



Bluebird Trails & Tales

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

• Volume 23, Issue 1 Spring 2021 • www.thebsp.org • Editor: Joan Watroba • bluebirdhappy365@outlook.com



A Message from the President

Dr. Dean C. Rust, BSP President

Winter Roosts for Bluebirds

“**A**PPROXIMATELY HALF of a Bluebird’s life is spent in daylight; the other half is spent in the darkness. During only two periods of each year, at the equinoxes in spring and fall, is the 24-hour day of a Bluebird divided equally into 12 hours of light and 12 hours of dark. Depending on latitude, summer days may have 16 or more hours of daylight. Just the opposite occurs each winter when only 9 or fewer daylight hours are followed by 15 or more hours of nighttime. Winter nights in the mid to upper United States pose several problems for Bluebirds.

Low temperatures, snow, sleet and ice, food shortages and hungry predators accompany the long nights. Roost sites that provide protection, both from weather and predators, during these long nights will help the Bluebirds survive the cold winter months. Consequently, those Bluebirds that select the best roost sites are the most likely to survive and be biologically successful”. T. David Pitts, *Studying Eastern Bluebirds*, pg. 140.

I hope your COVID-19 2020 Bluebird season encompassed much success. Now is the time to plan for a stellar upcoming spring season. As a Bluebird Landlord there is always something to learn and perfect going forward. One technique that can enhance your game plan for being even more successful with the Blues is to consider adding a winter roost box to your backyard. You can help your Bluebirds keep warm at night with either a specially designed box or just modify one of your existing nest boxes. Either way, it will make you feel good that you are doing ALL you

can do to “WIN with Bluebirds”. Let’s get started!

Bluebirds only nest in spring and summer – it is their breeding season. From April to August, this is “Prime Time” for Bluebirders everywhere. During the rest of the year, our special secondary cavity-nesters often use these same boxes for shelter at night, especially in winter. Groups of 12-15 Bluebirds may sleep together if the box is large enough. You can help your backyard Blues keep warm at night with a few simple steps. Other backyard songbirds that may use your roost box are chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, downy woodpeckers and finches. When you are turning your electric blanket on this winter, think of your beloved Bluebirds and whether you have provided a simple warm & cozy roost box to shelter them from the harsh elements of winter.

5 Tips for Creating a Winter Roost Box for your Bluebirds

- 1) Buy a “pre-fabricated” roost box from: **Duncraft, Amazon, Audubon Society or Wild Birds Unlimited.** These boxes will be deeper than regular Bluebird boxes with larger floors 6” x 6” or 10” x 10”. Perches are **NOT** needed unless you still believe in the Easter Bunny, Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy! Roosting Bluebirds sleep in a heap or pile on the floor of the box and they keep each other warm. **See photo on page 2.** Mount this roost box on a smooth metal pole with a predator guard. In November or December, it is a good time to bring in one of your regular Bluebird nest boxes and

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A Message from the President continued from page 1

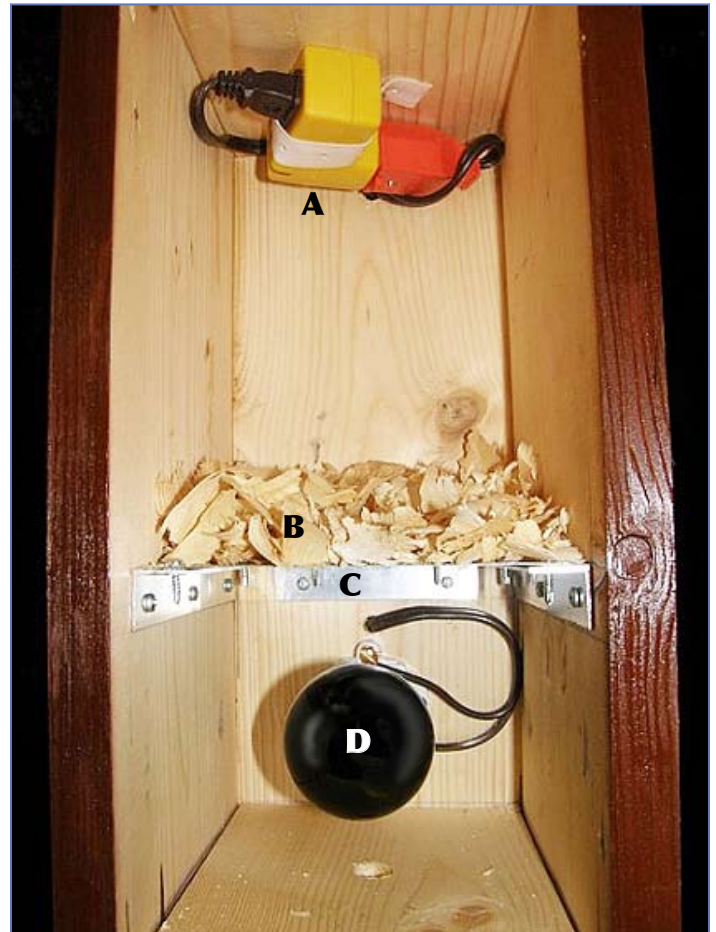
exchange it with your new winter box. This is a good time to dry out your regular box and do some repairs. Duncraft has a model that costs \$59.95 in their current catalog as listed: Convertible Winter Roost House.



- 2) Another plan is to modify one of your existing boxes into a roosting box. This is the economy route. Close all ventilation holes with Mortite, wood shims or plexiglass strips in the top of the box and floor. Foam weather-stripping can also be used to plug vents or open slots.
- 3) The 1 1/2" entrance hole of a Roosting Box should be low on the front of the box and NOT high. On some commercial boxes, the fronts can be inverted (flipped 180 degrees) to allow the entrance hole to be low on front. Warm air rises in the box, so this keeps the box warmer by not allowing the warmed air to escape. The critical warm air generated by the roosting birds is retained. Then add some pine needles, cedar wood chips or grasses to the box floor. A scientific temperature study done several

years ago proved that boxes with a grouping of Bluebirds roosting in them recorded temperatures at 29°F when the ambient outdoor temperatures was at 18°F.

