



# Bluebird Trails & Tales

The Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania  
An Affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society

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## A Message from the President

*Dr. Dean C. Rust, BSP President*

### Did you know?

In Volume 22, Issue 3 Fall/Winter 2020 Newsletter “Bluebird Trails and Tales”, I wrote an article entitled “Did you Know?”. This will be 2.0 of that missive.

1. All Bluebirds, both male & female, are born with a white eye ring. As the fledglings mature during molting in the fall, the male white eye ring fades away but the females keep their white eye rings their entire life.
2. Bluebirds can fly at speeds up to 45 miles per hour if necessary.
3. Bluebirds raise their young in old or pre-existing nesting cavities, i.e., they are “secondary cavity-nesters” They have an average nesting success rate of about 60%.
4. Eastern Bluebirds live in most of the United States east of the Rocky Mountains plus Bermuda and in Southern Canada. There are also native populations of Eastern Bluebirds in Mexico and Central America.
5. Eastern Bluebirds eat mostly insects, and they tend to spy on them from above and then catch them on the ground. Spiders, grasshoppers, beetles, caterpillars, and crickets are all favorite foods for them. During the winter months when insects are hard or impossible to find, they will eat a wide range of fruits and seeds. Juniper berries, Holly berries, Winter berries, Dogwood berries, sumac, and mistletoe are all on the menu... plus mealworms and peanut butter suet treats at your bird feeder.
6. Eastern Bluebirds that survive to adulthood can

live for 4-7 years. That is unusually long for a native songbird, but many Bluebirds do not survive their first year.

7. Bluebirds don't typically mate for life, although it's not uncommon for a breeding pair to spend more than one breeding season together. During the breeding season, they are monogamous, meaning they form a “pair-bond” and work together to raise their chicks. Whether they “reconnect” the next season after the winter is over is questionable.



*Young Bluebird Fledges  
by David Kinneer*

8. Females never turn bright blue, instead staying a dull blue-gray for their whole lives, although they do have some bright blue feathers. The males will begin to develop bright blue feathers when they molt in the fall. They may appear especially blue during the mating season in April-May & June-July.

9. Bluebirds and migration. Do they migrate? YES and NO. In the northernmost areas of their range, Canada, and the northern tier of states in the US, many do migrate. They are present only during the breeding season in these uppermost regions. Large portions of Texas, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, and other southern states are wintering grounds for these migrating birds. Bluebirds that live in the Southeastern US, Central Mexico and Central America do NOT

>> A Message from the President continues on page 2

## A Message from the President continued from page 1

migrate and enjoy a much longer breeding season with plenty of insects all year long.

10. A female Bluebird will typically lay between 3 and 5 eggs in her nest. Pennsylvania Bluebirds on average have two nests each season, divided into brood periods of April-May and June-July. Three nests are very special and usually found in more southern states.

11. There are **seven subspecies of Eastern Bluebirds**.

*Sialia sialis* is the most common in the US, *sialis bermudensis* in Bermuda, *sialis nidificans* in central Mexico, *sialis fulva* in southwestern US and Mexico, *sialis guatemalae* in southern Mexico and Guatemala, *sialis meridionalis* in El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, and *sialis caribaea* in Honduras and Nicaragua.

12. The Eastern Bluebird's Song is very distinctive. They make a call that sounds like "chur lee" or "chir we". To be exact, it is a "warble". Many birdwatchers describe it as sounding like they are singing the words "truly" or "purity".

13. Bluebirds are very social and their flocks can number from a dozen to over a hundred. However, they do not live in flocks, only during the fall and winter seasons. During the breeding months is when you will see Bluebirds alone or in pairs and will be close to their nesting sites.

14. Bluebirds are highly territorial. During their breeding season, the males will protect their nesting sites even before they have found a female to mate with. The male Bluebird is a sentinel/guardian and he is very adept at protecting the nesting site, especially when the female is incubating eggs or feeding chicks. She is most vulnerable at this time and the male is willing and ready to take on any predator or another male Bluebird!!

15. A Bluebird can spot caterpillars and insects in tall grass at the remarkable distance of over 50 yards (that is half the length of a football field).

16. Three species of Bluebirds are found throughout North America, including the **Eastern, Western** and

**Mountain Bluebirds**. All Bluebirds are cavity nesters and will use an artificial nest box. Bluebirds have made an incredible comeback since the early 1970's as a result of thousands of Bluebird nestboxes being installed across the country and with the inception of the North American Bluebird Society in 1978.

17. An active Bluebird nest and/or clutch of blue or white eggs is a wonder of nature. The female turns the eggs many times each day while incubating them under her body without even looking!! This turning of the eggs keeps the temperature even and prevents the yolk inside the eggs from sticking to the shell. It also polishes the exterior of the eggs so they are shiny from the oils on the female's belly. She also orients the eggs so that the rounded end



*Bluebird in Cavity*  
by Richard Hess

is up (air sac is here) and the pointed end is down. She does that without looking as well!! If you find a clutch of Bluebird eggs that are dull, not warm, and pale, they are probably abandoned.

18. Two states have the Eastern Bluebird as their state bird: New York and Missouri.

19. Bluebirds consume about 4 grams of food per day, or about 12% of their body weight. This is equivalent to a two-hundred-pound human eating 24 pounds of food each day.

20. As the days grow longer in the spring, a male Bluebird's brain releases hormones that stimulate the production of testosterone. This hormone in turn stimulates the area of the brain responsible for singing behavior, thus triggering the male to begin his mating song.

