



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



Reducing the Plight of the Black-capped Chickadee (BCC)

The name of this friendly, small, acrobatic bird comes from its 'chick-a-dee-dee' call. It is as tame and gregarious as most other members of the tit family (the Tufted Titmouse is a cousin) and is a common garden visitor in most northern states of North America. It is constantly active, hopping from twig to branch in search of food. It is particularly tempted by sunflower seeds, peanuts, or suet placed on a bird-table or feeder. Chickadees also like a ball of suet or a seed bag attached to a tree branch. As a 12-month, year-round visitor to backyards, this little bird gets in cozy proximity to everyone he or she meets.

The Black-capped Chickadee's scientific name is *Poecile atricapillus*, of the family Paridae. It is about 5½" long. Black-capped Chickadee habitats include coniferous forest, open woodlands, thickets, and gardens across Eastern Alaska, southern Canada, and the northern United States; the BCC is the state bird of Maine. Their diet consists of insects and larvae, snails, seeds, berries, and suet.

The Black-capped Chickadee is one of the most passive of all birds. This might have something to do with its relative small size plus its amiable personality. Over the years I have noticed that this little avian gets "pushed around" or "bullied" by bigger birds...and just about every bird is bigger and bolder than the BCC. So... what happens in the "real bird world"? After building

a very thick moss and fur nest, after hours and days of hard work, the BCC couple gets pushed out by a larger and more aggressive bird. Even our most congenial,



Black-capped Chickadee

beloved, and docile Bluebird can be rather "un-neighborly" and pushy at times and will take over a BCC nest location!!

For a few years, the population of our Black-capped chickadees has been on the decline, especially in PA, where we have accurate numbers to examine. What can we do? This is so easy. Here is the technique.

The ideal entrance hole for a BCC is 1 1/8". I make entrance hole reducers out of ¼" thick PVC or wood scrap measuring 2" high by 5 ½" long. With two wood screws, this cover can be secured over the original 1.5" entrance hole or a slot where a BCC has just completed a nest with several eggs. This cover can be left in place for as long as the BCC's egg laying, incubation and feeding of the chicks takes, or until the fledge date arrives. Then it can be removed, instantly reverting the box back to a regular Bluebird nest box with a 1.5"

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A Message from the President *continued from page 1*

entrance hole or slot. I currently have about 8 different nests using this technique, and it is working quite well. I am keeping a list of Black-capped Chickadee FLEDGES for 2025, and I am confident my BCC numbers are going to soar this year!!

Dr. Dean C. Rust
President of the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania
May 30, 2025



Standard style nestbox with one and one eighth inch hole restrictor.



Gilwood Slot Box with one and one eighth inch hole restrictor installed.



Lenker style box with one and one eighth inch hole reducer installed.



Entrance hole reducer to one and one eighth inches diameter for BCC.



Black-capped Chickadee nest with 8 eggs.

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Young Bluebirds near nestbox
 Photo Credit - Mike Dickie

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From the Editor *by Joan Watroba*

Nestbox Neighbors—Other Native Songbirds

The sight of a cupped nest with 4, 5, or occasionally 6 blue eggs is a thrill for every Bluebird monitor. On the Fort Hunter Bluebird Trail in Dauphin County, we were excited to find a Bluebird nest with six eggs; all of them hatched, and all six young Bluebirds successfully fledged. The discovery of white Bluebird eggs in a cupped nest is always a pleasant surprise as well. Last season I had a Bluebird nest with four white eggs. All hatched and four healthy young bluebirds fledged from that brood.