- 4) If you are a woodworker, you may wish to build a special roost box using plans from the internet. A few years ago, I built an "electrified box" for roosting Bluebirds. It uses an EH-38 thermostat to control an electric bulb beneath a copper floor covered with cedar shavings. If I were a Bluebird, I would try and find a box like that each night!! See my website: www.bluebirdconservation.com (click on Articles: "How to Construct Heated Roosting Box for Bluebirds). I have made 5 of these. *See 2 photos (interior/exterior view)



- A) EH-38 thermostat wired to 110 AC**
- B) Cedar shavings**
- C) Floor platform for copper plate**
- D) 60 Watt black bulb for heat**

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BSP Officers

- President**
DEAN RUST 2022
 July7ds@aol.com
 717-669-0167
- Vice President**
PHIL DURGIN 2022
 pdurgin@comcast.net
 717-732-5325
- Secretary**
NANCY PUTT 2021
 bluebirds@pa.net
 717-432-2647
- Treasurer**
JOYCE STUFF 2021
 bspcc@innernet.net
 717-328-3411

Board of Directors

- SHIRLEY HALK** 2021
 717-865-2650
- KEN LEISTER** 2021
 kenapeg@aol.com
 610-696-5271
- DAN THOMAS** 2022
 adthomas10@comcast.net
 717-786-7893
- BILL CUPPETT** 2022
 grammied34@gmail.com
 814-479-2230
- TERRY GERHART** 2021
 gerhartsat@aol.com
 610-670-5508
- MARILYN L. MICHALSKI** 2021
 emeraldmm@verizon.net
 610-933-0497
- NANCY FRAIM** 2022
 nancyfraim@comcast.net
 610-873-7454

BSP Chairpersons

Newsletter Editor/Auction

JOAN WATROBA

bluebirdhappy365@outlook.com
717 766 2102

State County Coordinator

KEN LEISTER

kenapeg@aol.com
610 696 5271

Farm Show/York Garden Show

NANCY PUTT

bluebirds@pa.net
717 432 2647

Nominations/Elections

VACANT

Membership

NANCY FRAIM

nancyfraim@comcast.net
610 873 7454

Finance

JOYCE STUFF

bspcc@innernet.net
717 328 3411

2021 Conference

PHIL DURGIN

pdurgin@comcast.net
717 732 5325

State Monitoring/Awards

SHIRLEY HALK

717 865 2650

Research

CHUCK MUSSER

chasmusser@aol.com
717 367 3548

Merchandise Manager

SUSAN DURGIN

susandurgin@gmail.com
717 614 7077

Promotion/Ned Smith Day

PHILIP DURGIN

pdurgin@comcast.net
717 732 5325

Webmaster/Speaker Bureau

HARRY SCHMEIDER

harryschmeider@gmail.com
724 285 1209

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.



photo by Maria Prentice

Website Videographer

SHIRLEY RUST

july7ds@aol.com
717 669 0167

Publication/Artwork

CHARLES LUCAS

chaslucas@gmail.com
412 462 6735

Website Photographer

DICK HESS

aa3hv1@verizon.net
570 437 2755

Junior Membership

MARILYN MICHALSKI

emeraldmm@verizon.net
610 933 0497

Woodworking

DEAN RUST

july7ds@aol.com
717 669 0167

Publicity

DEB SMITH

goveg17110@yahoo.com
717 234 4503

Thanks to Deb Smith, new BSP Member for volunteering to serve as Publicity Chair for BSP. If you have interest or skills in any of these committee functions, please contact us.

A Message from the President continued from page 2

- 5) Protect your roost box from predators. Mount it on a 1" smooth metal conduit pole. Use an 8" diameter x 2' length Ron Kingston Stovepipe Baffle as a predator guard. Place box in a protected area from wind and face it to the southeast. "Winter snow and ice storms are frequently followed by cold northern air.



photo by Michael L. Smith

During these conditions, the bluebirds have trouble finding enough food during the day and then are faced with long, cold nights. By roosting inside a cavity such as a winter roost box, Bluebirds are sheltered from the chill-factor winds and precipitation. If five or six Bluebirds roost together, they can raise the temperature in the box several degrees and reduce the amount of fuel (food or fat) each bird needs in order to survive". T. David Pitts, pg. 145.



A good way to tell if Bluebirds are roosting in a box - feces and seeds on the box floor. A thick layer of feces up to 1/2" may indicate that a communal roost of Bluebirds has been using the box for several weeks. Also mixed in with the feces will be small down feathers that appear grey or blue (little puffs of down). *** See photo. This is another sign that Blues are utilizing the roost box. Roosting Bluebirds defecate several times each night and this can get messy. Being stacked on top of each other, feces can shower down on birds below in the pile. These feces with uric acid can damage clean feathers and remove protective oils from the bird's plumage. The bird can then be more vulnerable to wind and rain outside the box.

"Which is better for a Bluebird: a solitary roost or a communal roost? When a Bluebird with a thick layer of fat has been able to find food and the air temperature does not drop below 20 degrees F., a solitary roost is usually selected. Roosting by itself, a Bluebird reduces the risk of predation and avoids having its feathers soiled by the feces from other birds. If the late afternoon weather conditions indicate an extremely cold night and the bird has NOT found much food or if its fat reserves are almost used up, the bird's chances of maintaining sufficient body heat to survive the night are higher in a communal roost, in spite of the hazards associated with such roosts.

Every night challenges the survival abilities of Bluebirds. However, the long, cold nights of winter present special problems. The birds that select the best roost sites are more likely to survive. Through many generations of Bluebirds, events such as winter weather have selected those individuals that are best adapted, in both behavior and physiology, to their local environment". T. David Pitts, pg. 150.

With this new information regarding Winter Roosts for Bluebirds in your toolbox, this year may be the year for a "Motel 6 Accommodation" in your backyard? Bluebirds require so little, but they give so much! Have a great New Year in 2021!

Dr. Dean C. Rust
January 20, 2021

From the Editor *by Joan Watroba*

Think Outside of the Box

AS BLUEBIRD MONITORS, we are keenly focused on what we observe inside of the nest box. It is a thrill to be able to observe the entire nesting cycle: nest building, egg-laying, eggs hatching, babies growing, and the young bluebirds fledging. (leaving the nest box) Then we clean out the box, in hopes that there will be a repeat performance-a second or even a third successful nesting cycle. Certainly, what happens inside of the nest box is of ultimate importance. However, factors outside of the nest box are also very important and must



Photo by Lorrie Preston

be considered before and even after we set up a nest box. We must expand our view and **think outside of the box** and consider the following factors:

Preferred Habitat - open, mowed areas - Be aware of habitat changes over time which may indicate the need to relocate the nestbox. For example, a habitat which becomes thick with vegetation and high grass may no longer be good for either the bluebirds or the monitor.

Availability of **Perches** - scattered trees or posts provide suitable perches - Adding a perch can be as simple as pounding a pole into the ground in the vicinity of the nestbox

Mounting Poles-use smooth conduit pipe poles and cover with capped PVC pipe or install a stovepipe guard around the pole. Avoid placing nest boxes on trees or on wooden posts without metal flashing, as climbing predators can climb the rough wood surface, reach into the box, and access the nesting birds.

Box orientation - Face the box to the East-away from the prevailing winds to keep cold winds and rain from directly entering the nest box entrance hole and reduce the risk of hypothermia to the young birds

Bird's Flight Pattern - Be aware of hazards such as traffic from nearby roads and how it may affect the safety of the birds when they enter or exit the nestbox

Predator Guards on Boxes - A Noel Guard at least 7 inches long installed over the entrance hole is very effective to keep raccoons or cats from reaching into the nestbox to access the eggs and birds.

