



The Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania

AN AFFILIATE OF THE NORTH AMERICAN BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

- Volume 21, Issue 2 Fall/Winter 2019
- Editor: Joan Watroba • bluebirdhappy365@outlook.com • www.thebsp.org



A Message from the President

September 30th has rolled around and the 2019 Bluebird nesting season is “in the books” here in Pennsylvania. I hope you had many successful fledglings of Blues this spring/summer and now is the time to reflect on those blessed memories. If your season wasn't all that great, now is the time to think about some changes for the 2020 season which will be here before we know it. Perhaps change the box location if Bluebirds did NOT choose it to build a nest in 2019. I moved our box two weeks ago because bushy undergrowth (Oakleaf Viburnum and Honeysuckle) had invaded & crept up too close to the box. Our backyard Bluebird nest box is now in a new, more open spot and I am hopeful of 2020 success due to this simple change. Another idea would be to try a new type of box or build a new box just like the old one but with new lumber. A good rule of thumb: If you are not having success, make some changes!

Did you know? The Eastern Bluebird (EABL) can spy or see an insect on the ground at 100 feet away. Their visual acuity is many times

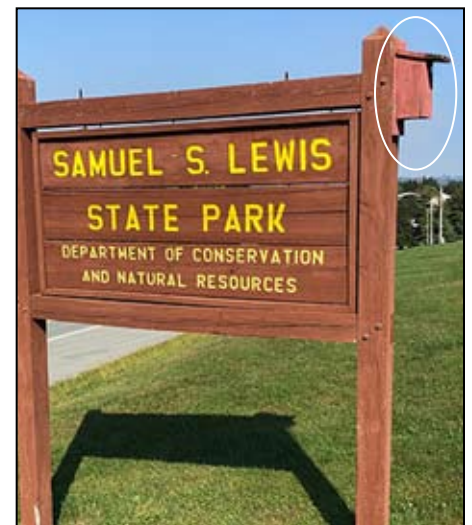
greater than the human eye. They see a world that we cannot even imagine. Over the past few years I have been experimenting with nest boxes that are hidden yet right out in the open. Let me explain.



Bluebird nesting sites are safer when “predators” (both animal and human) don't visualize the nest or know where it is. Why not install nesting boxes that ONLY the Bluebirds can see or find? It has been fun and I have yet to place a box that the Bluebirds can't discover!! This is where you can be creative and enjoy your trails or backyard nest box even more. Let's get started.

I like to explore the possibilities of

“signage”. If you have a Bluebird trail in a state park, county park, church, school, athletic complex, or housing development “open area”, signs are always an option. At **Landis Valley Village and Farm Museum** in Lancaster I have a Bluebird trail. There is a large green sign at the intersection of Landis Valley Rd. & Oregon Pike. This is a very busy intersection and thousands of cars pass everyday but very few people know that a Bluebird box exists in that sign!! I had to build a special Bluebird box with outside dimensions of 4” wide to fit between the north and south sides of the sign that sandwich the box. [See photo]. Bluebirds found this box within a week of installation and I have had several nests of Blues. The only problem with this box is that it faces squarely to the west and during



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a heavy rainstorm the nest can get wet. Wind and rain can blow directly into the entrance so this is one box I have to check after a thunderstorm!!

Sam Lewis State Park, in York County, is another location where I have used the main entrance sign for a Bluebird box. This signage box is positioned south-southeast in a perfect direction plus a location with electric power lines above for perching. Visitors to the park never see the box because it is installed on the 8 x 8" post away from the road and it is painted to match the sign. [See photo]

High school campuses and athletic fields are another great place to install Bluebird boxes. In 2012 I started monitoring a Bluebird trail at



Landisville Middle School/Hempfield High School. This trail was created as an Eagle Scout Project in 2007 with 20 boxes. After 6 years of neglect, the trail deteriorated into a "House Sparrow Haven" trail with all 20 boxes inhabited by HOSP!! With the addition of skylight boxes and selective

trapping, today the trail consists of 28 boxes and no HOSP! One of the box locations is the girls varsity softball field where I have a Bluebird box under the scoreboard in deep center field 30 yards behind the outfield fence. Look at the two photos – one is before a BB box and one is after. This is a case of a box in plain sight but unless you know it is there, you won't see it. Bluebirds will find it!!

Another great habitat for Bluebirds is a baseball field at **Lancaster County Central Park**. I particularly like placing boxes on both the left and right field foul pole screens. A stepladder is needed to reach up to the box and monitor it, but it is safe from the industrial-sized mower decks which can sever & crush 3/4" conduit. Eggs inside will get scrambled and chicks can receive broken necks when suddenly hit by mowers. None of the players or fans will notice the Bluebird boxes far down the foul lines in both right and left field. Predators are NOT a



problem with this set-up. And the Blues are incredibly happy with acres of mowed lawn surrounding their home and teeming with insects to feed their young. [See photo].



