



# The Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania

An Affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society

• Volume 18, Issue 3 Fall/Winter 2015

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## A Message from the President

Dr. Dean C. Rust, BSP President

**“Bluebird conservation offers an unusual opportunity for people who are truly concerned about our wildlife heritage to accomplish something by means of direct action.”**

*Lawrence Zeleny, “The Bluebird- How You Can Help Its Fight for Survival”, 1976*

2015 has been an exciting year for The Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania! In addition to our regular programs: PA Farm Show, PA Garden Show of York, Ned Smith Festival of Nature and Art, Wetlands Festival in Wildwood Park, Harrisburg, Native Plant & Wildlife Festival, Overlook Park, Lancaster, Tuscarora Wildlife Education Project (TWEP), Mercersburg, and the Penn State Master Gardeners Plant Fair, Centre County, BSP reached out to several new organizations this summer:

On March 21st, BSP was invited to have a booth at the 2015 PennApic Spring Bee Workshop in Dover, PA. Bill Strauss, Deb Carman, and Dean Rust talked with beekeepers from around the state and discovered that they are quite interested in bluebirds. Twenty-eight new BSP member/families were signed up on that Saturday.

BSP was also invited to host a booth at the initial “Step Outdoors Lehigh Valley Festival, May 30 – 31.” Peter & Denise Reinhart, Ken Leister, and Don Bonett represented BSP and talked with many people over the two day event. This will become an annual event.

On July 25th, BSP hosted a booth at the Summer Garden Experience (PSU Research Farm) Auction Rd, Manheim. Twenty-two new BSP members were signed up. Chuck Musser, Bill Strauss, Ken Leister and Dean Rust talked “bluebirds” with anyone who would listen. BSP will add this to our list of future summer programming events.

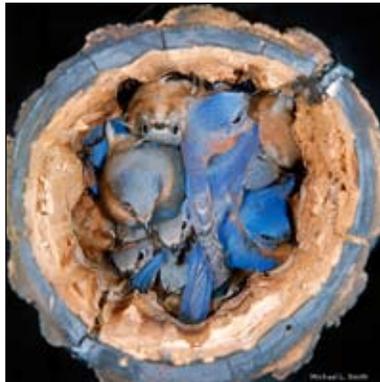
Summer of 2015 was our “kick-off” campaign

for our NEW Junior BSP Program. I want to thank Marilyn Michalski and Ken Leister for heading up this committee and designing the application form for this new outreach program. This may be the only “Junior Bluebird Membership Program” in the country. If you are a BSP member, you can sponsor a child 16 years of age or younger and become their mentor as you involve them in the wonderful world of bluebird monitoring.

There is no cost. Involving our youth is one of the most important things that we can do to insure the future of bluebirds.

See the “Application Form” in this newsletter or find one on our web site: [www.thebsp.org](http://www.thebsp.org)

Now that summer is winding down, it is time to compile your nesting data for the 2015 nesting season. Send it to: Shirley Halk, 42 Park Drive, Grantville, PA 17028.



Michael L. Smith photo

Whether you have 1, 2, or 3 nest boxes or several bluebird trails, your reports are vital so that we have accurate data on our PA bluebird population. Thank you in advance for sending in these reports!

Please help us recruit new BSP members. I can't think of a better gift than sharing your love for bluebirds with others. It could be a neighbor, friend, family member, or co-worker. The gift of a BSP Membership is one of those gifts that keeps on giving throughout the year via our seasonal Newsletter. For that “hard to buy for” person – a BSP Membership at \$15.00 may be just perfect. If you have a wood shop, build a new bluebird box and give it as a gift. Perhaps

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## from the President

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install it for them, if they are not sure how to do it, and give them advice on monitoring.

Bluebird tip for late fall and winter: Winter is a crucial period for bluebirds, especially if they decide NOT to migrate to a warmer climate. "Winterize" your bluebird box, as it can make a great "roosting box" with some simple modifications. Make sure the ventilation gaps or ports are closed. A strip of wood can be tacked over the gap or ventilation holes so that air cannot blow into or through the box. An old grass nest can provide some insulation or add a bed of pine needles. The drainage holes in the floor should be taped or blocked as well. A few minutes of your time can transform your summer box into a winter box. It is important to remember that not just 1 or 2 bluebirds roost in a box, but a whole family group may survive the deep-freeze of Jan, Feb and March in your newly created "winter roosting box".

If you ever have an idea to make BSP a better organization, please do not hesitate to contact me by email: [july7ds@aol.com](mailto:july7ds@aol.com) or cell: 717-669-0167. We still need a County Coordinator in five PA counties: Forest, Luzerne, Northumberland, Philadelphia, and Warren. If you live in or near one of these counties, please help find that special person who can provide a link for that county to BSP. Thank you in advance.

In the words of Doreen Scriven, author of *Bluebird Trails – A Guide to Success*, 1999: "We hope this book will entice those who had never even thought of being "caught" by bluebirds. Be forewarned: once you have attracted that first beautiful devoted pair of bluebirds, you are trapped! Your life will change! You will be beguiled by their beauty, their courtship, and their loving care of their young. The "time you couldn't spare" will be spent watching them, worrying about them, constantly improving your trail, moving your boxes, solving problems, outwitting predators, and boasting to anyone who will listen that you have helped bring "your own" beautiful blue thrushes into a better world!"

Dr. Dean C. Rust,  
*President of BSP*

## BSP Officers

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Artist: Susan Renkel

## From the Editor

**T**HIS NESTING SEASON HAS been full of surprises. Due to the long, cold winter and a wet and cold early Spring, the bluebirds were late in getting started with their nesting activities.

Nesting at most of my six trails started about three weeks later than usual. When the weather moderated, it seemed like all of the species started nesting at the same time, which resulted in some aggressive competition for nest boxes. I was very disappointed that a tree swallow pair removed three bluebird eggs from a nest box and took over that box, even though there were several other nest boxes available nearby.



The house wrens removed the eggs of bluebirds, chickadees, and titmouse from nest boxes at two separate locations.

