparrow in Ohio during the winter, usually arriving in the Fall. They breed in the far north of Canada and Alaska before migrating south into the United States. They love to hang out in flocks on the ground and will regularly be seen picking up scrap seeds underneath bird feeders. Despite their name, American Tree Sparrows do not spend much time in trees but

forage and actually nest on the ground! They were named by European settlers that thought they looked similar to the European Tree Sparrow.

American Tree Sparrows are about 5.5 inches in length, and weigh about 0.5-1 ounces, about the same size as a House Sparrow. They have a plump body (using the feathers to fluff out in the cold weather to stay warm), a small bill, and a long, thin tail. Their heads are gray with a rusty cap on top, and a rusty stripe running through their eyes. There is no streaking on their grayish colored breast, and have a small dark smudge in the center of it. Both males and females are the same size and have the same markings.

Songs

Males sing a series of high, sweet whistled notes, generally falling slightly in pitch overall, often with clearer notes followed by more complex patterns. A song lasts about 1-2 seconds. There are many song dialects, each shared by many males, but each male sings only one. Singing begins in late winter before the spring migration.

Calls

When feeding or foraging in flocks, American Tree Sparrows toss back and forth a musical twitter, sometimes described

as a teal-wit or teedle-eet, which may vary from flock to flock. Alarmed, they give a hard tseet. In flight, they make a softer tsiew. Females solicit copulation with a whey-whey-whey while fluttering their wings and raising their tails.

References: Cornell Lab All About Birds

Treasurer's Report by Molly Wilsbacher

- 1. As mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, our annual Bluebird Conference is on Saturday, March 1, 2025, and we are looking for new or slightly used items for the silent auction.** You can easily bring those items with you to the conference and drop them off at the silent auction table. Or you can email me at OBSTreasurer@gmail.com and I will make arrangements for pickup by me or another OBS Member. Please keep in mind that the value of all donations can be used as a tax deduction!
- 2. Please keep the Ohio Bluebird Society in mind this holiday season!** There are three options to donate: (1) You can mail a check to: Ohio Bluebird Society, % The Holden Arboretum, 9500 Sperry Road, Kirtland, OH 44094; (2) You can donate by debit or credit card via PayPal: Donate to OBS; or (3) You can honor a loved one via our Legacy Box Program: Legacy-Program.
- 3. As reported in prior newsletters, 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.** The Board of Trustees just approved two small grants for Huntington High School in Chillicothe, and Peachblow Crossing Elementary in Lewis Center. Please visit our website to learn more or to apply for a grant: Grant-Information.
- 4. In the 3rd Quarter of 2024, we received approximately \$800 in membership dues and renewals.** We also received \$195 in donations, primarily memorial donation in honor of Mel Bolt. Thank you to everyone who made a donation, as every little amount really helps! Anticipated expenses in the 4th quarter include: (1) quarterly newsletter expenses, (2) website maintenance expenses, and (3) conference expenses.



Ask Madame WingNut

House Sparrows Revisited

By Paula Ziebarth



I have been fortunate to successfully host at least two broods of Eastern Bluebirds in my yard for the past 22 years. Without active House Sparrow management, that would not have been possible. I live on a quarter-acre lot in a suburban subdivision in the city of Powell, Ohio.

Strategies I use have been very effective and some vary with the seasons. Join me for a walk around my yard throughout a typical year. As the seasons change, so do the behaviors of House Sparrows and my management techniques.

AUTUMN

As I write this on a beautiful late October day, I am enjoying watching a variety of native birds coming to the feeding station. I do not feed birds during late spring and summer months because there is food aplenty in the wild for birds to eat then and competitor birds can endanger my nesting Eastern Bluebirds and other natives. I do set out feeders for the birds once fall rolls around. Black sunflower oilers and homemade suet mix for Eastern Bluebirds are the only options available.

House Sparrows show up at the feeders also. They are not migratory, but flocks of these birds move within about a 0.5 to 1.5 mile radius of their natal site. In addition to feeding native birds in colder months, I view fall and winter as an opportunity to attract non-native House Sparrows and European Starlings into my yard to remove as many as possible. Fall is a great time to trap House Sparrows with repeat bait traps. I set several traps out, and captured 33 House Sparrows in the past week. About 90% of the birds I capture this time of year are juvenile birds that fledged this year. Juvenile males have an ill defined black bib and predominantly yellow bill. I use fresh crumbled white bread and millet for bait. Traps are only set when I am there to monitor them because native birds can become trapped and must be released immediately if that happens.