The last stop is **Susquehannock State Park Bluebird Trail** near the Susquehanna River. Information Kiosks and Pavilions grace the landscape at this park and are excellent places for Bluebird boxes. Predators, large gang-mowers and human hands just can't get near these locations for a box, and mother Blue knows safe housing when she sees it. I keep a small ladder in my truck for monitoring these installations. [See photo].

I am always looking for additional nest box locations that are in plain sight but just can't be seen.

Happy Bluebirding <><><>

Dean C. Rust, DDS
October 2019
President, Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania

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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.

WE NEED YOU

The Officers and Board members of this great organization feel strongly about the above statements. It probably goes without saying that the BSP membership also feel the same way. Whether you monitor a trail, interact with other Bluebirders, build your own boxes, or provide educational activities, consider sharing your experience and knowledge by serving on the Board of Directors of the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania. Serving on the Board gives you the opportunity to support and promote our mission, provide your personal experiences, valuable ideas and perspectives regarding the direction of the BSP, and to forge new relationships.

You will also enjoy working with a vibrant and dedicated group of individuals. We have a number of openings for Board positions beginning next year. If you feel that you want to contribute your time, knowledge and experiences regarding Bluebirds, please consider this offer as a nominee to the Board.

If you want to learn more about the BSP and serving on the Board, please do not hesitate to contact me. Looking forward to hearing from you!

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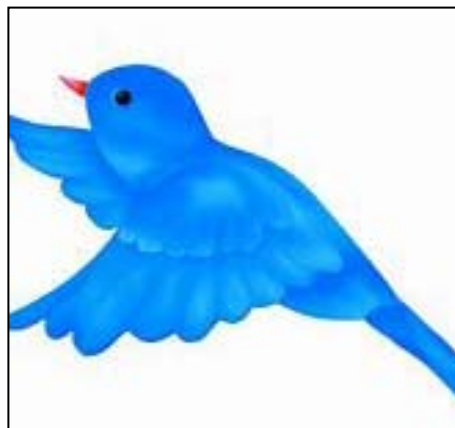
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Contact a Committee Chairperson



Feel free to contact the Committee Chairpersons to apply your skills and interests to BSP activities.

We BSP volunteers have fun!

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Publicity

VACANT

From the Editor *by Joan Watroba*

*A*s I write this column, it is mid-September, and the active nesting season is now completed. However, this is a great time to review my weekly trail check reports and compile the data so that I can prepare my Annual Nest Box Report for BSP. It is also a good time to think about what changes can be made to my trails to promote better nesting success for next year. I am making some minor repairs to nest boxes, paying special attention to the roofs, which tend to need replacement after a few nesting seasons. Leaky roofs are a main cause of nesting failures because if the young birds get wet, they cannot yet regulate their body temperature and can die inside of the nest box due to hypothermia. It is easier to replace roofs and other nest box parts if the box is assembled with screws instead of nails. I am also relocating a few of the nest boxes which did not have nesting activity this past nesting season, or which are now located in brushy or wet areas due to habitat changes. I have placed a handful of clean, dry pine needles in some of the nest boxes, which can serve as insulation from the elements for songbirds which may roost in them during extreme winter weather, and the bluebirds may also use the pine needles as a



photo by Chuck Musser

base for building their nests in the Spring.

All in all, it was a productive nesting season. Almost every nest box was used by a native songbird. However, I did notice that many bluebird eggs did not hatch. This could be due to the very hot summer, but in one specific nest box, the female may have been laying infertile eggs. She laid eggs twice in the same box, but neither clutch hatched. I also discovered a large black snake in an active nest box of tree swallows-Yikes! The monofilament line worked well to deter the House Sparrows from using the nest boxes, and the Noel Guards worked well to keep the raccoons and feral cats from

reaching in the entrance holes to get to the eggs and nesting birds.

Since the weather in South Central PA is still very warm, there is a very good supply of natural foods available, including insects and berries. As the cold weather arrives and when the snow and ice of winter return, I will be offering the supplemental food choices which were such a hit last winter: dried mealworms, commercial peanut/raisin suet cakes, shelled sunflower seeds, peanut hearts, and the fruit/nut seed mixes. When the weather gets really cold, I will make batches of the crumbly peanut butter/cornmeal suet served from a log-style feeder. Continue offering supplemental food options

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From the Editor continued from page 5

through early Spring, as that is when many natural food sources have already been consumed. If you are planning to add any ornamental shrubs or trees to your yards, please consider choosing native plants which will thrive in your area and those which will produce fruit or berries for songbirds. See Lorrie Preston's article, "Bring Back our Songbirds with Healthy Habitat" on Page 8 to learn more.

Reminder: If you have not yet done so, please submit your Annual Nest Box Report to BSP. www.thebsp.org. Report Forms were included with the Summer newsletter and are also available on the BSP web site: Scroll across to More...then select Annual Report Form from the drop-down box.

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 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 as pictured on page 5:

Need Bird Seed, Suet, Bird Feeders?



photo courtesy of allaboutbirds.org

These stores are generously helping them with their Birdseed Fundraiser by providing popular birdseed varieties at affordable rates plus feeders and other bird-related items at discounted prices.