House wrens are very territorial and aggressive, and they often remove eggs, and even very young birds from nest boxes in their vicinity. However, because they are native songbirds, it is illegal to disturb their nesting cycle by removing a full stick nest with cup, eggs, or their young. However, since they often place sticks in many nest boxes without continuing their nesting activity

there, it is acceptable to remove unorganized sticks from inactive nesting sites. That said, on one of my trails, a House wren pair and bluebird pair nested successfully in back-to-back nest boxes.

Once they got started, the songbirds were very active with their nesting activities. So happy that the nest boxes behind my office in Harrisburg produced two broods of bluebirds. One nest box in another location produced

three broods of bluebirds. It seemed like it was the same pair that nested three times, but that could only be verified if the parents would have been banded. In addition to bluebirds, I also had many

successful nestings of other native songbirds, including chickadees, tree swallows, and house wrens. It was also a great year for berries, and I noticed a lot of berry juice residue in nest boxes after the young had fledged.

It is very important to remember that bluebirders who monitor nest boxes will experience disappointments on their trails—abandoned nests, eggs that did not hatch, dead baby birds, dead adult birds, and signs of predation. This can be very upsetting, but we must understand that these types

## From the Editor

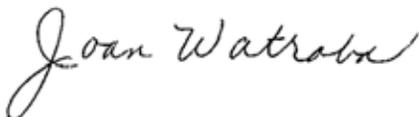
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of losses are common in nature and that we cannot control what happens. All that we can do is to try to provide a safe nesting opportunity which includes a well-constructed nest box, a proper mounting system, and the use of predator guards. The frequency of losses is probably much higher in songbirds that use natural cavities. These natural cavities may be large enough to allow competition from European starlings. Songbird species which construct open nests to lay eggs and raise young may be even more susceptible to predation.

It is important to celebrate the successes and not dwell on the losses when evaluating the nesting season results. If you only have one nest box, you may want to add more nest boxes, monitor an existing bluebird trail, or even set up a new bluebird trail in suitable habitat. That will allow you to experience success in multiple locations. Remember to always get permission to set up nest boxes on public or private land, and always coordinate your trail setup with the mowing crew so that the boxes will not interfere with their mowing and landscaping activities.

\*\*\*Please remember to send in your end-of-year nesting report to BSP so that we can evaluate the combined results of our efforts. Annual Nest Box Report forms are available on the BSP web site: [www.thebsp.org](http://www.thebsp.org) Scroll to More...then select Download Weekly & Annual Nest Box Report Forms and select Annual Nest Box Report Form.

\*\*\*Three Annual Nest Box Report Forms received by October 15, 2015 will be randomly drawn for prizes from the BSP Store, so please submit them by the above date.



Joan Watroba,  
Editor

## BSP is NOW GREEN!

**Benefits of receiving the BSP newsletter by e-mail:**

- **Quicker Delivery of the publication**
- **Reduction of the cost for printing and postage fees to deliver the newsletter**
- **Reduce the use of natural resources-trees to make paper and fuel to transport mail to its destination**
- **Ability to view photos in color**

Please consider going GREEN as your newsletter delivery option! To receive the e-mail version, please send an e-mail from the e-mail address that you wish to receive your BSP newsletter to: [btntnewsletter@thebsp.org](mailto:btntnewsletter@thebsp.org). In your e-mail, please include BSP Newsletter Delivery in the subject line of your e-mail, along with the following:

1. **Your name as it appears on the mailing label of your newsletter.**
2. **Your current mailing address.**
3. **Your phone number.**
4. **Retype your e-mail address**

\*\*\*\*If you are already a Green Choice Member, and if you change your e-mail address, please send an e-mail to the above e-mail address and include E-MAIL CHANGE in the subject line-Thanks!

## Update-BSP Officers & Board

The Bluebird Society of PA is happy to announce that the following Officers and Board Members have agreed to serve another two year term of service beyond their current term, which expires in 2016.

**President - Dean Rust 2016-18**

**Vice President - Philip Durgin- 2016 - 18**

BSP Board Members:

**Dan Thomas - 2016 - 18**

**Bill Cuppett - 2016 - 18**

**Terry Gerhart - 2016 - 18**

We also thank Dale Cook, who has served on the BSP Board for several years.

**Marilyn Michalski**, Nomination Chair

## Man-Made Hazards to Bluebirds

by Joan Watroba

**O**PEN-TOPPED PVC PIPES and hollow pipes can be a major hazard to bluebirds and other cavity-nesting species. The birds can go down into the opening to explore the suitability for a nesting site, and then can become trapped inside if the tube is too smooth to climb back up and too narrow to allow them to open their wings to fly out. If you use PVC pipe around your mounting poles to deter predators, be sure to cover the top of the open pipe with a cap or a strong, secure netting so that curious birds will not become trapped inside. Hollow plastic poles which are used in quantity



**This hollow PVC pipe with cap, keeps birds from entering the pipe**

to protect very young tree saplings from being eaten by deer and other animals present the same hazard on a larger scale.

Landscaping netting placed around ornamental plants to

protect them from deer and rabbits can also trap birds. Some of the netting is as thin as a mist net, which is actually used by licensed bird banders to capture, band, and then release the birds after obtaining scientific data. Songbirds may enter the netting around plants through a top opening or may fly into it and then cannot get out.

A safer option is to use wire fencing installed a bit away from the plant with the size of the holes large enough to allow birds to enter and exit safely.

## The Origin Of Feathers

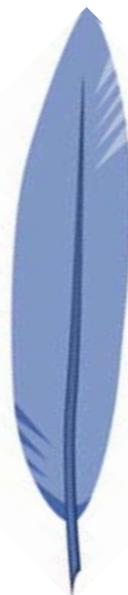
by Marilyn Michalski

**B**IRDS ARE THE ONLY LIVING animals with feathers. This feature sets apart the AVES Class from all other vertebrates. The feather is a body part that has many unique and life-advancing qualities.