Traps should be set in an area they will be attracted to: near dense vegetation they use for roosting or cover or near a feeding station. Because we have not had a hard frost yet this year, my trumpet vine on the back deck is providing plenty of cover for House Sparrows to hide in as they approach the small two door havahart trap set on deck rail. I have had this Model 1025 Havahart for over twenty years. They are hard to find now, but I wonder, if the smaller 1020 would do the job. Over half of the House Sparrows I captured this week were caught in that trap. Often two go in at once. When set with both doors open, it creates a nice tunnel for them to go through. To retrieve birds, set trap on ground on its end with setting mechanism on your right hand side. Carefully open door, blocking exit with both hands while reaching in to grab bird with your right hand. This little trap is an inexpensive way to get started trapping House Sparrows.

I also set out my two favorite repeat bait traps on the ground: the three compartment wire sparrow trap available through Troyer's Birds' Paradise and the deluxe repeating sparrow trap found at sparrowtraps.net. When I do not see House Sparrows coming to feeders or cover, traps are put away again until needed. Sporadically using traps this way seems to reduce likelihood of a target birds becoming wary of traps and also discourages raccoons or Cooper's Hawks from trying to raid traps. It makes the area much safer for native cavity nesting birds next spring because I am catching House Sparrows before they can breed. Trapped House Sparrows are humanely dispatched and recycled as food for recovering raptors and other wildlife at The Ohio Wildlife Center.

Quite a variety of birds came to the feeder today: Eastern Bluebirds, Northern Cardinals, White Breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Chickadees, Carolina Wrens, Blue Jays, American Goldfinch, Downy Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers, Red Bellied Woodpeckers, Common Grackles, Mourning Doves, American Robins, Tufted Titmouse, House Finch and Dark-Eyed Juncos.

WINTER

I have less success trapping House Sparrows during winter months. I continue to feed birds and provide a heated water bath for them to drink from. If House Sparrows show up in significant numbers, traps come out again.

In late winter, House Sparrows begin to look for nest sites. I am always listening for their distinctive "song" and I generally hear one in my yard by late January or February. If a male House Sparrow is singing, he is declaring territory and calling for a mate. I check nest boxes in my yard to see if he has been in there. If he has, he will leave droppings behind (small solid white 1/4" long droppings) or strands of nest material. Van Ert trap is set in the box and I usually have him within minutes to hours. I only use a Van Ert trap in a nest box when a House Sparrow has claimed it, checking trap every hour or two if set during daylight hours. If I do not capture the bird within 24 hours, I remove the trap and nest start and wait a few days to try again if needed.



Dog Piper enjoying a fall day



House sparrow droppings in nest box in late winter

March rolls around and Eastern Bluebirds begin building their nest in my backyard Bluebird box. I have monofilament sparrow deterrent installed on the front of their box (diagram for installation can be found on the OBS website). My Bluebird nest box is located in the center of my backyard in the most open area I have, as far from tree line and my people house as I can get.

I make sure to have one or two nest boxes available for House Sparrows to “try” in. I usually have a 1-1/4” hole reducer installed on these to keep Eastern Bluebirds from investigating them. House Sparrows will easily fit through a 1-1/4” hole while Eastern Bluebirds will not. These boxes are installed near an area House Sparrows will be attracted to: my people house, stiff needled evergreen tree or other vegetative cover, bird feeding station, etc. If a House Sparrow claims a box, he/she is removed with a Van Ert inbox trap as soon as possible.

SPRING AND SUMMER

Eastern Bluebirds in my yard finish their nest and begin laying eggs the last week of March or first week of April. I stop feeding birds in April generally, letting birds finish the sunflower oilers and disinviting them into my yard. Some of the native species that are attracted to bird feeders are predators of birds (American Crows, Blue Jays, Cooper’s Hawk, squirrels, raccoons). As natural food sources become prevalent, I do not like to invite competitors into the yard, especially not House Sparrows.

House Sparrows are no longer traveling in their large winter groups. They disperse to breeding sites and I catch them there with inbox traps if those attempted sites are nest boxes on my street or on my park trails.

I seldom hear House Sparrows singing on my street. When I do, it is usually easy to trap them in nest boxes. If allowed to sing, they will attract more to an area so goal is always to have no House Sparrow song near any nest box I monitor.

For Purple Martin rigs in my yard on South Bass Island, I have traps that fit inside any housing I set out. I also have had great success using the three compartment wire sparrow trap baited with fluffy white feathers and straggly grasses and/or pieces of yarn. I set it on the ground under the Purple Martin housing or other house they are interested in. They want to add the nest material to the nest they start in a gourd or house and are trapped when they do. Having a live House Sparrow in the holding chamber in the center of the trap can attract them with no bait at all. They probably view bird as a competitor or prospective mate and in they go. If using repeat bait traps during nest season, I seldom use food bait. Nest material and live birds work well to attract them. The beauty of this is you will not attract non-target native birds this way.