If you have questions regarding the Birdseed Fundraiser, please contact John Latsha, Birdseed Fundraiser Chair, at 717-982-1141 or email him at jlat1965@gmail.com

During the months of November and December, Appalachian Audubon of Camp Hill, PA is sponsoring a Birdseed Fundraiser. You can purchase bird seed, suet, mealworms, and bird feeders at discounted prices at two locations in the Harrisburg area. All proceeds will go towards educational programs and outreach for bird conservation. Order Forms are available on the AAS web site: [www.appalachian audubon.org](http://www.appalachianaudubon.org)

Forms are also available at these participating locations: East Shore: Hanoverdale Agway near Hummelstown or West Shore: Davis Country Living Agway in Mechanicsburg

The Junior BSP Member Page

We welcome these twenty-one new BSP Junior Members, who joined in 2019. Included are some of their comments:

Faithavion Neill of Brookville, PA

Noah Greskiewicz of West Chester, PA

Jack Reidenbaugh of Mt. Lebanon

Harper Brubaker of Harrisburg

Jillian Fuchs of Exton

Jack Butler of Chester Springs

Lily Aceuedo of Exton

"I love to look at birds and take care of them."

Rishitha Musuku of Chester Springs

"I want to help the birds."

Ella Benner of Chester Springs

"To help save the bluebird population."

Abigail Thompson of Chester Springs

"I enjoy watching birds and want to help them."

Myanna Happonen of Chester Springs

"I love birds."

Isabella Wall of Harrisburg

"Taking care of bluebirds in Girl Scouts and home."

Jenna D. Orris of Harrisburg

"Taking care of bluebirds and helping others."

Rishika Kurma of Chester Springs

Sophia Renk of Charleroi

"I want to help the birds, and I also really like them."

Ryan Hickey of Exton

"I want to learn about birds and help them."

Jay Smullen – of Harrisburg

Melvin James Stoltzfus of Narvon

Lloyd Lantz of Leola –

"I love birds."

Melvin Esh – of Gordonville

Stephen E. Esh – of Gordonville

JUNIOR MEMBER NEWS:

Four of our Juniors joined the BSP while attending "Family Days on the Farm," an annual event held this year at the farm of John Esh in Lancaster County on July 26 and 27. Board members Dan Thomas and Marilyn Michalski set up a "BSP Booth" and talked to attendees of all ages. Dan's grandson Aaron helped us, as he spoke with many young people about birds. We had interesting and meaningful conversations, and we got to hear many stories of birds in this farmland area.

As of September 1st, we have 111 active Junior Members in the program. For questions about the Junior Membership Program, contact Marilyn Michalski – 610-933-0497 or emeraldmm@verizon.net.

LETTERS FROM A JUNIOR MEMBER:

April 26, 2019



Dear Mrs. Michalski,
I am glad you approve of our nest box. I hope we will put it up soon. Sorry we didn't call you, but we were in Boston for the weekend. Hopefully we can work out another time! I know you really like birds, and I want to fulfill my job as a Junior Bluebird Society member. I really love birds,

◀ *Jr. BSP Member, Jack Butler of Chester Springs, PA joined BSP on March 25, 2019*

(not as much as you), and I want them around my house. I really like bird calls!

Thank you, Jack Butler

On June 12, 2019, Jack wrote a second letter:

Dear Mrs. Michalski,

We got bluebirds! Yesterday, we saw a female bluebird fly into the box and she stayed in there for a while! There was a male nearby and the two looked like they were mates. I don't know if there's eggs, since if we looked into it by taking off the front part we may destroy it. But we are pretty sure that a bluebird's nest is in our nesting box!

Maybe you could come over to look at it! Hopefully see you soon! Thank you,
Jack Butler

To Jack,

Thank you for your welcome letters! I'm happy to report that I did visit your home and inspect your nestbox. Your female bluebird laid three blue eggs. A few weeks later I checked the box again. The great news is that three new Eastern Bluebirds have flown out of your nestbox. They have joined their parents in the daily search for food and water. Congratulations on a job well done! You have certainly helped bluebirds!

Marilyn Michalski.

Bring Back our Songbirds with Healthy Habitat

By **Lorrie Preston, Naturalist and Wildlife Gardener**

What would our world be like without backyard songbirds? Quiet, empty, and desolate...I surely wouldn't want to live without them. Their lively antics entertain on the chilliest of winter days. Their welcome songs in February promise that spring is around the corner. Their colorful plumage and exuberant calls during the breeding season echo our own excitement for warm, sunny weather. Birds are the easiest wildlife species to observe, and millions of Americans consider themselves "bird watchers."

But songbird populations are dwindling – many species by as much as 70 percent or more. There are many reasons for their decline. Some of those reasons, like climate change, seem so big that we, as individuals, feel that we can have little impact. But there is one area where each one of us can make a big difference, and that is by restoring habitat.