Lawrence Zeleny, PhD wrote an excellent article related to the plight of the Bluebird, titled ***Song of Hope for the Bluebird***, which appeared in the June 1977 issue of National Geographic. This article stated: "...during the past forty years (*prior to 1977*) the population of the Eastern Bluebird may have plummeted by as much as 90 percent. ...*The songsters have dwindled in number, as imported species such as Starlings usurp nesting sites or man destroys them. By building nesting boxes, bird lovers foster a comeback.*"

The article included an illustration of a nestbox plan and highlighted the importance of monitoring nestboxes. "...*the birdhouses should be set up where they can be monitored on foot, by bicycle, or by car.nesting House Sparrows should be removed. Starlings can be excluded by cutting entrance holes with a diameter of precisely one and a half inches (for the Eastern Bluebird species).*"

Zeleny's article prompted many people across the country to put up and monitor a large number of Bluebird boxes and to establish Bluebird trails in suitable habitats. The result is one of the most successful Citizen Science Projects which not only benefits Bluebirds, but also the other native cavity-nesting songbirds who use the boxes. The Mission Statement of the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania # 4 states: Provide opportunities for people to become

involved in efforts that assist Bluebirds and other native species. These other species face the same challenges that Bluebirds do. Natural cavities are limited, caused by the removal of trees due to land development and the competition from non-native species including the House Sparrow and the European Starling. Such birds are very aggressive and will fiercely compete for both natural cavities, such as old woodpecker holes, and also for human-made nestboxes. These introduced species are not protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act due to the danger that they present to native songbirds, so it is legal to remove their nests, eggs, and even these birds from the environment.

This nesting season, I was thrilled to follow the nesting cycle of two other native songbird species on my trails. A Carolina Wren family selected a nestbox at Fort Hunter, and five young Carolina Wrens successfully fledged from the box. It was a thrill to watch the full nesting cycle, from nest to egg to seeing the young birds in the domed nest.

A Black-capped Chickadee nested in another nestbox at Fort Hunter, and eight young Chickadees successfully fledged from that box. As soon as I saw that a Chickadee was building the moss nest, I placed a hole restrictor to reduce the size of the entrance hole from 1 ½ inches to 1 1/8 inches so that a larger species such as a Bluebird or a Tree Swallow would not take over their nesting site. I have followed this protocol of reducing the size of the entrance hole for previous Chickadee nestings and find that it prevents nesting failure due to interference from larger birds and encourage you to do so.

We encourage all of you who put up and monitor nesting boxes to continue, and hope that you will share the joy of Bluebirding with others. A great way to do so is to invite someone you know who enjoys nature and the outdoors to go with you when you

check your nestboxes. Introducing young family members to Bluebirding can be a wonderful activity and may encourage them to become the Bluebirders of tomorrow who carry on the legacy of Lawrence Zeleny, PhD, who did so much to promote the comeback of the beautiful Bluebird so that we can continue to enjoy their beauty and song today and in the future.

Note: Lawrence Zeleny was interested in helping Bluebirds at an early age. He was born in Minnesota, and as a boy he constructed bluebird boxes to try to get bluebirds to nest in them. He had limited success due to interference from non-native House Sparrows. He did not give up. He later moved to Maryland, and after a long career as an Agricultural Biochemist, he retired in 1966 and made a full-time effort to save the Bluebirds. He set up and monitored an 85-nestbox trail

in Maryland, which was very productive in fledging hundreds of Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows. He and his wife, Olive, were fascinated by the beauty and song of Bluebirds, and encouraged others to get involved in Bluebirding by placing and monitoring nestboxes in suitable habitats and by not allowing House Sparrows to utilize their nestboxes. In 1978, Lawrence Zeleny, PhD founded the North American Bluebird Society (NABS) and became its first President. The Bluebird Society of PA and more than 60 other bluebird conservation organizations throughout the United States, Canada, British Columbia, and Bermuda are currently affiliates of NABS, so Dr. Lawrence Zeleny's passion to promote bluebird conservation is shared by many.