21. Unpaired male Bluebirds may sing up to 1,000 songs per hour, but males as a group average a more reasonable rate of four to five hundred songs per hour.

## In This Issue

A Message from the President .....1-2, 5

In This Issue ..... 3

BSP Officers/Board of Directors ..... 3

BSP Chairpersons ..... 4

Our Mission Statement ..... 4

From the Editor (Provide Vital Habitat Features for Songbirds) .....6-7

We “Treasure” Her..... 8

Updates - BSP County Coordinators ..... 9

Upcoming Events - Save the Dates..... 10

A History and Update of a Productive Bluebird Trail ..... 11  
at Lancaster Country Club

Mailbag .....12-13

When a Bird Parent Goes Missing .....14-15

There’s a Code for That! ..... 16

Events Report..... 17, 19

Pike County: Bears vs. Bluebirds ..... 18

Bon Air Country Club Loves Bluebirds ..... 19

Congratulations to: Cheryl Tomlinson, Pike County ..... 20



Photo Credit - Sheryl Smith

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## Our Mission Statement

The mission statement of the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania is simple, yet powerful:

1. Provide and promote educational activities relating to bluebirds, birding, conservation and related subjects.
2. Monitor and conduct research relating to bluebirds, other cavity nesting birds, food sources, habitats, and trails.
3. Build, maintain, and monitor bluebird boxes and trails.
4. Provide opportunities for people to become involved in efforts that assist bluebirds and other native bird species.
5. Provide social opportunities to share information and experiences relating to bluebirds and related conservation topics.



Photo Credit - Mike Dickie

*“Today ...the bluebirds, old and young, have revisited their box, as if they would fain repeat the summer without interference of winter if Nature would let them.”*

Henry David Thoreau,  
September 29, 1842

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*If you have an interest in serving as Committee Chair for any Vacant Committee Position, please contact us.*

## A Message from the President continued from page 2

22. The first Bluebird Nesting Box Trail was established in Adams County, Illinois in 1934, by T.E. Musselman.

*“For Bluebirds hold a special place  
In all that view and watch them grow  
They occupy a rare exclusive space  
That lifts and sets our hearts aglow  
Other birds bring smiles and grins  
But none can bring that sense of cheer  
For none seem quite so close as friends  
As ones in blue we hold so dear”*

Poem by David L. Warbritton,  
Greensboro, North Carolina



**Bluebirds in Winter**  
by Richard Hess



**Bluebird in Flight**  
by Mike Dickie

## *A Tribute to Ed Monroe*

Ed's interest in the Eastern Bluebird began in crafting and setting into place nesting boxes - first around his home, then later, around his fourteen-acre field on his beloved getaway he called "The Farm".

While sharing garden favorites like potatoes and pumpkins with friends and neighbors, he also shared his enthusiasm for the bluebird, and eventually became the Allegheny County Coordinator. As part of his efforts, Ed contributed to the enrichment of the bluebird habitat and the installation of nesting sites throughout North Park, the largest among Allegheny County's park system near Pittsburgh.

By trade, Ed was a Professional Engineer, Surveyor, and Wastewater System Operator, working his way up to Partner, Shareholder, and Vice President at Gannett Fleming, an international engineering firm. He passed away at the age of 85 on Tuesday, July 18, 2023. Ed was an active member of the Pittsburgh community, and is dearly missed as a father, grandfather, farmer, and engineer.

Submitted by Ed Monroe's son, Ed Monroe, Jr.



*Note from Marilyn Michalski, BSP State CC: We will all miss the exemplary service of Ed Monroe, BSP member for many years and his dedicated work as the County Coordinator in Allegheny County.*

## From the Editor *by Joan Watroba*

# Provide Vital Habitat Features for Songbirds

Birdwatching and gardening are two of the most popular hobbies in America, and many nature enthusiasts are adding features to their yards and gardens which promote songbirds to visit and linger. Nature photography is also very popular, and by providing a suitable habitat you can create more opportunities to attract them, observe their behaviors and photograph their beauty.

It is important to preserve natural cavities in old trees as well as to add nesting boxes of different sizes with a variety of entrance holes to accommodate the many types of cavity-nesting species. Cavity-nesting birds often use nest boxes in the winter months for roosting. I have seen downy woodpeckers roosting in nest boxes, and some bluebirders have reported finding multiple bluebirds in their nesting boxes during the winter months to stay warm and get out of extreme weather conditions. By planting a

variety of trees, preferably native species, you will be providing both nesting sites and a food source, as many native plants also produce fruits or berries. Conserving natural snags in corners of the yard and adding perches can provide places for birds to land prior to entering their nesting sites.

Adding supplemental food sources can be very important to sustaining the birds, especially in the winter or in early spring. During these seasons the supply of natural food sources such as insects, berries, and fruit is very limited. Supplemental food offerings can include mealworms, which are a favorite of bluebirds and they also will feed on some commercial suet cakes, especially the berry, fruit, or peanut types. A crumbly mixed suet can be made using melted suet, corn meal, peanut butter, shelled sunflower seeds, and raisins. This suet can be placed on a flat dish on a platform or placed in an enclosed bluebird feeder which will restrict access by the larger birds and other critters, such as squirrels.