Habitat loss is the number one reason that species go extinct. What do birds need for habitat? They need food, water, shelter, and a place to raise young. As land is developed to create homes and services for people, the habitats for birds, butterflies, beneficial pollinators, and other forms of wildlife are destroyed. The native trees, shrubs, vines, grasses and flowers that provided food and shelter for birds and wildlife throughout history disappear. Creatures are displaced, and forced to live in small islands of wilderness that can only sustain a limited number of their kind. The rest try to adapt the best they can, often suffering significant population loss in the process.



photo by Lorrie Preston

The good news is that with a little effort, each one of us can restore healthy habitat for many songbird and wildlife species, and most are quite adaptable if the four needs listed above are met.

In order to help the birds, butterflies, and beneficial pollinators, we need to bring back the native plants that have been lost. Berries, fruit, nuts, pollen, and nectar from native plants, and even the cyclical insect populations supported by native plants, are timed perfectly with the life cycles of our local birds and wildlife. Native insects and caterpillars are crucial, as they are the exclusive food for almost all baby birds. Plants from Asia, Europe and other far-away lands offer very little for birds and wildlife in comparison, and some foreign plants become invasive and crowd out native plants and habitat in our wilderness areas.

The plant choices we make are critical, as they directly determine which bird and wildlife species can survive and thrive in our area. Not all of the plants you choose have to be native, but the more native plants you in-

clude on your property, the higher the quality of wildlife habitat you create. Native plants are beautiful and can be easily integrated in the landscape. They are more common at our local garden centers in recent years, and more plant nurseries specializing in native plants can be found with a little research. Several non-profit organizations also host native plant sales in spring and fall. They are happy to help you choose the right native plants for your particular needs.

As individuals and as a community, we have a responsibility to restore healthy habitat so birds will be singing in Pennsylvania and beyond for many generations to come. For more information, read "Bringing Nature Home; a Case for Native Gardening" by Dr. Douglas Tallamy" or his more recent book with Rick Darke "The Living Landscape." For native plant lists and online information, start with this website from PA DCNR: <https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/Conservation/WildPlants/Landscaping-withNativePlants/Pages/default.aspx>

Congratulations! Dean Rust Receives NABS Award

We are so Proud
and Happy
that Dean Rust,
our BSP President,
was recently honored
with the
President's Award
from the



His award letter reads:



Jim Engelbrecht NABS Treasurer (left) presents the NABS President's Award to Dean Rust

This award is bestowed upon someone in the bluebird community who has made a difference in our long lasting struggle to ensure that all three species of bluebirds, as well as other native cavity nesting birds continue to thrive on this continent and that they will always be here to amaze and delight future generations of Americans long after we are gone. Your exemplary leadership of the Bluebird Society of PA and your authorship of the outstanding book, *The Beloved and Charismatic Bluebird* are only two examples of this lasting contribution that you have made and continue to make to the cause. It is with pleasure that I bestow this award on behalf of the entire Board and membership of the North American Bluebird Society on you in appreciation for all you have done for our little blue fellow travelers on this earth.

Sincerely,
Bernie Daniel, President
North American Bluebird Society

Editor's Note:

Dean said: I had been invited to present a bluebird program on September 29th during the Fall Annual Conference of the New York State Bluebird Society in Binghamton, New York. Today I got a huge surprise presentation of a 2019 NABS President's Award by Bernie Daniel. Jim Engelbrecht presented it after my Bluebird presentation. Along with it was a gorgeous framed watercolor of a pair of Blues in a rural farm barn scene. I still am in shock!! 40 people attended the day long event at Chenango Town Hall.

Thanks, Dean for all that you do for bluebirds and for BSP!

Why Do Birds Peck or Fly into Windows or Glass Doors? *by Joan Watroba*

Many people who we talk with at bluebird events tell us that songbirds are repeatedly pecking at the windows of their homes or at the side mirrors of their automobiles. Some birds are flying directly into their windows and getting injured or killed. They ask why, and also what they can do to stop this unwanted and destructive behavior.

When songbirds repeatedly peck at mirrors or windows, they are seeing their own reflections. Since they are territorial, especially during mating season, they are trying to drive away the intruder. They are very persistent, and will continuously peck at these surfaces until the reflective surface is interrupted by placing something on the surface. Covering the side mirrors of an automobile with a bag or small towel when the vehicle

is not in use will stop this behavior. Closing drapes or blinds on windows or glass doors may reduce the reflection, or adding features such as films or netting directly to the glass surfaces can also be effective to reduce bird strikes

Here is a link from All About Birds/Cornell Lab of Ornithology which provides more information about this serious problem, as well as many tips to reduce bird losses due to their flying into reflective glass surfaces:

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/why-birds-hit-windows-and-how-you-can-help-prevent-it/>

www.allaboutbirds.org



Photo by Susan Spear/Cornell Lab

The Step Outdoors Lehigh Valley Event

The Step Outdoors Lehigh Valley event took place at Steel Stacks in Bethlehem, PA. on June 1 & 2, 2019.