Black-capped Chickadee nest with 8 eggs
Photo Credit: Joan Watroba



Newborn Chickadees
Photo Credit: Joan Watroba



Fully-feathered Black-capped Chickadees
Photo Credit: Joan Watroba



Carolina Wren Nest with 5 eggs
Photo Credit: Joan Watroba



Carolina Wren (adult)
Photo Credit: Don Danko



Nestbox with reduced entrance hole of one and one eighth inches
Photo Credit: Joan Watroba



Upcoming Events - Mark Your Calendars:

***Check out the BSP Facebook Page for more Bluebird Events**

BSP Board/Membership Meetings:
Thursday evenings at 6:00 p.m. via Zoom
on these dates:
October 23, 2025

Please contact Phil Durgin at 717-732-5325 or email pdurgin@comcast.net or Nancy Fraim at 610-873-7454 or nancyfraim@comcast.net prior to the event to receive a link to participate in the meetings, which you can join via Zoom or phone.

January 15, 16, & 17, 2026 - PA Farm Show
(Thursday-Saturday)
Location: 2300 North Cameron Street , Harrisburg, PA
<https://www.farmshowpagov/>

BSP will participate in a rotating exhibit during the last 3 days of the event, January 15-17, (Thursday-Saturday). One of the area's biggest and most popular events, and one of BSP's favorite bluebird educational outreach experiences. This is a fun event for the entire family, with interesting programs, demonstrations, a variety of animals, vendors, and offers delicious PA food choices in the food court. ***Volunteers are needed to host the BSP educational/ BSP Merchandise Booth.** Contact Nancy Putt, Event Chair at: 717-712-3951 or e-mail: bluebirds@pa.net to volunteer for the event. THANKS

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

March 27 & 28, 2026-26th Annual BSP Conference
(Friday evening and Saturday)

Eden Resort and Conference Center, Lancaster, PA
<https://edenresort.com/>

BSP is happy to host the 26th Annual conference in Lancaster County. The meeting space, food, and lodging are all available at this beautiful and spacious venue. BSP has hosted a conference here in the past and we have been very pleased with the venue. BSP has reserved a block of rooms at a discount for conference attendees. Hope to see you there!

A special mailing including registration and itinerary will be sent to all active BSP members in early 2026. More information will also be available on the BSP website: www.thebsp.org closer to the event.

Conference Chair-BSP President, Dr. Dean Rust
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Remember To Submit Your 2025 Nestbox Report By Friday, October 31st, 2025

Every report is essential. We need to know how many Eastern Bluebirds fledged in our state, along with Tree Swallows, House Wrens, Chickadees, and other native songbirds that nested in your boxes.

The 2025 report form is on our website – www.thebsp.org

You can print out a copy and mail it in. Or, better yet, you can enter your nestbox data on your computer. We need your submission BY EMAIL IF POSSIBLE. Here's how: Go to www.thebsp.org

Then click on *Helping Bluebirds*. Then look for "Annual Nest Box Forms and Summaries." From there, you click on the blue button called "2025 Annual Nestbox Report Online Form." You fill in your answers on the pages supplied on your computer, check over your answers, and then click **SUBMIT** (click this only once). You are done!

To print out a paper copy of the ANNUAL NESTBOX REPORT FORM, you also go to www.thebsp.org and click on *Helping Bluebirds*. Then click on **Annual Nestbox Forms and Summaries**. Then click on the blue, rectangular button called 2025 Annual Nestbox Report Paper Form. You click "print" to make your paper copy. After you fill out the form by hand, **MAIL IT TO: MARILYN MICHALSKI -- 31 BEACON DR. W. -- PHOENIXVILLE PA 19460.**

For additional information call Marilyn at 610-933-0497, where you can leave a message with your name, address and phone number.
DEADLINE: FRIDAY, OCT. 31, 2025

PLEASE SUBMIT YOUR RESULTS -- even if you monitor only one nestbox!