**Definition:** *The feather is an epidermal growth that forms a covering over the skin – plumage. Feathers are the most complex skin-related structure known.*

Where did feathers come from? Searching for the origin of feathers has led scientists to examine the fossil record and the scales of reptiles. Scales and feathers are related; both are made of keratin, a fibrous, waxy protein found in

animal horn, hair, hooves, and claws. An early theory posits that, millions of years ago, the scales of early reptiles/ dinosaurs began to change - to stretch out and elongate. As scales lengthened, they improved insulation - heat-conserving qualities. They also aged along with their primitive hosts, which resulted in the fraying or splitting apart of scaly material. Over



time, these frayed/split fibers became the first feathers. The fibrous nature of keratin then led to the formation of a ridge or shaft in the feather, along with the production of offshoots, barbs and barbules, which are small barbs or pointed projections, especially one of the small projections fringing the edges of the barbs of feathers.

Recently, this theory has been disputed, and new ideas have taken its place.

In 1995 a new theory of feather development was advanced - based on two concepts. First, that

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## The Origin Of Feathers

by Marilyn Michalski continued from page 5

proteins (keratin matter) in living-bird feathers differ from those in reptilian scales. This means that feathers may not have originated from scales. Second, that feathers do not grow from the same flat folds of skin as scales. Feathers are tubular structures which emerge from a cylindrical sheath. (Prum and Brush, 2002). Below is an artist's view of the emergence of an early feather: [http://people.eku.edu/ritchisong/554images/Feather\\_evolution\\_StageI\\_v2.jpg](http://people.eku.edu/ritchisong/554images/Feather_evolution_StageI_v2.jpg) This theory needs more research.

Fortunately, recent fossil-finds in China are yielding new evidence of feathers, as found in theropod dinosaurs. It is now accepted that feathers developed initially in dinosaurs. Two researchers, R. Cowen and J. H. Lipps, support the theory that feathers are a new evolutionary feature. They assert that feathers did NOT come from scales. Instead, feathers formed without a known precursor, except for a thickening of skin, and they originated in a skin layer deeper than the one from which scales form.

Thus, they believe feathers arose alongside already existing scales. They write: "Many birds have scales on their lower legs and feet where feathers are not developed, and penguins have such short feathers on parts of their wings that the skin there is scaly for all practical purposes. So there is no real anatomical problem in imagining the evolution of feathers

on a scaly reptilian skin. Feathers evolved in theropods as completely new structures." Chapters 13-14 of Cowen and Lipps History of Life.

In 1996 Chinese paleontologists found the fossil of a small, short-armed theropod which had a layer of thin, hollow filaments covering its back and tail. This was evidence of primitive feathers, from 125 million years ago.

Ornithologists Prum and Brush (2002) support the theory that feathers did not develop from scales, because scales are basically flat folds of the integument (skin), whereas feathers are tubular structures. Feathers today have a tube-like shaft at the skin end, called the calamus, which grows out of a cylindrical sheath.

The only feature shared by feathers and scales is that they both begin growing out of an epidermal thickening above a grouping of dermal cells. The feather may be an evolutionary novelty, developing numerous components, including the feather follicle, tubular feather germ (an elevated area of epidermal cells), and a complex branching structure.

Conclusion: We do not know which of the two theories sketched out above is correct, or if there is a yet another theory that will answer the question of the feather's origin. But we do have a lot of good news. There is agreement on the beauty, usefulness, and life-altering power of feathers. They have changed the course of life on

Earth - they generated a new class of animals. Birds and their feathers enrich our lives. Their qualities are specialized and extensive, and their talents and songs give joy to our lives. Surviving millions of years of evolutionary modification, they are still with us - for which we are grateful. Let us hope that continuing research will provide definitive answers to the question "How did Feathers develop?"

### Sources:

Cowen, R., and J. H. Lipps. 2000. The origin of feathers and the origin of flight in birds. In Cowen, R., History of Life, 3rd edition, Chapters 13 and 14. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Science.

Harrison, Colin, with Howard Loxton. The Bird: Master of Flight. Blandford, 1993. Nedin, Chris. "All About Archaeopteryx." 1999. www. Prum, Richard O. and Timothy Brush, various research articles, 2002. Rpg 11/4/93; agc 11/07/94; bmw 8/17/95 - 8/20/95, and jrj 1/7/96. www.google -- many "feather" sites. Zimmer, Carl. "Evolution of Feathers." National Geographic, 2011.

## We Are BSP

Story and photo by Charles Lucas

IT HAD TO BE MY FIFTH grade teacher, Miss Toole, who piqued my interest in birds. She was a wonderful teacher; a tough one too. She would occasionally send notes home to my mother about my classwork—and I guess I'd have to say I loved her despite my poor math and spelling grades. But enough about that. She loved flickers and would always tell our class if she heard or spotted one. When I was able to recognize one, I became a fan of flickers, too. Soon I was watching other birds, trying to identify them with the help of a Golden Nature Guide bird book. I was discovering birds.

A wonderful thing happened to me in Miss Toole's 5th grade class. I was selected to attend art classes at the Carnegie Museum in the Oakland section of Pittsburgh. The classes, for grades five, six and seven took place every Saturday morning during the school year. We were affectionately known as "Tam-o'-shanters." After seventh grade, two years of tempera painting classes at the museum followed, with the next two years at the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University). All of this happened at a time when it only cost trolley fare to get to and from Oakland, where the museum and Carnegie Tech were located. The experience and the instruction were first-rate, and best of all, it was FREE.

Getting back to the Tam-o'-



shanter classes—each Saturday morning a hundred plus kids filed into the museum's music hall. We proceeded to our seats in the auditorium, and each of us was given crayons, paper and a masonite board which became a lap desk for creating our art. After every one was settled in their seat, the teacher, standing on the auditorium's stage, motivated our creative minds by discussing the subject of that week's class. The teacher augmented the discussion with illustrations done in chalk on craft paper at an easel. The auditorium became very quiet and remained so as we took notes on one side of our 8-1/2"x11" sheet of paper. Then it was time to turn the paper over, think about the discussion subject and create in crayon, a picture that had formed in our mind.

Meanwhile, as we worked at our seats with crayon, 12 of our numbers, whose drawings were selected as the very best from the previous week's crayon drawings, worked at easels on the auditorium's stage. With colored chalk they created a large scale version of their drawing.