BSP volunteers were Dean Rust, Becca Patrick, Peter Reinhart and spouse, Lee Erney (father of Monroe County Coordinator) and Ken Leister, BSP State County Coordinator. They assisted participants to assemble bluebird nest box kits, who take them home with them so that they can become actively involved in providing nesting opportunities for bluebirds and other native songbirds. The PA Game Commission donated 50 nest box kits



and BSP offered 30 kits at our cost of \$10 each. The proceeds from the event were split with the Steel Stacks. It was nice to see Kevin Sekula, New County Coordinator from Montgomery County and Becca Patrick, New County Coordinator for Northampton County at this event. It was a fun and productive event for everyone involved!

Ken Leister, Event Chair
BSP State County Coordinator

Editor's Note:

Step Outdoors Lehigh Valley is an annual free family festival celebrating all

things outdoors! Filled with dynamic presentations, hands-on activities and tons of fun, this event is designed to introduce children and their families to the wonders of the world around them. Activities include archery, biking, birding, fishing, hiking, nature photography, visual arts, wildlife presentations and more. Guests enjoy activities and presentations by more than 25 different organizations focusing on conservation, wildlife and outdoor recreation. Plan to attend this event next year. Contact Ken Leister at 610-696-5271 or e-mail: kenapeg@aol.com for details or to volunteer next year.

Success at “Family Days at the Farm” by Marilyn Michalski

Dan Thomas and I had two great days at “Family Days on the Farm” on July 26 and 27. We talked with many young children and adults as well. Dan set everything up—which you can see in his photo.



He and his grandson, Aaron Heitland were effective—and fun to work with. They stayed well past my arrival time on Saturday morning. We added 3 new Junior Members during this event. We had excellent exchanges with folks of all ages. Everything worked out well, and we didn't require more than the three of us. This event was well-attended—I estimate the crowd on Saturday at about 400 to 500. Dan and I focused on the young—we probably spoke with 50 or 60 school kids in person. We had many exciting conversations and learned about their bird adventures. We encouraged them in assisting bluebirds and other cavity-nesters. I had one long conversation with an 11-year old, discussing his anxiety over a bluebird pair who examined his nest box, but didn't nest in it. With one of

my nest boxes in hand, I explained key aspects of successful nest box design and set-up.

The only minor “hitch” was that two men spoke with Dan about not using a TV, as it is against Amish

principles. We heard that “slides,” like the images we use in PowerPoint, would be more acceptable. I think we can switch to PowerPoint programs,

which will be more acceptable to them and obviate the use of a TV and video. I spoke with Kathleen Reiff, a Family Days Board Member, who will convey our compliance to the Amish Board. She and I spoke for some minutes on the House Sparrow invasion at her farm, where House Sparrows (HOSP) have infested their barn and eat the chicken feed. I recommended making the ledges inside the barn (walls and roof support beams) inaccessible to HOSP by installing metal webbing (with a tighter weave than chicken wire) over horizontal support beams. She appreciated the idea and will discuss it with her husband. We would benefit many farmers if we could develop ways to reduce/exterminate HOSP in barns and sheds.

In 2020, “Family Days on the Farm” will be held at the David Lapp Farm, 3737 Yost Rd., Gordonville, PA 17529, on July 24 and July 25.

Marilyn Michalski, Event Coordinator
BSP Chester Co-County Coordinator



BSP Newsletter Submission Contest

Congratulations! Newsletter Submission contest Winner-Lorrie Preston

Lorrie, 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 very excited 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, 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: BSP, P.O. Box 756, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055-0756



Bluebird Fledglings by Richard R. Hess

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

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

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.

BSP Membership/Board Meetings

Location:

Giant Conference Center/Upstairs Community Room
Camp Hill Shopping Center
3301 E. Trindle Road, Camp Hill, PA
Thursday evening-6:00 P.M.

2020 Dates:

January 23, 2020-Thursday evening-6:00 P.M.
April 23, 2020-Thursday evening-6:00 P.M.
July 23, 2020-Thursday evening-6:00 P.M.
October 22, 2020-Thursday evening-6:00 P.M.

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. If you cannot attend the meetings in person, we can arrange for you to attend via conference call.

Contact Dean Rust, BSP President prior to the meeting dates to make arrangements to join BSP meetings by phone from your home.

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

Come and join us at our meetings!

Mailbag

Bluebirds successfully fledge!

Dear Dean,

I was so happy to hear from you, especially as I have been planning to write to tell you how much your advice has helped me to make good homes for the bluebirds.

Last summer two nests fledged successfully. Each had four baby birds. This summer the bluebird parents made three nests. (I clean out the nest box immediately after the babies fledge). The first nest made in April had only two eggs and one never hatched but the other baby fledged successfully. The second and third nests each had four birds and all of them fledged successfully. I have been putting out meal worms regularly and I believe that's what has helped. This photo is of the third group of nestlings. I was concerned



about the one on the right as it always seemed to be less alert than the others, but it grew and fledged just like it's siblings. We do have the baffle predator guards on all three bird boxes.

Last summer and this summer I also had to two nests of five tree swallows and all fledged successfully. It has been really exciting for me and the reward continues as we see many bluebirds flying around the property each day. Thank you so much for your help with this. I will print out that form and send it in with the details.

I really enjoy reading your newsletter and continuing to learn more!

