



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

In 2010 when I started to monitor my first Bluebird trails, I found the North Carolina Bluebird Society website and a short article entitled:

“Monitoring Tips”

1. Nest boxes should be monitored at least once a week during the nesting season.
 2. Check the boxes in the afternoon to avoid disturbing the mother in the morning, which is egg-laying time.
 3. Do NOT open occupied nest boxes once the nestlings are 14 days old.
 4. Tap on the side of the box before opening it. Do not stand directly in front of the entrance hole! The adult will usually leave, and the young will huddle down in the nest.
 5. **Warning:** Open the box very slowly and carefully. Be prepared for predators and wasps. Check the box quickly and leave.
 6. Remove and dispose of the nest as soon as the young have fledged. Clean the nest box thoroughly and rub unscented ivory soap on the interior surfaces as a wasp deterrent.
 7. ***Use a molded wood fiber nest cup in the nest boxes to facilitate nest building as well as monitoring activities.
- ***This number 7. “bullet point” has been my credo these last 11 years out on the Bluebird Trails which I monitor, and I would like to share with you some of the amazing discoveries that I have made regarding nesting cups.

Fasten your seat belt and let’s move forward ...

“Why Use a Nest Cup?”

A nest cup can be a 4” plastic, cardboard or molded wood fiber, either round or square in shape. The cups are also called “jiffy pots” or “peat pots” and they can be found in most hardware, garden, or nursery stores. The cost will range from 30 cents to a dollar depending on the thickness and grade. Buy a 3 pack or 5 pack, because the thinner ones will only last a year. This nest cup placed in your nesting box will act as a template for your mother Bluebird to weave her soft grass or pine needle nest. And she will build the nest in record time, as fewer building materials are usually needed. Many times, she will only use one-half of the cup for her nest. On other occasions, if she likes a deep nest, she will use the entire cup. It is her choice, as she is the expert artisan nest builder.

When eggs start appearing, they stay nestled down in the bottom of the nest where it is safe. Without a nest cup, perhaps you have seen that sometimes an egg gets pushed up onto the brim of the nest. Unfortunately, the mother may NOT



>> continued on page 2

A Message from the President continued from page 1

recognize this problem and the egg is “out of the zone of incubation” for a few days. That is bad enough. But there is a worse scenario – the egg is on the brim of the nest at the side door and when you come to monitor the box and tip open the door, the egg rolls out and hits the ground. It is rare but it can happen. With a nest cup, the eggs are always secure in the bottom of the nest!!

Another problem with large, deep, spongy, regular bluebird nests without a nest cup may have “soft spots” in the nesting construction. This can lead to “submerged egg syndrome”. Again, one of the eggs can find this soft spot and get inadvertently pushed down into the nest. The mother has no way to raise the egg and if she tries, it only goes down further. This egg will NOT hatch because it is “out of the zone of incubation” unless you notice the problem and correct it. With a nest cup, the evenness of the building material as it is spun into place in the cup stays at a defined thickness and prevents “egg sinking”.

The nest cup also acts as a moisture barrier. This is one of the best attributes of the nest cup. Every year in PA in April we have many days of continuous rain and wind. This coupled with low temps in the 38 to 42-degree range creates an unfortunate perfect storm that can descend onto a blissful happy nest and brings a quick death of hypothermia to a whole group of young chicks. This can be devastating to the Bluebird Landlord. YES, the weather can be cruel at times. During this time frame, there is a lack of insects to feed the nestlings which adds to the death sentence. Swirling wind and driving rains can enter the box via the entrance hole and the ventilation ports and then find the box floor. When the floor gets wet, that moisture then wicks up into the nesting material, creating a wet nest. Nest cups can prevent wet nests in April due to their moisture barrier characteristic!! Wet nests can be changed out using dry nests. However,

time is of the essence and who can be checking their nests every day?

For the Monitor, removing the nest for a weekly check is quite simple. A nest cup with eggs and/or nestlings, may be lifted out, viewed, photographed, and returned to the box in just a few seconds without moving one blade of grass or pine needle. By removing the entire nest cup, a good inspection can be made for ants or earwigs under the nest. Diatomaceous earth can then be introduced for either of these maladies and the cup can be returned with an exact orientation.

When monitoring bluebird boxes regularly and peering into the darkness of the box to count number of eggs or chicks, it can be a daunting task. Wouldn't it be nice to pull out the whole nest cup and its contents, to examine in the light of day?

Sometimes even mother Bluebird makes a skimpy, hasty nest and lays eggs before the nest is fully finished. She may be a novice bluebird mother and her timing has not yet been perfected. The eggs may even be on the bare floor! And the chicks may not stay in the ill-defined nest. Chicks can now get their legs or wings pinched when the door is closed. The nest cup precludes these problems. The nest cup provides a circular wall that protects the eggs and chicks even when the nest is shallow! The cup surrounds the chicks keeping them free from drafts. And when the nestlings become fledglings, O Happy Day, the nest cup can easily be cleaned and replaced for the next nesting.

May the Bluebird of Happiness always reside within you, and may your summer of 2020 with Bluebirds be the best season ever!!

Dr. Dean C. Rust

May 6, 2020

President of the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania



In This Issue

A Message from the President 1 - 2

In This Issue 3

BSP Officers 3

Board of Directors 3

BSP Chairpersons 4

Our Mission Statement 4

From the Editor 5 - 6

A Walk on the West Penn Trail 7

2019 BSP Bluebird Monitor’s Report Summary 8

My Favorite Bluebird Story 9

BSP Newsletter Submission Contest 9

It’s a Small, Small World for Bluebirds 10 - 11

My Back Yard 12

A Bluebird Story 13 - 14

Mailbag 14 - 16

The Joy of Monitoring a Bluebird Trail 17 - 19

Tribute to Ed Palmer, BSP County Coordinator
and Lynn Crouthamel, BSP Member 19

BSP Upcoming Events 20

BSP County Coordinator Update 20

Sharing My Time with Bluebirds and Purple Martins 21 - 22

Bluebird Society of PA Membership Form 23

Back Cover 24



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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, habits, 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.



Male Eastern Bluebird on Oakleaf Hydrangea

photo by Maria Prentice, New Jersey

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From the Editor *by Joan Watroba*

Every Day is “Earth Day”

*April 22, 2020 marked the
50th Anniversary of Earth Day.*

*The mission of Earth Day is to
raise awareness of the need for
environmental protection and
to inspire people to become
stewards of the natural world.*

*Earth Day is now a global event
celebrated in 193 countries.*



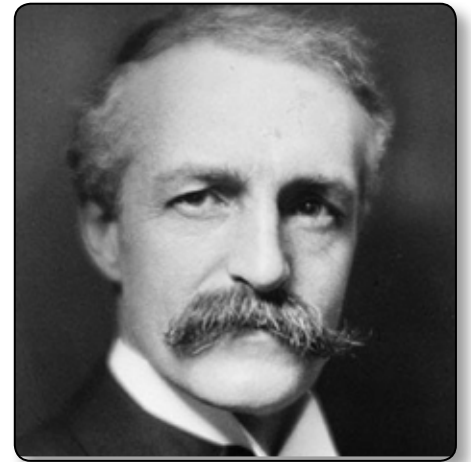
In 1969, Senator Gaylord Nelson from Wisconsin was determined to convince the Federal Government that the planet was at risk. He was considered one of the leaders of the modern environmental movement and developed the idea for Earth Day. He envisioned a large-scale, grassroots effort. American people responded by expressing their concern about what was

happening to the land, rivers, lakes, and air and to support the concept and designation of Earth Day. The first observance of Earth Day was in 1970 and prompted people of all ages to become actively involved in activities which benefit the environment.