A habitat feature which is often overlooked and is perhaps the most important is **water**. Songbirds need water year-round, not only for drinking, but for bathing and preening their feathers. Water serves to cool down the bird's body temperature in warm weather, and birds preen with water to remove dust, loose feathers, and

parasites. Preening with water also restores the insulation factor of their feathers. Remember to change the water in the birdbath often and keep it circulating, which will prevent mosquitoes from laying their eggs in the birdbath during the warmer months. Moving water also attracts more birds, and adding a dripper or mister to your birdbath in the summer will attract more songbirds. A mister is also a magnet to hummingbirds, and they will repeatedly fly through the mist. We are lucky at our house to have a small stream which runs along



*Bluebirds with suet*  
Photo by Chuck Musser

the front of our property, and many times in the winter months we have observed flocks of bluebirds and other small songbirds drinking and bathing in the stream. Adding a small heater to your birdbath in the winter will provide them with access to water even in below-freezing temperatures. Winter food sources tend to be dryer than the soft-bodied, moist insects like cutworms which are available

## Provide Vital Habitat Features for Songbirds con't.

during the summer months, so water helps them to digest their food during the winter months. The water in a birdbath should be shallow-not more than two or three inches deep and a rough, textured surface will allow them to get a good foothold. Adding a couple of small rocks along the inside of the bird bath will provide the birds with a surface to stand on.

By adding the above habitat features, you will be creating a wonderful **Bed and Breakfast for the Birds**. They will appreciate it, and you will enjoy watching the birds year-round.

### Bluebird Banquet Suet Recipe

by Linda Janilla Peterson

**Mix:** 1 cup peanut butter, 4 cups yellow corn meal, 1 cup unbleached or whole wheat flour

**Add:** 1 cup fine sunflower seed chips, 1 cup peanut hearts (or finely ground nuts) 1/2 to 1 cup currants (or raisins cut in halves)

**Drizzle and stir in** 1 cup of rendered, melted suet (can substitute lard or a commercial suet square)

Cool before serving and keep unused portions refrigerated until use to avoid the mixture from getting rancid Note: Resulting mix will be crumbly and should have bean/pea-sized lumps from the drizzling of the melted suet. If it is too sticky after cooling, mix in a bit more flour. If too dry, drizzle in more melted suet.

*Editor's note: Serve suet mixture on a raised flat tray, bluebird feeder, or from a log-style feeder.*



*Bathing Beauties at the Bird Bath by Mike Dickie*

## We “Treasure” Her

A big Thank You goes out to Joyce Stuff for her many years of service to BSP. It all started in 1998 when Kathy Clark, one of the founders of BSP, reached out to Joyce to see if she would be interested in becoming a member of the newly-formed Bluebird Society of PA. Joyce was already a lover of bluebirds and an active member of NABS. Joyce agreed to become a member and, shortly thereafter, a County Coordinator for Franklin County and a BSP Board Member. The Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania was growing, and the former State County Coordinator needed help. He reached out to Joyce and asked her take over his position promising to assist her.

During her tenure as State County Coordinator, Joyce developed a County Coordinator (CC) binder with resources for presentations, educational handouts, and list of where to obtain nestbox kits. No details were skipped. Joyce even made a diagram about how to set up a table at a bluebird event. Twice a year, Joyce held CC meetings in different parts of the state to encourage camaraderie among the coordinators. Joyce wanted them to know that she appreciated their efforts and that she was always accessible.

Joyce especially loved going to nature festivals where she would engage with people new to bluebirding. During these events she met many novice bluebirders, listened to their questions and gave sage advice. Joyce held many workshops, talks and events all to promote the population of bluebirds.

In 2011 Joyce gave up the role of State County Coordinator, but remained Franklin County’s Coordinator and became BSP’s Treasurer. BSP’s finances were placed in very capable hands. From deposits to insurance payments, Joyce always kept accurate account records with full transparency. As the organization grew to 900 members, so did the accounting responsibilities.



Joyce and Her Grandchildren

In July of 2023, Joyce decided to retire from the active role she held as Treasurer. Instead, Joyce plans on spending more time walking along her bluebird trails while taking in the splendor of nature. Nature has always given her a sense of serenity, a place to look inward, and a place to be close to God. One thing is for sure, Joyce will be “always bluebirding.”

*NOTE: Joyce has fledged over 4,000 bluebirds on her two dairy farms in Franklin County.*

Article submitted by Nancy Fraim



*How readily the bluebirds become  
our friends and neighbors  
when we offer them suitable  
nesting retreats!*

*– John Burroughs*



## *Our BSP County Coordinators - News & Updates: October 2023*

1. We welcome **KEN KNAPP** as the NEW County Coordinator in **Allegheny County**. Ken can be reached at kcknapp50@gmail.com 724-831-3156. *Our former CC, Ed Monroe, passed away in July, 2023. See the tribute to him in this issue.*
2. In **Carbon County** we welcome **CAROL SCHNAITER** as the NEW Co-County Coordinator with Don Bonnet. Carol can be reached at 815-440-8640. schnaitercarol@gmail.com.
3. We welcome **KEN SMITH** as the NEW Co-County Coordinator in **York County**. Ken is joining Nancy Putt, BSP Secretary/Co-County Coordinator in **York County**. Ken Smith is at 410-299-4670.
4. In **Wayne County** we welcome **BARB KORTELING** as the NEW County Coordinator. She's at 570-470-1580 and barbkorteling@gmail.com *Former CC James Kilgore has resigned.*
5. We have accepted the resignation of Richard Clark as Co-County Coordinator in Dauphin County. We are happy to confirm that BILL STRAUSS continues as the **Dauphin County** Coordinator. His number is 717-541-9168.
6. In **Monroe County**, Coordinator Deron Erney has resigned. We are searching for a new County Coordinator in Monroe County. Please contact Marilyn if you can recommend a bluebirder in Monroe County.
7. In **Lackawanna County**, we have contacted numerous individuals from the Scranton Audubon Bird Club, located in Lackawanna, but we have been unable to obtain a County Coordinator in this County. Please call me if you know of a potential candidate in Lackawanna County.
8. In **Clarion County**, we need a Co-County Coordinator to assist Charmaine Borza.
9. In **Schuylkill County**, Rich Rieger, appeadayonsite@aol.com, needs a Co-County Coordinator. Please call Marilyn with names and contact information.

