



# Bluebird Trails & Tales

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

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## A Message from the President

*Dr. Dean C. Rust, BSP President*

## Bluebird Monitoring 102

**A**nother Bluebird season is upon us, and this is Prime Time for the BLUES. Now is the best time of year for Bluebird Lovers. It is game time once again for 4 months and all the “pre-season” training, jogging, wind sprints, weightlifting, dreaming, and stretching exercises are over.

Two brood seasons is the schedule for competition: April-May plus June-July.

Let’s see what kind of numbers we can put up on the scoreboard this year!!

I have asked experts from beyond the borders of Pennsylvania to share some of their experiences and techniques regarding successful monitoring. **Ready...Set...Go!**

Bob Peak, from Cadiz, KY has 32 years of monitoring thousands of nest boxes. He is pleased to say that he has been stung by a bee only twice. When Bob started monitoring nest boxes (in the early 1990’s), he didn’t know that bumblebees (the round, fuzzy, black and yellow bees) like to build their honeypot nests in old/used chickadee nests. Over the years, he has found several of them...almost all were occupied and being guarded. So, when he was clearing an old chickadee nest out of a nest box about 30 years ago, Bob heard a buzzing noise in the nest material, and in an instant, a bumblebee flew out, landed on his chest and it stung him. (As Bob is sure you know, unlike honeybees, bumblebee stingers are not barbed,

so they can sting multiple times...ouch!)

Since that time, he has been particularly cautious when removing old chickadee nests, but he recently became lackadaisical, got in a hurry, and gently reached into a chickadee nest with his bare hand to check for eggs. Lo and behold, a bumblebee was resting in the nest cup, and stung Bob on the finger. (In response, he almost said one of George Carlin’s seven-words-you-can’t-say-on-television...but he restrained himself.) In the future, Bob is vowing to (1) not get in a hurry, and (2) always use a mechanic’s mirror or flashlight to check things out thoroughly in the nest before putting a bare finger in the box. He would advise other Bluebirders to do the same... especially with old chickadee nests. (Bob hasn’t found bumblebees in titmouse



*Bumblebee*

nests or prothonotary warbler nests, but since each species uses varying amounts of moss in the base material of their nests, he thinks it is possible. Beware!

Dick Tuttle is our next panel member from Delaware, Ohio. He has been monitoring Bluebirds, Tree Swallows and American Kestrels for 54 years. He writes, “Today I checked my Tree Swallow grid of 57 boxes and the best thing used today was one of my mirrors that I cut from a larger mirror years ago. Today’s mirror is 2” x 3 1/2” and its edges and back surface is taped to prevent cuts, etc. It fits in my shirt pocket. Swallows drape feathers over their eggs and the mirror held

**>> A Message from the President continues on page 2**

## A Message from the President continued from page 1

*in one hand allows my second hand to temporarily sweep feathers to one side while allowing me to see what is going on so I don't touch the eggs. The feathers usually return to their former position once my fingers back off. House Wrens and Bluebirds have their own unique situations that my mirrors allow for safe monitoring as I enjoy my nest box trails. Conserve on with hand-held mirrors."*

And now deeper into the Midwest to where Gene Birr lives in Little Suamico, WI. Gene is the County Coordinator in Oconto County and in his 14<sup>th</sup> year of Bluebird monitoring. He has two monitoring tips frequently used on his trails:

**1)** *"Some years, blowflies are a serious problem around here. When the Bluebird chicks are 7 to 12 days old, I take my paint scraper and lift the nest off the floor about an inch to look for the larvae. Then while holding the nest up with my left hand, I use the scraper to remove the larvae off the floor. In serious infestations, I remove the nest and replace it with a nest that I have saved from an abandoned box. Then I replace the eggs in the nest. This problem is most frequent in very warm weather late in the season and seems to bother Tree Swallows more than Bluebirds. Last year they were not a problem at all."*

**2)** *"Ants are an even more serious and frequent challenge to nesting songbirds. I use a similar technique to inspect the nest and remove the ants near the floor. Then I sprinkle a teaspoon of cinnamon powder on the floor. In really bad infestations, I remove the chicks from the nest, then remove the entire nest from the box and replace it with a new nest, man-made if necessary. Then I sprinkle a little*



