



Bluebird Trails & Tales

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

• Volume 24, Issue Fall/Winter 2022 • www.thebsp.org • Editor: Joan Watroba • bluebirdhappy365@outlook.com

The Bluebird Society of PA's 23rd Annual Conference



When: March 17-18, 2023
Where: Downingtown Country Club
93 Country Club Drive
Downingtown, PA 19335

More information will be coming in a separate mailing in January and on the BSP website: www.thebsp.org



A Message from the President

Dr. Dean C. Rust, BSP President

The Nestbox that Started It All in 2008

Fifteen years ago on May 2-4, 2008, we were visiting Ocean City, MD for the weekend. A "Springfest" celebration was advertised and we decided to check out the festivities at the south end of the boardwalk on Saturday afternoon. Thousands

of other people were also attracted to the carnival rides, Thrasher's Fries, caramel corn, pulled pork sandwiches, pizza, ice cream and vendor tents galore. "Springfest" is a great venue to spend a few hours and

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the boardwalk is nearby if you wish to stretch your legs for 30 blocks of brisk walking.

We soon found hundreds of vendors eager to sell their crafts of art, jewelry, wreaths, dried flower arrangements, toys, T-shirts, hats, boots, and all kinds of artwork. I was attracted to a vendor who was selling Bluebird boxes. He had one basic model for sale and stacks of inventory. I don't remember any Bluebird literature with the box and the price was right (\$10.00) so I bought my 1st Bluebird box. The box seemed small, but what did I know? The vendor was the expert and other people were buying them as well! I was pleased that I had found something special within my budget at our 2008 OCMD excursion. Little did I know at the time what a dramatic change that little box would have over the next 15 years of my life.

Floor space dimensions of my new box were 3.5" by 3.5" – very cozy. Height of box was 8" and wood was ¼" in thickness on roof, back, front, floor, and sides. The box was stapled together. It had four ½" ventilation ports (two on each side at top) and was a front-opening box. This delicate secondary nesting cavity is still the smallest box I have on any of my trails!

The first location for my newfound prize was a location in our backyard where I could keep a close "monitoring eye" on it. Of course, I installed it on a medium sized oak tree right behind our garden with the Conestoga River as a backdrop. At the time it seemed like a good idea! Squirrels were attracted to it immediately and loved to sit on it while eating acorns much to my displeasure. Black-capped Chickadees and House Wrens were also lured to my new Bluebird nestbox, but no Bluebirds seemed to be interested? WHY? Some people are lucky as Bluebird Landlords right away – but I was NOT one of them. Perhaps I needed a little more experience and knowledge about Bluebirding? In that first year I would occasionally see a Bluebird land on our box but I would have to be patient. **Lesson No.1:** Bluebirding is NOT a sprint but a long - distance race.

In year two, 2009, the Bluebird visits increased until we finally had a nesting pair of Blues. And soon we had a clutch of 4 Bluebird eggs! My Bluebird education was about to take a giant leap forward. One day I was researching Bluebirds on my computer and

I discovered a story about how a black (rat) snake was able to crawl up a pipe to a nest box and erase all the eggs from the Bluebird nest. And it did not leave a trace! The story had photos and I was horrified. I thought to myself – that could never happen to me. I soon took a break and walked to our back porch with a view of our box. NO! NO! NO! I saw a 6' black snake mid-afternoon curled around the oak tree and our new Bluebird box. I grabbed a broom and ran down to the crime scene and smacked the snake with a powerful roundhouse swing which separated the snake from our box. Unfortunately, I was 5-6 minutes too late. The eggs were gone! A valuable lesson was just learned by me: Bluebird boxes require predator guards. In fact, having "double" predator guards is a good idea: a stove-pipe baffle plus a Noel Guard is great technique. Too many people are of the opinion that predators won't find their backyard nest box! **Lesson No 2:** A Bluebird Landlord can only be lucky for a limited period of time.

In 2010 I started building more of my own boxes for family, friends, and my trails. I made several different models: Peterson, Troyer Slot, NABS, Carl Little, Kentucky Bluebird box, Gilbertson PVC, Xbox to name a few. I moved my 1st-ever Bluebird box around in different settings until it finally found a home at the main kiosk at Susquehanna State Park. It has remained there to this day as Box No. 20. On May 26th this year I found a clutch of 5 Bluebird eggs and all 5 BLUES FLEDGED in June. This amazing little nest box has been a home to more than 20 Bluebird families over the years. With a few repairs now and then, I think this little "starter box" will last another 10 years! I never dreamed that one little box could provide so much enjoyment and fun! That was the best \$10 I have ever spent!

There is an old saying: "There is a lid for every kettle." I think that is true of Bluebird nest boxes, too. All Bluebirders seem to have their favorite model and there are plenty to choose from. But there are two more important things that determine Bluebird success more than your choice of nest box:

No.1. The habitat or location where you place your box and No. 2. The regular monitoring and checks you make during the nesting season.

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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.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

photo by Mike Dickie



Bluebird Pair in Winter

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If you have an interest in serving as Committee Chair for Nominations/Elections, please contact us.

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Despite many Bluebird trails in four counties and several hundred Bluebird nest boxes to monitor, I have never forgotten my first box. And it is still a top producer! Do you remember your first box?



Kiosk with Nestbox at Susquehannock State Park

When you get this President's Message the weather will have moved into late fall and early winter. Now is the time to check, repair and revamp your boxes & trails so you can hit the ground running with Bluebird success next year when April 1, 2023, rolls around.