America's public lands are now part of our nation's heritage and identity, but our public lands continue to face various threats ranging from selling off these lands and taking them from public control, removing key protections for land, water and wildlife, and irresponsible land use and development.

Concerns about the preservation of the natural environment were previously addressed by three of many other conservationists prior to the establishment of Earth Day. The following three environmentalists had ties to **Pennsylvania**:

GIFFORD PINCHOT (August 11, 1865 – October 4, 1946) was a member of the Boone and Crocket Club which was named in honor of Daniel Boone and Davy Crocket, hero hunters during that time. This was one of North America's first conservation organizations and was founded by President Theodore Roosevelt. The mission of the organization was the conservation of wildlife and habitat for the public by reducing the overharvesting of game animals and setting aside habitat for wildlife. Pinchot served as the first head of the U.S. Forest Service from 1905-1910 and was



Gifford Pinchot

instrumental in preserving millions of acres of land for public use.

Today, Americans who enjoy the most popular national forests have Roosevelt and Pinchot to thank. Gifford Pinchot settled in Pennsylvania and served as the 28th Governor of Pennsylvania. In 1961 the Gifford Pinchot State Park in York County was dedicated to honor his lifetime of commitment to conservation and the creation of forest reserves.

ROSALIE BARROW EDGE

Rosalie Barrow Edge (November 3, 1877 – November 20, 1962) was an environmental advocate, New York socialite, suffragist, and amateur birdwatcher. In 1929, she established the Emergency Conservation Committee to expose the conservation establishment's ineffectiveness, and strongly advocated for species preservation. In 1934, after decades of hawk and eagle slaughter on a ridge in the Appalachian Mountains in Pennsylvania, Edge unilaterally ended the annual shoot by

>> **From the Editor continues on page 6**

From the Editor continued from page 5

buying the property and turning it into a sanctuary. In 1934 Edge also founded the world's first preserve for birds of prey — **Hawk Mountain Sanctuary** near Kempton, Pennsylvania.

RACHEL CARSON (05/27/1907-04/14/1964) was born on a farm near Springdale, Pennsylvania near Pittsburgh. She was a Biologist and was instrumental in raising the environmental consciousness of the American public regarding the dangers and consequences of widespread pesticide use through her influential science environmental book, *Silent Spring*, which was released in 1962.



Rosalie Barrow Edge, founder of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary

Spending time in the outdoors has become even more important in my daily schedule, and I have become even more observant of the natural world. Walking along my bluebird trails to check my nest boxes has raised my spirits. At my

We are dependent on the Earth for our survival, too.

“We abuse land because we see it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”

Aldo Leopold

Since so many of us enjoy birds and wildlife, here are several ways that we can help them:

7 Simple Actions to Help Birds

For details: www.birds.cornell.edu/home/seven-simple-actions-to-help-birds/

1. Make Windows Safer
2. Keep Cats Indoors
3. Reduce Lawn, Plant Natives
4. Avoid Pesticides
5. Drink Shade-Grown Coffee
6. Protect Our Planet from Plastics
7. Watch Birds-Share What You See
Cornell Lab of Ornithology
birds.cornell.edu

Wishing you much joy in nature!

Joan Watroba

Joan Watroba, Editor



Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring*

Editor's Perspective of early 2020

The arrival of the terrible Coronavirus illness in early 2020 prevented people from gathering in groups due to the need for social distancing. Many planned activities related to “Earth Day” and other Spring conservation events, including our 2020 Annual Bluebird Conference, had to be cancelled. That was very disappointing.

bluebird trail at Simpson Park, the Yellow Breeches Creek is a great habitat to see many species of songbirds as well as shore birds. Watching the flow of the stream and listening to the cascading water brings me a calm feeling of “being one with all things”. I do not consider “Earth Day” as only an annual one-day event. Instead, I realize that every day is “Earth Day”- a celebration of Mother Earth and all living things, including us.

A Walk on the West Penn Trail *by Charles Lucas*

IN SPRING A FEW YEARS AGO, after the leaves appeared on the trees, a friend invited me to take a leisurely walk along a 1.7 mile trail in Indiana County, Pennsylvania. My friend, Andy and I met at Dick's Diner along Route 22 in Murrysville, Westmoreland County, where we had breakfast. It was a logical stop since our destination, West Penn Trail, is just off Route 22.

Although not a stranger to trails, this was my first time on this particular one. Andy on the other hand, is a veteran to this and many other trails in Pennsylvania. By the way, Pennsylvania boasts more than 1,200 miles of trails. However, that really isn't a great number when you consider how large our state is.

As I remember, the trail on either side of the tow path was thick with trees and other vegetation but was sufficiently wide enough for easy walking. Birds were not as vocal as they might have been a little earlier in the day. And of course, there were no bluebirds since heavily treed environs are not the normal habitat of our favorite bird.

As I mentioned earlier, the leaves were heavy on the trees by this time and the spring rains had ceased considerably, but there was strong evidence of their having passed through. The trail at times abuts the adjacent Conemaugh River. Swiftly moving waters earlier in April brought a great deal of debris to the railings of



wooden bridges we traveled across as we journeyed along our path.

On the return trek we were surprised at the sight of a scarlet tanager who perched motionless on the branch of a tree as we approached.

There was time enough for me to take my camera from its case and also time enough to change to a longer lens and quickly snap a picture. As they normally perch high in the canopy of trees, it was a little surprising to see this beautiful specimen at near eye level. The best part for me was the fact that I had never seen a scarlet tanager before.

End of story.

West Penn Trail

trails.dcnr.pa.gov and <https://trails.dcnr.pa.gov/trails/trail/trailview?trailkey=165>

On a personal note: my friend Andy and his wife Christine live in Butler County, while my wife Sarah and I live to the south near Pittsburgh, in Allegheny County. Also, I have the pleasure of working together with our editor, Joan Watroba, who's lives clear across the state in Cumberland County. She does the gathering of articles and stories; editing and writing, while I do the layout and design for the publication you are now reading.