**Paper wasp nest**



**Wasp nest on bluebird box ceiling**



**Wasp petiole**

*cinnamon in and around the nest and floor. This practice works very well most of the time. Last year I found a newly hatched brood of swallow chicks just 1 or 2 days old, where only one chick was still alive. I disposed of the nest and the dead chicks, formed a nest of dry grasses, then returned the lone survivor to the nest. I was pleasantly surprised to see that it had survived on my next visit and that the parents raised that single swallow till it fledged 3 weeks later."*

And now, a favorite suggestion for Bluebird monitors and Bluebird landlords from your BSP president, Dean C. Rust. Did you ever wonder why a Bluebird box can be successful for several years with the Blues and then one year it goes into "shut-down mode"? Suddenly the box is ignored by the Bluebirds and they vanish from sight even with a finished pine needle nest and 1 egg!! Why does this happen? It could be that House Sparrows are the likely deterrent...but I have a more insidious, less obvious culprit. It is the paper wasp, *Polistes jokahamae*.

Have you ever heard of a [Petiole]? It is the small stem, stalk, or connection of a paper wasp cell to a house eave or ceiling of a Bluebird nest box. ONE PETIOLE WILL SHUTDOWN BB NEST CONSTRUCTION or a BB NEST. I have been finding lots of petioles and paper wasps this year on my trails because of one simple fact. I am looking for them!! I am convinced that paper wasps can shut down all the FUN with Bluebirds for hundreds of people each year.

It is dry and dark in the upper corners of most Bluebird nest boxes and that is exactly what the female wasp is looking for. With some saliva and fiber from dead wood and plant stems, a petiole is glued to the ceiling by a solitary female (the "foundress"). It will be the foundation for a one-celled at first or later a multiple-

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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.



*photo by Maria Prentice*

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*If you have interest or skills in any of these committee functions, please contact us.*

## A Message from the President continued from page 2

celled abode for the wasps. A 6" high-intensity flashlight is a MUST to do a complete examination of your box. I even found a petiole on the inside of one of my nest cups this year!

Not finished yet. Wasp nests come in all sizes but the 'one-celled nests' are the hardest to spot in the box. But there is another place to check. Under the box and most importantly under the baffle. Things can get dangerous at this juncture!! **USE CAUTION!!** There may be some very large 4-6" diameter wasp nests with 15 or more wasps that are aggressive. They are living in the top of the stovepipe baffle, five-gallon bucket or cone baffle and they will NOT usually be friendly. I recommend arming yourself with gloves, long sleeve shirt and Spectracide Wasp and Hornet foam spray for this job. Your need to eradicate the wasp nest ASAP!!

The wasps under the baffle are the ones that will sting you when you are checking your nest box. As you gently

bump the baffle with your waist or hip, while focusing your eyes on the nest cup in the box, these wasps "blindsides" you with stings to your neck or eyebrow! I know because I have been a recipient quite often. You never "see" them until you "feel" them.

What to do? This is the really simple part and all about prevention. Use bar soap or liquid soap (my preference with a small paint brush) and liberally coat the ceiling of the box and 2" down on all 4 sides. This will prevent the attachment or anchor of the "PETIOLE". Don't forget to coat the inside of the baffle, nest cup, cone, etc. If the wasp can't attach the petiole, the paper wasp will NOT be a future problem. One coat of soap per year will do it. "VOILA!"

Have a great summer with "THE BLUES" <><><>

Dr. Dean C. Rust

President of the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania

## The Virtual Bluebird Programs were a BIG HIT!

On Wednesday, March 31 at 7:00 p.m. participation from the attendees who



*Dr. Dean C. Rust*

BSP Board Members Marilyn Michalski & Nancy Fraim, and Robin Spurlino from Friends of Springton Manor Farm's Bluebird Trail, presented a wonderful and educational bluebird program, "For the Love of Bluebirds". It was a Free Program hosted by the Chester County Library System via Zoom. More than 100 people registered and learned about bluebirds and their nesting and habitat needs. Participants asked many questions about bluebirds and how to attract them. After the main presentation, there was an active question/answer session with active

Rust, BSP President hosted a dynamic, virtual bluebird program via Google Meets. The program title, Introduction to the Nesting Needs and Behavior of Bluebirds. The Host for the program was Hershey Gardens, and was Free to BSP Members and Members of Hershey Gardens and \$15 for other attendees. Several people joined BSP as a result of this educational outreach. Following his presentation, Dean offered a live virtual walk along the bluebird trail at Hershey Gardens, which was installed and is monitored by BSP volunteers. Attendees could

wanted to learn more about what they could do to attract bluebirds and other native songbirds to their nest boxes.