I have found that managing House Sparrows in my suburban yard makes a huge difference in the population of these dangerous non-native competitors, not only in my yard, but on local Bluebird Trails. I have helped other monitors and homeowners learn to control House Sparrows and the native cavity nesting birds in the area are doing very well here. As the winter months loom closer, I look forward to watching the Eastern Bluebirds and other native species at my bird feeders.

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.



Small two-door Havahart trap



Three compartment wire sparrow trap



Deluxe repeating sparrow trap



Juvenile male HOSP on left has sparse black bib and predominantly yellow bill whereas mature male on right has dark bill and larger bib.



Heavy cover provided by this trumpet vine harbors House Sparrows which hop down to enter havahart trap on deck rail.

Remembering Mel Bolt

By Marcella Hawkins



Speaker at many conferences

As I was going out my driveway to work one morning in 1999, I stopped by some pine trees as I saw a blue bird sitting on my cement mushroom. I stopped my car and took a picture of it – wondering why it didn't leave when I stopped. Then I saw another blue bird drop down beside it and they flew away together. What were those birds??? I had never seen them before.

The next week as I read the local newspaper, I saw an article about a Bluebird specialist who had given a seminar at the library. His name was Melvin Bolt. Surely, this must be what

I saw under the pine trees! I found his name in the phone book, gave him a call and he invited me to his house – he and his wife Mary Ellen would be happy to give me more information. I stopped to see them after work and obtained a lot of information – and, I purchased a nest box that Mel had designed and made.

The next day, we put up the nest box and before 15 minutes had passed, there was a Bluebird checking it out. We live on 200 acres of farmland in southwest Holmes County. I was now hooked!

Mel and Mary Ellen were hosting the Ohio Bluebird Society (OBS) annual conference in 2000 – and I made sure to attend. It was so interesting and I learned so much – also met a lot of other Bluebirders. As I got more involved in OBS, I took on the position of Treasurer and various other positions. Mel and Mary Ellen were my mentors from the very beginning. When I decided we should have a conference – since there had not been one for several years due to loss of interest – Mel and Mary Ellen helped me send out notices to members and get other things in place. In one month, we had speakers; auction items, volunteers and 150 people who showed up for the event. There really was a lot of interest in Bluebirds.

Mel and Mary Ellen presented hundreds of programs over the years since OBS was started in 1987 and gained many new



Mary Ellen and Mel Bolt

members for the organization. They were members of many state and national organizations, i.e., North American Bluebird Society (NABS), Greater Mohican Audubon Society (GMAS), and many others.

Mary Ellen passed away in May, 2010 and that took a toll on Mel. They were such a team! Linda Lang also became a protégé of Mel at the same time I did. We started meeting Mel for lunch on occasion and eventually this became a monthly meeting – at our favorite hangout – Bob Evans. Mel was a very integral part of both our lives – mentoring us on Bluebirds. He had experienced almost anything you could think of over his many years of helping Bluebirds. In 2003, Mel and Mary Ellen received the prestigious Blue Feather award from OBS in recognition of their accomplishments in all areas of Bluebird conservation and management.

Mel designed his own nest box and sparrow trap – which I have used for the past 25 years. He was also an expert when it came to woodworking – making countless toys and giving them away to children. He made wooden Bluebirds for some of our conferences to use as door prizes.

Mel was a mentor and friend, who will be missed dearly. I treasure the time we had during the last 25 years – and always think of him when I hear or see one of our beautiful Bluebirds.



Marcella, Mel, Linda Lang



Mel's regular and special nest boxes



Member News

A Season of Change – by Darlene Sillick, OBS President

We all know what happens as the autumn leaves change colors and drop their leaves. We fall back in time and prepare for the chill in the air, the holidays arrive that include time with families near and far, and being thankful for what we have and loving one another are qualities for the months ahead.

Ohio Bluebird Society is going through more changes than most years. I am stepping down as OBS president and Heather Harris has graciously stepped up to be the new OBS president. She will lead our organization with the help of our six other trustees. I strongly believe that change and new leadership is a very positive thing. Heather has many skills and the wisdom to be a great leader for OBS. Please take time to get to know Heather. We also need at least two more trustees since the terms for trustees Pat Dutton and Judy Semroc have expired. Their work for OBS has been invaluable and much appreciated! Please consider helping us fill these open trustee positions. A trustee's term is for 3 years and you can renew one more term according to our by-laws. We meet 6 times a year by Zoom calls.