"The personal satisfaction and pleasure derived by participating in monitoring nest boxes is a reward money cannot buy. Whether you have one box or fifty, the joy and excitement of seeing a new nest, then blue eggs and observing the nestlings, is almost beyond description. Observing bluebirds in the nest box is a celebration of life — one of the many miracles afforded us in this world."

— Harry Krueger

May ALL your BLUES be BIRDS!!

Dr. Dean C. Rust
President of the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania
September 7, 2022



Exterior of Productive Nestbox at the kiosk



Interior of Nestbox which fledged so many Bluebirds

From the Editor *by Joan Watroba*

The 3 Rs of Bluebird Trail Care

As the bluebird nesting season comes to a close, this is the ideal time to review your nesting activity and to evaluate the nesting success of each nestbox and of the trail in general. It is important that the nestboxes be in good shape to provide a safe nesting site, and that the habitat continues to be suitable for bluebirds.

Repair

Nestboxes which are assembled with screws instead of nails are much easier to maintain, as it is very easy to remove and replace the worn-out sections if they have been attached with screws.

Take a closer look at each nestbox and determine if it is in good condition or if it needs to be repaired. The first part of a nest box to deteriorate is the roof. If the roof has cracks, or if there is a gap between the roof and the back of the box, replace the roof and caulk any gaps between the roof and the back of the nest box. A major cause of death to young nestlings is hypothermia, which is caused by the nest getting wet during prolonged periods of rain and low temperatures. To prolong the life of a roof, you can cover it with a layer of roof shingles or seal it with a coating of clear polyurethane or light-colored paint or stain suitable for exterior use. Wrapping the roof with sheet metal or copper will also protect it from the elements. Also check the floor of the nestbox to make sure that it is in good condition and that it is attached securely, as it serves as the base for the entire nesting activity. Check to make sure that the entrance hole on the front of the box is the correct size for the species that you wish to attract. If the entrance hole has been made larger by squirrels or woodpeckers, reduce the size of the hole by placing a hole restrictor made of either wood or metal over the compromised hole.

Note: Chickadees usually start nesting before the bluebirds and tree swallows. If I find a chickadee nesting, I add a smaller hole restrictor so that the larger birds will not take over their nestbox. When the chickadee has completed its nesting activity, I remove the 1 1/8" hole restrictor and replace it with the 1 1/2" hole restrictor. (This past season a chickadee nested in a nestbox first with the reduced entrance hole and fledged their young. I then placed the 1 1/2 inch restrictor over the hole and a bluebird used the same box to raise their second brood.)

Here is a list of the entrance hole sizes for some songbirds which use nestboxes. Obviously, birds often nest in boxes with entrance holes larger than stated below, but they cannot enter smaller cavities than these. All of these sizes are based on a round entrance holes:

- Eastern Bluebird 1 1/2 inches
- Black-Capped Chickadee 1 1/8 inches
- Carolina Wren 1 1/2 inches
- House Wren 1 inch
- Prothonotary Warbler 1 1/8 inches
- Tree Swallow 1 1/2 inches
- Tufted Titmouse 1 1/4 inches
- White-Breasted Nuthatch 1 1/4 inches
- Great Crested Flycatcher 1 9/16 inches
- House Sparrow 1 1/4 inches

Do not allow House Sparrows to nest in your boxes. They are non-native, very aggressive, will kill other species to take over a nestbox and are not protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act



Metal and Wooden Hole Restrictors -1 1/2 inches (left and middle) Wooden 1 1/8 inch Hole Restrictor (right)

Replace

Nestboxes do not last forever. The weather and frequency of use are the main factors which affect the life of the box. When most or all of the sections of the nestbox are showing signs of wood rot, it is best to replace the entire box.

Nestboxes made of cedar or other hardwoods will last longer than those made of pine. Avoid using pressure-treated wood and composite decking material to build nestboxes, as the chemicals used to manufacture them may leach inside of the box. Painting or staining the outside of the nest box will

From the Editor - The 3 Rs of Bluebird Trail Care continues from page 6 *both photos are by Mike Dickie*

help it to withstand the weather. Use light or clear shades, not dark colors, which will absorb the heat and make the box even hotter in the summer.

Note: Since songbirds often roost in nestboxes during cold winter weather, I leave them up year-round. Many bluebirds stay in the area and they may start checking out nesting sites in February. In the Fall, I add a couple of handfuls of soft, dry, white pine needles in each nestbox. This provides some insulation inside of the box during the cold weather, and the bluebirds can use the pine needles as a base of nesting material in the Spring.

Relocate

The ideal habitat for bluebirds is open, mowed areas with scattered trees or wires for perching. Factors which can affect the suitability of the habitat are an increase in brushy vegetation, a change in mowing patterns, and commercial development.

If the location of your boxes is no longer conducive to attracting bluebirds, relocate them. Sometimes a slight change will result in the bluebirds using your box. Consider moving the box from the back yard to the front yard if the habitat there is more open. Install boxes in open habitat facing East and away from prevailing winds. Features such as scattered trees or wires will provide a place for perching. If the mounting pole is slanted, add a stake to the base of the mounting pole to straighten it so that the nestbox is upright.

Pairing nest boxes may be helpful to reduce competition for the same nestbox. Bluebirds and Tree Swallows will often tolerate each other if they both have a box in the same habitat. Consider placing nestboxes on separate poles within 10 feet of each other in the same habitat.

Brushy vegetation will attract House Wrens, which are native songbirds, but they will interfere with the nesting of any other songbirds which are attempting to nest in the same habitat. If the trail is located in high grass or in wooded habitats, it will be hazardous to both the monitor and to the songbirds. High grass and woods are havens for ticks and

snakes. If there are trees or high vegetation close to the boxes, field mice will nest in them. Since Hantaviruses are transmitted to humans from the dried droppings, urine, or saliva of mice, do not allow field mice access to your nest boxes.