On Saturday, April 17, 2021 at 10 A.M. Dean

virtually "look" inside of some of the nest boxes and see bluebird nests and eggs. Dean explained the need for monitoring or checking nest boxes on a regular basis and taught proper etiquette to observe nesting activity. Thanks to Rebecca Lawrence, Manager of Education & Public Programs at Hershey Gardens for organizing this wonderful opportunity for people to learn so much about bluebirds.

On Wednesday, April 21 at 7 p.m. Dean Rust, BSP President offered a virtual bluebird program to members of the Hershey Mills Nature Group, who are residents of Hershey Mills, a retirement community in West Chester, PA. There they have a 100-box bluebird trail and were delighted to learn more about bluebirds. Per Christine McCormick of Hershey Mills: "All 32 attendees greatly appreciated your talk and look forward to your thoughts and suggestions regarding our Bluebird trail. Thank you!"

## From the Editor *by Joan Watroba*

“Roses are **Red** and Violets are **Blue**” ... and Bluebirds are also **Blue**.

### Blue Birds or Bluebirds?

There are many birds which are **Blue**, including the three species of Bluebirds-Eastern, Western, and Mountain. However, when writing about this specific species-Bluebirds, it is important to display Bluebird as one word-not two. Some people think that we are talking about Blue Jays when we mention Bluebirds. In addition to Bluebirds, here are some other beautiful songbirds which are **blue**:



*Blue Grosbeak-Breeding Male*



*Indigo Bunting-Breeding Male*



*Adult Tree Swallow Male*



*Purple Martin-Adult Male*



*Blue Jay-Adult*

Songbird photos from:  
[www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org)

Cornell Lab of Ornithology

For more information: <https://www.si.edu/stories/when-blue-bird-not-blue>

**Note:** The color **blue** that we see on a bird is created by the way light waves interact with the feathers, and their arrangement of protein molecules, called keratin. In other words, **blue** is a structural color. Different keratin structures reflect light in subtly different ways to produce different shades of what our eyes perceive as the color **blue**.



*Eastern Bluebirds feeding on Sumac*  
photo by Richard R. Hess

I am so thrilled with the way that our eyes perceive the color blue in these beautiful songbirds!

Joan Watroba, Editor

*Joan Watroba*

## Mailbag

Mailbag 04/08/2021

From: Marilyn Michalski

**To: Dick Tuttle**

### **New Kestrel Nest Box**

Thanks for your help on the design of a Kestrel nest box. I followed your instructions and completed this large nest box a week ago. It is constructed from white pine. The 2.5" entry hole was extended 1 inch further down below the opening, to compensate for the smaller diameter of 2.5". I hinged the nest box opening so it can be flipped down on two black hinges to give a view of the interior without harm to nestlings.

The top (A-line roof) can be removed easily with two screws. Inside, at the top, the roof will be equipped with a RING camera in 2022. I have a lot of work ahead of me to purchase the camera, access WiFi, and share the nest box image with 2 or 3 dedicated birders. I cannot install a camera in the current active nest box, as there is no room for a camera.

I'm working on a new location about 8/10ths of a mile further East from the original (active) nest box, which was successful in 2020, and is probably active again this year. We've seen the Kestrel pair flying around this box. I'm hoping that 8/10ths of a mile will be enough distance between the two nest boxes. Otherwise, we'll find another suitable nest box site (AMKE) more than a mile away, with access to WiFi. The entire nest box will be given a camouflage paint job (exterior latex/wood stains)



**Marilyn Michalski with her new American Kestrel Nest Box**

to help it blend in with surrounding foliage. Yes, I have a woodshop in my basement—my enjoyment of woodworking comes from my father, who used woodworking as his hobby and relaxation activity. He was a Lutheran minister.

Marilyn Michalski  
BSP Board Member

Reply from Dean Rust:

**Marilyn,**  
WOW!!! Sweet looking Kestrel nest box!

Great Job. You are quite the wood

craftswoman!! I am sure your Kestrels are going to love their new abode! I have 3 or 4 Kestrel boxes located on different trails but so far, no renters!!  
All the Best, Dean

Reply from Joan Watroba:

**Wow, Marilyn!**  
Impressive Nest Box!

I am a carpenter's daughter, but my skills are limited to using a battery-powered screwdriver.