Our BSP County Coordinators have done excellent work this year -- monitoring nestboxes and helping others with Bluebird Trails. I am proud of their dedication! We have most of our 67 PA Counties covered! Please call me with CC recommendations for these Counties: **LACKAWANNA, MONROE, and CLARION** (additional help needed in Clarion).

Marilyn Michalski, BSP State Coordinator 610-933-0497 or email: emeraldmm@verizon.net

*The bluebird is well named, for he wears a coat of the purest, richest,  
and most gorgeous blue on back, wings, and tail; no North American  
bird better deserves the name, for no other flashes before our admiring  
eyes so much brilliant blue.*

*- Arthur Cleveland Bent*



## Upcoming Events - Save the Dates:

\*Check out the BSP Facebook Page for more Bluebird Events

### BSP Board/Membership Meetings

Thursday evenings at 6:00 P.M. on the following dates:

- January 25, 2024 • April 25, 2024
- July 25, 2024 • October 24, 2024
- Please contact Phil Durgin at 717-732-5325 or email: pdurgin@comcast.net or Nancy Fraim at 610-873-7454 or email: nancyfraim@comcast.net prior to the event to receive a link to participate in the meetings.

### PA FARM SHOW- January 11-January 13, 2024 (Thursday-Saturday)

Location: 2300 North Cameron Street , Harrisburg, PA

<https://www.farmshow.pa.gov/>

BSP will participate in a rotating exhibit during the last 3 days of the event, January 11-13. One of the area's biggest and most popular events, and one of BSP's favorite bluebird educational outreach experiences.

This is a fun event for the entire family, with interesting programs, demonstrations, a variety of animals,

vendors, and offers delicious PA food choices in the food court.

\*Volunteers are needed to host the BSP educational/ BSP Merchandise Booth and to assist in the Make & Take Nestbox Activity on Friday, January 12th from 10 a.m.-noon during which children and their parents assemble



nestboxes that they can take with them.

Contact Nancy Putt, Event Chair at: 717-432- 2647 or e-mail: bluebirds@pa.net to volunteer for the event.

THANKS in advance for helping to educate others about bluebirds. New volunteers are always welcome, and you will be with another one of our volunteers who have helped us in the past. It is a great opportunity to learn about bluebirds!

### Bluebird Society of PA's 24th Annual Conference April 19th and 20th, 2024

Antiochian Village Conference Center, Route 711 North, 140 Church Camp Trail, Bolivar, PA 15949

This venue is located in Western Pennsylvania in the beautiful Laurel Highlands, about 18 miles from the Donegal Exit of the PA Turnpike.

The Annual BSP Conference offers excellent speakers, demonstrations, vendors, a live and silent auction, a delicious luncheon, and an opportunity to learn from, and socialize with people who share your love of bluebirds and enjoy the wonders of the natural world. The event will feature a Friday evening program and Social and a full day of activities on Saturday. A special communication regarding the conference, including registration information, speaker bios, and itinerary will be sent out to all active BSP members in early 2024. Registration forms and Itinerary will also be posted on the BSP website and BSP's Facebook Page closer to the event. **Registration will be open starting in January of 2024. Friday evening: Laura Jackson** from Bedford, PA will present a program, *Birds In My Backyard*. Laura is also very knowledgeable of and interested in native plants and how they are so important to the ecosystem. She and her husband are also excellent photographers. **Saturday: Dean Rust**, President of the BSP, will give a keynote program to help to guide us in how we can help our Bluebirds. **Lucas Degroote** from the Avian Research Center in Stahlstown, PA will deliver an interesting program on his research of birds. After the live auction, **Andrea Kautz**, an Entomologist with the Powdermill Nature Reserve in Rector, PA., will present a program about the importance of insects for our ecosystem. As we know, Insects provide a vital food source for Bluebirds.

*The Avian Research Center in Stahlstown, PA and the Powdermill Nature Reserve are both located in the Laurel Highlands and are part of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History.*

Wilma Light, 2024 BSP Conference Chair,  
724-331-1800 | lightgarden515@gmail.com

## *A History and Update of a Productive Bluebird Trail at Lancaster Country Club*

*by Joan Watroba*

In July of 2011, Todd Bidlespacher, Golf Superintendent wrote an article, “**Have You Seen Any Bluebirds?**” in their *Golf Course News* publication.

He wrote about the history of the bluebird trail and explained that five years prior to 2011, **18** nest boxes were constructed and placed on both the Flynn and Highlands Golf Courses by Leonard Mayberry, an employee and Woodworker. Todd indicated that some additional boxes were added to bring the total number of boxes up to **24** in 2011.