My best,
Lisa

Hi, Joan -

One of the couples who attended your presentation here in our neighborhood and ordered one of the nesting boxes from the BB Society sent this photo of their 5 new babies yesterday. They are so excited, and publicly thanked me online on our neighborhood chat for introducing them to the BB Society of PA. Lots of good bluebird nestings and activity around here this year. Happy news and good publicity!

Thank you! Lorrie Preston



Tributes to Jane Pietsch

Here are some memories of Jane submitted by BSP members

We at BSP who knew Jane Pietsch were saddened to learn of her passing on August 3, 2019. Jane lived in Harrisburg, PA and was one of the original founders of BSP, which was incorporated in May of 1998. She was very active with BSP for many years. Jane served as BSP Treasurer, Board Member, and volunteered for many bluebird events. Jane was enthusiastic about bringing back the bluebirds and monitored bluebird nest boxes in her yard and along local trails. Her sense of humor and love of bluebirds inspired everyone she met.

Joan Watroba

I remember Kathy Clark bringing Jane and Dave to my first bluebird event here in Franklin County in 1999. It was difficult to believe that someone would travel all the way down near the Mason Dixon line to support a new BSP County Coordinator. Jane latched on to me right away and Dave followed nearby. They were a great couple supporting each other all the way. Jane loved the Peterson boxes. One in her front yard and one in the back. I remember her every time I open a Peterson box. They are my favorite box also, probably because of Jane Pietsch.

Joyce Stuff

Hello All, I was made aware of the passing of our friend and a founding member of BSP. Jane Pietsch passed away this past week. She is survived by her husband, Dave. They were both very involved as volunteers, Dave with box building and Jane as Board Member, Treasurer, and helping with events.

Nancy Putt



Jane Pietsch
November 1, 1940—August 3, 2019

I was very sad to receive an e-mail from Joan Watroba telling me Jane Pietsch had passed away. I wanted to go to the service with Joan, as she told me she would be attending as well to remember Jane. Joan stood up to talk about Jane when the pastor asked if anyone had anything to say. I knew Jane and her husband, Dave, for a long time. Joan called them a "power couple". Wow! That was right! Dave helped with everything and did box building. What Joan did made me want to tell people how I knew Jane too, and she asked me to write for the newsletter telling people what I said at the service. This is only a small part of it. I am adding a few extras here for the newsletter as some may not have known Jane Pietsch.

I have a daughter who was crazy about birds. She was only 8 or 10 as I remember. I took her to Audubon meetings, and that was never enough.

She wanted more. So the Audubon president here locally suggested a bluebird trail. Joanne Slavinski and I took over a bluebird trail at Pinchot State Park in York County and there were 65 boxes which because of how the park is laid out, took us too many hours to check each week. We contacted the local Audubon to get help to monitor it, and they put it in their newsletter.

Well, here comes Janie. She calls me and she doesn't want to help with the trail but asks if I will get people together and form a club or something. I told her to call me back (this was late summer) next year. Guess what, she did! Over and over! I did what she asked. We got these people together through an ad in The West Shore Shopper and The Guide (local free papers). Lots of people showed up and they all talked about bluebirds. They argued about nestboxes and what to do or not to do. Eventually, we formed "The Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania." Jane's email was OneBluebird@aol.com. At the funeral, Brian, her son, told me he gave her the idea for that name. Jane made the world better with her infectious smile and yes, being on the BSP board, and she would always make her opinions known. She was always there when she was needed helping in every way. She served in many positions and it took years to get new people to come in and help.

BSP was founded by the love of bluebirds and not necessarily people who knew how to run something. We did the best we could, and here we are today because Jane never stopped calling me all the time! One more memory I want to share. We had our first BSP conference at Messiah Village

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Tribute to Jane Pietsch continued from page 14

Nursing Community. The men made all the food and were in the kitchen. I wish somebody had pictures of this. I remember at our first auction at that conference Dave, Jane's husband, and Jane were on opposite sides of the room bidding against each other. Oh how funny when they discovered

that. It was over a hat!!! Nobody loved bluebirds more than Jane did. She was a driving force and served many hats over the years.

Oh P.S. hats off to all of you now serving on the Board or as County Coordinators. I'm so happy this organization exists today. I toast Jane

for her persistence. Jane is the reason there is a BSP.

Kathy Clark

First President of the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania, founded in 1998

Annual Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania Conference March 27th & 28th, 2020

Mark your calendars and plan to attend the 22nd Annual BSP Conference to be held at the:

Best Western/Lehigh Valley Hotel and Conference Center

300 Gateway Drive,
Bethlehem, PA.

www.lehighvalleyhotel.com

610-866-5800

The BSP Annual 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 and itinerary will be sent out to all active BSP members in February, 2020.

More information will also be posted in upcoming newsletters and on the web site: www.thebsp.org as details become available. BSP has reserved a block of rooms at the conference venue, so please let them know that you are attending the BSP Conference when you reserve your lodging

PA Farm Show 2020 Saturday, January 4 thru Saturday, January 11th, 2020

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



BSPs nest display as seen at the Pennsylvania Farm Show

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!