## Mailbag continued from page 7

01/30/2021

### **Hi Marilyn,**

Here are the bluebird houses that are getting delivered today to Stan Robinson at Norristown Farm Park... need to get them out of garage before the snow arrives.

Hope you're doing well and had a nice time in Florida.

**Rich Leatherman**

### **Hi Joan,**

Even in the Winter, our County Coordinators are "hard at work." Here is Rich Leatherman's valuable construction project (see photo) that will benefit Montgomery County's Norristown Farm Park. County resident Stan Robinson is in charge of this large Bluebird Trail at the



Park, where he oversees a team of monitors that check the nest boxes. Rich is the Co-County Coordinator in Montgomery County, and he has helped many of us by constructing his well-crafted bluebird nest boxes. I benefited in 2020, when Rich

supplied six of his nest boxes for the renewed Bluebird Trail at the Upper Providence Township Public Park and Recreation Center.

**Marilyn Michalski**

## "When Nest Boxes Are Not Monitored/Maintained

### **Here are three photos**

of nest boxes in a small public park in Northern Chester County.

These nest boxes have NOT been monitored - since??? (probably for 5 or 6 years).

I found them on a walk with friends in 2020. All nest boxes were desiccated, leaky, and unsafe for bird use. I recommend that we put these photos in our next newsletter to show our readers what happens to boxes left unchecked. In





**Mailbox** continued from page 8

the first photo, I found bluebirds nesting in the box last summer when it was only 6 inches above ground. Since then, it slipped further down on its mounting post.

On March 25th, 2021, I removed the old nest box and replaced it with a new one at the recommended height from the ground. We must emphasize the importance of checking (monitoring) all nest boxes in every nesting season after installation and making repairs as needed.

**Marilyn,**



I have seen this movie before!! Great idea to post these photos on what a neglected Bluebird box/trail looks like. It doesn't take long for neglect, decay, wetness, missing/rotted wood pieces and House Sparrows to give a death sentence to a once viable Bluebird nest box and trail. We should all add a segment like this to our Bluebird Presentations!!! Thanks for sharing!!

**Dean Rust**

**Hi Joan and Charles,**

I just did a post on our Facebook Page. We just received ultimate compliments from BSP Member, Doug Anderson. His comment on our most recent issue (Spring 2021) of "Bluebird Trails and Tales" as follows:

"Just got the BSP Newsletter today, great stuff. Your newsletter is THE BEST!!! And such a great group."

**From Deb:**

Thank you, Doug! And to our Newsletter Team - Joan Watroba and Charles Lucas - we appreciate you so much!

Sincerely, Deb Smith, Facebook Administrator



(c) Richard R. Hess

photo by Richard R. Hess

## Mailbag New Bluebird Trail in Manheim, PA

### *Joan,*

These are friends of mine - Norm & Jan Heming. I love to see people involved in projects like this!! They got permission and installed a trail in their over 55 community. Posted on Facebook.

### *Dean*

With permission and encouragement here at Brookshire, we started a bluebird trail here today. Within 15 minutes, we had a male and female bluebird checking the box out. We put up 8 boxes today. We will be monitoring them all spring, summer, and fall today.

### *Jan Carson Heming*



## Tribute to John Kinney *Submitted by Joyce Stuff, Franklin County Coordinator*

**John Kinney, age 103**, a longtime resident of Greencastle (Franklin County) PA, died April 30, 2021. John belonged to the Shady Grove Ruritan Club, Shady Grove PA where he spearheaded the efforts of the Ruritan Club to help conserve the Eastern Bluebird by building and selling Eastern Hemlock nest boxes. The profits went to help support annual local college scholarships sponsored by the Ruritan Club. An educational pamphlet was enclosed in each nest box.

Mr. Kinney was well-known throughout Franklin County, PA for his dedication in helping bring back the bluebird. A loyal Bluebirder, starting in the late 1980s, he built nest boxes and included information on bluebirds and how to care for them. He presented bluebird programs to help involve more people in bluebird conservation.

On May 1, 2000 Mr. Kinney submitted to the North American Bluebird Society (NABS) his hemlock

nest box for NABS approval. On May 14, 2000, Steve Eno, NABS Box Approval Committee Chair sent Mr. Kinney a letter of approval for his nest box. Mr. Eno was very impressed with the quality of the box, the large roof and the quality and thickness of the wood used for the box. He also liked the mounting bracket on the bottom of the box so that it could easily be inserted in a round in-the-ground pipe.