Todd indicated that the first few seasons were not very productive for attracting bluebirds, but he admitted that besides occasional cleaning and bringing them in for repairs during the winter season, there was not a consistent level of attention given to the activity in the boxes during the nesting season.

In 2009, the golf course began the process of gaining Audubon certification, and their approach to the bluebird trail became more involved and organized. In July of 2010, Dean Rust, BSP President, who lives near the course, offered to monitor the boxes every week and created a conducive environment for attracting bluebirds. It was all due to regular weekly monitoring of each box during the nesting season (April to August) and predator guards on every nestbox to protect the eggs, chicks and mother Bluebirds. With Dean’s assistance and expertise, they fledged over **40** Bluebirds in 2010, and as of July 2011, **40** Bluebirds had already fledged. Second or third broods would increase that number.

Dean continues to monitor the trail at Lancaster Country Club, which is now **50** nestboxes and the number of bluebirds fledged there during the 2023 season was **140!!**

Dean has written a comprehensive and informative guidebook called the ***Pennsylvania Golf Course Bluebird Trail Initiative*** to assist bluebirders to establish productive bluebird trails on golf courses in all 67 counties. If you are interested in monitoring nestboxes on existing bluebird trails on golf courses or would like to partner with a golf course in your county to do so, please contact Dean Rust at 717-669-0167 or email [july7ds@aol.com](mailto:july7ds@aol.com)



*Dean at Lancaster Country Club*

*Note: The Lancaster Country Club will again host the U.S. Women’s Open Golf Championship from **May 28-June 2, 2024**. The tournament organizers were thrilled with the turnout and the community support the last time it was held there. Plan to attend by reserving tickets, and you can watch great golf and beautiful Bluebirds on the course.*

## Mailbag —

### Nestbox Styles

From: Jonathan Meyers  
To: Joan Watroba  
July 4, 2023

I just read your organization's "**Everything You Need to Know About Bluebirds**" publication and am revisiting my choices. I have been using these bluebird boxes. Do you think that box is still a good choice? If not, can you recommend boxes I can purchase for use?

From: Joan Watroba  
To: Jonathan Meyers  
July 5, 2023

Hi Jonathan- Yes-That is a good nestbox - my only suggestion is to paint the roof a lighter color so that will not absorb so much heat as a black roof will. If these boxes are working well for you and the bluebirds are successfully nesting in them, I would not change to another type.



Nature's Way Bluebird Box

From: Jonathan Meyers  
To: Joan Watroba  
July 6, 2023

Hi Joan. Thank you for the quick response. The bluebirds in my yard seem to like these boxes and they are frequently occupied. I don't monitor them the way your publication advises (when I approach the box or open it, I always end up scaring a bluebird out) but I do observe adults entering and leaving and see juveniles around my property. I'm open to other designs to supplement these boxes (I'm thinking of adding two more) if you have strong recommendations about other boxes available for purchase. Thanks for advocating for Eastern Bluebirds!



Juvenile Bluebird at Bird Bath  
by Jonathan Meyers

To: Jonathan Meyers  
From: Joan Watroba  
July 7, 2023

If you want to try different nestbox

styles, the PVC or Gilbertson nestboxes have been productive. Some bluebirders report that House Sparrows do not like to nest in these styles but other native songbirds will successfully use them.

*Editor's Note: Please know that even if the adult birds fly out of the nestbox when you open it, they will quickly return. Bluebirds tolerate monitoring, and it is important to know if everything is going well with the nesting. If you check it every week, you will know when the babies will fledge and then you can clean out the box in preparation for the next nesting. If the old nests are left inside the box, the female may build a nest on top which brings the nesting material too high and makes the nest more prone to predation. Also, a soiled nest can promote blowflies to lay larvae in the nesting material which can kill young birds.*



PVC  
Nestbox



Troyer  
Nestbox

# Mailbag —

## Bluebird Trail at Brethren Village/ Lititz

From: Gloria Denlinger,  
September 4, 2023

To: Dean Rust

There are 5 bluebird eggs which are ready to hatch. I never thought how much I would enjoy it. There is something very powerful about seeing a carefully built nest with blue eggs that hatch into these tiny creatures that eventually fly and develop into gorgeous birds! Thank you for your input and education over the years.

To : Gloria Denlinger

From: Dean Rust

September 4, 2023

Gloria, That is EXCELLENT!! A real late nest but they all count! **83 FLEDGED** is a super number! When you started in 2015, I doubt if there were 5 or 10 that FLEDGED at that time?! You have really developed a population of BLUEBIRDS at Brethren Village !!

*Note: Gloria Denlinger is a BSP Member and has been a bluebird trail monitor of the bluebird trail at Brethren Village, Lititz, PA since 2015.*

## 4th Bluebird Nest

From: Lisa Fetterman

To: Joan Watroba, 08/08/2003

My bluebird pair have started a **4th** nest this season. **So exciting!**

**AWESOME!!!!** I have a few 3rd BB nestings, but no 4th yet!

One year I had 2 separate BB nestings in nestboxes on the same trail which started in early September and the young fledged successfully!

That is very unusual so late in the season.



## Check out our New Bluebird Sign

From:

Ken Knapp To: Dean Rust  
September 1, 2023

Hi Dean and Phil, Better late than never. We finally installed one of the bluebird signs we made using the template that you provided. Thanks so much. We think it looks great! This is one of Ray Morris's bluebird trails.

To: Ken Knapp  
From: Dean Rust  
September 4, 2023

Ken - **WOW!** That does look great! I have a couple of those to put up as well!