Distance between Nest Boxes - In the past, it was recommended that nest boxes be placed at least 100 yards from one another to accommodate more than one bluebird pair. In recent years, I have observed that bluebird pairs may nest as close as 75 feet, especially if there is a habitat feature such as a body of water or marshy area between them, which provides a separation of their habitats. If there are bluebirds and tree swallows competing for the same box, install another box within 6-18 feet away. That can allow the bluebirds and the tree swallows to each have a nest box.

Water-Water is a very important feature. If you have a bluebird box in your yard, provide a bird bath. Adding



a heater to it can provide a needed source of water year-round. If your bluebird trail is located near a stream or lake, the birds will use this natural resource to drink and to preen their feathers.

Supplemental Food - Provide supplemental food, especially in winter and in early spring before the insects have hatched. Commercial suet cakes or homemade peanut butter/cornmeal/raisin suet are good options. Avoid placing feeding stations right next to the bluebird box, as that will attract other birds and wildlife to the nesting site.

And lastly, **monitoring outside of the box** with binoculars when the young bluebirds are more than 14 days old will allow you to safely observe the parents feeding their young from the outside of the entrance hole and will even allow you to watch the drama of their young leaving the box and flying into the world.

Joan Watroba
Joan Watroba, Editor

My Hobby Farm *by William F. Repack*

MY "FARM" has a history, that I am aware, which dates back to at least the year 1900.

I am located about 5 miles from the Pittsburgh Airport. Presently it is on seven rolling acres, with 1/3 in the woods (Oaks, Maples, Sassafras, Walnut, etc.) and a campground overlooking a stream. The rest (maybe four acres) is on two level pastures with a Picnic Shelter, Gazebo, Stable (mini donkeys), feed/hay building, tool shed, three-car block garage, large block barn (used to be a commercial chicken coop) and our five-bedroom Victorian home. As a retired university professor and entrepreneur, I have developed many businesses from this property.

Now at 80, I am content to attend to my "wild" animals/birds, bunches of turkeys and a large herd of deer. Each Spring, I find, and quietly leave newborn deer alone to be cared for by their Moms. My love for all animals has led me to Bluebirds and my building of their houses (13) and placed on the property. Just a beautiful bird! I joined the Bluebird Society of PA to learn more about the Bluebird and how to protect it from more aggressive birds (House Sparrows). Note that I have the bird houses ready for the Bluebirds this coming Spring with the "fishing line" attached as directed to deter the House Sparrows.

Editor's Note-Thank you for providing such a wonderful habitat for the farm animals, songbirds, and wildlife on your Hobby Farm.



“How I Earned My Associates Degree in Bluebirding” *by Deb Smith*

ASIDE FROM THE FACT that my parents instilled their love of birds in me, I always adored Bluebirds (BB's). I truly didn't have a specific reason why - until I hung my first BB nest box in early June, 2020. I bought the box at Agway, called it my new COVID hobby, and stressed over where to put it for perfect placement - wind/rain direction, shade, and vicinity to shrubs. I decided to hang it on a nail on my wooden 4 x 4 clothesline post - and that was where it stayed. I didn't know how to mount a nest box on a pole, or how to get the post in



the ground.

I honestly thought I'd never get BB's to nest in that box, but shocker - within a week, I started noticing a male and female claiming it as theirs. Can this be real?? So exciting! I looked inside and saw a nest being built that I thought was the BB's. I found out much later that it was actually a House wren's nest - a bunch of sticks, but I didn't know because I kept seeing BB's. Turns out that the BB's built their pine needle nest right over top of the wren's twig nest. I have since been told that it is usually the other way around. Sometime in mid- June, the female



laid 4 beautiful blue eggs.

Word around here was that there is a gentleman named John Blair who walks his dog, Jack, in the neighborhood and is very knowledgeable about BB's (along with wife, Cathy). On June 29th, he walked by my house and I asked if he was “The Bluebird Guy” and he said

yes! I asked if he would come into my backyard and look at my setup and he opened the nest box door and found the 4 babies had hatched! I was ecstatic, and it turns out that he and his wife are members of BSP. He later dropped the Summer 2020 issue of the BSP newsletter in my mailbox. Before that, I didn't even know that BSP existed!

Then, a horrible spell of severe heat and humidity set in for my newborns. On July 2nd, I opened the door and like any proud Grandma, took an awesome video of the babies gaping. Ah, all is well! On July 3rd it was even hotter, and I opened the door to check on them. They didn't move. I thought they were almost dead and thought they needed to go to a wildlife rehabilitator. Pure panic. Good thing that John Blair had dropped off that newsletter! I started randomly writing emails and calling



>> How I earned, etc. continues on page 9

“How I Earned My Associates Degree in Bluebirding” continued from page 8

some of the Officers and Directors listed on pages 2 and 3 - I was a total stranger to all of them, and near tears. The President, Dr. Dean Rust, was on a beach vacation, but was kind enough to take my call. Phil and Susan Durgin were also very helpful. Spoke with Nancy Putt, who reassured me that the babies were OK. And Joan Watroba was amazing, too. I am forever grateful to these people (because of their willingness to help - and because of my newly found reason for loving BB's - I felt inspired to give back to BSP in some way.) They told me that once the babies get feathers, they have some insulation against the heat. I started lugging a heavy patio umbrella back and forth, following the sun's path, all day - every day until they fledged.

By July 11th, the babies were fluttering their wings, and on the 13th, I took my last “in-nest” photo, so as not to risk them flying out prematurely. I did not get to witness the actual fledging, but after about a week, the parents brought them all back for mealworms. Be still, my heart!

Around this time in July, I cut the membership application off the back of the Blair's BSP Newsletter and mailed it in. I had noticed that the Publicity position was vacant and volunteered for that (I began helping with posts on the BSP Facebook page in the fall). After I received my Welcome Packet from Nancy Fraim, Membership Chair, I wrote to her thanking her for all of the information. We then spoke on the phone and she taught me so much more about Bluebirds. Forever grateful to her. Had the pleasure of driving to Downingtown to have lunch with Nancy, husband Joe, and



John Blair lines up a Noel Guard on Deb Smith's bluebird nestbox

BSP State Coordinator, Ken Leister (who gifted me a nest box, thank you!). Also got to see Nancy's BB nest box equipped with a Ring Camera, so cool!

Ken Leister asked Dauphin County Coordinator, Bill Strauss, if he could assist with placing another nest box on a pole in my back yard - and sure enough - it happened! Also, my neighbors, John and Cathy Blair recently came over to give me more BB advice, and John has now installed two Noel Guards (using a pattern from BSP) on my boxes.

I readily admit that my biggest mistake was installing my first nest box on a wooden post without a guard or a baffle, but that will be corrected - I found a baffle that fits around 4 x 4 posts. I am very thankful that the babies had a successful fledge.