His accomplishments for the recovery of the Eastern Bluebird were recognized with two awards. In 2004 at the NABS Convention in Ithaca NY, John received the NABS Bluebird Conservation Award. In 2003 at the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania's 5th Annual Conference in the Poconos, John received a BSP Blue Feather Award.

In the good old days, Mr. Kinney attended many BSP Conferences and the highlight of every conference for him were the skits that Kathy Clark created,

and others acted out. He chuckled during the skits and in the car on the way home to Franklin County.



***Kinney Nest Box - 34 years old, and still providing a successful nesting site on the farm.***

## Song by Michael Reno Harrell *Words and video submitted by Ginny Jackson*

**Hi Dean**, Are you familiar with the song? *Bluebird Boxes* by Michael Reno Harrell. Here is Michael Reno Harrell performing Bluebird Boxes: ([59](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qiswf)) [Bluebird Boxes - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qiswf) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qiswf> PBS aired it on "Song of the Mountains" Season 15 Episode 6

*Bluebirds like to live in little boxes  
So I built them a home with my own hands  
And now the blues know better than to come around here  
Cause bluebirds won't give blues a place to land.*

*If you've got trouble you should try it  
Get yourself a hammer and some wood  
Cause if you build houses for the bluebirds  
Your luck'll turn around from bad to good  
So get yourself a hammer and some wood.*

*You know, trouble used to be my close companion  
Hard times had become my stock and trade  
But since the day the bluebirds came to live here  
I've gotta say the blues have stayed away.*

*If you've got trouble you should try it  
Get yourself a hammer and some wood  
Cause if you build houses for the bluebirds  
Your luck'll turn around from bad to good  
So get yourself a hammer and some wood*

*So anytime the road gets rough and rocky  
Just remember you know what to do  
Spend a little time working with some pine  
And you'll be singing Bye Bye to the blues.*

*If you've got trouble you should try it  
Get yourself a hammer and some wood  
Cause if you build houses for the bluebirds  
Your luck'll turn around from bad to good  
So get yourself a hammer and some wood  
And get some bluebirds in your neighborhood.*

## “Plant a Stick for Bluebirds” by Nick Kerlin

**Nest boxes, predator guards and monitoring** all help insure successful Eastern Bluebird nesting. How about something else that is easy to make, low or no cost and gets immediate use?

There is such a thing. Just “plant a stick.”

Eastern Bluebirds are considered ground foragers. They usually hunt for food from perches. The birds find an elevated spot from which they can scan low ground vegetation for insects. Once prey is sighted, they swoop down and catch their meal. Research indicates they can spot their insect prey as far away as 60 feet. The elevated spots are also used for display and nest-guarding.

Many times, there are already convenient perches to use: utility wires, tree snags, fence lines, etc. But what if these are not present or if so, are located a distance from areas the bird use to hunt insects?

I first noticed this behavior when I observed Eastern Bluebirds using nest boxes in a field of four-foot-tall grasses and goldenrod. A six feet wide trail was kept mowed through the area. This is where the birds hunted for insect prey. They never went into the deeper grass and flowers on either side of the trail. The birds had to fly nearly a hundred yards away from their nest box before they found a perch. Perching atop next



photo by David Lester

boxes was rarely used for this purpose. Perhaps this was a behavior meant to lessen the chance of predators finding the nest site? Trees and shrubs with heavy leaf concentrations were seldom used for perch hunting. Did birds find this interfered with sight lines or locating a perching spot amongst the leaves?

I decided to supplement the need with perch “sticks.” Wooden stakes or metal fence posts (at least one inch

in width) were hammered into the ground. A horizontal piece attached at the top to make a T-shaped structure could be added, but I found this was not necessary. The one-inch diameter provided enough room for perching. Another alternative was to make a starter hole, then push a dead tree limb that had a few slanting or horizontal branches into the ground. My experience in placing these resulted in birds often landing on the perch stick within minutes after placement. Additionally, it increased the foraging area once birds were able to view sections of the curving mowed trail that they were unable to see before due to lack of perches.

The perch stick should reach about six feet above the ground. It is a convenient height to work with. It can be lower or higher. As long as the stick is higher than the surrounding vegetation it seems to work. I never tried it but stripping the leaves or girdling the main stems of invasive species (privet, honeysuckle, etc.) in a field should also work.