Andy has walked West Penn Trail at least a dozen times. This is a list of the birds he has recorded seeing on his many walks.:

- | | | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| American Redstart | Catbird | Grackle | Red-eyed Vireo |
| Bald Eagle | Cedar Waxwing | Great Blue Heron | Redheaded Woodpecker |
| Baltimore Oriole | Cerulean Warbler | Hairy Woodpecker | Robin |
| Black Billed Cuckoo | Common Merganser | Hooded Warbler | Rose-breasted Grosbeak |
| Blackbird-Rusty | Common Raven | Indigo Bunting | Scarlet Tanager |
| Balckburnian Warbler | Common Yellowthroat | Kingfisher | Sparrow-Chipping |
| Black-Capped Chickadee | Cormorant | Least Flycatcher | Towhee |
| Blue Jay | Crow | Louisiana Water Thrush | Tree Swallow |
| Blue-gray Gnatcatcher | Downy Woodpecker | Mallard | Turkey |
| Blue Grosbeak | Eastern Bluebird | Mourning Dove | Turkey Vulture |
| Brown-headed Cowbird | Eastern Pewee | Osprey | Warbling Vireo |
| Brown Thrasher | Eastern Phoebe | Pileated Woodpecker | Wood Thrush |
| Cardinal | Goldfinch | Red-Bellied Woodpecker | Yellow Warbler |

2019 BSP Bluebird Monitor's Report Summary

Submitted by Shirley Halk, BSP State Monitoring Chair

Number of Nest Boxes Reported-3214

Bluebird Eggs - 5285

- 5204 blue eggs
- 81 white eggs

Bluebirds Fledged-4847

Other Native Cavity-Nesting Species Fledged:

Tree Swallow-3195

House Wrens-1731

Black-Capped Chickadees-146

Tufted Titmouse-12

Carolina Wrens-10



illustration by Susan Renkel

Thanks to all who submitted your Annual Nest Box Report to BSP. A detailed report by Monitor and County is available on the BSP web site: www.thebsp.org

Comments on the reports listed the following factors which affected nesting success:

- House Sparrows (many monitors successfully used both passive and active methods to control this non-native species)



photo by Richard Hess

- House Wrens (native songbirds) Monitors relocated nest boxes to more open areas to reduce interference
- Weather Conditions (extreme heat in summer).
- Bears (Lycoming County)
- Please note that we did not receive any nesting reports from almost half of the counties in PA. If you live in any of those counties and monitor nest boxes, please send in your nesting data to BSP so that your county can be represented.

Weekly Monitoring Forms and the Annual Nest Box Report Forms are also available on the BSP web site:

www.thebsp.org

- **Please submit your annual report by October 15th each year** (to enter the Early Bird Contest Drawing) Otherwise by December 15th to the BSP State Monitoring / TBT Trails Chairperson.

Shirley Halk,
42 Park Drive.
Grantville, Pa.17028

My Favorite Bluebird Story *by Crickett (Bonnie) Klinger*

I wanted to easily feed the birds without having to trudge outside through the cold wind, deep snow, or rain. My husband does not enjoy large, involved projects, so I came up with something simple for a feeder that would reach up to our large living room window.

I found a sheet of wood and put a frame around it so that the food would not spill out. We then screwed the bottom of the frame into a 4"x4" post after my husband shaved off a small amount of wood at an angle. This helped the water to drain off under one side of the frame. Then we poured cement into a plastic bucket and inserted the post into it and waited for it to harden. It worked perfectly!

My favorite bluebird story is when I took three big handfuls of



photo by Wendell Long via sialis

mealworms and scattered them across the front side of the tray. Before I even brought my hand back inside of the window, a dozen or more bluebirds landed on the tray, while more waited impatiently for their turn to indulge. I noticed a smaller male bluebird which stood back close to the end of my arm, not eating. Maybe it was a juvenile. With my other hand, I scooped up some more mealworms and put

them directly in front of the smaller bird, which slowly began to eat them. Minutes later I felt something odd on the opposite end of my arm. When I looked, I saw that this smaller bluebird was stroking my arm with his wing and there were not even any mealworms on my arm or in my hand. It seemed that the little bluebird was expressing its gratitude to me for feeding it. This was certainly the best "Thank You" that I have ever received!

Editor's Note: Adult bluebirds often wave their wings during the courtship period, and young bluebirds may "wingwave" to beg for food. However, in this case, I think that it was a sweet gesture of gratitude.

BSP Newsletter Submission Contest

Contest Winner Congratulations to: **Darlaine Manning**

Please select an item from the BSP Store at www.thebsp.org and then call BSP Merchandise Manager, Susan Durgin at (717) 732-5325 to arrange for the delivery of your prize.

The BSP Newsletter Committee 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.

1. Your entry can be a general question or article about bluebirds

or other nature topics, a write-up about something that you observed in your yard or on your trail, an original poem, a trail monitoring tip, or any non-copyrighted material. Please send copies only of printed materials or PDF's/word documents of electronic submissions and jpeg files of photos.

2. To submit by regular mail, write: Attn: Newsletter Submission contest on the front of the envelope and send to: Joan Watroba, Newsletter Editor, 2408 Bumble Bee Hollow Road, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055-0756

3. To submit by e-mail, include BSP Newsletter Submission Contest in the subject line of your e-mail to: bluebirdhappy365@outlook.com

4. The latest date to submit items is the following: Spring - January

7, Summer- May 7, Fall/ Winter- September 7. The Newsletter Editor will then review the items and reserve the right to include your submission in an upcoming edition. Since we cannot return any items, please send copies only of materials and/or photos. Please include your contact information-name, address, phone number or e-mail address (optional) with your entry. Thank you in advance for your submissions!

One submission will be randomly drawn at the cut-off date for each newsletter edition, and the person whose entry was randomly picked will have their choice of any item offered in the BSP Merchandise Store website: www.thebsp.org

It's a Small, Small World for Bluebirds

April 26, 2020-E-mail from Rich Leatherman:

Hi Joan, I hope you are doing well. I am one of two Montgomery County Coordinators for BSP. I recently read the June 1999 issue of the BSP's Bluebird Trails and Tales. Back then, you were the Committee Chair of Fundraising. Do you remember a man by the name of Doug LeVasseur, who was one of the speakers at the first conference? In March of this year I met him at the Grand Canyon of Arizona, and he was wearing a hat with a bluebird decal. He was past president of NABS and OBS (Ohio Bluebird Society). He presently resides in Arizona. He shared his story about a piece of art that he bid on at the auction that year. He was the second to the last bidder, but there's more to the story...Happy Bluebirding

Rich Leatherman

P.S. We have 4 young blues in our back yard enjoying the mealworms.

March 26, 2020 -Letter from Doug LeVasseur to Rich Leatherman

Hi Rich-Wasn't that like just crazy for two bluebirders to run into each other on the ridge of the Grand Canyon? And the way that we were carrying on, I'm Sure many of the passerby thought we were long lost best of friends!

I also would like your help with something on my bucket list. I am going to send you a picture of a picture. Anyway, the picture is of a Ranger, and a boy looking into a bluebird box. It is hanging on the wall of our place back in Ohio.

You might recall that I was involved with NABS (North American Bluebird Society) and so was asked to speak at the very first convention/annual meeting of the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania. It was at this meeting where I saw this line drawing at the auction. I really loved it and was determined to outbid anyone who thought that it shouldn't be mine. Finally, there was just myself and another lady bidding. She threw in a higher bid, but I knew she was slowing down. I knew I would likely get the drawing with one more bid.