All of the things I have learned in my six short months as a “BB Newbie” are way too numerous to mention. Almost feel like I earned a

“Bachelor's in Bluebirding”, come to think of it. I never knew what a BB song sounded like before this year and can now recognize them from afar. I am incredibly thankful for everyone who has helped me in any way, shape, or form! Luv all my new BB friends.

One of my favorite things is the famous Bluebird wing-wave. I saw “my” male wing-wave “my” female as they were sitting on the fence, close to the time of fledging. It was as if he said, “Good job, Mate!”

As of this writing on December 9, 2020, I have set up a mealworm/suet feeder directly out from my kitchen window and the BB's come several times a day. There is also a heated birdbath for water. They are the only birds that stop me in my tracks and seeing them provides a sweet break from the bleakness! It's the only thing I like about winter!

Upcoming BSP Events

BSP Board/Membership Meeting Dates:

- April 22, 2021-6 p.m.
Thursday Evening
- July 22, 2021-6 p.m.
Thursday Evening
- October 28, 2021-6 p.m.
Thursday Evening

Please contact Phil Durgin, BSP Vice-President prior to the meeting dates to arrange to join BSP meetings.

Phil's contact phone number is 717-732-5325 or e-mail Phil at: pdurgin@comcast.net

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.

Please join us at our meetings!

During the pandemic, the BSP meetings have been held virtually via ZOOM, so please contact Phil for an invite to attend the meeting from the comfort of your home.

• April 17, 2021 10 A.M.

(Virtual bluebird program via Google Meets) Introduction to the nesting needs and behavior of Bluebirds with Dean Rust, President, Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania.



photo by Richard Hess

\$15, includes adult membership to The Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania.

Free for Members of Hershey Gardens

Free for Current Members of the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania.

Join Dean Rust and Hershey Gardens on Google Meets for a virtual, informative presentation about the care and behavior of the Eastern Bluebird, a native songbird of Pennsylvania.

Following his presentation, Dean will join you **live** from Hershey Gardens for a virtual walk along our bluebird box trail and look for "assets", or a box with eggs and teach the proper etiquette to observe bluebirds from a safe distance.

Following registration, an email with a link with additional details

on how to use Google Meets will be sent to you.

Rebecca Lawrence, Manager of Education & Public Programs, Hershey Gardens

To register, call Hershey Gardens, 717-534-3492 by April 3rd
rellawrence@hersheygardens.org

On the Horizon:

• March 11&12, 2022

We hope to see you at the 2022 BSP Conference, which is scheduled for **March 11&12, 2022** at the Best Western/Lehigh Valley Conference Center in Bethlehem, PA.

www.lehighvalleyhotel.com

Thank you for your continued support and interest in the bluebirds!

<https://www.hersheygardens.org/events-programs/3260>

Bluebird Monitor/Caretaker Needed

If you live or work near Wyomissing, PA (Reading Area) and would like to take care of and monitor the nest boxes on an established Bluebird Trail at the

Wyomissing Park, please contact: Terry Gerhart, BSP County Coordinator at: gerhartsat@aol.com or call him at 610-670-5508

There's Lots to Like on BSP Facebook

Lots to Like, even Love on BSP Facebook!

BSP has a wonderful Facebook Page. It's called the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania Facebook Page. BSP members and non-members can Like, View, and Follow the items posted on it. Here is the direct link:



<https://www.facebook.com/Bluebird-Society-of-Pennsylvania-166745809525/>

Everyone can view it and see the many photos, stories, and videos. You can also request items to be posted on it.

Editor's Note:

Thanks to Phil Durgin, BSP Vice-President who launched our Facebook page, and to Deb Smith, BSP Publicity Chair who co-administers the site. We are grateful that soon after becoming a BSP Member, Deb volunteered to handle the day-to-day administration of this Facebook site. The quality and number of posts are impressive-Check it out!

2020 Seasonal Newsletters are now Posted on the BSP Web Site

Now that the year 2020 is behind us, the seasonal newsletter issues for 2020 are now posted on the BSP WEB SITE www.thebsp.org

Go to www.thebsp.org Select **More...** and scroll down to **Past Newsletters**.

NEW!!! BSP Decal Stickers are Now Available

- Tell others about your love of bluebirds and BSP!
- 5" colorful stickers
- \$3 ea. if purchased at BSP EVENTS
- \$4 ea. (include \$1 for shipping) for mail delivery

To order, send a check payable to "BSP" to:
Susan Durgin, BSP Merchandise Manager
3918 Ridgeland Blvd. Mechanicsburg, PA 17050



Yeah! The Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania now has a YouTube channel

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgHqvFR4SdeUrcKgxvVof9w>



photo by Susan Renkel

Here you will find videos on these important topics:

- Nesting Behavior of Bluebirds
- Ways to Attract Bluebirds to Your Backyard
- Views from Inside of the Nest Box
- How To Monitor Nest Boxes
- Bluebird Predator Guards-Protect Your Bluebird Nest
- Bluebird Kit

Thanks to Nancy Fraim, Jenny Shealy, Nancy Putt, Dean Rust, and Phil Durgin, who contributed to this wonderful bluebird educational resource. These videos were offered during the virtual PA Farm Show which was held from January 9-16, 2021

BSP is now enrolled in AmazonSmile!



When you sign up for AmazonSmile and select the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania as your charity, Amazon will donate .5% of your purchase to BSP.

AmazonSmile is the same Amazon you know. Same products, same prices, same service!

Our unique charity link is:

<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/25-1810835>

Proceeds from these donations will be used by BSP for educational outreach and for setting up and maintaining bluebird trails.

BSP Remembers and Honors:

David V. Pietsch

David V. Pietsch, (Dave) age 80, of Harrisburg, PA, passed away on Tuesday, September 15, 2020. He was the widower of Jane Louise (Langer) Pietsch. David and Jane were very instrumental in the early years of BSP. Dave was very active with the Woodworking Committee to provide BSP with a supply of nest boxes, and Jane served as BSP Officer and Board Member for many years. Jane and Dave loved bluebirds and set up and monitored bluebird boxes in the Harrisburg area.

Richard K. Putt

Richard K. Putt (Rick) age 74, passed away after a long illness on January 24, 2021. Rick was the husband of Nancy Putt, who serves as BSP Secretary. Rick taught Science at Mechanicsburg Senior High School for 30 years and loved the outdoors. He monitored and maintained 6 bluebird boxes at Chestnut Ridge Park and 12 nest boxes at Logan Parks in Dillsburg for 10 years. BSP sends sincere condolences to Nancy and to their entire family.

Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania Financial Report 2020

Submitted by Joyce Stuff, BSP Treasurer

Revenue

Administration (matured CD)	\$10674.23
Store	881.39
Membership Fees	10,815.00
Donations	1,710.50
Speaker Income	170.00
Fundraising.....	00.00
Woodworking	1,934.38
Conference	3,260.00
Total Revenue	\$29,445.50

Expenses

Administration	\$ 2,435.29
Store	1,079.82
Membership	2,199.13
Fundraising	00.00
Woodworking	4,056.42
Conference	4,144.16
Education	650.44
Newsletter	4,076.76
County Coordinator	130.00
Research	51.30
Total Expenses	\$18,823.32

BSP Financial Statement Summary for 2020

Checking Account Balance 12/31/19.....	\$38,491.64
2020 Revenue.....	+29,445.50
2020 Expenses.....	-18,823.32
Checking Account Balance 12/31/20.....	\$49,113.82
Cash-On-Hand (store cash box).....	+ 100.00
Total Cash Assets 12/31/20.....	\$49,213.82

Mailbag

Thanks to you and to all of the people who contributed to the Fall/Winter issue of our Bluebird Trails and Tales. Every article was so interesting, especially knowing that they are personal stories that people share about their bluebird experiences.

Dean Rust's message was also very informative for me. I did not realize our dear bluebirds have so many feathers and at different times of the year. A Big Hug for all that you do.

Pat Greenawald, Messiah Lifeways at Messiah Village



photo by Nancy Fraim

Editor's Reply: Hi Pat-Nice to hear from you, and thanks for your positive feedback about the BSP newsletter. It is ironic that the Bluebird Society of PA started with a small group of people interested in bluebirds. It was to be a small Bluebird Club. The original founders were Jane Pietsch and Kathy Clark, and the first meeting was held in a meeting room at Messiah Village in Mechanicsburg more than 20 years ago. I attended that first meeting and then many more. It then blossomed into a statewide organization which is an affiliate of NABS.

"Sadly, there comes a time when all of us have to leave our homes for various reasons, along with our beloved Bluebirds. I hope that when that day comes for me, I am in a position to ask the new owners if they are interested in continuing to take care of my nest boxes, which is important to me.

If they say "yes" I will leave my boxes up and include as much information as possible. If they say "no", I will take everything down and donate to BSP."

Deb Smith

Editor's Reply: Hi Deb-Thank you for your thoughtful posting. It expresses the need for bluebirders

to insure that their nest boxes and trails continue to be cared for in the event that their situation changes. If anyone has a bluebird trail and is no longer able to monitor/care for it, please contact the BSP County Coordinator in your county and he or she will try to find a person to monitor it.

Make Your Bluebirds Count in 2021!

If you monitor bluebird nest boxes, please keep a record of your nesting data. This data is important to determine trends in the propagation of bluebirds and other native songbirds.

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

www.thebsp.org

- Please submit your Annual Nest Box Report by October 15th of each year (to enter the Early Bird Contest Drawing) Otherwise by December 15th, and send to Shirley Halk, BSP State Monitoring,

42 Park Drive. Grantville, Pa. 17028

Here are the 3 Winners of the 2020 Annual Newsletter Submission Contest who can select an item from the BSP Merchandise Store:

- **Kim Christie-Delaware County,**
- **Donna Rice-Mercer County,**
- **Nick Kachur-Allegheny County**

The 2020 Annual Nest Box Report for BSP by county will be posted on the BSP web site www.thebsp.org when it is compiled.

New Bluebird Trail at UPMC York

by Nancy Putt, BSP York County Coordinator

BSP MEMBER Richard Brown from York County, who lives a few miles away from UPMC York identified this location as favorable habitat for a bluebird trail. It was his idea to contact the facility to inquire about placing a bluebird trail there.

Thanks to Chad Myers, UPMC Pinnacle Foundation Director of Development and Joe landolo, UPMC Memorial VP of Operations, who were very receptive with partnering with BSP to establish a new Bluebird Trail on the grounds of UPMC Memorial. A Big Thanks to Shaun Rust and his Dad, Dean Rust, BSP President, who cut out the 15 western red cedar wood boxes and assembled them. Shaun then wrapped all cedar roofs

with 5mil copper. The hospital purchased the nest boxes from BSP, and BSP volunteers assisted in installing them in suitable habitat on November 24, 2020.

The trail is about 3 miles long and the habitat includes rolling

hills with areas of mowed grass and open space along a large pond. There are also some wooded areas. BSP Member Richard Brown will be monitoring the trail.

The UPMC Memorial Transform the Trail fundraising campaign allowed people to sponsor a nest box for themselves or in honor of a loved one by making a donation to the hospital. A plaque with the donor's message will be placed on the nest box.

Soon after Box # 1, a special cedar box was installed, a bluebird pair was seen sitting on the box. "If you build it, they will come."

Editor's Note: This new Bluebird Trail is located at UPMC Memorial, 1701 Innovation Drive, York, PA



Richard Brown and Nancy Putt



Chad Myers (left) Nancy Putt and Joe landolo

The Wellness Trail is open to the public. Here is a diagram:

<https://cdn.upmc.com/-/media/upmc/locations/hospitals/memorial/documents/upmc-memorial-wellness-trail.pdf?la=en&rev=22eaab0415944ce1b9fd41be86>

Transform the Trail: <https://ouryorkmedia.com/stories/upmc-memorials-transform-the-trail-is-a-prescription-for-healthy-living/>

Native Plants Provide Needed Food Sources for Songbirds

by Joan Watroba

*Or if I plant a tree with fruit,
On which the birds may feed,
I've helped to foster feathered friends
And that's a worthy deed.*

From "I Love a Tree" by Samuel N. Baxter



WITH THE SHARP INCREASE IN developing large tracts of undeveloped land and farmland for residential housing or for commercial use, the supply of natural foods for birds and wildlife is greatly diminished.

*Please set a goal for 2021 to plant a native tree or ornamental shrub which will produce fruit or berries for the birds.

For a list of native plants which produce food for birds:

- <https://abcbirds.org/blog/native-trees-shrubs-attract-birds>
- <http://www.sialis.org/plants.htm>

*Some trees and shrubs native to Pennsylvania that are a good source of fruit for birds:

- <https://extension.psu.edu/programs/master-gardener/counties/chester/how-to-gardening-brochures/gardening-to-attract-birds>



Bluebird Eating Berries photo by Richard R. Hess

- Serviceberry
Amelanchier
- Spicebush *Lindera benzoin*
- American Beautyberry *Callicarpa americana*
- Pin Cherry *Prunus pennsylvanica*
- Dogwood *Cornus*
- American Holly *Ilex opaca*
- White Pine *Pinus strobus*
- American Cranberrybush *Viburnum trilobum*
- Juniper *Juniperus virginiana*
- Elderberry *Sambucus Canadensis*
- Blueberry *Vaccinium corymbosum*

Bluebird Loyalty *by Marilyn Michalski*

AN EASTERN BLUEBIRD pair will stay together most of the year. During winter they usually flock with other bluebirds (EABs). In Pennsylvania, as days warm up (late February and March), the male will explore potential nesting sites. He will sing to attract a female – either his regular partner or a new female if he is a first-year Blue or a widower. He will demonstrate how to enter and exit the box. Sometimes he will “court” his female with wing fluttering – the delightful “wing-waving.” Once the female goes into a nestbox, she will normally proceed with nesting. We will hear the male’s soft warble, and, once we recognize the sound, we will enjoy its subtle charm. He may use his “click” sound – a “call” to alert or warn her of possible danger. When a female accepts a male, she will stay with him. The male’s genetic inheritance makes him a dedicated “husband” to his female. He will follow her as well as lead her.