I had concerns that hawks might find perching bluebirds attractive prey, but never witnessed any capture attempt. I would suggest that perches not be placed close to nest boxes to deter avian predators and other birds from harassing the nesting site.

## Hello to all the Bluebird Lovers by Nancy James

**I have been a bluebird landlord** for over 20 years and have learned a lot about their habits. At one time, I also gave seminars in surrounding counties, sharing what I have learned. This year was a very interesting year with the one male bluebird. I had 8 bluebirds coming to my dried mealworm feeder all winter. When spring came, as usual, all but one pair left to find other housing. This one male bluebird goes to several house windows, sitting on the sills

and railings, looking “in” the windows. For a month now, he continues to sing daily, like he is calling another bird, even though there is a female here as well. He was not pecking at the windows or flying into them. I could not figure out what he was doing or what he wanted.

I have a full-length glass in my door, and he sits on the bottom of the frame. So, I taped some paper to the outside of the glass, and he “sat on” the tape and looked in, as if

Hello to all the Bluebird Lovers continues from page 12



*Bluebird perched on the flag*

he wanted to come in. I know he was not looking at his reflection, because when I installed the screen door, he then clung to the screening. Also, he flew under my porch roof to sit on my windowsill.

I contacted someone from the Bluebird Society, and it was suggested that the bird may have been cared for by a Wildlife Rehabber and then released, and that may be why he was so comfortable around people and curious about human behaviors. He is eating from the feeder and has a mate. There is a beautiful nest with 5 eggs. So, I wanted to share this unique experience with all of you.



*Bluebird at the bottom of the door frame*

**Note:** The left photo was taken from my kitchen window, where he just flew to the flag. In the right photo, he looks in the window, as if he is asking, "Let me in, please".

I HOPE YOU HAVE A SUCCESSFUL YEAR!

**Editor's Note:**

Here is another explanation for his cheeky behavior- maybe he is trying to tell you to put out more mealworms in the feeder.

## BSP County Coordinator Changes

**Delaware County**

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**Charles Trusky**

570-225-5961 (correct phone number)

THANKS to the following BSP County Coordinators for their prior service as BSP County Coordinators.

Please remove them from your list of active BSP County Coordinators:

- **Alice Severeid**-Delaware County
- **Ed Palmer**-Mercer County
- **Kevin Sekula**-Montgomery County

### Please Answer the Call

BSP State County Coordinator, Ken Leister, is launching a campaign to provide all counties THAT DO NOT HAVE Coordinators with a County Coordinator.

If you live in one of the following counties, please welcome a call from a BSP representative: • Armstrong  
• Bradford • Green • Huntingdon  
• Lackawanna • McKean • Mercer,

- Mifflin • Philadelphia • Snyder,
- Susquehanna • Union • Wyoming.

We appreciate BSP members to volunteer to serve as a BSP County Coordinator and to serve as a resource of information about bluebirds for persons in your counties. Please give this request serious consideration. Thank you in advance.

For More Information, contact Ken Leister, State County Coordinator  
[kenapeg@aol.com](mailto:kenapeg@aol.com)

## We are BSP – JAY SMULLEN *by Deb Smith, BSP Facebook Administrator*

Dear Folks - if you take the time to read this post, please also give it a "LIKE" because our Youth are the future of Bluebirding. Thank You!

**INTRODUCING Jay Smullen**, a fine 15-year-old young man and "BSP Junior Member" who has been taken "under the wing" of BSP Dauphin County Coordinator, Bill Strauss. They currently monitor a 28-nest box Bluebird trail at Hershey Gardens (a 23-acre botanical garden and arboretum) where they undertook a revitalization project in 2019 which resulted in replacing all nest boxes with new BSP models. By late spring of 2019 many of the volunteers and staff began to notice and applaud the hard work of the Smullen/Strauss team. The interest level of this new



*Jay and Bill at Hershey Gardens*

trail permeated the grounds each day that Jay and Bill applied their "skillful transformative work". Almost 100 hours of labor between Jay and Bill made this "new" Hershey (Dauphin County) Bluebird Trail a reality.

Jay Smullen will continue to monitor the trail in 2021 with the help of staff. What a "win-win" project for everyone!!