*Dean's Note: This BSP sign was posted in Allegheny County at Latodami Nature Center/North Park which is over 3,000 acres.*

*From left to right: Ken Knapp and Alan DeLuca with the new bluebird sign  
Photo Credit: Ray Morris*



# WHEN A BIRD PARENT GOES MISSING

*by Marilyn Michalski*

There is a famous motto, “First, do no harm” which cautions against performing actions which unintentionally cause harm. It is attributed to Hippocrates, a Greek physician in ancient times. Although the motto is directed at medical treatment for humans, it is appropriate for helping native birds.

## THE DISAPPEARANCE OF BOTH ADULT BLUEBIRDS:

When bluebird parents disappear, we face a serious problem: How to save their young. The problem begins when we find that nestlings are not being fed, and we conclude that no adult birds are alive to feed them. Without food, bluebird hatchlings and nestlings will die. To prevent this, WE MAY HAVE TO INTERVENE. We can take hatchlings/nestlings to a qualified, licensed rehabber OR we can put them into another active nest where baby birds (of the same species) are similar in size to our orphaned ones.

## **BUT WAIT! DON'T RUSH INTO ACTION! THINK!**

Are we absolutely certain that both bluebird parents are missing? Before we do ANYTHING, we must verify that BOTH male and female adults are dead. If we saw the dead body of the female AND the male, we can proceed with rescuing baby birds. BUT....

What if one parent is STILL ALIVE and HIDING (as in camouflaging his/her activity), then we must NOT remove nestlings. Instead, we will confirm who is dead and who is alive. The success of baby birds depends on our accuracy! The survival of ONE ADULT BIRD means we should do NOTHING. Why? A single living adult CANCELS THE NEED TO move nestlings. One parent can feed and nurture nestlings until they survive on their own.

It is easy to be misled – and conclude that nestlings are NOT being fed. Here's why: a surviving adult bird will make itself inconspicuous to hide from predators, and we might NOT see an adult enter or exit the nestbox. Many avian species use clever ways to avoid being seen, and some use evasive tactics to remain unnoticed. If a single adult bird is feeding young, we should NOT move nestlings.

## IF ONE BLUEBIRD IS ALIVE AND FEEDING YOUNG?

1. WAITING OVERNIGHT – We check the nestbox one afternoon to determine how the nestlings look and behave. If their little heads bob up and down, and their beaks open wide, we know they're being fed. THE NEXT DAY we check again to observe their condition. If they are, once again, looking healthy, we believe a parent is feeding them. When nestlings are NOT fed, they become lethargic. Their heads will not lift up, and their beaks will stay closed.

Complicating factor: SOME NESTLINGS PLAY DEAD WHEN THEIR NESTBOX IS OPENED. We must not let this fool us. We will look for signs of life: tiny motions of their bodies and evidence of breathing (lungs expanding a tiny bit). Healthy nestlings have a clean odor, so if there's a bad smell, we must remove any dead bird. Many of us have found that nestlings of Chickadees, Bluebirds, and Tree Swallows will play dead when they are frightened. We must be PATIENT as we determine their actual status. It is better to postpone action than to remove nestlings from a nest where a parent is feeding them. Fortunately, we have another technique to determine their status:

2. EXTENDED WATCHING OF THE NESTBOX. We sit behind a natural barrier such as a tree or side of a house/

garage so an adult bird cannot see us from the nestbox. We sit quietly and watch the entry hole. We should be at least 30 feet away so as not to scare off a living parent. Some sources say we should watch for 4 hours to determine if an adult is feeding them. Why? Because if a partner has expired, the remaining adult will be fearful and wary of danger, making the intervals between feedings longer than normal. Within 3 hours of watching, we SHOULD SEE an adult flying into or out of the nestbox, if it is alive.

USE BINOCULARS OR A SMALL TELESCOPE (OR EVEN OPERA GLASSES) during this extended WATCH. The larger the entry hole appears to our eyes, the better chance we have of confirming an adult's presence. Our concentration will allow us to see the activity of an adult bird. Because avian parents can enter a nestbox in less than a second, we should use sight enhancers, like binoculars.

When we spot a surviving adult darting into his/her nestbox, we feel an enormous wave of relief, because we have proved that our precious bluebird babies are being fed!

By Marilyn Michalski, BSP State County Coordinator



**Baby Bluebirds with Pin Feathers by Schuyler Mu**

*NOTE: I wrote this article to honor two of our County Coordinators: Our CC in Franklin County, Mary Ellen Piper, who did NOT transfer 3 orphaned bluebird nestlings into another nestbox until she confirmed that her male bluebird had survived the hawk attack that killed his female. This male was skittish and swift in his feeding missions, so he was hard to see. His 3 nestlings all fledged.*

*Our CC in Pike County, Cheryl Tomlinson, while at her home base in Malvern, PA, saved Chickadee nestlings after a neighbor handed her a nestbox saying, "They're all dead – can you get rid of it?" Opening the box, Cheryl saw 7 LIVE baby chickadees hunkered down in fear. She convinced her neighbor to return the nestbox to its original location so the parents could continue feeding them. All fledged safely.*

*Editor's Note: I experienced a similar scenario this past nesting season. During a weekly nestbox check, I saw a dead female bluebird in the vicinity of the nestbox. The four young bluebirds all looked healthy, but I wanted to make sure that they were still being fed, as I did not see the adult male. I went back and sat in my car and used binoculars, which allowed a clear view of the nestbox. After about 10 minutes, I observed the male repeatedly fly into the nestbox with food and exit with fecal sacs from the young. I was thrilled that they were being taken care of, so that I did not have to go to Plan B or C. Happy to report that all four of the baby bluebirds successfully fledged.*

# There's a Code for That!

by Darlaine Manning

Today QR codes are omnipresent. They are on menus, backs of church pews, lamp posts, garden signs, in art galleries, zoos and on toilet stall doors. It seems inevitable that they become part of the Bluebird trail experience.