Although their nesting will often be successful, they may be displaced or harmed. We have learned that nestbox competition is intense – not always do bluebirds win the struggle with competitors. The demise of the male bluebird is the worst scenario. In 2009, after attracting my first bluebird pair, I found that the male had disappeared during the feeding of nestlings. All by herself, the

young female fed her nestlings and enabled them to fledge. It had been a challenge for her – sometimes she delivered large, hard-backed beetles to them, which they could not swallow. I found several dead beetles inside the nestbox after they left. What followed was a depressing scenario: The female and her fledglings did not return, so for several years I had no bluebirds.

newborn birds of other species. I try to relocate nest boxes away from brushy areas to more open habitat which seems to reduce the House Wrens from using the nest box. Some bluebirders have had luck using Wren guards to deter the House Wrens from using their nest boxes.

In 2014 a new bluebird pair established themselves in this

nestbox. They arrived as a couple – the female was unique in that she laid white eggs; every clutch of eggs was white rather than blue. Only 5% of bluebird eggs are white. After three years of successful nesting, the male vanished. I dreaded this occurrence, because the female will normally abandon a location if she has no partner. I expected her to vacate my property, but I was wrong. Somehow, a new male bluebird wandered into the area and found her. Perhaps she liked the open space of my backyard, along with the live mealworms I provided. Plus, I never use pesticides or herbicides.



Wing-Waving, a Sweet Courtship Behavior photo by Patrick Ready

With or without bluebirds in residence I maintain a bluebird nestbox in my yard, and I make sure that NO House Sparrows use it. I also discourage House Wrens to use the nest box. House Wrens are native songbirds, but they can be very destructive to other native songbirds by pecking and removing their eggs and even removing

I was lucky this widowed female remained near her nestbox because a new male found HER. I realized that a female bluebird may behave like a “cougar” and attract a young male. This couple had several years of nesting successes. She had been a steady, calm bird -- rarely did she get excited or frightened. She went

Bluebird Loyalty continues on page 17

Bluebird Loyalty continued from page 16

about the business of reproduction as though she had a Degree in the process. In March of 2019 she laid four white eggs and then disappeared. Her male stayed to defend the nest – like all members of his species, he will NOT abandon eggs or nestlings – even if the partner goes missing. After three weeks of absence, I knew she had met her end. I was glad she had lived a full bluebird life – about eight years – the average lifespan of an Eastern Bluebird.

The male remained devoted to the eggs. He flew around looking for the female and entered the nestbox numerous times a day. He sometimes stayed inside the box for 20 minutes, and he might have tried to incubate the eggs. My colleague, Nancy Fraim, our BSP Membership Chair, and I had witnessed incubation by male bluebirds through our RING cameras, which we installed inside of our nest boxes.

After 21 days of the female's absence, I carefully examined the eggs, which were then 28 days old and determined that they were spoiled. (Bluebird eggs should hatch between 10-12 days after incubation starts) Because I didn't want the male to waste time defending nonviable eggs, I removed them, as well as all nesting material. When the male discovered his nestbox was empty, his behavior changed immediately. He flew away and was not seen for a week. Although alarmed, I had faith in his commitment to his nestbox. On the eighth day I spotted him sitting on top of it. Another bluebird was nearby. A female? With binoculars I confirmed it was

a young female, whom he had led to the nestbox. The happiness I felt was indescribable. I watched from my kitchen window as he sang to her and enticed her to the nestbox. I was impressed how quickly she perched on top of the box. Within a day his new partner inspected the interior, and within two days she was taking in nesting material. My eyes burned with joy.

Was this the original female? Had she come back? No, this female exhibited more energy and liveliness. Her identity was confirmed when she laid five blue eggs, which hatched on schedule. The nestlings fledged at the expected time, and a second brood was also successful. This bluebird pair is still together and moving into their third year of partnership. During the winter they congregate in a hermitage of approximately a dozen bluebirds who feed on Bluebird Suet in my yard.

Even though we maintain safe environments and monitor our nestboxes, we may lose a bluebird. Their life spans are limited, and their natural enemies are numerous. We do what we can to protect them, and we wish we could do more to prevent the disappearance of the male. If he goes missing, the female no longer has an "anchor" to the location. If she has already laid eggs, or has young in the nestbox, she will feed them until they fledge. Without eggs or young she will have no "connection" to the box and may become a wanderer. BUT – if the neighborhood has a healthy population of bluebirds, the Human Landlord may not have to wait long for a new pair to find the available nestbox.

The Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania (BSP) has made a significant improvement in the population of Eastern Bluebirds. The installation of new nestboxes, along with regular monitoring, has made bluebird success more common. I am fortunate to live in Chester County where their population is high. Other counties are also increasing their bluebird numbers – Lancaster has a large population, and Montgomery County is catching up. Many other counties are also "growing" their bluebird numbers. As an organization that spreads knowledge and encourages monitoring of nestboxes, the BSP has made beneficial improvements for Eastern Bluebirds. In recent years, the efforts of a growing number of monitors are helping bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting birds. In addition, monitors work to reduce the numbers of dangerous, non-native birds. We will not tolerate House Sparrows and European Starlings to utilize our nestboxes. With our BSP membership close to 1,000, the proactive work of dedicated bluebirders is expanding safe nesting environments for our beloved Eastern Bluebirds!

May all your bluebirds find partners!

Editor's Note:

Marilyn currently serves as BSP Board Member and is the Junior Membership Chair

*Special Thanks to Patrick Ready for permission to include his beautiful photograph with this article.