It took about a year before one of my drawings was selected for "the easel." Midway through the morning, those on the stage were asked to introduce themselves. When it was my turn, I proudly stepped before the microphone and said, "my name is Charles Lucas, I'm in the sixth grade at Marigold school in Munhall, and this is my first time at the easel." I walked back to my easel and did my very best to reproduce at a much larger scale, the crayon drawing that I had done a week earlier. It was *a flicker*.

In January of 2014, my wife and I attended the Pennsylvania Farm Show (she loves horses) where I joined the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania and bought a bluebird nesting box. Last summer at our summer cottage in Butler County, I mounted the box on a 2-1/2" plastic pipe that I filled with concrete. Before summer's end the box was host to house wrens... a disappointment. That's not to say I dislike house wrens, but I wanted bluebirds. Early this spring I cleaned out the nesting material from the box in the hopes of attracting new tenants. A few weeks later my wife and I were at the cottage, planting a spirea shrub very near to the nesting box. I was thrilled when I saw bluebirds flying in and out of the nesting box. What a wonderful feeling when you've got the blues!

## Monarchs and Milkweeds/Host Plants

by Joan Watroba



A Monarch Butterfly

photo by Harry Schneider

**M**ONARCH BUTTERFLIES require specific host plants to reproduce. The female lays eggs on the host plants, the larval caterpillars feed on the host plant leaves and then the fascinating process of metamorphosis takes place with the formation of a chrysalis which turns into a butterfly.

Due to extensive land development, untimely mowing of fields, and the use of pesticides, the host plants that Monarchs need in order to propagate are in short supply. I am lucky that the Monarchs found our cluster of Swamp milkweed in the yard, and we have several caterpillars which

will turn into beautiful Monarch butterflies. The main plants in the Northeastern part of the U.S. which serve as host plants are:

- Common Milkweed  
-*Asclepias syriaca* (well-drained soils)
- Swamp Milkweed-*Asclepias incarnata*  
(damp, marshy areas)
- Butterfly Weed-*Asclepias tuberosa*  
(well-drained soils)

**Note:** Do not confuse with *Butterfly Weed* with *Butterfly Bush*. *Butterfly Weed* is a low-growing, native perennial with bright orange blooms. *Butterfly Bush*, *Buddleja*

*davidii* is a non-native (originated in Asia) and invasive flowering bush species which provides nectar, but does not serve as a host plant to butterflies. It also spreads out and competes with native species for space and nutrients.

For more information about how you can assist the Monarchs, check out: <http://www.monarchjointventure.org/> <http://www.monarchwatch.org/>



A Monarch caterpillar on swamp milkweed

## BSP Junior Membership – NEW!

Whenever BSP volunteers offer bluebird programs and nest box building activities to children in schools, youth group organizations and at other events, we see that the children are fascinated with the behaviors of bluebirds and birds in general. We wanted to offer a special Junior BSP Membership so that young people can become active with BSP and be able to learn more about bluebirds and share their observations of songbirds and other nature topics.

The BSP's Junior Membership is open to anyone between the ages of 8 and 16 years of age. No dues or payments are required, as this membership category is free. Along with this membership comes a free

Newsletter sent via e-mail, three times per year. Each new Junior Member will receive, by regular mail, a free BSP logo patch and a welcome note from the Chairperson. The Junior Member needs to be sponsored by an active BSP member and must renew his or her membership once a year, with an e-mail or note to the Chairperson, who will answer questions about birds at any time.

We encourage current BSP members to sponsor a young person who has an interest in bluebirds to become a Junior BSP Member.

Let's inspire the young nature enthusiasts to become the Bluebirders of the future!

### HOW TO BECOME A JUNIOR MEMBER

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BE 8-16 years old.</li> <li>• Enjoy birds and want to help them.</li> <li>• Find an adult sponsor who is a BSP member. Ask him/her to sign this form.</li> <li>• Mail in application, with a parent's signature.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MAIL TO:<br/>Marilyn Michalski,<br/>Jr. Mbr. Chair<br/>P. O. Box 662 Kimberton, PA 19442</li> <li>• Phone: 610-933-0497 E-mail:<br/>emeraldmm@verizon.net</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renew your membership once a year by e-mailing or calling the Jr. Mbr. Chair and letting her know about your experiences with birds. Let her know about changes to your information.</li> </ul> |
|--|---|--|

### BENEFITS OF BECOMING A JUNIOR BSP MEMBER:

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free membership until the age of 16 (no dues).</li> <li>• Free newsletter sent via e-mail</li> </ul> | <p>three times a year. Each new Junoir Member will receive, by mail, a free BSP "LOGO" (4" Diam. Decal) a set</p> | <p>of plans for a bluebird house.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free advice and/or info via phone or e-mail (use above contact info.).</li> </ul> |
|---|---|--|

CUT ALONG DOTTED LINE AND MAIL TO ADDRESS ABOVE, THE BSP JR. MEMBERSHIP CHAIR

▲YOUR NAME ( Please print all information)

▲YOUR ADDRESS (include zip)

▲YOUR BIRTHDAY MONTH DAY YEAR                      ▲YOUR E-MAIL                      ▲PHONE:

▲SIGNATURE OF YOUR PARENT/GUARDIAN

▲SIGNATURE OF YOUR BSP SPONSOR (BSP MEMBER)

▲REASON YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE A JUNIOR MEMBER

▲CONTINUE REASON IF DESIRED

## BSP Mailbag

From Dean Rust, BSP President:  
Thanks to BSP volunteers Denise and Peter Reinhart, Don Bonett, and Ken Leister, who made this inaugural event happen for BSP in 2015. Many Thanks for exceptional effort on a hot weekend in May.

What a great issue of our BSP Newsletter!  
Excellent articles! Much enjoyed!

Thank you,  
Marilyn

Once again I have the joy of watching a pair of Great Crested flycatchers in my back yard, next to my vegetable garden. Had a brood 2 years ago and I built a box especially for them (larger box with a 2 1/4" hole) ....again They chose the old cedar bluebird box where a woodpecker had enlarged the hole to approximately 1-3/4". They are due to fledge the end of this week.