Four of us split the monitoring at our Master Gardener Learning Garden Trail this year to make it easier to accommodate everyone's summer plans. The tech savvy friend in our group convinced us to try a QR code system linked to a shared Google forms site. Google forms functions like Excel and is sortable, searchable, and sharable. We discovered a plethora of options to create free QR codes as well as a whole lot of ways to spend money to make them look amazing. We settled for a basic form of QR Code Generator.



We had our share of fun as well as frustration learning how to tailor it to our needs and the way we work best. Here is a quick overview of our experience for those who may be thinking about trying it out. We also invite thoughts from the experienced QR code users in the group.

Initially we set up QR codes for each box but found that cumbersome in terms of entry and problematic when we wanted to see the big picture. We chose a single QR code for the trail where you can easily enter the data for a single box, submit that and be given the option to open a new report for the next box. The form itself is easily sorted by the date,

box, or monitor when you want a full review.

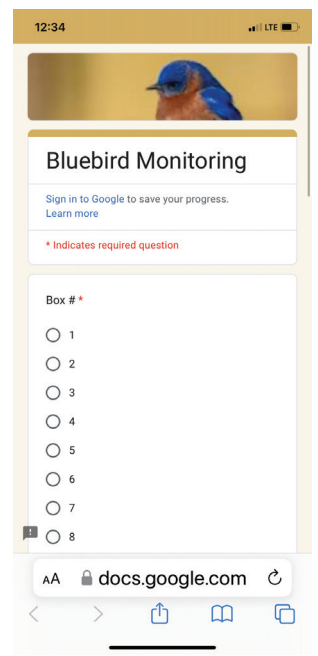
Here is a snapshot of the nesting activity data:

**Editor's Note: I added the color coding below to delineate the headings/data which are captured and displayed in a spreadsheet format.**

Timestamp	Box #	Date	Monitor's name	# of Eggs	Egg color	# hatchlings
4/7/2023 15:04:48	3	4/7/2023	Darlaine	0	Nest in place	
4/20/2023 12:42:03	1	4/20/2023	Sue Holliday	0	Nothing in box	
4/20/2023 12:48:34	2	4/20/2023	Susan Holliday	0	Nest built	
4/20/2023 12:49:14	3	4/20/2023	Susan Holliday		Partial nest	

Moving forward, we will eliminate the date entry, since the entry is time stamped and also add entries for nest and also bird type. The team feel, generally, that it is a useful tool and are speculating on how we can make better use of the data. I'd be interested to hear how Ken's (Ken Knapp's) experience has been, and what he /they include in their data collection points.

PS. Here is a screenshot of the monitoring landing page: 





## Events Report:

**On May 24, 2023**, Nancy Fraim presented a virtual bluebird program, ***For The Love Of Bluebirds*** to members of the Valley Forge Audubon Society of Eagleville, PA. She is a Downingtown resident, very knowledgeable about bluebirds, and serves as BSP County Coordinator for Chester County, BSP Board Member and BSP Membership Chair.

Happy to say that the program is available to view on the website of the Valley Forge Audubon Society:

<https://valleyforgeaudubon.org>

**On Saturday, July 8, 2023**, I presented a bluebird program, ***All About Bluebirds*** at Colonel Denning State Park in Newville, PA. Gene Krasicki, Environmental Education Specialist, PA DCNR requested someone from BSP to offer a program. I brought the educational display, brochures, and handouts, and presented a Bluebird Basics program.



The attendees were very engaged and asked many questions. The bluebirds stopped in to say Hello by singing and flying around and landing on a box near to the amphitheater. Binoculars were available so that the parents and children could see the bluebirds up close

and personal.

Gene monitors and maintains a productive bluebird trail at the park, and during the program we were able to check some of the nestboxes and see adult bluebirds, nests, and eggs. Some bluebird pairs had already fledged their first broods. Gene says that bluebirds and chickadees have used the nestboxes, and so far, no house sparrows or house wrens. There were about 20 attendees of various ages-many of them were families camping within the park. After the

program and trail walk, there was a nestbox building activity with nestbox kits provided by the park, and the children and their parents assembled the boxes to take home with them. It was a beautiful Summer day-cloudy with a slight breeze-a perfect day to learn about and to watch the bluebirds.

Joan Watroba, BSP Cumberland County Coordinator

**On Saturday, July 29, 2023**, Bluebird Society of PA volunteers participated in the **Ned Smith Festival for Nature and Art**, which celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Ned Smith Center. It was a very well-attended event at MYO Park, outside of Millersburg, PA. The



event was held under the large shade trees along the Susquehanna River, where the breeze was a pleasant relief from the heat. With a steady stream of visitors stopping to visit our bluebird educational table, we were busy answering numerous questions, handing out literature and listening to many stories about their experiences with bluebirds and other cavity nesting birds that use their boxes. We passed out many of our handouts to families who had just come from the PA Game Commission's FREE nest box building event that was held in the morning so that they would have more information about getting started as bluebird landlords. BSP members David Price, Steven Horner and Bill Frantz helped with the box building. Cindy Self, Joan Watroba, and Joyce Horner assisted me at our booth and we welcomed 5 new BSP members and families to BSP.