We know we get to enjoy the bluebirds that visit us during the winter months and before you know it, Tree Swallows will return north with their antics which we love to watch. We know our bluebirds favorite perches in our yards and we smile when we hear their sweet songs that make us look around and see their steady gaze.

We are helping Heather with the planning for the March 1, 2025, OBS annual conference. Next year Heather will be ready to plan her first annual conference for 2026. We always like to hear from you and your thoughts for speakers and topics. Remember our Silent Auction is our big fundraiser for the year. Be sure to contact the OBS Treasurer, Molly Wilsbacher, if you have items to donate.

Our keynote speaker on March 1, 2025 will be Julie Zickefoose. She always delights us with her stories of what the birds have taught her. Julie has many gifts to share with us and we are so willing to learn from her through her words and her art.

The registration form for the 2025 OBS conference is included in this issue of the OBS newsletter. A huge thank you to our editor Penny Brandau who continues to put together a wonderful newsletter.

Thank you to all our trustees who donate their time to enjoy the native cavity nesters, lead our organization and teach others how special these birds are to our lives. Special thanks to our membership so we can have an amazing Ohio Bluebird Society. We appreciate hearing from all of you and having your support. Please make Heather feel welcome!!

Many thanks!! - Darlene Sillick

Welcome New Members!

Jeff Brinton
Darryl Keller
LeeAnn Pretzman

Thank You to Our Donors!

Rachel Newcomer
LeeAnn Pretzman

In memory of Mel Bolt

Dave & Pat Dutton
Ronald & Shirley Kidd
Ken & Patty Kinney

Bluebirds Help Heart Patients

By Jay Brindo, former OBS President

I had a very good year in 2024. Despite having open-heart surgery April 22nd with nature just starting to get busy, I managed to gather interested volunteers to drive me around and helped me safely walk to each of my nestboxes for monitoring. I'll bet the people who have checking a Bluebird trail as part of their physical-therapy recovery program are far and few, but it sure helped me get back on my feet sooner!

I have 31 boxes on my trail and my final count was 90 Bluebird fledglings. At one point over the years, I had 67 boxes with more fledglings, but never a 3:1 ratio like this season. A result of climate warming? Not sure, but I do know the milder spring made for more survivors. Happy trails!





OHIO BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Back to Basics!

March 1, 2025

SPEAKERS –

Julie Zickefoose	Have You Ever Wondered? What I've Learned In 40 Years of Bluebirding
Heather Harris	Bluebirds 101: The Loved Species
Marne Titchenell	Pollinators
AWARDS	to be announced – Heather Harris
Jamey Emmert	Wings Along the Water: A Lake Erie Birding Trail Adventure
Tim Bischoff	Kestrels and Motus Towers
OBS panel	to be announced –
Paula Ziebarth	Purple Martin Landlord Tips



Original artwork by
Anna Rose

LUNCH HOUR BREAK – PRAYER - LEE JOHNSON

Silent Auction – Our biggest fundraiser!
Educational table demonstrations and posters
OBS display table – Van Ert traps for sale (\$10)

CONFERENCE LOCATION & TIME

Check-In: 8:00am
OBS Annual Members Meeting: 8:30 - 9:00am.
Conference: 9:00am – 4:30pm
Non-members plan to arrive by 9:00am main conference start time
Ashland University
John C Myers Convocation Center
638 Jefferson Street, Ashland, Ohio, 44805

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

COST

\$30 OBS member, \$40 non-OBS member, \$15 student (21 & younger), \$20 seniors 65+ OBS members
Includes Conference and Lunch (please pre-register using attached registration form) (No Walk-ins)
- **Registration Deadline: February 17, 2025. Register Online at <https://ohiobluebirdsociety.org/conference/>**
Or Mail to: Jeff Blosser, OBS Membership Chair, 3091 Devonshire Dr., Delaware, OH 43015

Awards, educational displays, silent auction and much more!

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

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

THANK YOU



SPONSORS!



OHIO BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Back to Basics!

March 1, 2025

REGISTRATION FORM

Registration Deadline: Friday, February 17, 2025

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

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

Name: _____ OBS Member? YES / NO

Organization: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail: _____ Phone: _____ County: _____

I AM REGISTERING AS (DEADLINE TO REGISTER IS FEBRUARY 17, 2025) (NO WALK IN'S)

____ OBS Member (\$30) ____ Non-OBS Member (\$40) ____ Student = 21 & younger (\$15) ____ Seniors 65+ (\$20)
(SR. OBS MEMBERS)

MAIL REGISTRATION

Jeff Blosser, OBS Membership Chair

3091 Devonshire Dr.

Delaware, OH 43015

OBSMembershipchair@gmail.com

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO

OBS

or register online!