Dan Thomas,  
Lancaster County

Hi-Thank you so much for all you have done to help make the inaugural Step Outdoors Lehigh Valley Festival on May 30 & 31 a great success. The Bluebird Society's participation in the event and your help with the bluebird box workshops were two key elements to this year's event. The goal was to create a free family festival for the region and I think we definitely saw that this past weekend, with many families with younger children coming out to learn about the outdoors. We look forward to working with you on the 2016 Step Outdoors Festival.

Have a wonderful day,  
Mark Demko, ArtsQuest

NICE NEWSLETTER!!!

John Love,  
Butler County



Great-crested flycatchers, young and adult – photos by Dan Thomas

## Bluebird with Missing Toes and More

by Keith Kreidler

Missing toes can be caused by several things. There is a virus, Avian Pox that can infect feet, but is not limited to just the feet. It is quite common for baby birds to be born with birth defects that can include missing toe nails and or missing toes or parts of toes. Bumble Foot in birds can be caused by poor nutrition. Improper incubation temperatures



**Bluebird with missing toes**

are sometimes thought to cause various birth defects in young birds. High levels of Selenium can cause birth defects, more common in baby ducks that feed in waste water ponds that have excessive levels of selenium. You might think about adding a ledge under the entrance hole if this bluebird pair is successful laying eggs. Otherwise the male will have a hard time helping feed in a normal wood bluebird nesting box with a smooth front board.

Keith Kridler , Texas

Hi Keith-Question-When I do my trail checks, I sometimes see an

infestation of tiny mites in nest boxes after the young tree swallows leave the nests. Wondering if the mites come from the feathers that tree swallows use to top off their nests? On some occasions I also find them in the nests of bluebirds after they have fledged. Does that mean that the mites were there when the young were in the nest box or did the used nests attract them? I monitor boxes every week and do not notice them except in used nests.

Per Keith Kreidler: There are about twenty different species of mites and lice found on birds. Normally most birds will have a few mites and or lice on them. Very common for there to be some parasites on the feathers, cast off from wild birds and or backyard poultry. Life cycle on mites, for some species is 7 days, 10 would be more common.

So by the time the babies have fledged there could be four more generations of these pests. I need to read up again but I believe/ recall some female mites and lice will lay upwards of 100 eggs. Some species lay their eggs in the nesting materials others will lay their eggs in the cracks between the nest box parts. There are also multiple species of fleas that live on some birds. Hot soapy water will scald/ drown them, a few spritz's sprayed inside the box, of one of the caged bird sprays for parakeets or other pet birds will clean out a nesting box fairly safely.

Probably if you look really close to the bare skin areas of the baby birds just as they begin to tuft out of the pinfeather stage you will start to see pests. Until the baby birds become warm blooded the mites and lice will stay mostly on the female. She has the big bare brood patch, mites and lice will be right on the edges of that bare skin.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Mailbag:**

Question: My brother, who lives in Ohio, has several nest boxes on his farm property where bluebirds successfully nest. He often observes both bluebird parents and the recently-fledged bluebirds going back in and out of the nest boxes during the day and at night for about two weeks after the nesting cycle, even during this warm weather. Have you observed that?  
Marilyn

### **Editor's Reply:**

*I have only heard of them assisting their parents to feed the young babies of the second brood or to roost in nest boxes to keep warm in cold weather. I checked with other bluebirders, and some have seen downy woodpeckers and nuthatches go in and out of nest boxes in Summer months, but not bluebirds. Maybe the bluebirds see the nest boxes as a cozy and safe place to hang out. Or maybe it is part of the educational process for the parents to teach the young about nesting in cavities.*

## Request for Feedback

### Using Monofilament Fishing Line on the front of nest boxes to Deter House Sparrows

by Joan Watroba

**M**ANY BLUEBIRD monitors are installing monofilament fishing line on the front of nest boxes to deter House sparrows from using nest boxes. I have personally used this method for about 15 years and with very good results. It does not seem to deter other native songbirds such as tree swallows, house wrens, titmice, or chickadees from using nest boxes, as I have had successful nestings of all of these other songbird species in nest boxes with the line installed.

I have spoken with many other bluebirders at our educational booth at events who have also reported good results. Others have said that they have tried it and it has not worked at all.

Some factors which affect the effectiveness of this method include:

#### **Timing of the installation of the line:**

If the line is placed on the box after the house sparrows have already been using the box, including entering and exiting the box, building a nest or laying eggs, they will already have formed a bond to that particular nest box, and they will be more persistent in continuing to enter the box in spite of the line.

#### **Length of the roof overhang:**

If the roof does not have at least a 2 ½ "overhang, there will not be enough space between the line and the front of the nest box, which will make it ineffective.

#### **The configuration of the installation:**

The standard method is to install the line vertically just outside both sides of the entrance hole and attached it at the bottom of the nest box so that it does not dangle, which would increase the chance that the birds could become tangled in it. The monofilament line must be taunt and ping like a bango string.

#### **Note:**

*I have heard about two instances of songbirds becoming tangled in the line, and in both situations, the line was not installed as outlined above.*

\*\*We would appreciate hearing from you to let us know about your experiences with using monofilament line on the nest boxes to deter House sparrows.

Please let us know of both problems and success.

E-mail feedback can be submitted to me at:

**[sunshinebb@msn.com](mailto:sunshinebb@msn.com)**

Please place *Using Mono Line on Nest Boxes* in the subject line of your e-mail.

Feedback can also be sent by regular mail to our mailing address:

Bluebird Society of PA  
P.O. Box 756  
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055  
Attn: Joan  
BSP Newsletter Editor

## In Memory of Valerie Ferner

Valerie and her husband became involved with BSP after she and I attended the Harrisburg garden and outdoor show some years ago. We both bought bluebird boxes. She became the bluebirds' best friend, expanding the number of boxes in their yard over the years.

Val and Dave were very attentive to the birds, buying them roasted mealworms and sunflowers seeds that were already husked. They provided a special feeding box just for the bluebirds and a bird bath that was heated in the winter, of course. They also were diligent about keeping the predatory birds away from the bluebirds' boxes.

She called the first pair Bert and Bonnie. There were many others to follow. She also created two bluebird paintings -- both of which are very special to us. One she submitted several years ago as an auction piece for the Bluebird society when there was a conference in Harrisburg. Another of my sisters made sure we had the winning bid to keep it in our family.