Then someone came up to me and casually mentioned that the lady



Doug LeVasseur (left) and Rich Leatherman meet up at the "Rim" of the Grand Canyon

I was bidding against had a personal connection to the two people in the picture. I can't remember exactly what it was. Perhaps the child was her grandson or the Ranger was her son. So, when I heard this, I refrained from outbidding the lady's prior bid. She bought the picture. So how did it end up hanging in my living room?

Well, a number of years later, a member of the BSP came through southern Ohio, called me, and said that he had something for me. And he dropped off the picture! Well, the lady who won the picture at the auction knew that I loved the picture, too, but had stopped bidding so that she could have it. It seems that she had enjoyed having the picture these past several years, knew that I would too, so was sending it to me! Just shows to me that what goes around, comes around. I gave up bidding so

she could have the picture, she buys it, and then it ends up hanging in my living room! So, Rich, I would like your help in identifying if possible, the two people in the picture. A good lead would be to know the name of the artist. The picture is in Ohio and I cannot seem to remember seeing a name on the picture. I'll work on finding it out. In the event we can find a close family member who would appreciate having the picture, I would like to give it to them.

Best Regards, Doug

April 4, 2020 -Excerpts from another letter from Doug LeVasseur to Rich Leatherman

Good Morning, Rich,
I hope all is well there in Souderton with you and yours. My wife Ethel-Marie and I are doing just fine here in

>> continued on page 11

It's a Small, Small World for Bluebirds

Apache Junction, AZ. I have always been a person who enjoys working with my hands, working outdoors, and doing "projects". I have told people that I can keep as busy here on this 100 by 150 ft. lot as I do back in Ohio on 100 acres.

Of course, the one big drawback is that there are no Bluebirds here in "The Valley". We do have that place south of Flagstaff. It is within walking distance of the Coconino National Forest and I put up six or eight bluebird boxes in some of the pine openings there and have had moderate success in raising a few Western Bluebirds.

I usually check these boxes just a few times a year...as when we are returning to or coming from Ohio... Anyway, I do receive the BSP newsletter and I read Dean Rust's article starting on the front page. It is sad that so many other very deserving conservation organizations these days find it difficult to attract members...any members and especially young members. But this is nothing new.

When I was more involved with NABS and OBS (Ohio Bluebird Society) it was nearly always a hot topic around the boardroom and lunch tables. One rather novel idea as to how to "spread the word" is something that I came across at a meeting of either some state bluebird organization or NABS annual meeting. I was given a pin that had a picture of a pair of bluebirds on it, and above the pair it says, "Ask Me About Bluebirds".

Can you imagine the impression we would have made on each other if either one of us had been wearing such a pin on the Rim that day?! So it's not like I wear the pin every day, but I do wear it on certain occasions and at certain events. In Ohio every year we have a Wildlife Diversity Conference. Hundreds of "like-minded people" attend it. The members of a fishing club I belong

to in Cleveland sends volunteers to a spring fishing camp and a fall hunting camp each year. One can find "like-minded people" here too and there are many other examples. The nice thing is that you are not in anyone's face. You are responding to someone's inquiries prompted by seeing the bluebird pin.

Best Regards from Doug

Editor's Note: Please contact Doug directly at doug.levasseur@gmail.com if you are familiar with this wonderful drawing and can identify the artist and/or the persons who are pictured in it.

I notice that on the bottom left of the print it says, "Preserving Their Future". My interpretation of this title is that it highlights the importance of inspiring young people to become actively involved in nature and bluebirding. This ensures that both the bluebirds and the children will have bright and happy futures in the natural world.

It certainly is a small, small world when it comes to bluebird enthusiasts! Even though Doug Levasseur lives outside of PA, he has been an active member of BSP for many years. He upgraded his membership level to a Life Member, which demonstrates his commitment to provide a higher level of financial support to the mission of BSP

and to the bluebirds.

Richard Leatherman is an active member of BSP by serving as BSP Co-County Coordinator for Montgomery County. He is a skilled woodworker who builds nest boxes and is involved in setting up and monitoring bluebird trails to promote nesting success of bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting species.



Print titled, "Preserving their Future"

My Backyard *by Ken Leister*

As I stand in the kitchen, looking out the garden window that is over the sink, I am able to see the bird-related equipment which, over the years, I have built and installed. The yard is a very busy place for my bird friends. The first piece of equipment which comes into view is a special Bluebird Feeder. This is a combination suet and mealworm feeder. The usual way this combination feeder is built is by having

produced almost two thousand nest box kits and nest boxes. The machines in the woodshop are basically set up to produce nest boxes. When I look from the kitchen window



the mealworms covered and the suet exposed. But I have covered both suet and mealworms with a wire cage—Why? I am tired of putting suet out in the morning and by noon the block of suet is gone. (I also make my own suet.) The big birds, like the Starlings come and eat until the block is gone. So, with this new feeder, the bluebirds have their own private feeder. The second piece of equipment is a ten-foot pole with three feeders on it. Two feeders are seed feeders, and the third is a suet cage that I fill twice a week. At least I am feeding the big birds something! The third piece is a nest box that has the start of bluebird nest. This box usually fledges bluebirds every year.

At the end of the property is my woodshop that over the years has

to the woodshop, I can view all equipment in a staggered line. When I stand in the middle of the backyard and look south (or right) I can see the nest box in my neighbor's yard. That box has a bluebird nest with five eggs in it. When I look to the left (north), I can see the nest box in my other neighbor's yard—empty at this time. These boxes were all built in my shop.

Between the house and the first combination feeder is a patio with a heated birdbath. This provides fresh water all year round. Next to the birdbath, along our all-purpose porch, we have a large rhododendron bush with a variety of ornamental nest boxes which are there for the house wren and the chickadee. So far, I have been lucky. The boxes in the rhododendron

have been able to keep the house wrens busy, and they stay out of the other nest boxes.

I count myself lucky, for over a period of three days I have observed the following birds: Chipping Sparrow, White-Throated Sparrow, House Sparrow, House Finch, Dark-Eyed Junco, Song Sparrow, Mourning Dove, Robin, Chickadee, Cowbird, Northern Flicker, Common Crow, Grackle, Downy Woodpecker, Red-Bellied Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, Blue Jay, Cardinal, Starling, White-Breasted Nuthatch, Red-Winged Blackbird, and the Eastern Bluebird.

So much for the back yard. Someday I will tell you about my front yard!



A Bluebird Story *by Dr. Dean C. Rust, BSP President*

May 11, 2020 Lancaster Country Club Bluebird Trail

MONDAY 05/11/2020 was a blustery day with starts and stops of rain and 54-degree temperatures. Not a pleasant day to be outside, but it was a Monday (LCC is closed on Mondays) and two weeks had elapsed since my last check of the Bluebird boxes. It was time. With warm clothing, rain gear, hat, gloves, and a golf cart, how bad could it be? Here we go, starting with Box #1 and hoping to get to Box #50 if the weather holds in about 3.5 hours. What exciting things might I find today? The expectation of “monitoring a Bluebird Trail” is always an adventure. Today would be no different.