By providing safe nesting sites in suitable habitats, bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting songbirds will have the best chance of successfully nesting and producing healthy offspring.



P.S. Please provide a reliable water source (heated birdbath) and supplemental foods, especially during the cold, winter months when natural food sources are limited. Bluebirds will eat shelled sunflower seeds, peanut hearts, mealworms-live and dried, birdseed mixes with fruit, and homemade and commercial suet.

Joan Watroba, Editor BSP



BSP Upcoming Events **Save the Dates**

BSP Board/Membership Meetings:

- October 20, 2022
- January 26, 2023
- April 27, 2023
- July 27, 2023
- October 26, 2023

Thursday Evenings at 6:00 p.m.

Meeting Location: Giant Supermarket,
Community Room, Camp Hill, PA

Meetings are also offered online via Zoom, but please contact Phil Durgin, BSP Vice President at 717-732-5325 or [email: pdurgin@comcast.net](mailto:pdurgin@comcast.net) prior to the event to confirm the meeting mode and to receive an invitation to join the meeting.

Pennsylvania Farm Show:

- January 7-14, 2023
Location: 2300 North Cameron Street
Harrisburg, PA
<https://www.farmshow.pa.gov/>

BSP will participate in a rotating exhibit during the last 3 days of the event, January 12-14.

One of the area's biggest and most popular events, and one of BSP's favorite bluebird educational outreach experiences. This is a fun event for the entire family, with interesting programs, demonstrations, a variety of animals, vendors, and offers delicious PA food choices in the food court.

Pennsylvania Farm Show continues in the next column

Volunteers are needed to host the BSP educational/BSP Merchandise Booth.

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

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

BSP's 23rd Annual Conference

- March 17-18, 2023
Location: Downingtown Country Club,
Downingtown, PA (Chester County)
<https://www.golfdowningtown.com>

The Annual BSP Conference offers excellent speakers, demonstrations, vendors, a live and silent auction, a delicious luncheon, and an opportunity to learn from, and socialize with people who share your love of bluebirds and enjoy the wonders of the natural world. The event will feature a Friday evening program and social and a full day of activities on Saturday.

A special mailing regarding the conference, including registration information, speaker bios, and itinerary will be sent out to all active BSP members in early 2023. Registration forms and Itinerary will also be posted on the BSP website: www.thebsp.org closer to the event.

BSP County Coordinator Updates

With help from President Dean Rust, BSP County Coordinator Kim Springer in Mercer County and Nancy Fraim, BSP Membership Chair and Co-County Coordinator in Chester County, we have made great progress in obtaining County Coordinators for **63 out of Pennsylvania's 67 Counties! YEAH!!!**

We Thank all BSP County Coordinators for serving as a representative of BSP and to promote successful bluebird nestings in your counties.

We Need You!!!!

We have only 4 counties without a BSP County Coordinator:

PA Counties WITHOUT a BSP County Coordinator:
Greene, Huntingdon, Mifflin, and Susquehanna

We have NO BSP members in those counties. Please call me with recommendations, or volunteer to serve as the County Coordinator of one of these Counties.

[NOTE: A COMPLETE LIST OF ALL COUNTY COORDINATORS WILL APPEAR IN THE SPRING ISSUE](#)

Please contact me at 610-933-0497 or email: emeraldmm@verizon.net

Thanks,
Marilyn Michalski, State County Coordinator

Thanks, Ken Leister for a Decade of Service as BSP's State Coordinator



Ken served as the State Coordinator from 2012 to 2022. We thank him for his leadership!

- After joining BSP in 2005, Ken has been a leader of “all things Bluebird.”
- After ten years as State Coordinator, he joins Nancy Fraim as Co-County Coordinator in Chester County.
- He gives educational talks on cavity-nesting birds – focusing on the Eastern Bluebird at Open Houses, Gardening Clubs, Parks, Festivals, and Schools.

Both photos by Blake Goll, Willistown Conservation Trust



- One of Ken's most popular talks is “How to Monitor a Bluebird Nestbox.”
- Ken creates nestboxes in his backyard workshop, where he developed a unique design-the Leister Nestbox.
- He generates hundreds of nestboxes and kits each year. His nestbox is found in many locations-and is featured in Box-Building presentations.



photo by Nancy Fraim

- For those with “in-box cameras”, he can modify nestboxes to accommodate RING or BLINK cameras.
- Ken shares his knowledge with all ages, especially Junior BSP Members, a program that he created to inspire young people to get actively involved in bluebirding.
- He serves on the committee for the 2023 Bluebird Conference.
- He donates time, energy, and ‘know-how’ to educate folks throughout Pennsylvania, and he invented “THE BLUEBIRD CHAT” which he developed for use in business environments.

His distinguished service continues!

Submitted by Marilyn Michalski

<<< Inside of Ken Leister Nest box

Join us at the 23rd Annual Conference on March 17-18, 2023 to Experience the Fun of BSP Conferences and to Create More Wonderful Memories!