So, that's a little of how our Valerie and her husband loved bluebirds and cared for them. My sister Valerie Ferner passed away on 9/11 and wanted contributions to go to the Pa Bluebird Society. She

lived in Etters, Pa. Good luck to your society.

Best wishes,  
Elizabeth Coyle and Vicky Perratone, Valerie's Sisters

### Editor's Reply:

So sorry to hear of Valerie's passing, but thank you for sharing the story of the care and love which her and her husband bestowed upon the bluebirds. Thanks to her wishes, BSP has received many contributions to honor her life and will be used to promote educational outreach related to bluebirds.

## Bluebirds, Raspberries, and Daylilies

by Ken Smith



photo by Ken Smith



Baby Bluebirds

photo by Ken Smith

▲ This is a box from Chuck Musser: I usually get House wrens, but this year, the Blues. Really liked the last newsletter format and content. This is at our home, trail at the BonAir

Country Club. It is doing really well after slow start.  
Ken Smith

**From the Editor:**  
Thanks, Ken, so much for your

communication and positive feedback regarding the BSP newsletter and new design. Loved your photos! Thanks for allowing us to share them with our members.

## Events Report: Ned Smith Festival

It was a beautiful day along the river at MYO Park in Millersburg, PA for the Ned Smith Festival event on Saturday, July 25th. The bluebird program was well-attended, and volunteers at the BSP Booth were kept very busy talking with people about bluebirds and their nesting experiences. Thanks to the volunteers who assisted at the booth and those who assisted with the box-building activity. They built 83 nest boxes provided by the PA Game Commission with the children and their parents. We had a total of 8 BSP volunteers during the event – 4 assisted at the BSP booth and 4 helped out at the nest box building activity.

Fifteen people joined BSP and many people purchased items from the BSP Store. Thanks to the volunteers for making this such an enjoyable and productive outreach experience to the public.

Volunteers: Marilyn Donak, Doris Hoffman, Joanne Slavinski, Joan Watroba, David Price, Kevin Lutz, and his two friends.

Joan Watroba,  
BSP Cumberland County  
Coordinator

Hi Joan,  
Within minutes of fledging from our front door reef, with U.S. Flag providing protection and cover is I believe chipping sparrow. I lifted flag to take photo. Can either you or Dean verify the small birds identity? This is second clutch on door. Front door entrance banded from use, of course.  
Thanks, Ken

Hi Ken and Dean,  
I agree with Dean that they are finches-The beak is a distinctive finch beak-I would say house finches. Cute nesting-very patriotic birds!

**Editor's Note:**

*For more interesting facts about House finches, including that they only feed their young vegetable matter, check out: <http://www.sialis.org/hofibio.htm>*



photo by Ken Smith

Young House Finches — Fledge Day

## Event Report

by Nancy Putt

- Bluebird Presentation/Nest Box Building – July 14th, 2015
- Children’s Summer Camp /Penn State Master Gardeners
- Cumberland County Extension Office, 310 Allen Rd. Carlisle, PA

The bluebird presentation and box building was fun and went well. The kids were interested, had good questions, and loved the “Inside the Nest Box” video. They did a good job with assembling the nest boxes – there was plenty of help – Dale Cook and Dave Price make an excellent team!

The kids especially liked using the power screwdrivers. It just takes a while to get the right pieces properly in place before screwing them together. After helping with one, it was pretty easy. We were finished at noon when the parents starting picking up their children.

It was a really fun day! The children also worked outside in the garden harvesting root crops, then made a hummingbird feeder, and then a suet feeder using grapevines.

Editor’s Note: Thanks to Nancy Putt, Dale Cook, and David Price for volunteering at this event. Happy that Susan Beinhaur of Penn State Master Gardeners invited BSP to participate in this special event. It is so important to get young people actively involved in bluebirding, gardening and other outdoor activities so that they can learn about and appreciate the wonders of the natural world.

### From Susan Beinhaur–

Thank you for coming to speak with our campers. Please express our gratitude to them for us. The campers really enjoyed the program, and you have planted the seed of the importance of bluebirds, and of nature. The film is a great piece – very informative, but on a level that the campers could understand. Everyone, campers and volunteers alike, enjoyed it. The little hand screwdrivers are great – just the right size for small hands. I cannot imagine trying to do the project with manual tools. Again, thanks to your volunteers – it was a wonderful program.

## Bluebird Patrol

Bill Strauss:  
BSP County Coordinator —  
Dauphin County

Robin Malloy and Michael Malloy:  
Trail Monitors for Spring Creek  
Golf Course and  
Hershey Country Club  
(East and West)

Dean Rust: BSP President & BSP  
Co-County Coordinator- Lancaster  
County



Bill Strauss, Robin and Michael Malloy, Dean Rust

photo by Mim Strauss

## Nominate Your Favorite Bluebirder for a BSP Award

**P**LEASE HELP US TO recognize individuals or groups who you feel have greatly contributed to bluebird education and/or have promoted the nesting success of bluebirds and other native songbirds.

### Award categories are:

- Bluebirder of the Year
- Blue Feather Awards
- Letters of Commendation.

Please include a brief write-up regarding your nominee, and include their name, county, and their contact information.

Awards will be presented at the annual BSP Conference to be held on April 8th and 9th, 2016. Recipients do not need to be present to receive their award, but it would be great if they can receive their award in person during the

Award Presentation on April 9th.

Also include your name and contact information and send this to the BSP Award Nomination

Chairperson:

Shirley Halk  
42 Park Drive  
Grantville, PA 17028.

Please submit your nominations for the BSP Awards by January 31, 2016 — Thanks!

## BSP Newsletter Submission Contest

**T**HE NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE is very excited that many BSP members are submitting material for the BSP newsletter, and we want to encourage more members to do so. By submitting your questions, nesting experiences, and field observations, we will be able to offer a wider variety of articles and materials that are of interest to our readers. Your entry can be a general question or article about bluebirds or other nature topics, a writeup about something that you observed in your yard or on your trail, an original poem, a trail monitoring tip, or any non-copyrighted material.