Patrick is the President of the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, www.braw.org

2021 BSP COUNTY COORDINATORS KEN LEISTER, STATE COUNTY COORDINATOR -KENAPEG@AOL.COM

BLUEBIRD SOCIETY OF PA COUNTY COORDINATORS ARE HERE TO ASSIST YOU WITH ANY PROBLEMS AND QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE CONCERNING BLUEBIRDING AND REQUESTS FOR BLUEBIRD PROGRAMS IN YOUR COUNTY. THERE ARE COUNTIES THAT NEED COORDINATORS, IF YOU LIVE IN THAT COUNTY AND WOULD LIKE TO BECOME A COUNTY COORDINATOR CONTACT THE STATE COUNTY COORDINATOR:

KEN LEISTER PHONE: 610 696 5271 E-MAIL: KENAPEG@AOL.COM

ADAMS

John Gabreski
717-337-2851

ALLEGHENY

Ed Monroe
412-486-0766
ewmonroe2@verizon.net

ARMSTRONG (Vacant)

BEAVER

Scott Parry
412-841-5071

BEDFORD

John & Cathy Everhart
814-623-8852
johneverhart3077@gmail.com
cathyeverhart3088@gmail.com

BERKS

Terry Gerhart
610-775-9474
gerhartsat@aol.com

BLAIR

Kelly Baronner
814-932-4100
rkbaronner@gmail.com

BRADFORD (Vacant)

BUCKS

Bill Moyer
215-536-7032
wcpmoy@comcast.net

BUTLER

Darrell Daubenspeck
724-735-2363
daubie@zoominternet.net
and

Harry Schneider

724-285-1209
harryschneider@gmail.com

CAMBRIA

Bob & Winnie Illig
814-533-9237
winillig@hotmail.com

CAMERON

Robert Kerner
814-486-3484

CARBON

Sandy & Don Bonett
610-681-8807
don4nett@ptd.net

CENTRE

Joanna Taylor
Contact State County
Coordinator

CHESTER

Marilyn Michalski
610-933-0497
emeraldmm@verizon.net

and

Nancy Fraim
610-873-7454
nancyfraim@comcast.net

CLARION

Amy Wolbert
814-764-5321
ashoupdwolbert@gmail.com

CLEARFIELD

Norman Bloom
814-761-7962
ngbloom@comcast.net

CLINTON

Linda Frye
570-769-7375
vfrye@kcnet.org

COLUMBIA

Margaret Pickin
570-784-2633
mpickin@ptd.net

CRAWFORD

Bill Wenger
412-720-0766
w.wenger@comcast.net

CUMBERLAND

Joan Watroba
717-766-2102
bluebirdhappy365@outlook.com

and

David L. Price
717-245-2926 (h)
717-576-0726 (c)
david17007@aol.com

DAUPHIN

Bill Strauss
717-541-9168
mbstrauss@verizon.net

DELAWARE

Alice Severeid
610-544 9057
alicesevereid@hotmail.com

ELK

Wayne Bryndel
814-772-4604
wbryndel@windstream.net

ERIE

Bernie Connelly
814-734-5446
bbconnelly1@verizon.net
and

Andrea Wyman
814-398-8384
awyman@edinboro.edu

FAYETTE

Jane Shuck
724-277-8526
janeshuck@zoominternet.net
[net](mailto:jane@zoominternet.net)

FOREST

Mark Ritke
814-676-4747
bluebirdsunlimit@aol.com

FRANKLIN

Joyce Stuff
717-328-3411
bspcc@innernet.net

FULTON

Florence & Robert Pyle
610-322-7031
bluebirdflo@yahoo.com

GREENE (Vacant)

HUNTINGDON (Vacant)

INDIANA

Michael Schmaus
814-938-0928
mspaelk@yahoo.com
Debbi Barate
814-446-5661
ridgebackqueen@aol.com

2021 BSP COUNTY COORDINATORS *continued from page 18*

JEFFERSON

Marsha Harris
814-265-1231
mlharris@penn.com

JUNIATA

Gail Getz
717-463-4041
dggetz@embarqmail.com

LACKAWANNA (Vacant)**LANCASTER**

Dan Thomas
717-786-7893
adthomas10@comcast.net
and
Dean Rust
717-669-0167
july7ds@aol.com

LAWRENCE

Bill Wenger
412-720-0766
w.wenger@comcast.net

LEBANON

Shirley Halk
717-865-2650

LEHIGH

Denise/Peter Reinhart
610-965-5389
parrots@ptd.net

LUZERNE

Jeffrey Stratford
570-332-2942
jeffrey.stratford@wilkes.edu

LYCOMING

Fred Stiner
570-323-1313
fredstiner@yahoo.com

McKEAN (Vacant)**MERCER**

Ed Palmer
724-301-3113
plife@zoominternet.net

MIFFLIN (Vacant)**MONROE**

Deron Erney
610-657-4653

MONTGOMERY

Richard Leatherman
215-723-6476
rich-rach@juno.com
and
Kevin Sekula
267-663-9677
ksekula2002@yahoo.com

MONTOUR

Donna Kreischer
570-437-3649
dkteacher@verizon.net

NORTHAMPTON

Rebecca Patrick Jeffrey Fritz
484-256-7490
beccapattick@yahoo.com

NORTHUMBERLAND

Ben Rissinger
570-758-4771
jar43@comcast.net

PERRY

Larry & Cheryl Gross
717-756-6975
lcg1112@comcast.net

PHILADELPHIA (Vacant)**PIKE**

Tom Peifer
570-470-9960
tomp345@ptd.net

POTTER

David Hauber
814-274-8946
haubers3@penn.com

SCHUYLKILL

Charles Trusky
570-773-2737

SNYDER (Vacant)**SOMERSET**

Bill Cuppett
814-421-9795
grammied34@gmail.com
and
Simeon Yoder
814-267-9932

SULLIVAN

Kat Clark
570-928-8952
hayes.clark@frontiernet.net

SUSQUEHANNA (Vacant)**TIOGA**

Leslie Clifford
507 622 4527
lcliffor@mansfield.edu

UNION (Vacant)**VENANGO**

Carl Hohmann
814-676-2782
hohmannc@comcast.net

WARREN

Mark Ritke
814-676-4747
bluebirdsunlimit@aol.com

WASHINGTON

Gigi Gerben
414-206-1310
kasgerb@yahoo.com

WAYNE

James Kilgore
609-874-2122

WESTMORELAND

Joanne McIlhattan
724-523-9203
ejmci@comcast.net
and
Wilma Light
724-331-1180
lightgarden515@gmail.com

WYOMING (Vacant)**YORK**

Nancy Putt
717-432-2647
bluebirds@pa.net



Artist: Susan Renkel

Renovation of Bluebird Trails (Lower Allen Township Park and Camp Hill SCI)

OUT WITH THE OLD, in with the new. With the help of a BSP mini grant, the old and near-old boxes at the Lower Allen Township Park (about 25 boxes) and Camp Hill SCI (also about 25 boxes) bluebird trails were replaced with new boxes. Thanks to Phil Durgin, who constructed the new nest boxes with wood purchased through the mini grant. Some of the boxes were still in good shape, so we left them. With a little TLC, many of the boxes that we took down could be placed in service again. That is the plan.

In addition to replacing the old boxes, Kathy Clark, Phil Durgin, and Bill Frantz paired some boxes—generally 10-12 feet apart, and installed Chuck Musser's specially designed tree swallow deterrents (as modified by Dean Rust) on several boxes at Camp Hill SCI, as that trail has been pretty much totally taken over by Tree Swallows.

We salute BSP member Doris Hoffman, assisted by other BSP volunteers, who originally set up the trail at Lower Allen Township Park in Lisburn, which Doris had monitored for many years.