LUNCH SELECTION — BRING YOUR OWN COFFEE CUP AND WATER BOTTLE FOR A SUSTAINABLE CONF.



Photos by Katelyn Shelton

Name on Name Tag: _____

Sandwich Choice:

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

Salad Choice:

- ___ Chicken Caesar Salad
- ___ Chef Salad with Turkey and Ham
- ___ Strawberry, Spinach, and Candied Cashew Salad

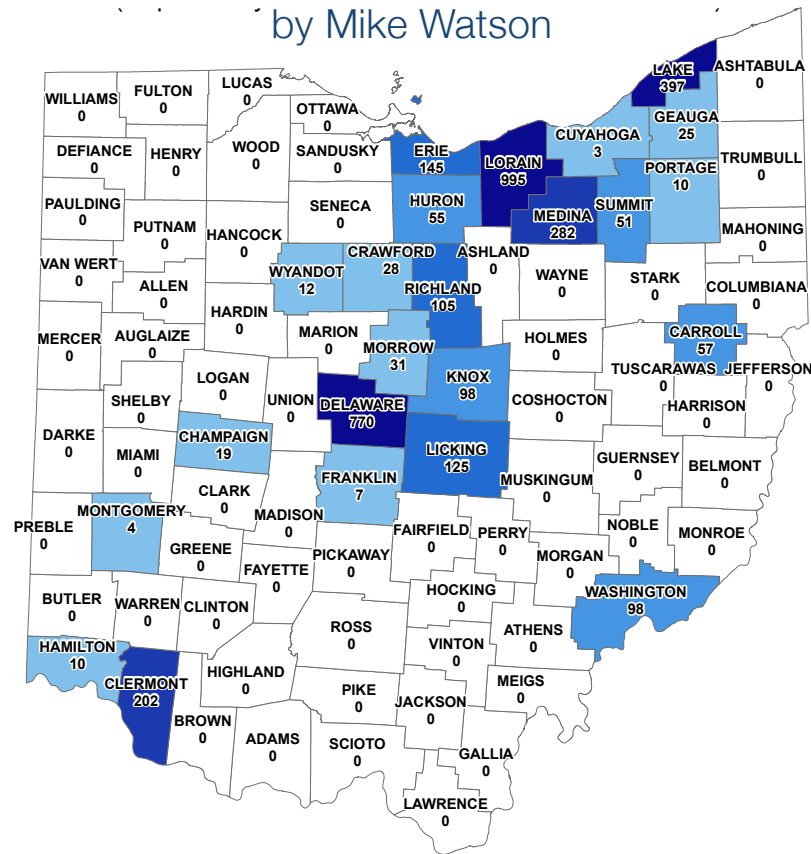
Thank You Sponsors!



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

OBS 2024 FLEDGLING REPORT

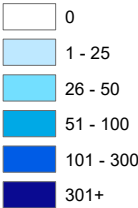
by Mike Watson



Native Species	Total #
#Reports	45
Eastern Bluebird	3529
Tree Swallow	3470
House Wren	1025
Purple Martin	1770
Black-capped Chickadee	10
Carolina Chickadee	59
Carolina Wren	40
Barn Swallow	19
Tufted Titmouse	5
Great Crested Flycatcher	6
Eastern Phoebe	5
Total # Native Cavity Nesters	9938

Invasive Species Managed	Total #
House Sparrow dispatched	672
House Sparrow eggs destroyed	438
European Swallows dispatched	4
European Swallow egg destroyed	8

#Fledged per County



created by Mike Watson; The Holden Arboretum



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:

Jeff Blosser, OBS Membership Chair
3091 Devonshire Dr.
Delaware, OH 43105

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 Ohio Bluebird Society to join our group.

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OHIO BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Mission Statement

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

ohiobluebirdsociety.org

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Affiliated with the North American Bluebird Society

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Deadline for Submitting Articles:

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

Nest Box Nuggets – from Richard Tuttle



“Much is being reported on the decline of the kestrel population during recent decades, but every kestrel nestbox project that I am aware of has successfully raised our continent’s smallest falcon. We need more conservation projects to answer the small falcon’s need. So, conserve on!”

*From: “The 2020 American Kestrel Nesting Season ”
– Ohio Bluebird Monitor Summer 2021*