After the first half of the trail, with box #24 checked out and logged in, it was time for a break to warm up, get some hot coffee and grab a snack. Back to the golf cart in 30 minutes, I was energized, and the sun came out and made a huge difference. It was all downhill now and the most scenic iconic part of the LCC golf layout, the Flynn Course, straight ahead. This is where they held the Women’s Golf Tournament Open in 2015.

Box #26 was my second stop and checking my notes from April 15 and April 27, I knew I had a full Bluebird nest with 5 eggs in this box. I was expecting to find baby Bluebird nestlings – a bunch of them. When I opened the front door to the “knock-off Pederson box” the first thing I saw was a flash of brilliant Azure blue. Oh, I thought, there is a parent inside... how fun!! But the bird did NOT move. It just laid there as still as can be. Time stood still for a moment – I wasn’t prepared to open the front door to a crime scene, but that is exactly what I had just done. I was frozen in slow motion and I finally came to the

realization that this would be my most unforgettable moment in my “Bluebird nest box door-opening career!”



I saw three eggs pushed to the side and the nest was in a turbulated condition. This nest looked like it had been hit by a tornado. There was a gray lifeless nestling under some nesting material and the male Bluebird, the three eggs and the corpse of the nestling were all quickly placed in a bag.

Now what do I do? There was still a pile of nesting material on the floor of the box and as I contemplated sweeping out the remaining grasses, I saw movement. I froze again! A feathered chick about 9 or 10 days old was moving about in the grasses. My

first thought was that I immediately need to find a “foster home” for this little orphan so I ran back to my golf cart and got a nest cup. I placed the remaining grasses in the cup and shaped a nest and put the little nestling in the cup. Then I covered the cup with a spare wool glove and went back to the cart. As I was sitting in the cart thinking about all the possibilities I would have on the rest of the trail for a foster home with siblings the same age, the better half of my brain started some much needed cognitive reasoning. Hey, wait a minute, slow down buddy, you don’t need foster parents! Put the youngster back in the box because there must be a bird taking care of him/her? He or she would NOT be living without another bird actively feeding



insects for the last two weeks. OK – that seems like a good idea. I took the nest cup with the nestling back up the hill to the box. Closed the door and walked 15 feet away to see what would happen next?

>> continued on page 14

A Bluebird Story *continued from page 13*

In about 2-3 minutes a female Bluebird showed up. WOW! It must be the Mother? And with no hesitation, she went right into the box with an insect to feed the nestling. This was no orphan, this little bird had a caring mother. And this female Bluebird has been caring for the last member of her family through some really difficult times the last two weeks. Not to

mention having a dead nestling and the father's carcass laying right on top of the nest the whole time. She has been possibly incubating and feeding in some really tough circumstances.

The resilience of the Eastern Bluebird is unsurpassed when the going gets tough (the tough get going). This story highlights the impeccable parenting skills of the Eastern Bluebird

female and her consummate love for her offspring. Bluebirds truly are altruistic! I know I will never forget this event and I wanted to share it with you. Life is precious...each and every one.

Dean C. Rust, President of the Bluebird Society of PA
05/11/2020

Mailbag

Update on the Bluebird Trail at Twin Woods Golf Course

Dear Joan,
First of all, I am thrilled to be a BSP member and learning how to be a friend to these beautiful birds. I am especially excited to have a trail of my very own to monitor. Marilyn (Michalski) continues to be an amazing partner and resource and graces me with her presence every few weeks. I am so thankful for her guidance.

The Twin Woods Golf Course Trail is small with four boxes, but Bluebirds are certainly present in the area

so we are optimistic that it will be successful even this first year. Marilyn suggested that I send this mystery nest along to you to see if someone can identify the builder. We have speculated and have a few guesses but would appreciate any ideas. It is an odd mixture of materials, but the area doesn't really offer much in the way of pine needles or fine grasses.

We also have a nice Bluebird nest in Box #2. It looks like it is close to completion, so hopefully we'll have some eggs next week. As you can see from that photo,



Bluebird Nesting at Home Nest Box



New Location of Box # 3

>> Contest continues on page 15

Mailbag *continued from page 14*

Update on the Bluebird Trail *continued from page 14*



Bluebird Nest Made with Odd Materials

it has some unusual building materials included, but the builder was very present, so we know that this one belongs to a Bluebird.

The other two boxes haven't generated much interest yet, so we moved Box#3 to another site and left #4 as is because it had a few sprigs that could be from some tree swallows. Next week should tell us if anything is happening with these two.

We put a fifth new box in my front yard which was quickly claimed. Now we have a nest with five eggs that I am keenly watching. The parents are quick to let me know if I am gardening too close to them!

Thanks for any guesses that you might have about our mystery nest. All best regards, Darlaine Manning

Editor's Reply: Hi Darlaine-So happy to hear from you and about your active bluebird trail at the Twin Woods Golf Course in Hatfield, PA. Thanks for sending this article and the photos to me. I would love to include it



Mystery Nest

with your photos in the upcoming Summer issue of the BSP Newsletter if that would be O.K. with you. Here in PA we have several very productive bluebird trails on golf courses. Our President, Dean Rust has trails on golf courses, and he created a handbook with tips for setting up bluebird boxes in these special habitats. I have copied him with this message.

I would guess that the mystery nest is a Tufted Titmouse. They use a combination of leaves and moss and sometimes bark. Please keep me posted. They are a native cavity nesting songbird and sometimes use nest boxes. Thanks for your support and interest in the bluebirds!

Follow-up: Mystery Nest Identified- On June 7, five nestlings fledged from this nest. Monitor Darlaine Manning and I identified the fledglings as Carolina Wrens from their distinctive white eye stripes and rusty brown feathers. The parents were singing their distinctive, loud "teakettle, teakettle, teakettle" from nearby branches.

Marilyn Michalski

Mailbag

Dean,

Thank you a lot for your help. It really was an experience for me learning what a conduit, lath screw, clamp, is, asking for help at Lowe's, figuring out how to use a small drill with a bit to tighten the lath screws/clamps.

At some point I would like to make stovepipe baffles for the 4 bluebird boxes I monitor at the park. It will be a challenge for me but putting up the bluebird box has helped my confidence in an area that I have little experience, skills, and knowledge.

I have 3 little blue dishes out with mealworms. One on top of the bluebird box, one on a little stand, one in a bluebird feeder. Do you think this is all right or is it not good to have them so near the box? So far I observed a Carolina Wren on the blue cup on the stand. The meal worms I put in the cups in the morning are gone by the end of the day. I hope you and your family are safe and well.

Sue Miller

Editor's Note: Best to keep a food source away from the top of the nest box during the nesting season to prevent other birds from harassing the nesting songbirds.

Sue,

Thanks for sending the finished project photo!! GREAT JOB!!! What a super learning experience!! Your next project will be much easier now that you have some



skills. I hope you attract a darling pair of Blues to call your nest box, pole & baffle setup. "Home Sweet Home"! Keep me posted!

Dean Rust

My Early Days of Bluebirding

Having lived on a farm all my life, I helped my Dad in the fields when I was a teenager. He would let me mow, rake, and bale hay, disc ground and plow corn, but when equipment broke down, I was instructed to come in and get him.