The Camp Hill SCI trail was established many years ago by a Cub Scout Troop. Kathy Clark was the first monitor. Thanks to Bill Frantz, followed by Susan and John Wesley, who also monitored this trail for several years.

These trails came full circle, when Kathy Clark stepped up again to monitor and rehab these two productive bluebird trails in 2020.



The old nest boxes



The new nest boxes

A closeup of the finished product >

Editor's Note:

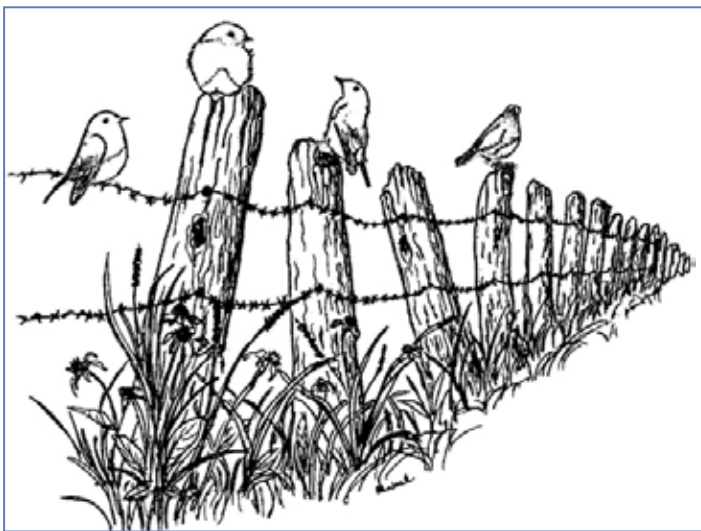
Kathy Clark served as the first President of BSP for many years and continues to be actively involved in bluebird conservation. Thanks, Kathy!



Excerpts from the 2020 State Parks Cavity Nesting Trails Report

From: *Teresa A. Kromel, Chief Outdoor Programming Services Division, PA DCNR*

THANKS TO OUR DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS and staff, 47 state parks monitored 1,949 boxes and fledged a total of 6,470 birds, including Eastern Bluebirds, Purple Martins, American Kestrels, Wood Ducks, and several other species. This year saw a slight decrease in almost all areas including participating parks, boxes monitored, and birds fledged. Unlike most years when weather is the dominate factor in the fluctuation of numbers, this year's cause was COVID-19. In March when most



volunteer monitors are cleaning and preparing the nest boxes for season, department-wide restrictions were set in place for the health and safety of our monitors and staff. Volunteers were unable to monitor nest boxes until early summer, which is reflected in the lower number of fledglings. Monitors at 5 park locations opted out of monitoring for this season due to the challenges presented this year.

Since the program's beginning in 1980, volunteers have fledged over 151,000 individual birds and over 19 species.

Species and the Numbers Fledged

Eastern Bluebird 1954, Tree Swallow 1954, House Wren 1082, Purple Martin 622, Merganser Species 111, Chickadee 105, Other Wren 39, Titmouse 11, American Kestrel 9, Flycatcher Species 3, Other (non-native) 38

The following monitors were also recognized for their years of service to this program:

20 Years

Ida Parry and Scott Parry, Raccoon Creek State Park, Kathy Sieminski, Jacobsburg Environmental Education Center

15 Years

Dave Roberts, Black Moshannon State Park, Gary Armbrust and Jane Armbrust, Yellow Creek State Park, Diana Worley, Canoe Creek State Park, John Slipka, Tyler State Park

10 Years

Dorothy Weisberg, Moraine State Park, Dale Cook, Gifford Pinchot State Park, Richard Shovestull, Prince Gallitzin State Park, Dean Rust, Sam Lewis & Susquehannock State Parks, Gail Beidler, Fort Washington State Park, Maria Hess, Fort Washington State Park, Donna Gordon, Tyler State Park,

5 Years

Sylvia Grisez, Chapman State Park, Sean Minnick, Hills Creek State Park, Alan Thoms, Sinnemahoning State Park, Jan Thoms, Sinnemahoning State Park, Mimmi Bradley, Prince Gallitzin State Park, Bob Illig, Prince Gallitzin State Park, Winnie Illig, Prince Gallitzin State Park, Bill Wener, Pymatuning State Park, John Jakoby, Hickory Run State Park

Editor's Note:

I am sure that you recognize the names of many BSP Members above who are being honored for their many years of service of monitoring nest boxes within the PA State Park Cavity-Nesting Trails Program. Please contact Carly Broder (cbroder@pa.gov, 717-783-3344) if you are interested in becoming a nest box monitor within the PA State Parks.

New Bluebird Trail in Centre County

ON SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2020 the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania (BSP) in cooperation with Centre Region Parks and Recreation, and Patton and College Townships, installed 14 new Bluebird nest box units at Bernel Road and Oak Park Hall. Joanna Taylor, BSP County Coordinator for Centre County was there to share information about bluebirds and effective nest box construction and placement prior to installing the nest boxes. The nest boxes were funded through a mini-grant from BSP, and they will be monitored and maintained during the nesting season.

Two parks in the Centre Region (Circleville and Graysdale) already host successful Bluebird nest boxes, including Circleville and Graysdale, as well as at Soaring Eagle Wetland maintained by the Wildlife for Everyone Foundation. Susan Wheeler, the Public Works Project Manager at Patton Township, says that she is “enthusiastic about parks having a role in bluebird conservation and the addition of new boxes to Bernel Road Park and Oak Hall Park.”

However, the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania’s President, Dean Rust, says “in order for nest boxes to work, they must be monitored and maintained on a weekly basis during the nesting season.” And that’s where volunteers come in. Volunteers like resident Mike Wittrig, who monitors Circleville and Graysdale



Joanna Taylor, BSP County Coordinator for Centre County with Ken Leister, BSP board member

Park, says that he “enjoys his time outside while monitoring bluebird boxes and hopes park visitors have a better chance of seeing these beautiful ‘blue’ birds as nest boxes expand into more parks.” Nick Kerlin, who monitors the nest boxes at Soaring Eagle Wetlands volunteers because “it gives him something specific he can do to help address local conservation issues.”

For more information about these Centre County bluebird trails, please contact BSP County Coordinator, Joanna Taylor at: joannataylorus@gmail.com.

BSP Newsletter Submission Contest

Contest Winner: Congratulations to William F. Repack

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.



photo by Maria Prentice



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: _____



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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: nancyfraim@comcast.net

Wednesday, March 31 7:00 p.m. "For the Love of Bluebirds"

Free Bluebird Program -Virtual, via Zoom - Presenters: **Marilyn Michalski & Nancy Fraim**, BSP Board Members/Bluebirders & Robin Spurlino, from Friends of Springton Manor Farm's Bluebird Trail. Part of the Longwood Gardens Community Read Program. Participants eligible for a free drawing for a one-day pass for 4 at Longwood Gardens.

Register on-line:
<https://ccls.libcal.com/event/7546041>

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.

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