“Nest Box Mysteries” by Marilyn Michalski and Nancy Fraim

When we monitor nest boxes, we often encounter puzzling sights. We may find a different number of eggs than we had seen previously. If the egg numbers go up, we are happy. But if the egg numbers go down, we wonder what caused the disappearance. Or worse, how could three nestlings in a nest box – too young to fledge – have vanished? Although we can make educated guesses regarding what happened, we do have a way to get accurate answers: We can put in a RING camera system.

Small in size, the RING camera is installed inside a modified nest box underneath the roof. When connected to a WiFi signal, the nest box interior can be displayed on an iPhone or PC. At the urging of my friend and fellow Bluebirder, Nancy Fraim, I purchased this camera and a solar panel to charge it. I've learned more from the camera than I thought possible. The RING system shows all activity inside the nest box, which the owner can watch as “live-action” video. This article describes several events in which the RING camera provided answers.

FIRST CASE:

We know that female Bluebirds incubate eggs. Wrong! We found that the Male Bluebird can incubate eggs almost as well as the female. A pair of Eastern Bluebirds, in their fourth year of nesting in my yard, had two nesting failures in April and May. Neither of these clutches was viable; after twenty-five days I opened one of the eggs to find only albumen and yolk. Although this pair finally abandoned these nests, they refused to give up. We watched the female construct a third nest inside a box equipped with a RING camera. She laid three white eggs (her usual color) and began incubation. The RING camera soon showed the male Blue-

bird sitting on top of the eggs (photo #1.) We watched him settle over the eggs almost every day. Their clutch successfully hatched and fledged three Eastern Bluebirds. We think it's plausible that the male's incubation helped the eggs reach maturity.



#1 - Male Bluebird on Top of Eggs



#2 - Male & Female Bluebirds on Nest at Night (Ring Camera)

SECOND CASE:

In a nest box located in Downingtown, PA, where another RING camera was installed, we witnessed a horrific attack. At 11 p.m. on July 10, 2019, the homeowner got an “action alert” signal. She watched in anguish as a flying squirrel killed two Bluebird nestlings. A third nestling, who hid in a corner of the nest box, survived. Because northern flying squirrels are endangered in Pennsylvania, we could not harm them, but we had to prevent the squirrel from entering the nest box again.

We removed the dead nestlings and bagged them for disposal away from the nest box. We did not want any odors to attract other flying squirrels, who sometimes feed on carrion. We then put the surviving nestling into a clean salvaged Bluebird nest, per per-

mit and returned it to the nest box.

We considered several actions: Should we transfer the nestling to another nest box, with healthy nestlings of the same age? No, because the parent birds were alive and well. We know avian parents will feed their brood, even if there is only one.

We moved the nest box and its post further away from a nearby tree to reduce the Flying Squirrel's access to the box. We know that active nest boxes can be moved ten or twelve feet away from their original positions; bluebird parents will make the adjustment.

Should we attach a Noel Guard? No, this guard had never been installed on the box, so we weren't sure how the parents would react to it. Sometimes a Noel Guard threatens adult birds and leads to their abandoning the nest. We know of cases in which Bluebird eggs perished when this device scared away the parents. Using the Noel Guard should be a “last resort” if adult birds are not accustomed to it.



#3 - Flying Squirrel Attacking Nestling Inside Nest Box (screen shot 11 p.m. on July 10, 2019)

Instead, we installed a Wren Guard. This had been done earlier, when eggs were laid. It had been removed when the nestlings were eight days old - half-way to fledging. When the surviving nestling got ready to fledge, we removed the guard. Happily,

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“Mysteries” continued from page 16

the Wren Guard thwarted the squirrel, and our nestling fledged safely!

THIRD CASE:

During the night of July 18, 2019, a RING camera showed a raccoon taking newly hatched bluebirds out of a nest box. This was a terrifying sight -- watching the paw of the raccoon reach into the nest box and grab hatchlings, killing two of them. One of the babies survived, as it got pushed into a corner of the nest box.

The next morning, we found the lone hatchling still alive. We removed bits of shell from its body and fed it a few mealworms. Then we installed a Noel Guard over the opening of the box. Sadly, either the parent bluebirds did not accept the Guard or they were traumatized by the attack of the predator, they abandoned the box. By the time we removed the Noel Guard, the parents had left the area and the lone hatchling perished before we could match it with foster parents or to contact a Wildlife Rehabber.



#4 - Paw of Raccoon Reaching into Nest Box (night of July 18, 2019)



#5 - Paw of Raccoon digging into nest, searching for eggs and nestlings. Note the typical tearing-up of nestbox materials (night of July 18, 2019)

FOURTH CASE:



#6 - Six chickadee nestlings—close to fledging (screen shot March, 2019)

In March, a pair of Black-Capped Chickadees started a nest inside a RING-equipped nest box. We watched in awe as the female brought bits of moss and fur into the nest box. She was more active than we thought possible, spending many hours a day tucking moss into different sections of the floor. She spun around in her nest many times, as if she were a perfectionist. We watched for a week as she arranged and re-arranged nesting material. Her dedication and sense of purpose exceeded every concept we had of nest construction. Finally, she began laying eggs – a total of 6. Both male and female Chickadees incubated eggs, and both tucked themselves into the nest box at night. The feeding of nestlings was surprising and entertaining – as tiny bits of insects were pushed into the mouths of hatchlings. In addition, we were startled by the vigor with which the parents jammed their beaks beneath the nestlings to retrieve fecal sacs. Five of the six fledged. One died of natural causes.