My husband and I bought a farm in the early 70s and he mounted 6 nest boxes on the back fencerow. Monitoring bluebird boxes was a new experience for

me because I never used a hammer, a screwdriver, or a drill before. Out in the fencerow, I had to teach myself, with no man around, to monitor the six nest boxes all by myself. The dog was my only companion.

I can relate to Sue's frustrations at first, but now can dwell more on the beautiful, satisfying experience of monitoring 90 bluebird nest boxes 40 years later.

Joyce Stuff

The Joy of Monitoring a Bluebird Trail *by Marilyn Michalski*

IN 2019 the BSP Board approved a “Mini-Grant” for eight new nest boxes and mounting posts to create two new Bluebird Trails. This grant generated excellent outcomes for both Eastern Bluebirds and their human helpers, Monitors.

Everyone who monitors a “Bluebird Trail” is in for an adventure. Monitors face new and educational experiences. Not only will they meet new friends, but they will be entertained by the activity of cavity-nesting birds. Monitoring gives a wealth of Nature’s abundance to those involved, and it also protects the lives of native American songbirds. Bluebird monitors can take some credit for the small increase in the Eastern Bluebird population in the last decade. We believe that without monitors on our Bluebird Trails, cavity-nesters would be subjected to many more dangers and threats. * See Bernie Daniels’ article in the Winter 2019-20 issue of BLUEBIRD, the publication of the North American Bluebird Society.

Below are highlights of four new monitors in the BSP, who are interested in native birds and offered to learn about monitoring. They are developing a wide range of capabilities out “in the field.” Initially, we may have only basic knowledge about nesting birds, but we will gain information and experience rapidly. Monitors learn by doing!



Diane Johnson

DIANE JOHNSON – Bluebell, PA
 A BSP member, she had been volunteering at a conservation area, but lost her contact there. I invited her to join me at Bluestone Golf Course, where I had monitored for five years. The Bluebird Trail there, with 14 nest boxes, plus a spare box, was fledging mostly Bluebirds and Tree Swallows. A serious House Sparrow population had been reduced. Since she and her husband Barry live only a block away, this was the perfect trail for her. Diane took over full-time (once a week) monitoring of this Trail in 2020. She has already made this trail more effective. After encountering vandalism on a couple of nest boxes, she obtained the help of Golf Course Superintendents to deter further damage. Diane also made essential repairs to boxes after she found the opening sides stuck shut. There is never a dull moment in Monitoring. On April 14th she found several nest boxes with full clutches of bluebird eggs.



Joyce Phillips

JOYCE PHILLIPS – Kennett Square, PA
 Joyce began monitoring at Pocopson Park, in Southern Chester County over a year ago. With eight nest boxes, this trail had been overwhelmed by House Wrens. Joyce helped the bluebird population by removing two of the nest boxes monopolized by Wrens. She then moved another nest box to a more open field, away from trees and bushes where Wrens like to nest. Last year the Pocopson Trail fledged 19 bluebirds. Joyce recommended that we initiate a bluebird trail at the new Unionville Community Park in West Chester, PA. This is an excellent example of the way monitors generate ground-breaking ideas to increase bluebird populations. Thanks to the Mini-Grant, Joyce received four new bluebird nest boxes and mounting posts. She installed these early in 2020. With cooler than normal weather, none of these nest boxes had evidence of bluebird nests as of April 8th. But we are confident this trail will have good news soon, as we have seen Eastern Bluebirds in the park.

>> continued on page 18

The Joy of Monitoring a Bluebird Trail *continued from page 17*

DARLAINE MANNING – Lansdale, PA
Eager to start a “Bluebird Trail,” Darlaine believed a golf course would provide fruitful nesting territory for bluebirds. She contacted golf course managers in Montgomery County and got several invitations. After on-site visits, she was invited to install a new “Bluebird Trail” free of charge at Twin Woods Golf Course in Hatfield, PA. This is the other recipient specified in the Mini-Grant. We installed four nest boxes there in March.

Twin Woods is a small (9-hole) course open to the public. Monitoring on a weekly basis. Darlaine discovered a bluebird nest on April 2nd and saw a male bluebird in the area. After three weeks, two of the nest boxes remained empty, so we changed their locations.



Darlaine Manning

We think that territorial aggression from Robins and Mockingbirds prevented Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows from nesting. When nest boxes in bluebird territory go unused, we know something is deterring adult cavity-nesters from building nests.

We will develop opinions as to the source of this problem – knowing we can adjust our responses and actions as new information comes to light. We must stay alert to everything on our trails. We watch for dangers, experiment with solutions, and try to improve the lives of bluebirds and other native birds who use cavities. We often take binoculars on our bluebird trails to ID the birds in the area. We may provide a source of water, as all birds require it. The BSP has generated a list of tools/supplies that are useful while monitoring. This list also appears in President Dean Rust’s book entitled “The Beloved and Charismatic Bluebird.”

Sarah Soto – Conservationist in Upper Providence Township, Montgomery County

Sarah learned about BSP when she visited the PA Farm Show in January. As an employee of Upper Providence Township, she contacted me about renewing an old bluebird trail on the grounds of the Anderson Farm Park on Hopwood Road. Sarah and I toured the old trail before the restrictions of the Coronavirus were in place. We found it in poor condition, with nest boxes toppled over, floors missing, infestations of mice, and rotted wood comprising what was left of the other nest boxes.

Montgomery County Co-Coordinator Rich Leatherman offered to help, and constructed 22 new nest boxes, some of which he will donate to this

township. Unfortunately, as we were about to install Rich’s nest boxes, we were stopped by COVID-19 and the closing of U.P. Township facilities. A single new nest box, which Sarah and I installed in February, as a preliminary experiment, could not be monitored. Although it might have entered our thoughts, we will not cross a police barrier. We received permission to install nest boxes early in May. We will update our readers on this trail soon.

We are all impacted by the 2020 pandemic. Some monitors have found their bluebird trails in “lock-down,” but many are open – and those we monitor. We will check our trails once a week, if possible. We can, and do so successfully, request an exemption from “coronavirus” restrictions, because we remain outdoors -- away from buildings, homes, and other occupied locations. Without monitoring, bluebirds are subject to a



Sarah Soto and Richard Leatherman

wide range of dangers, many of which we can eliminate and prevent.

>> continued on page 19

The Joy of Monitoring a Bluebird Trail *continued from page 18*

Few things in life are as healthy and invigorating as monitoring bluebird boxes. We know that medical professionals recommend walking. As we walk briskly in the open and breathe fresh air on our bluebird trails – we get improvements to our health! Plus, we can tell our friends, acquaintances, and strangers that “We monitors are doing essential conservation work!”

Basic Tips for Success in Monitoring:

First, do no harm. Bluebirds are not always predictable, because many factors influence their nesting schedule. There may be long delays between nest building and egg laying, and eggs may take longer to hatch if the female does not begin incubation right after laying them. We must be patient.

Be gentle – the eggs of small birds are extremely fragile. It is advisable NOT to touch them. When eggs are cracked, they will not hatch, and the female may abandon the nest.

Never let non-native species use nest boxes. House Sparrows (HOSP) and European Starlings (EUST) are NOT protected birds. It is better to remove a nest box than to let HOSPS and Starlings nest in it.