Send to: BSP, P.O. Box 756  
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055-0756.

We are also accepting newsletter submissions by e-mail. Please enter Newsletter Submission Contest in the subject line and e-mail to the BSP Editor at: [sunshinebb@msn.com](mailto:sunshinebb@msn.com). The last date to submit items is the following:

- 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 the person whose entry was randomly picked will have their choice of any item offered in the BSP store website: [www.thebsp.org](http://www.thebsp.org)

The Newsletter Editor will then review the items and reserve the right to include your submission

in an upcoming edition. Since we cannot return any items, please send copies only of materials and/or photos. Please include your contact information-name, address, phone number or e-mail address (optional) with your entry.

**Congratulations! Newsletter Submission Contest, winner: KEN SMITH**

Please contact the BSP Store Manager, Doris at (717) 766- 3877 and provide her with your prize choice. Items can be viewed at the BSP web site. Select the link to: BSP Online Store at [www.thebsp.org](http://www.thebsp.org) to view the list of items available.

## BSP County Coordinator Updates

### Bedford County:

New e-mail addresses for Co-County Coordinators:

**Cathy Everhart**  
[3088@gmail.com](mailto:3088@gmail.com)

**John Everhart**  
[3077@gmail.com](mailto:3077@gmail.com)

### Mercer County:

**James Weaver:**  
Co-County Coordinator  
New E-mail address:  
[Deerflyhaven@Verizon.net](mailto:Deerflyhaven@Verizon.net)

### Westmoreland County:

**Wilma Light**  
New Co-County Coordinator -  
Welcome!  
Phone: 724-238-7041  
E-mail [lightgarden515@gmail.com](mailto:lightgarden515@gmail.com)

## BSP Calendar of Events

**2015 BSP Board Meeting Date-**

Giant Foods Community Room,  
Camp Hill, PA  
October 22, 2015  
Thursday evening at 6:00pm

**2016 BSP Board Meeting Dates**

Giant Foods Community Room,  
Camp Hill, PA

- January 28, 2016  
    Thursday evening at 6:00pm
- April 28, 2016  
    Thursday evening at 6:00pm
- July 28, 2016  
    Thursday evening at 6:00pm
- October 27, 2016  
    Thursday evening at 6:00pm

Please plan to attend board meetings to learn about upcoming BSP activities and events and to share your ideas about a variety of issues related to bluebird conservation.

If you cannot attend the meetings in person, we can arrange for you to attend via conference call. Contact Dean Rust, BSP President to make arrangements to join BSP meetings by phone right from your home.

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

**Come and join us at our meetings.**

All meeting dates listed above and below are open to the public.

- PA Farm Show 2016-  
    January 9- 16, 2016  
    Farm Show Complex,  
    Harrisburg, PA  
    Hours: 9:00 am - 9:00 pm Jan.  
    9-15, 9:00 am-5:00 pm Jan. 16

**Volunteers Needed** to handle the educational/store booth and to assist with the nest box building activity. Volunteers will be reimbursed for event parking. Enjoy the largest agricultural fair east of the Mississippi and enjoy the delicious food offerings at the PA Food Court. Request that volunteers handle a 4-hour time slot- 9-1, 1-5, or 5-9. Please call Nancy Putt- 717-432-2647 or e-mail her at: bluebirds@pa.net to volunteer. For more information on this event, visit the Farm Show website: www.farmshow.state.pa.us/

**PA Garden Show of York 2016-**

- March 4-6, 2016  
    York Expo Center-  
    Memorial Hall, York, PA Hours:  
    Friday, March 4: 10am - 8pm  
    Saturday, March 5: 110am - 8pm  
    Sunday, March 6: 10am - 5pm

The theme this year is "Stepping Through Thyme". BSP will host our educational exhibit, offer a free nest box building workshop, and Nancy Putt, BSP York County Coordinator will give a presentation- "Attracting Bluebirds to Your Backyard."

**Volunteers will be needed,** and BSP members in York County are encouraged to help...with free parking & entrance available for volunteers. This is a wonderful event with colorful landscaping exhibits, speakers, demonstrations, and programs to inspire people to think of Spring. \* Please call Nancy Putt- 717-432-2647 or e-mail her at: bluebirds@pa.net to volunteer.

For more information on this event, visit their website: www.pagsy.com

**18th Annual Bluebird Society of PA Conference Holiday Inn-Harrisburg/Hershey**

April 8 and 9, 2016  
www.holidayinn.com/Grantville  
This contemporary hotel off of I-81 is located at 604 Station Rd, Grantville, PA

\*A limited number of rooms are available for conference attendees at a group discount, so please book your accommodations early. Indicate that you are with the Bluebird Society of PA.

Phone: 717-469-0661 or 800-315-2621

- Friday evening:  
    Social, Programs, and Vendors
- Saturday: Full Day Conference with Programs, Vendors, Displays, Luncheon, Amish Quilt Raffle , and Silent and Live Auctions.

A special conference mailing will be sent out to all active BSP members in late January and registration information and conference details will be posted on the BSP web site closer to the event.