Enjoy a few images from the 2022 Annual Conference:

- 1) Kathy Miller, Photographer and Author
- 2) Ken Knapp, Program Presenter and Bluebirder of the Year 2022
- 3) The Bluebird Power Couple-Dean and Shirley Rust
- 4) Leo Hollein presents program about bluebirds and tree swallows
- 5) Nancy Frain received Blue Feather Award for 2019
- 6) Darlaine Manning received Blue Feather Award for 2022
- 7) Wilma Light and Charlotte Knudsen at the BSP Merchandise Table
- 8) Joyce Horner received the Blue Feather Award for 2019
- 9) Bill Strauss and Jay Smullen received Service Commendation Awards for 2019
- 10) Phil Durgin received Bluebirder of the Year Award for 2019
- 11) Maggie Rash and Patrick Miller of Miller's Wildlife and Conservation presented a Raptor Program with live animals
- 12) Not Pictured-Scott and Ida Parry received Service Commendation Awards for 2022

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photos by Shirley Rust

Ned Smith Festival Event

On July 30th, it was a beautiful Summer day to honor the life of Ned Smith, local Artist, and Author. The event was held at MYO Park, which is located along the banks of the Susquehanna River in Millersburg, PA. This is an annual event which is always held on the last Saturday of July and features the beauty of nature and art with activities for the entire family.

BSP volunteers participated in this event by hosting an educational/merchandise tent, assisting in a



Volunteers Susan Durgin and Joan Watroba at the BSP booth

nestbox-building event, and by presenting a bluebird program.

Thanks to Phil Durgin, Event Chair, Susan Durgin, BSP Merchandise Manager, Wilma Light, Rich Rieger, and Joan Watroba, BSP County Coordinators and to the nestbox building team. There was a steady stream of visitors to the BSP booth, and the bluebird program, How To Attract Bluebirds was well-attended, and participants eagerly shared their bluebird nesting experiences.

BSP Volunteers at Amish “Family Days on the Farm”

By Marilyn Michalski – BSP Junior Chair/BSP State County Coordinator

On July 30, 2022, Ken Leister and Marilyn Michalski spent a day at the farm of Mr. Melvin Stoltzfus in Lancaster County to represent BSP at the annual event called “Family Days on the Farm”. Hundreds of Amish and their neighbors attended this event, where programs on health, nutrition, gardening, activities for children, and farming topics were presented.

BSP members have volunteered at this event for seven years. We respect the lifestyle of the Amish and dress in a conservative manner. In addition, the BSP does NOT show any “live-action” movies, videos, or TV-based programs, as these are contrary to the Amish way of life. We provide handouts, encourage membership in BSP, answer questions, and give information on many aspects of birding – especially Eastern Bluebirds and other cavity-nesters. A major problem on Amish farms is the proliferation of House Sparrows, so we talk a lot about reducing their negative traits.

This year Ken presented several



Amish youngsters with nestboxes donated by BSP County Coordinator, Ken Leister

“hands-on” box-building sessions for young folks, which were well attended and popular. We had a crowd of youngsters around our display table about three deep. We’ll need a second table next year! Youngsters enjoy the “hands on” aspect of box building. We plan to return to “Family Days” in 2023 with more kits for assembly.

Marilyn and Ken gave a bird-box “baffle” to a BSP Junior Member who had requested help via a phone call several weeks prior to “Family Days.” The caller, Lloyd, is an involved young man committed to helping bluebirds thrive at his

home. BSP member Anthony Hill, from Chester County, donated the baffle we presented to Lloyd. We thank Anthony for this much-needed donation.

For everyone attending “Family Days,” a FREE gift was available – boards from two large pallets of white pine lumber donated by Mr. Zook of the Amish community. Cut to a width of 5.5 inches, we have the perfect span for use in “box-building.” Over the Fall and Winter, we will construct new nestboxes and box kits from this lumber.

A wide variety of freshly prepared, healthy food was available for lunch. We enjoyed newly-harvested potatoes from Mr. Zook’s farm which were deep-fried on the spot to feed the crowd. Ken and I ate servings of these delicious fries, and I avow they were far more flavorful than anything purchased at a fast-food restaurant! With sincere thanks to Mr. Zook!

Updates on Bluebird Trails in Mercer County

by Kim Springer, BSP Mercer County Coordinator

I wanted to give an update and share some exciting news regarding the Buhl Park Bluebird Trail in Hermitage, PA that I received a BSP Grant to help start back in 2017.



Male bluebird by Kim Springer

On 3/16/22, I gave a 2-hour morning presentation on Bluebird box monitoring to eight individuals. In the evening, I gave another 2½ hour presentation to 10 individuals. I promoted the BSP. These were educational seminars to promote individuals to put up and monitor boxes at home or anywhere - and to recruit volunteers to help with this 30-box Trail. As a member of the Buhl Park Wildlife Committee, I was able to use their facilities, tables, etc. for this training/recruitment seminar. Buhl Park had promoted this event on their Facebook page and their website. I also posted it to the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology's *listserv*.

I met with another interested individual on 03/30/22 for 1 ½ hours and did a one-on-one training session and then we went out and physically checked boxes.

I accepted the position of becoming the Mercer County Coordinator for the BSP on 03/31/22. I notified friends and Buhl Park Bluebird Trail volunteers about this exciting news and asked everyone to become members of the BSP. I also reached out to the few Mercer County BSP members and left them detailed phone messages to see if I can help with any needs, offer advice, etc.

On 04/26/22, I met with an individual that came to one of my training seminars. We spent 1½ hours on the trail monitoring boxes together...more one-on-one training. Also, on 05/2/22, I did the same exact thing with another individual. After I was finished, I met with

another trainee and her husband and spent more time in the field with them as well. This is the third time I've had this individual out in the field showing her exactly how to monitor the boxes. A good bit of training is necessary to make sure volunteers know exactly what are good nests versus bad nests!

A few people that helped monitor this trail in past years, signed up as volunteers again. So now, I'm very excited to have 14 volunteers for the Buhl Park Bluebird Trail! We already have nesting Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, and Black-capped Chickadees.