Read the literature! The BSP booklet entitled Everything You Need to Know about Bluebirds is an excellent resource. Pages 11 and 12 describe how to monitor a nest box. Pages 25-26 discuss ways to prevent House Sparrows from using our nest boxes. We also recommend Dean Rust’s book, mentioned earlier in this article and the list of Monitoring Tips which appear in his President’s Message column in this issue.

Communication Leads To Success in Monitoring:

A Monitor does not need a lot of knowledge or experience to begin checking nest boxes. What counts is a willingness to search for answers, and to communicate with fellow Monitors. There are many experienced monitors in the BSP, including our State County Coordinators, whose phone numbers

and e-mails can be found in the Spring issue of our BSP newsletter and are also posted on the BSP web site. We also have numerous bluebird web sites to provide excellent information: Two of my favorites are: www.thebsp.org and www.sialis.org

Also, BSP President, Dean Rust can respond to your questions on the Hot Line on the BSP web site. www.thebsp.org.

The enjoyment of birds is universal. Since birds have been around for millions of years, far longer than our species, we have had birds to grace our lives from the start of our history. As is true of us today, the earliest humans must have been uplifted by their beauty and flight, a capability that will always inspire us! Monitoring bluebird boxes allows us to experience a closer and greater appreciation of these beautiful and inspiring creatures.

Editor’s Note: Marilyn Michalski serves as BSP Co-County Coordinator for Chester County, BSP Board Member, and BSP Junior Member Chair.

Tribute to Ed Palmer, BSP County Coordinator

BSP is saddened to learn of the passing of Ed Palmer, who passed away on April 18th. Ed was a BSP County Coordinator for Mercer County for a long time, he served the Society well.

Ken Leister,
BSP State County Coordinator

Ed served BSP for many years in the capacity of County Coordinator for Mercer County. He had promoted the nesting success of bluebirds long before he became a BSP County Coordinator. He requested the Bluebird Fact sheets so that he could teach others in his county about how to help the bluebirds. He attended a County Coordinator meeting even before he became a County Coordinator. Ed Palmer was a wonderful person to know.

Joyce Stuff, Franklin County

Another Tribute to Lynn Crouthamel

I was sorry to learn of Lynn’s passing. He was such a great guy and was so dedicated to helping the BSP in its early years.

Many years ago when I first got involved with the BSP, Dave Pietsch and I made many trips to Sellersville to pick up a truck full of Lenker Bluebird boxes that Lynn made. Lynn donated all materials and his valuable time for our Bluebird friends. Lynn will be greatly missed.

Bill Strauss
Former BSP Woodworking Chair

Editor’s Note: Please see the complete Tribute to Lynn on Page 8 of the Spring 2020 issue of the BSP Newsletter.

BSP Upcoming Events

MARK YOUR CALENDAR — PLAN TO ATTEND!

BSP Board Meetings:

- July 23, 2020
6 p.m. Thursday Evening
- Oct 22, 2020
6 p.m. Thursday Evening

**** Please contact Dean Rust, BSP President to attend these meetings and to determine the venue/method the meeting will be conducted. _**

All BSP members are invited to attend BSP Board meetings to learn about upcoming BSP activities and events and to share your ideas about a variety of issues related to bluebird conservation. Contact Dean Rust, BSP President prior to the meeting dates to arrange to join BSP meetings.

Dean's contact phone number is 717-669-0167 or e-mail Dean at: july7ds@aol.com

Please join us at our meetings!

2021 Pennsylvania Farm Show

- Saturday, January 9 thru
- Saturday, January 16th, 2021

Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex
2300 N. Cameron Street
Harrisburg, PA
<http://www.farmshow.state.pa.us>

This is a fun event for the entire family, with interesting events, 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 Store Booth. BSP will offer nest box kits for \$10 for new BSP members. Contact Nancy Putt, Event Chair at 717-432-2647 or e-mail: bluebirds@pa.net to volunteer. BSP will refund the parking fee for those who can fill a 4- hour time slot.

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

2021 BSP Annual Conference

March 12-13, 2021
Best Western/Lehigh Valley Hotel and Conference Center
300 Gateway Drive
Bethlehem, PA.

www.lehighvalleyhotel.com
Direct Line to Hotel 610-866-5800

BSP has reserved a block of rooms at the Best Western/Lehigh Conference Center at a group rate, so please let them know that you are attending the BSP Conference when you reserve your lodging.

Details and reservation information will be available in early 2021

The Annual BSP Conference offers excellent speakers, demonstrations, vendors, and an opportunity to learn from, and socialize with people who share your love of bluebirds and enjoy the wonders of the natural world. A special mailing regarding the conference, including registration information, speaker bios, and itinerary will be sent out to all active BSP members in early 2021. Registration forms and Itinerary will also be posted on the BSP web site: www.thebsp.org closer to the event

BSP County Coordinator Updates

Montgomery County

Kevin Sekula
267-663-9677 (correct phone number)
ksekula2002@yahoo.com

- Kevin is a new BSP Co-County Coordinator and joins Rich Leatherman who already serves Montgomery County.
- We are seeking active BSP Members who wish to be a contact for BSP and

to help people in their counties to learn about bluebirds. If you live in any of the following counties and wish to learn how you can serve as BSP County Coordinator, please contact Ken Leister, BSP State Coordinator at: kenapeg@aol.com or call him at 610-696-5271

- Bradford • Greene • Huntingdon, • McKean • Mercer • Mifflin • Snyder, Susquehanna, and • Union



photo by Richard Hess

Sharing My Time with Bluebirds and Purple Martins *by Bill Wenger*

I remember the exact place where I saw my first Bluebird. It was on Thoms Run Road in South Fayette Twp., Allegheny County. The year was 1970 or 71. I always think of the magnificent colors of that male Bluebird. They were not as common then as they are now, thanks to many backyard birders and members of the BSP.

In 1974, I purchased a half acre of ground in northwest PA, by the Pymatuning Reservoir. One of the first things that I did the next year was to put up a Bluebird house. I can't say for sure if we had Bluebirds that year, but we started to have nesting Bluebirds every year after that. At some point, we lost a Bluebird nest to a House Sparrow. The war was on. I installed several more boxes and used them for trapping that non-native species. I don't know how many disappeared after tripping that Van Ert trap, but after several years, I did see those numbers decline. Between the Van Ert trap, a repeating trap, and a pellet rifle, House Sparrows and Starlings began to decline there.

In 2004, I noticed a new bird visiting our Bluebird houses. It had a white belly and a purplish back. Was it a Purple Martin, or a Tree Swallow? I found out that both of these birds belonged to the Swallow family, and the Purple Martin was the largest member of that family. Both birds were rare in this area at the time, but especially the Purple Martin. I remember making trips to Pymatuning as a child and seeing an apartment style birdhouse in the country, filled with pairs of birds on little porches. There was one right down the road from me that always drew my attention. That particular house and many others had been vacant for decades.