Please visit Hershey Gardens this summer and [Have A Bluebird Day!!](https://www.hersheygardens.org)  
<https://www.hersheygardens.org>

Jay is also (amazingly!) monitoring additional Dauphin County Bluebird Trails. Two of them are in West Hanover Township: Lenker Park trail has 8 boxes, Skyline Park trail has 12 boxes; 4 boxes (with more to be added) on a 100- acre farm in the Piketown area; and a new trail at Pheasant Hills in Susquehanna Township. His transportation is provided by his parents, his grandmother and his mentor, Bill Strauss. Jay builds his own new nest boxes and also the replacement nest boxes for these trails. He helps out friends and neighbors by building boxes and installing them for



*Bill and Jay work together on a nest box*

those who enjoy watching "The Blues" in their back yards.

In January 2019, Jay worked the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania's Booth at the PA Farm Show on three separate days and continues to grow in knowledge and understanding of the Eastern Bluebird.

In addition, Jay is an active member of his church and its youth

group; he is a scout in Boy Scout Troop 27 in West Hanover Township and is actively working toward completing his Eagle Scout Award. He also plays the piano and does yard work for friends and family.

Jay and his Father, Marcel were awarded BSP's 2017 Blue Feather Award (presented at the State Conference in State College, PA on April 8, 2017) to honor them for their hard work and dedication to Bluebird conservation. Congratulations to this Father and Son team!

Great job, Jay, family, and Bill Strauss, and thank you for caring for our beautiful and special feathered friends. We, at BSP, look forward to all your future endeavors. And, thanks to Mim Strauss for providing these awesome photos and information!



*Jay and Bill walk a trail at Hershey Gardens*

## The Bluebird Nesting Cycle *by Harry Schneider*

### *Nesting Timetable*

- **Nest Building** - 7 to 10 days grass, rootlets, or pine needles or all three items.
- **Egg Laying** - One egg a day, mid-morning 5 to 7 days generally 4 to 5 eggs laid. (sometimes 6)
- **Incubation** - 14 to 17 days- depends on the weather conditions.



*Bluebird Eggs by Stephen Reynolds*

### *From Hatch Day Forward:*

- **Day 1**- Bright coral pink skin, eyes sealed downy feathers on head and body.
- **Day 2 to 4** - Wings, head, and spine look bluish due to developing feathers emerging under skin.
- **Day 5 to 7** – Feathers sheaths begin to emerge on wings, eyes still closed.
- **Day 7** – First feathers burst from tips of sheaths, eyes open as slits, brooding by female stops (cold weather conditions brooding may continue.)
- **Day 8 to 11** – Eyes fully open, feathers continue to burst out from sheaths.
- **Day 11 to 12** – Feathers on wings and tail reveal cobalt blue on males, duller gray blue on females, female eastern bluebirds show white edging on outer tail feathers.

- **Day 13** – Cut-off date for nest box checks. Monitor with binoculars only. Check box only if something seems to be amiss. Fully feathered young become increasingly active and may fledge prematurely if box is opened.
- **Day 14 to 22** – Fledglings first flight, Empty nest flattened and young remain in cover while parents bring food, being cared for by the parents outside the nest box they are now termed as Fledglings.
- **Day 28** – Fledglings fly strongly following parents who feed them for 2 to 3 weeks.
- **Day 30** – Fledglings feed unassisted, now termed as juvenile birds.
- After maturing and molting into their true colors they become an adult bird.
- Bluebirds can have up to 3 nestings a year. Even 4 have been reported.



*Young Bluebird Eating Berries by Richard Hess*

Harry Schneider • 448 Portman Road • Butler, Pa. 16002  
[harryschneider@gmail.com](mailto:harryschneider@gmail.com)

Personal Website:

<http://www.ambassadorforthebluebirds.net>

## BSP Newsletter Submission Contest/Winner:

### Congratulations to: Nick Kerlin

Nick, Please select an item from the BSP Merchandise Store at: [www.thebsp.org](http://www.thebsp.org) and then contact the BSP Newsletter Editor, Joan Watroba at: [bluebirdhappy365@outlook.com](mailto: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

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

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.



*illustration by Susan Renkel*

## Upcoming BSP Events:

### BSP Board/Membership Meeting

- **July 22, 2021**-6 p.m. Thursday Evening (ZOOM Meeting)
- **October 28, 2021**-6 p.m. Thursday Evening (in-person meeting-Giant Community Room, Camp Hill)

Please contact Phil Durgin, BSP Vice President at 717-732-5325 or [pdurgin@comcast.net](mailto:pdurgin@comcast.net) prior to the meeting dates to arrange to join BSP meetings or to volunteer for the Ned Smith event.