Female bluebird by Kim Springer

ANOTHER TRAIL!? - I received a call back from a Mercer County BSP member. He informed me that he tends to a 15-box trail in Greenville, PA (Mercer County) and invited me for a tour. I didn't even know it existed. On 04/26/22, I met Jerry Brenneman at the Greenville Area Sports Complex soccer fields. The trail is at a great location. I also invited another individual to join us who was looking to volunteer to monitor. We checked all of the boxes. I gave him tips and advice. We both offered our knowledge to the volunteer and spent 1½ hours on the trail. There was one box with 5 Bluebird eggs, one with the start of another nest, and one that looks like it will be a Tree Swallow nest. Jerry inherited this trail, it's in need of many repairs, and I'm going to work with him to try to get it improved. I

Update on Bluebird Trails continues on page 13

Updates on Bluebird Trails in Mercer County continues from page 12



Young bluebirds with pin feathers by Kim Springer

emailed him the BSP Weekly Nest Box Check Report Form, so we can compile data for the BSP. I'm working to get one of my Buhl Park volunteers to work with Jerry since this location is closer to her home. Jerry is also interested in starting a 10-box trail at another location at the Greenville Riverside Park (also in Greenville, PA).

I met Jerry again on 4/30/22, this time at Greenville Riverside Park. We walked the entire park and looked for acceptable placement for nest boxes. I gave him more tips and advice, and we spent a little over an hour together.

On May 9th, I talked one of my Buhl Park trainees into coming to the Greenville Area Sports Complex soccer fields trail. We met Jerry, monitored all of the boxes, and she is all set up to help him monitor this trail going forward.

...and yet - another trail: May 9th, Jerry Brenneman took me to the Shenango Valley Cemetery also located in Greenville. There are currently three boxes set up there with Bluebirds currently using one box. We assessed this site for another Bluebird Trail, and I think this will be an exceptional location! I printed out a BSP Grant application and encouraged Jerry to complete it. After that, I went to Jerry's house to visit "Blue", his resident Bluebird that is nesting in an unusual location. The nest box is just steps away from his back patio, mounted under the eave of his garage. We checked the box and found two babies and two eggs.

Exciting things are happening (and hatching) in Mercer County!



Fully feathered bluebirds by Kim Springer

Best regards,
Kim Springer
BSP Mercer County Coordinator

Junior BSP Member News

The BSP has two new JUNIOR MEMBERS to introduce:

- First, **Andrew Stoltzfus Lapp**, who lives in Myerstown PA. He writes on his application that, "*I am a birdlover.*" His Junior Membership was activated in March of 2022.
- Our second new Junior Member is **Rebecca Peterson** of Chalfont, PA. Rebecca was signed up by her Grandmother in August of 2022.

All New Junior Members are sent a "Welcome

Letter" and a colorful new cloth Bluebird decal. They receive copies of our BSP Newsletter until they reach the age of 16.

If you are currently a BSP Member and would like to sponsor a young bird lover between the ages of 8 and 15 to become a Junior BSP Member, contact:

Marilyn Michalski
Junior Membership Chair
610-933-0497 emeraldmm@verizon.net

Event Report - Bluebird Education Program at West Hanover Township

On August 4, a bluebird education program for Summer Day Camp attendees was held at the Parks & Recreation Community Center of West Hanover Township. The two-hour program was sponsored by the EAC and coordinated through the Parks & Recreation and Day Camp staff.



Children building nestboxes

The presenters were Dr. Dean Rust, President of the Bluebird Society of PA, Bill Strauss, Dauphin County Coordinator of the Bluebird Society, Jay Smullen,

bluebird trail monitor, and Evelyn Burton, EAC member and program coordinator. The program highlighted bluebird habits and habitat and then the attendees were divided into two groups: the older children assembled bluebird houses from kits and the younger children made shoebox dioramas of the inside of a



Children's decorated nestboxes

bluebird box. As the pictures show, the program was thoroughly enjoyed by the Camp attendees, as well as the program presenters and staff.

Mailbag

One For the Books!

From: Cynthia Mench

Mon. May 9, 2022

To: Joan Watroba

Subject: One For the Books!

My mother-in-law, Carol Mench who lives in Bucks County had a bluebird box with a clutch of 8 bluebird eggs.

Editor's Reply:

Wow! Probably the result of egg dumping-separate females probably laid these eggs. If all of them hatch, she may want to offer some supplementary food like dried mealworms soaked overnight and place them on a flat surface where the bluebird

parents can see them so that they can feed them to the babies. Depending on when the eggs were laid and when they started to be incubated, due to the weather conditions, some of them may not hatch. Consider transferring them to a larger nestbox or add an addition in case all of them do hatch and mature. Please keep me posted.

From: Cynthia Mench

Saturday, July 16, 2022

To: Joan Watroba

Follow-up:

My mother-in-law said that there were two females, but only one incubated the eggs.

They all fledged- one was not strong and was very

Mailbag continues from page 14



small and died soon after leaving the nest probably didn't get enough food. But they DID IT!

Editor's Reply:

This large nesting certainly was one for the books!

*Large Clutch of Bluebird Eggs
photo by Mark Manchester*

From: Rebecca McConnell Date: May 9, 2022 To: "Dean C. Rust" Subject: **Bluebird Joy**

Good morning, Dr. Rust! We wanted to share with you the news that we have 5 hatchlings in our box right now! We found the first eggs right before Easter and they hatched Thursday 4/5.