FIFTH CASE:

Thanks to sharp images from a RING camera, we were able to detect the appearance of ants inside one of our nest boxes. Images of ants crawling up the sides of the nest box are unwelcome sights on our PC's and iPhones. With this knowledge we were able to

treat the nest box and eliminate the ant infestation – a threat to hatchlings. We put Terro underneath the nest box on the bottom side of the floor. Chemicals should NEVER be put inside a nest box. A new product from Terro is a small packet of insecticide which can be taped to the underside of the nest box floor. This packet eliminates the need to put liquid Terro on cotton and tape it under the nest box. The main ingredient of Terro is borax, which is safe when used as directed.

Another way to deter ants is to spread diatomaceous earth on the ground at the bottom of the post. The use of this powdery material is effective against ants. Dean Rust, in his book “The Beloved and Charismatic Bluebird” encourages the use of this material.

CONCLUSION:

A RING camera will provide essential information. Without the camera we would not have known what kinds of events caused the demise of some baby birds. Because we knew what had occurred, we were able to take preventive actions to insure the life of the surviving nestlings. We regard the RING camera as a valuable instrument in bluebird work, especially monitoring.

EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

The RING camera system is an excellent educational tool. Nancy Fraim and Ken Leister have installed RING cameras inside bluebird nestboxes located on the grounds of a few Chester County schools. Students are introduced to bluebirds, monitoring, and nestbox care – prior to the installation of the RING camera. This camera brings live action views (nest-building, egg-laying, and nestling feeding) into classrooms

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“Mysteries” continued from page 16

where they can be viewed on the Smartboard, Ipad, or computer in each classroom. Young students learn about, and enjoy watching, Eastern Bluebirds at work, in real time. For this to work a WiFi signal is necessary, and the signal must reach the nestbox. Since many school districts have this technology, views of Eastern Bluebirds at work in their nestboxes are now possible.



#8 - Nestbox interior with the ring stick up cam installed



#7 - The nestbox with its ring solar panel on top, facing south

RETIREMENT COMMUNITY BENEFITS

– We have also regaled the residents of a retirement community with the joys of bluebird activity in a nestbox, via a RING camera and a WiFi signal. Since many senior citizens are using iPhones, they have access to exciting views of bluebirds in action. We remind our

readers that, once a RING camera is installed in a nestbox, a Wi-Fi signal is required for successful views inside that box.

COST: The RING camera costs \$200 (\$150 on sale), and the Solar Panel costs \$49. For more information about equipment, see website www.ring.com. For details regarding set up or box design contact nancyfrain@comcast.net or kenapeg@aol.com.

NOTE: For those unable to utilize RING cameras, we recommend the use of the following websites to access information on threats to Eastern Bluebirds: www.sialis.org and www.thebsp.org

In the sialis website, go to “Predator ID”: <http://sialis.org/predatorid.htm>

Happy Bluebirding!

Marilyn Michalski
BSP Board Member

Nancy Frain
BSP Membership Chairperson

The Great Backyard Bird Count February 14-17, 2020

Bird watchers of all ages count birds to create a real-time snapshot of where birds are.

Mark your calendars and count the birds in your yard or in the field and report them. If you feed the birds, you can

count them without leaving the comfort of your home. This data is very important to find out the status of our birds in the winter months.

For More Information: gbbc.birdcount.org/



Female and male cardinals in winter



Chickadee in winter



Tufted titmouse in winter



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

Name _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____ County: _____

Phone No.: _____ (required in case newsletter is undeliverable)

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:
- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> County Coordinator | <input type="checkbox"/> Nestbox Monitoring |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nestbox Construction | <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Photography | <input type="checkbox"/> Research |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Speakers' Bureau | <input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Farm Show (Jan) | <input type="checkbox"/> BSP Conference (April) |

OFFICIAL USE ONLY: Check No.: _____ Renewal year: _____

Website: WWW.THE BSP.ORG

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*If you need to update your mailing address, please send changes to:

nancyfrain@comcast.net



On the Horizon:

March 11-March 15, 2020 -The 2020 North American Bluebird Society Conference will be hosted by the affiliate, Bluebirds Across Nebraska. The event will be held at the Holiday Inn in Kearney, Nebraska. Bluebirders throughout the U.S. and Canada will flock to see half a million Sandhill Cranes descend to the Platte River Valley, and speaker topics include a discussion of the three bluebird species, as well as a variety of other topics, vendors, raffles, live and silent auctions, and many field trips. For more information, go to www.nabluebirdsociety.org

BSP is a North American Bluebird Society Affiliate



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