Upon reading about Purple Martins, I found that in early June of 1972, Hurricane Agnes came up the East Coast and stalled over Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio, as well as many of the coastal states. It lasted



Gourd Rack

7-10 days with a lot of rain and windy conditions. I found out that Purple Martins are aerial insectivores, so they only eat flying insects. Then I found out that if it is below 48-50 degrees, or if it's raining or windy, bugs don't fly. The



Lonestar House

conditions caused by Hurricane Agnes kept the bugs from flying. At that time, it was in the middle of nesting season. The adult birds couldn't find bugs to feed the nestlings, and they died.

Eventually, the parents started dying off as well. They had perished before the landlords realized what had happened.

In the winter of 2004, I decided to begin a long journey into the world of Purple Martins. Martins are very unique in that they have evolved into a species that only nests in housing provided by man. For centuries, Indians hung gourds for Martins near their villages hoping to attract them. The Martins would alert the Indians if predators would come into their camp, and the birds benefitted from the protection that the Indians provided them. Unlike Bluebirds, Martins are a colonial nester, so they like to nest with other Martins. When you see the 'apartment style houses' or racks that have white gourds hanging from them, these are Purple Martin houses, or colonies, as they are called. They are very entertaining birds, performing aerial acrobatics as they enter and leave their housing. They also enjoy being around humans for the protection advantages it gives them. Open areas near homes and cut lawns are generally predator free, therefore, relatively safe for Purple Martins.

If you have a yard that has a large open area, then you may have a good location for attracting Purple Martins. They like the large open areas for protection from hawks, so they can sound the alarm and let other Martins know that danger is in the area. Years ago, most Martin houses had round holes, but this also attracted European Starlings, who competed for the nest cavities. Dedicated landlords (the term used for those who maintain colonies) developed new entrances called 'Starling Resistant Entrance Holes' (SREHs). These smaller entrances prevented European Starlings from trying to nest in the Martin housing.

>> continued on page 22

Sharing My Time with Bluebirds and Purple Martins *continued from page 21*

Anyone attempting to attract Purple Martins, should use this type of entrance, since it is very beneficial. Being able to raise and lower the housing is another new idea, and a necessity. It is the only way to actively monitor nesting birds and to maintain a healthy Purple Martin colony.

The oldest birds of a colony, those that return from the Amazon Basin in early spring, are called scouts. These adult birds come back early to get their choice of cavities. Some come back so early, around April 1st in northwest PA, that they jeopardize their lives due to possible bad weather conditions. Since they only eat flying insects, and it has to be around 48 degrees or above for insects to fly, these birds will perish if it stays below that temperature for 3 or 4 days. This isn't that rare in northwest PA in April. As mentioned earlier, insects will also not fly if it is too windy, or during rainy weather, so Martins can even have problems during late spring and early summer, as it occurred with Hurricane Agnes. It took many years, and in most cases, decades, for landlords to get nesting Martins back at their sites.

Some of the first locations to regain their Purple Martin colonies were the Pymatuning Learning Center and the PGC Wildlife Management Building on the Hartstown-Linesville Road. Both of these locations were able to get nesting Martins back in 1999. That was 27 years after Hurricane Agnes went through. This new housing was a joint effort between the Purple Martin Conservation Association and the local PA Game Commission employees. The young birds that fledged from these two colonies have been able to start new colonies all over the area. The Purple Martin Conservation Association, known as the PMCA,



was originally based in Edinboro, but is now located in the Tom Ridge Environmental Center in Erie. This has grown to be an international organization whose sole purpose is to help perpetuate the Purple Martin species via scientific studies and new management techniques. This organization has great information and you can visit this site at www.purplemartin.org. There is even a webcam on this site that you can view an active Purple Martin nest anytime, day or night.

After years of having martins visiting my site, I finally got a pair to nest in 2012. That was my 8th year of trying. I had added gourds to my site, both plastic and natural gourds, and then a large wooden birdhouse called a T-14. This was designed by Andrew Troyer of northwest PA, so the T was for Troyer, and 14 was the number of cavities that it has for individual pairs of Martins. Unfortunately, in 2013, these two birds did not make it back to my site. I had to start all over again. Luck arrived in 2016 when two pairs of Purple Martins decided to make my colony their home. Along with them, several bachelor males stayed at my

location. They were unable to find a female, so they called our place home. In 2017, the colony grew to 10 pairs, laying 48 eggs, 44 of which hatched and fledged 40 nestlings. Last year, there were 24 pairs and I am certainly looking forward to this year!

If you are interested in hosting Purple Martins, educational pamphlets and product catalogs are available directly from the PMCA by calling 814-833-7656. Another source for information is the Bird's Paradise, Andrew Troyer's company, at 814-587-2756. If you have any questions, you can email me, Bill Wenger, at w.wenger@comcast.net or call 412-720-0766, I would be glad to help.

If you would like to have a part of nature in your own back yard, and wake up to Purple Martin chatter each morning, why not think about starting your own Purple Martin colony and enjoy this gift of nature?

Note: I have purchased crickets for the purple Martins and mealworms for bluebirds, chickadees, cardinals, and others. They all seem to be feeding on them. I know Andrew Troyer has been using them as well and they go through thousands of both. I ordered some crickets and mealworms for the first time from the Five Points Cricket Farm in Kempton, PA. They are a local company. The quality of their crickets and mealworms were good! <https://www.fivepointscricketfarm.com>

Editor's Note: Bill Wenger is an active BSP member and serves as BSP county coordinator for both Lawrence and Crawford counties.



Bluebird Society of PA Membership Form

Regular/Family (16-64yrs)	Senior/Couples (65+)	Organization/Corporate	Lifetime
1 year -\$15	1 year - \$12	1 year -\$100	\$375
3 years-\$40	3 years -\$30	3 years -\$275	

***When you Renew for 3 years, you can take advantage of our discounted rates shown above!**

*** See BSP website for Junior Membership opportunities.**

**Mail to:
Bluebird Society of PA
P.O. Box 12
Exton, PA 19341**

New Member Renewal Donation

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E-mail Address: _____ (required if questions or e-mailed delivery of Newsletter)

Donation (optional): \$ _____ Total Amount Enclosed: \$ _____

If you are a new member, have you received your new membership packet? Yes No

How would you like to receive your newsletter? Regular mail E-mail

Please tell us how you learned about us: _____

- I would like to help with:
- | | |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Farm Show (Jan) | <input type="checkbox"/> BSP Conference (April) |

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BSP RENEWAL DATES/Mailing 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, please send changes to: nancyfraim@comcast.net*

Birds need water year-round to drink and to preen their feathers. Bird bath heaters will keep the water from freezing in the winter months.

- Adding a bird bath will attract many songbirds to your yard habitat.
- To keep your birdbath fresh, just rinse and scrub it with nine parts water, one part white vinegar.
- Change the water every day to keep it clean and to prevent mosquitos from hatching their eggs in it.
- Attaching a dripper or mister to your bird bath provides a source of moving water which backyard birds find irresistible!
- Wild Birds Unlimited - Drip-or-Mist



photo by Nancy Fraim

Beautiful video! Check it out: <https://youtu.be/xuixkRy4IRI>

BSP is a North American Bluebird Society Affiliate



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