photo by Chuck Musser

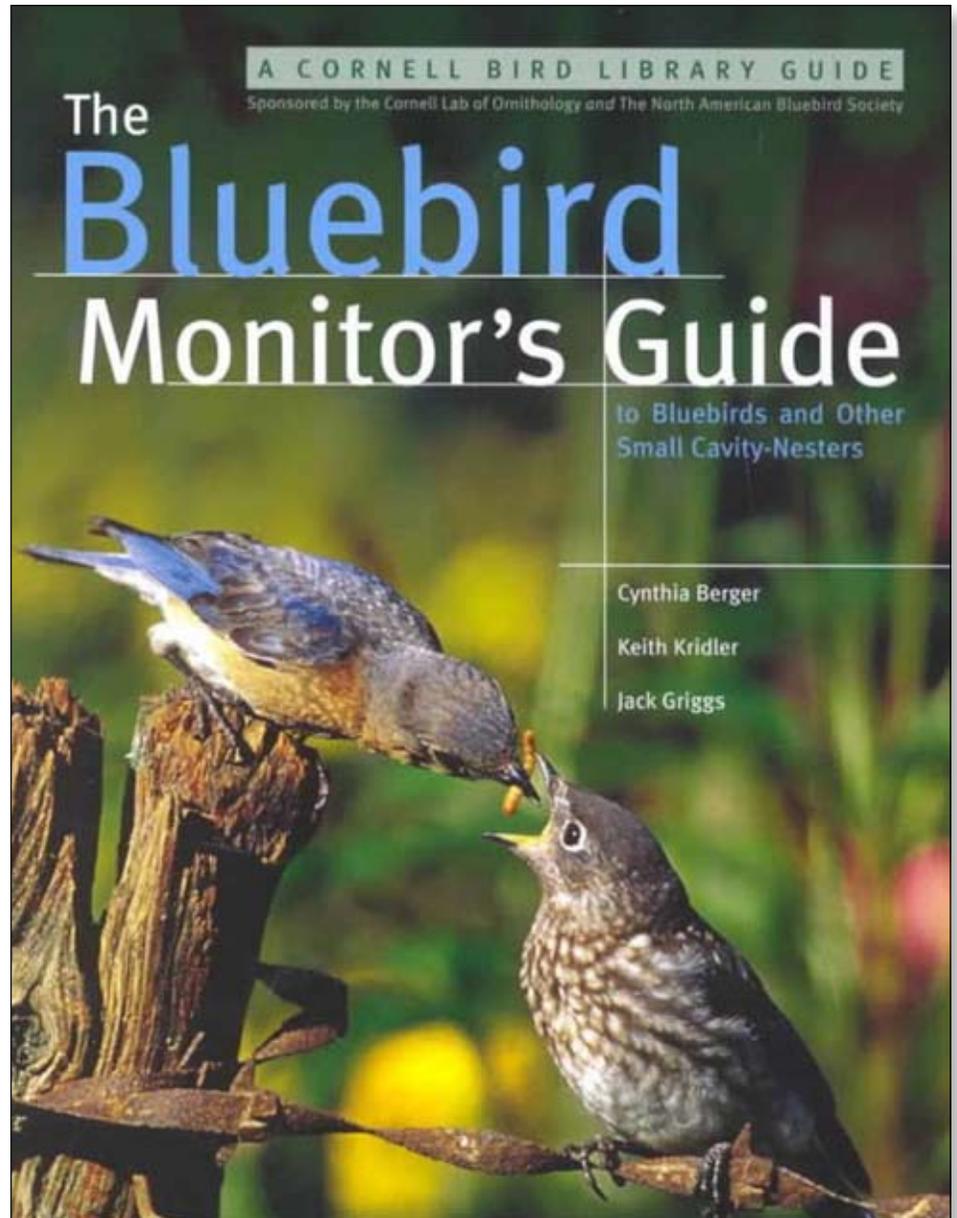
## The Bluebird Monitor's Guide

**I**N THIS BOOK, a select group of experienced bluebird monitors reveal how it's done: how you can attract bluebirds and, once they begin nesting in your backyard, how you can help ensure that nestlings develop and fledge successfully. Rural yards, suburban yards, even some small city yards can host bluebirds.

This wonderful book is approximately 8" x 10" of high gloss paper, 128 pages, and filled with beautiful photos.

**Special Price**  
**\$9.00**  
 plus S&H

**Makes a  
 Wonderful  
 Gift**



### BSP STORE

BSP Store – Something for Everyone!

Check out the BSP web site: [www.thebsp.org](http://www.thebsp.org)  
 Scroll to more...and select BSP Store to view many wonderful bluebird-related supplies, clothing, and gift items.  
 Wonderful items for holiday gifts!

To order items, Contact: Doris Hoffman, Store Manager at  
 (717) 766-3877

# BSP Membership/Renewal Form

Send to: P.O. Box 756, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055-0756



## 2015 BSP MEMBERSHIP RATE INFORMATION

Student	Senior	Regular/Family	Organization/Corporate
1 year -\$10	1 yr.-\$12	1 yr.-\$15	1 yr.-\$100
3 years-\$25	3 yrs.-\$30	3 yrs.-\$40	3 yrs.-\$275
			Lifetime Sponsor -\$375

### Renew for 3 years and take advantage of our discounted rates!

New Member  Renewal

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_ First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Middle Initial: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/Town: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_ County (if in PA) \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (optional): (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_ (Required if requesting e-mail delivery of seasonal newsletter, event updates)

Additional supporting donations are gratefully accepted and appreciated. Please make your check or money order payable to the "Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania" and return this application to:

**Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania • P.O. Box 756 • Mechanicsburg, PA 17055-0756.**

Additional Contribution (optional): \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Total Amount Enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate preferred delivery method of your newsletter by checking off one of the following options:

e-mail delivery Please enter your e-mail address here: \_\_\_\_\_

regular mail delivery

### Member Interest Survey:

I/We would like to learn about assisting BSP with:

Create/monitor BSP trails  Telephoning  Membership  Finance  Woodworking  Fundraising

State Monitoring  Education  Speakers Bureau  Photography  State Conference  Research

Publication/artwork  Newsletter  County Coordinator  Publicity  Web Site/Web Content

Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Special Events Help:

Garden Expo Booth @ Farm Show  Garden Expo Booth @ Hershey Gardens  Ned Smith Day @ Millersburg

Annual Farm Show @ Farm Show (January)  Tech Support @ State Convention  Other Special Events:

Please tell us how you learned about us:

OFFICIAL USE ONLY

Paid by:  Cash  Check  Money Order

Website: [www.thebsp.org](http://www.thebsp.org)

Website: WWW.THEBSP.ORG

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### **Recipe for Yummy Suet for Birds**

- 1 pound of lard (available in a tub)
- 18 ounces of crunchy peanut butter
- Heat the above ingredients in a large pan on the stove on low heat until they are mixed together. Remove from heat.
- Mix in: one- 2 lb. bag of yellow corn meal.
- Optional add-ins: raisins, shelled sunflower seeds.
- Refrigerate until using.
- Serve in a log feeder or on a flat tray from October through April.

**Photo and Recipe submitted by  
Chuck Musser**



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