Future bluebirders by Rebecca McConnell



Bluebirds eggs by Rebecca McConnell



Baby bluebirds by Rebecca McConnell

Mailbag photo by the Schuyler MU

From: Schuyler Mu (**SM**)
 Sent: Thursday, June 9, 2022
 To: Joan Watroba (**JW**) Subject:
First Experiences & Questions
Monitoring Bluebird Boxes

SM: Good morning, Joan-
I am a new BSP member and
beginner nestbox monitor. I have
 been meaning to email someone at
 BSP about my recent experiences
 with newly-erected nest boxes
 and ask a few questions. I wasn't
 sure who at the BSP to contact,
 but I did want to thank you for the
 terrific newsletter! I have also really
 appreciated the book that was sent
 when I joined - it's been a valuable
 resource I've referred to regularly.

So, a quick synopsis of my
 bluebird adventures so far: My
 family moved last summer from a
 forest setting in Western PA to a
 much more meadow - like property
 in York where the local bluebirds
 immediately caught my attention.
 We put up two nest boxes in April.
 Box 1 is in our front yard and isn't
 watched as closely as box 2, which
 is in our side yard and can be easily
 seen from the porch and house. Both
 were successfully occupied by two
 bluebird pairs who laid 5 and 4 eggs
 respectively starting around 04/20. I
 monitored the boxes every few days
 with in-person visits and watched the
 nestlings as they grew. We steered
 clear of checking the boxes in person
 (just used my camera / binoculars
 from a distance) or getting too close
 while doing yard work during their
 fledging window. We continued to
 see the parents visiting both boxes to
 feed the young, but my family and
 I were disappointed to miss both

sets of babies actually fledging. The
 closest we came was seeing one
 baby poke out their head to be fed
 by a parent at box 2. My best guess



Baby bluebird ready to fledge

is that the babies in box 1 fledged
 around 05/27 and those in box 2 on
 05/28. We have been waiting and
 watching closely for a glimpse of the
 young, but aren't sure we've seen
 any, although the adult bluebirds
 have been around consistently. I'll
 attach pictures of the eggs & nestlings
 from both boxes' first round.

Once empty, I removed the old,
 soiled nest from Box 1 on 05/28. This
 box was immediately staked out by
 tree swallows which began building
 a nest on 05/29. However, by 06/06
 bluebirds seemed to have re-claimed
 the site, and yesterday, 06/08, I found
 that they had built a nest on top of
 the Tree Swallow's feathered nest
 and laid one egg. Box 2 was clear
 of young on 05/29 but immediately
 showed bluebird activity with a male
 seemingly cleaning up the nest. I
 decided to leave the existing nest in
 this box due to the activity, and by
 06/06 the cup was refreshed with
 new grasses and deepened, and I
 found an egg in that nest yesterday
 as well. So, it seems we're beginning
 round 2 at both boxes!

JW: Hi -Wow! You are doing really
 well with your bluebird nesting
 experiences in York. Your photos
 are really nice and are effective in
 documenting your bluebird activity.
 One tip is that I would encourage
 you to check both nest boxes each
 week and note the activity on your
 calendar. Then you know how the
 nesting is going, how many eggs/
 babies and know when they will be
 leaving the nest box. When they are
 fully feathered, it is fine to monitor
 them with binoculars as you did, and
 not open the nest box. The nesting
 cycle timing is that the babies should
 be leaving the nest box between 16-
 21 days after they are born. I would
 like to include your experiences and
 photos in the Fall/Winter issue of the
 BSP Newsletter, as other members
 may have similar questions. Let me
 know if that would be O.K. with you.



Bluebird eggs in a nest

SM: Yes, that would be very cool
 to have my experiences and photos
 shared in the newsletter. I have
 additional pictures but only chose
 a few to represent their growth. My
 husband also gifted me a camera to
 support this new hobby, so I have
 an enormous amount of bluebird
 "glamour shots" piling up Ha- Ha!
 I'm looking forward to watching this
 second set and hoping for another

Mailbag continues from page 16

chance to see them leave their nests. Thanks again! Sky

If you don't see the nestlings fledge and don't see them around after the nest is empty, do you still count them as fledged?

JW: YES-count them as fledged and report on your Annual Report Form to BSP at the end of the nesting season, which was included in the Summer newsletter and is available the BSP website: www.thebsp.org.

SM: I have been keeping up with my monitor notes to turn in at the end of the season, and I have also been reporting to Cornell Lab's NestWatch site. I wasn't sure if I should report that all 9 nestlings fledged or report it as unknown.

JW: YES-and report any others that fledge during the nesting season of 2022.



Very young baby bluebirds

SM: I imagine that monitors of trail boxes are often in the same position. There was no evidence of predator behavior, all nestlings were healthy up to around day 12 or 13 when I stopped checking the boxes in person, and we saw the parents in and out of the boxes up until 05/27 & 05/28. However, we don't have predator guards on the boxes, so there is that possible threat. Although

we haven't seen any predators with the exception of squirrels down the street, I realize that predators still might be a very real threat whether we see them or not. I was going to ask my husband to install guards between nesting attempts, but I wasn't prepared for how quick the second round would start!



Baby bluebirds with pin feathers

JW: Yes-You may want to install Noel Guards on the nest boxes for climbing predators, but it does not seem as if there is a problem at present.

SM: Many thanks from a new bluebird enthusiast and for the fast reply. I did mark the days on the calendar once they were hatched, but I'm thinking now I was overly cautious and stopped checking on them too early - at 12 or 13 days rather than closer to 16 or 17 days old?

JW: Your timing to stop monitoring was correct, because at day 14 they will be fully - feathered so best to check them from afar rather than to open the box and take the chance of them fledging prematurely.