Nancy Putt, Event Coordinator and BSP County Coordinator-York County

>> **Events Report continues on page 19**

## *Pike County: Bears vs. Bluebirds*

### **Bluebirds Win in Overtime by Cheryl Tomlinson**

I joined BSP in March at the 2023 Bluebird Conference and decided to become an active member. I accepted the position of BSP County Coordinator in Pike County – a county that had not had a Coordinator for some time.

Although I live in Malvern, PA (Chester County), my family owns a boathouse and spends summers at Porters Lake, in Pike County, at a 3,000-acre Private Club. A fellow member, also a birder, reported seeing bluebirds near the orchard and American Chestnut grove. The sighting of these bluebirds inspired me to put up a new bluebird house for their future use.

My son and I installed a Ken Leister bluebird box. The image below shows the nestbox location – with terrain of open space and surrounding trees – a perfect habitat for Eastern Bluebirds.



Within a short period of time Ken's nestbox attracted a bluebird couple, which constructed a nest inside of it. On three successive days (July 1, 2, and 3) a bluebird egg was laid, giving us a clutch of 3 eggs. Exciting! Then, we heard, to our dismay, that a bear was roaming around the orchard. We became fearful, as this could mean trouble for our bluebird pair. Our fears became a reality when, on July 4, we found that the entire bird house and its metal pole had been flattened to



the ground. One egg was cracked outside the box, one was missing, and one rolled to an upper corner inside the nestbox. We did everything we could to rectify this dire situation. First, we carefully righted the house and put its "good" egg back in the

nest. Because we did not want to hammer the post back in – fearful of harming the surviving egg – we supported it with rocks. While collecting rocks, we dislodged a snake! Oh no! Unfortunately, the next day we found no eggs inside the nestbox.

We did not give up. We decided to use a technique often used on a small apple tree – to encase it in a wire cage. A wire cage will also protect a nestbox from bear and deer damage, so we put one around the nestbox; it measures roughly 48 inches high and 42 inches on each side. An adult "arm-length" is required to reach the box from outside the cage. It should prevent another bear attack!



Our efforts were rewarded when we discovered, on

July 16 and 17, two new bluebird eggs in the nest. Then, on August 12, we found two bluebird nestlings! A joy to see! On August 18 the large nestlings were still inside the nestbox, but they looked ready to fledge!



**Events Report** continued from page 17

**October 9, 2023-Manheim Farm Show**

45 nestboxes were built from 1 to 3 pm. Dan Thomas, John Groff, and Dean Rust were BSP box builders today!!!

Hello Dr. Dean!

Thank you for your help in building this bluebird house with us today, it was the highlight of our farm show Experience! And it was our first time ever there. Thank you for taking the time to start the project early for us, as we had to pick up big brother from school.

Liz Hall



*Dean Rust with Aspen M. Hall, 4 years old.*

**Bon Air Country Club Loves Bluebirds**

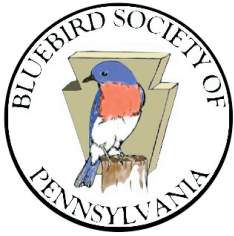
Our golf course in Glen Rock, PA has gone all in for our Bluebirds. In addition to a complete line of merchandise in the pro shop, we just recently installed all new hole flags, commemorating the Bluebird Trail, and the founding year of our club. Travis is our Golf Professional and is a big supporter of our efforts. My bluebird trail has been monitored for roughly 30 years, and of course I am known as the **Bluebird Man**.

Ken Smith  
Stewartstown, PA.



*Ken Smith displays Bluebird Pin Flag at Bon Air Country Club*





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Exton, PA 19341

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BSP RENEWAL DATES/Address Changes - Please check your mailing label on your regular mailed copy to see your renewal date. You can renew for one year or for multiple years, which will provide a discount. Both e-mail and regular mail members will also receive a letter by regular mail notifying of your renewal date. \*If you need to update your mailing address or your email address, please send changes to: BSP • P.O. Box 12 • Exton, PA 19341 or email: [nancyfrain@comcast.net](mailto:nancyfrain@comcast.net)

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## Congratulations to: Cheryl Tomlinson, Pike County

Your BSP Membership will be extended for a full year.

BSP is thrilled that many members are submitting material for the BSP newsletter, and we want to encourage more members to do so. By submitting your questions, nesting experiences, photos, and field observations, we will be able to offer a wider variety of articles and materials that are of interest to our readers. If your submissions include photos, please send the jpeg files.



Photo by  
Maria Prentice

To submit by regular mail, write: Newsletter Submission Contest on the front of the envelope and send to Joan Watroba, BSP Newsletter Editor, 2408 Bumble Bee Hollow Road, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055.

To submit by email, include BSP Newsletter Submission Contest in the subject line of your email and send to: [bluebirdhappy365@outlook.com](mailto:bluebirdhappy365@outlook.com).

One submission will be randomly drawn at the cutoff date for each newsletter edition: January 7, May 7, and September 7.

*Note: If contest winners are not currently members, BSP will provide a full year of BSP Membership.*

**BSP is a North American Bluebird Society Affiliate**



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