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.

- **July 31, 2021** (Saturday) Ned Smith Festival for Nature and Art, MYO Park, Millersburg, PA. Contact Phil Durgin

### 2022 PA Farm Show

- **Jan 8 through 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022**  
Farm Show Complex  
2300 N. Cameron Street,  
Harrisburg, PA

<http://www.farmshow.state.pa.us>

This is a fun event for the entire family, with interesting events, demonstrations, a variety of animals, vendors, and offers delicious PA food choices in the food court. Volunteers are needed to host the BSP educational/BSP Store Booth. Contact Nancy Putt, Event Chair at 717-432- 2647 or e-mail: [bluebirds@pa.net](mailto:bluebirds@pa.net) to volunteer. BSP will refund the parking fee for those who can fill a 4- hour time slot.

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

### Annual BSP Conference

- **March 18 & 19, 2022-** (REVISED DATES)

We hope to see you at the 2022 BSP Conference, which is scheduled for March 18 & 19, 2022 at the Best Western/Lehigh Valley Conference Center in Bethlehem, PA.

[www.lehighvalleyhotel.com](http://www.lehighvalleyhotel.com)

More details will be available via a special mailing to all active members and on the BSP web site closer to the event. Thank you for your continued support and interest in the bluebirds!



## Events Report – Wetlands Festival-Wildwood Park, Harrisburg, Pa

**Saturday, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

Great weather for the Annual Wildwood Park Wetlands Festival in Harrisburg, PA today! Very productive, too - we sold all of our nest boxes and kits! Huge thanks to Bill Strauss, our Dauphin County Coordinator, for setting our table up early and taking it down at the end. Thanks to our Secretary and York County Coordinator, Nancy Putt, for supplying the tub of display items. Thank you to Dave Price and Joan Watroba, Cumberland County Co-ordinators (they look so cute in their photo, Ha-Ha) for helping. Our BSP President, Dr. Dean Rust, arrived with tops for “Skylight Boxes” (House Sparrow deterrents), a hole reducer and a couple of his wonderful books. Joan took a photo of me riding my unicorn! We all had a great time talking to festival attendees about Bluebird conservation. The families really enjoyed seeing the egg/nest display of the songbirds that nest in the bluebird boxes.



**BSP Cumberland County Co-ordinators: Joan Watroba and Dave Price**

Volunteering at BSP events is FUN!!! Thanks so much to everyone and to Dauphin County/Wildwood Park for hosting the event!

Deb Smith  
BSP Facebook Administrator



**Dean Rust, Bill Strauss and Dave Price**



**Deb Smith, BSP Facebook Administrator**

# New Bluebird Trail in Dillsburg *by Nancy Putt, BSP County Coordinator, York County*

Early last March before the Covid shutdown, my friend Charlotte Knudsen wanted to get her grandchildren involved with bluebird conservation. Charlotte and I had a nest box building session with Katie, Hanna and Trevor in their family room at home. I gave instruction all about bluebirds and cavity nesting birds and how we can help them by putting up nest boxes and monitoring them.

Once we were finished, each of them wanted to put their personal touch on their boxes with their painted designs. Hanna is shown (photo no.1) with her painted box. Charlotte told me she wanted to put up boxes at local Franklin Township Park. She was eager to have a trail of her own to monitor. The BSP grant funded the purchase of seven boxes and hardware, and in early April, I assisted her in choosing locations for the boxes and together we got everything set up and ready to go!



no. 3). She is thrilled as a new bluebird monitor....bringing more bluebirds to Franklin Township!!!



Now there are two active Bluebird and one Tree Swallow nestings. Here is Charlotte checking one box with 5 baby bluebirds (photo no. 2) and another box has BB eggs (photo



## 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: [nancyfrain@comcast.net](mailto:nancyfrain@comcast.net)

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**Please submit** your nesting data for 2021 and nominate a special Bluebirder for a BSP Award by 12/31/21.

**The Annual Nest Box Report Form and the BSP Award Nomination Form** are both included with this issue and are also posted on the BSP web site: [www.thebsp.org](http://www.thebsp.org)

## 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](http://www.thebsp.org)



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