SM: I will report them as fledged to the BSP and will have to see if I can update the data that I submitted to the NestWatch site. Thank you so

much for the reassurance! I'm also going to look into the Noel Guards. I'm looking forward to watching this second set and hoping for another chance to see them leave their nests. Thanks again!

SM: Hi Joan, I wanted to give you an update on my bluebirds here in York County. We had successful second broods in both nest boxes. Seven fledged in all, and I'm very happy to report that I got to witness one fledgling's first flight from the box and subsequently have been seeing the juveniles around our yard a lot more. I haven't been able to get a good picture of a juvenile yet, but I'll include some of my favorite pictures from the second broods. Both boxes started with 4 eggs, but one egg did not hatch and disappeared around day 3; I'm assuming it was removed by the parents.

JW: Sometimes the parents will remove the unhatched eggs and other times they will leave them there and you will find them when you clean out the nestbox.

SM: I haven't seen any third nesting attempts, so that is likely it for our nest boxes this summer. I really enjoyed my first season monitoring the boxes. It's been a delightful and rewarding addition to our family's existing love of birdwatching and interest in conservation. I'm already looking forward to next year and thinking of adding two more boxes on our property. Hope you have been having a wonderful summer! Sky

BSP Needs You!

WANTED

BSP Webmaster

BSP currently has a really nice website, www.thebsp.org and it is a main resource to our members and to the public to learn about bluebirds and about the Bluebird Society of PA.

Thanks to Harry Schmeider who has volunteered his services as our Webmaster for many years. Harry is stepping down from this position, so we are desperately in need of someone who may be familiar with how to post items and features on our web site to keep the information current.

Our website uses the Weebly platform. If you are interested in learning more about how you may be able to assist, please contact Harry Schmeider: harryschmeider@gmail.com 724-285-1209

BSP Newsletter Designer

BSP publishes a seasonal newsletter-Spring, Summer, and Fall/Winter and our members and the public have expressed their enjoyment in reading it and learning so much about bluebirds and nature- related topics.

Our current newsletter Designer, Charles Lucas, has volunteered his time and artistic layout talents by serving as our Newsletter Designer since the Summer issue of 2015. He will be stepping down from this position starting in 2023. BSP Thanks him for his many years of service to BSP and for the many beautiful issues of Bluebird Trails and Tales which he designed.

If you have interest and experience in publishing, design, or copy layout, please contact: BSP Newsletter Editor, Joan Watroba, bluebirdhappy365@outlook.com or 717-766-2102.

The John Rust Bluebird Trail in Mercer County

I was notified by BSP Member Jerry Brenneman that there was a 52-box Bluebird trail I didn't know existed in my County. We made plans, and on 7/12 met the gentleman that tended the trail. When I was introduced to John Rust, I was flabbergasted. John had been a farmer & business owner in Greenville, PA. I knew him 25 years ago through the office that I managed - as he was friends with my former boss. What a small world! John said he had no idea that bluebird societies even existed.

Over 15+ years ago, John Rust moved into the St. Paul's Retirement Complex in Greenville and found 6 Boy Scout Bluebird boxes that he repaired. Since then, John has built 47+ more boxes, installed them in many residents' backyards, maintained, & monitored all of them. Some people built the boxes for John and some helped him monitor them. St. Paul's consists of 616 acres, so he had a golf cart he used to check the boxes every 7-10 days - which took him approximately 3 hours.

We spent 2 hours with John. He also took Jerry & me on a short 12-box tour, and we each checked some boxes. A box that happened to be on my side had a baby bluebird JUST coming out of its shell. I was able to snap a photo just as it plopped out (see photo with its 3 siblings, it's the one on the far left), and the bottom of its body was still shaped like the egg. How exciting! We counted 14 Bluebirds and 4 boxes had: 4 eggs, 3 eggs, 2 eggs, and 4 more eggs. This is a very productive trail, thanks to John Rust.

At 87 years old, John has decided to retire from his Bluebird Trail...well almost. John and Jerry asked if I'd speak that day at the Town Hall meeting to possibly 30 to 300 St. Paul's residents - to let them know the future of the trail was at stake. How could I say No?!

I came back a few hours later to a group of 40 people. We thanked and applauded John for his enormous contribution to the Community and the bird community! John couldn't begin to estimate the thousands of Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, and other

John Rust Bluebird Trail continues on page 19

The John Rust Bluebird Trail in Mercer County continues from page 18



John Rust sporting his Bluebird hat

native cavity-nesting birds that had fledged from his trail. I asked anyone to stay after the meeting to sign up to volunteer to monitor the trail. Ten people stayed, we talked for some time, and I obtained some contact information.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE! Now comes the task of getting volunteers to commit to boxes, getting more volunteers to sign up, & training people on all monitoring details. I made many phone calls and sent hundreds of text messages/emails with little to no response. One of the volunteers notified me in the middle of this that they found 11 more boxes - now up to 63 boxes! I decided to set up a training seminar in hopes that volunteers would attend. I typed up a flyer, put one in the St. Paul's community mailroom, one on their announcement board, posted it to their Facebook page, gave a copy to the Assistant Director, and messaged their Facebook Administrator to please share my flyer. A few residents responded, but mostly to let me know they had prior engagements. My hopes were grim.

The day came, 07/26, and I was fearing attendance would be low. People started trickling in until we had about 25 people! I gave my usual training/monitoring speech. I passed around color copies of each of the following: bird species they might encounter, what each of their nests and eggs look like, what Blowflies look like and do, BSP Nest Box Monitoring Sheets and Membership Forms, a Bluebird's Nesting Timeline, etc. We discussed topics of paper wasps, ants, wet nests, replacing nests, predators, feeding mealworms with the importance of coating them in calcium carbonate, and using food-grade Diatomaceous Earth to deter ants. Also, that by letting even one pair of invasive House Sparrows to nest, that can lead to 738,100 more House Sparrows in 5 years. In addition, outdoor cats lead to 40 million songbird deaths each year. House Wren dummy nests and House Wrens kicking out eggs or pecking tiny holes in other species eggs - these actions drive bluebirds away and destroy their young. We then all went to a nearby nestbox, and John went through the steps of monitoring a box that did have 2 Bluebird eggs in it (see photo).



Newly-hatched bluebirds

John Rust Bluebird Trail continues on page 20

The John Rust Bluebird Trail in Mercer County continues from page 19



John Rust demonstrates how to monitor a nestbox

One of the volunteers was nominated as the new manager of the trail. Earl Palmiter was happy to help but admitted he hadn't realized what he'd taken on... Earl and I made hundreds of copies of all of my color printouts and collated packets for 20+ volunteers. I left exhausted after being there for 4 hours.

John Rust & Earl have since gone around & mapped out all 63 boxes. Seventeen volunteers have stepped up, and everyone has been designated certain boxes. And John Rust, well, he is still tending 9 boxes! Not quite retired yet.

Earl asked me to come back to assess/monitor the trail/boxes with him, but he had fallen & broken a few ribs. So, on 08/17, I went out with volunteer Bill Zimmerman. We got to 42 boxes in a few hours. On Aug. 24th, I went back again. Bill and I finished the remaining 21 boxes in about an hour. I later typed up an assessment of each box and delivered it to Earl and John on 08/30.



Kim Springer presenting a bluebird program

Thank you so much JOHN RUST for your outstanding contribution to the Eastern Bluebird population!!!

Kim Springer, BSP Mercer County Coordinator

BSP Newsletter Submission Contest

Contest Winner: Congratulations to John Forbes

Please select an item from the BSP Merchandise Store at www.thebsp.org and then contact the BSP Newsletter Editor, Joan Watroba at: bluebirdhappy365@outlook.com or by phone 717-766-2102 to select your prize and arrange for delivery.

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

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

bluebirdhappy365@outlook.com

Cut-off dates for submission: Spring - January 7, Summer- May 7, Fall/Winter-September 7

One submission will be randomly drawn at the cut-off date for each newsletter edition, and they will have their choice of any item offered in the BSP Merchandise Store.

Bluebird Program for Girl Scouts in Southwest PA by John Forbes

On March 29, 2022, Girl Scout Troops No. 53101, No. 53037, and No. 53056 in Connellsville, PA participated in a bluebird box workshop at the Connellsville Little House. The project was sponsored by John Forbes, BSP Member of Upper St. Clair, PA.

additional information about the bluebirds and details on how to join BSP. The girls left the workshop eager to go home and set up their boxes for their new feathered neighbors!



Mr. Forbes, along with assistants Mary Jayne Jacaruso and Bunny Guynn led the girls through the steps of assembling the boxes and provided information on how to install and care for them at home. The girls were also visited by Jane Shuck, who is a member of the Bluebird Society of PA. Ms. Shuck provided the girls with

Mr. Forbes donated the proceeds of the workshop to the Connellsville Little House Society, which is a non-profit organization which maintains the Little House so that the local Girl Scouts can use the building for scouting activities. Donations can be sent to: The Connellsville Little House Society, P.O. Box 2044, Connellsville, PA 15425

Hope Hill Lavender Farm and BSP by Deb Smith

story continues on page 22



Wendy and Troy Jochems - courtesy the Lavender Farm Store

photo courtesy of the Lavender Farm Store

Hope Hill Lavender Farm and BSP continues from page 21

Congratulations to Wendy and Troy Jochems (Marine Veteran, Thank you for your service), Owners of Hope Hill Lavender Farm (HHLF) in Schuylkill County and new BSP Members. On August 7, 2022, their local newspaper, the Republican Herald published a lovely article about these hard-working folks.

Wendy and Troy have developed a partnership with BSP's Schuylkill County Coordinator, Rich Rieger, and he gives them a glowing Bluebird conservation review in the story! There is a mini-Bluebird trail on the property and Wendy occasionally posts photos on their HHLF Facebook Page, which are then shared to our

BSP Facebook page.

I had the pleasure of visiting with them this past May, and the beauty of this rolling farmland is just incredible! HHLF is celebrating the fifth year of their lavender Farm Store and 11 years as a lavender farm in Schuylkill County-added bonus, rescued farm animals!

Wendy/Troy and their staff are friendly and knowledgeable about all things lavender. They look forward to continued success with their beloved Bluebirds!

Their website is: www.hopehilllavenderfarm.com



*Bluebirds Huddling for Warmth-New Year's Eve 2020
photo byWendy Jochems*



Bluebird Hatch Day

photo byWendy Jochems



American Flag in Lavender field photo byWendy Jochems



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 (Spring) |

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



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



Please submit your nesting data for 2022 by October 31st and nominate a special Bluebirder for a BSP Award by 12/31/22.

The Annual Nest Box Report Form and the BSP Award Nomination Forms are both included with this issue and are also posted on the BSP web site: www.thebsp.org and you can now complete and submit your Annual Nest Box Form electronically through a link posted on the BSP web site.

Share Your love of Bluebirds with Others!

A GIFT MEMBERSHIP TO BSP is the perfect gift for a special person in your life.

It will bring them the seasonal publication, Bluebird Trails and Tales, and will deliver Bluebird Joy and Happiness to them all year long.

A Membership Form appears in this issue and is also available on the BSP web site: www.thebsp.org



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