The Threat of Non-Native House Sparrows

This article shares true accounts from Bluebird monitors and poses a question to the reader: How can we reduce the invasive, destructive behavior of non-native birds? It also confirms the injurious behavior of non-native birds. The challenge we face is determining how to prevent damage and death to our cavity-nesting birds – primarily our Eastern Bluebirds, Chickadees, and Tree Swallows. If we have been “Bluebirders” for more than a few years, we’ve probably experienced one or more of the scenarios below. Read on:

In May of 2021 a BSP monitor in Chester County was called to a farm where a large



Male House Sparrow

Bluebird Trail had been established. While checking nestboxes, a new monitor found something disturbing and asked for help to determine what had taken place inside a nestbox. An experienced Bluebirder joined him to examine a nest in which a dead male Tree Swallow was found with a bloody gash on its neck. When the new monitor wasn't sure what had happened, the veteran birder asked, “What is the only bird you know that can commit a physical attack on another bird inside a nestbox?” He answered, “Yeah, I know, it's the House Sparrow.” “True,” replied the veteran, “But what should we do about it?”

So we ask our fellow Bluebirders: “What can we do when we find a dead bird inside a nestbox – one that's a victim of a House Sparrow attack?”

We should first identify the cause of the bird's death. A close examination will provide clues, such as gashes or stab-like wounds on the dead bird's body. Every experienced monitor can recognize physical wounds from another bird's beak. The major perpetrator of physical injury is the male House Sparrow, a non-native bird that evicts other birds from a nestbox because he wants that box. The question then arises: “What actions will be effective and appropriate to correct this problem?”

In 2023 nestbox video footage captured an interaction between a female Chickadee and a male House Sparrow. The video showed the House Sparrow entering the nestbox while the Chickadee was building her nest. The House Sparrow approached the Chickadee and began to peck her with his beak. The Chickadee tried to exit the box, but the House Sparrow blocked her from leaving. She tried to avoid hits on her body, but she was too small in comparison to his size and strength. Her tiny beak, only ¼ inch long, was useless against his beak, twice as long as hers. The interaction continued, resulting in the Chickadee's death. This incident raises the question: “How should a Bluebird monitor respond to this kind of event?”

In the Spring of 2024, an experienced BSP monitor invited two high school students to join her at a small Bluebird Trail in Phoenixville. Both of these female students were scholastic achievers who had studied BSP literature and they knew how to monitor nestboxes. As they checked one of the boxes, they began to scream with cries of shock and fear. When the

Dead TS Pecked by HS



Female House Sparrow



Dead female Bluebird on nestcup.

monitor joined them, they found a beautiful male bluebird lying flat on the nestbox floor. Was he alive? They didn't know, so the monitor gently laid him on the ground. Even though he wasn't breathing, they checked for a heartbeat by putting two fingers on his chest, but there was none. When they moved the bird's head, they realized it was flopping around as if it were unattached to his body. The girls could see that the bluebird's head was only connected to its body by the skin of its neck. This meant the spinal column of the bluebird had been severed. When they questioned how this could have happened, they learned that the "House Sparrow" is capable of breaking another bird's neck if it wants that bird's nestbox for itself. The beak of the House Sparrow has a large base attached to the skull, which gives it enormous power. What action

should be taken by Bluebird Monitors who encounter a situation like this?

In the Summer of 2024, while monitoring one of his "Bluebird Trails," President Dean Rust found a dead female bluebird sitting on her nest, which she'd constructed inside a nest-cup. Her eggs lay under her, all dead. She herself had been blinded by a House Sparrow while incubating her eggs. The photo above shows how Dean found her – eyes gone. This is the cruel behavior of a male House Sparrow. What would be the appropriate action to take by a monitor of a Bluebird Trail where this occurred?

In May of 2025 a BSP member in Montgomery County found four bluebird nestlings – one day from fledging – afflicted with fatal injuries inside their nestbox. A House Sparrow had used its beak to hammer non-survivable injuries to their bodies. With its large base, the beak of the HOSP (House Sparrow) is strong enough to maim and kill other birds, mainly those with small or narrow beaks. When a House Sparrow finds a nestbox he likes, he will do anything to deter other birds from using it. His powerful beak enables him to drive away other birds, leaving their nestbox for him and his female. This means we bluebird monitors will find injured and deceased native songbirds inside our nestboxes, caused by a House Sparrow attack. When a bluebird monitor witnesses this kind of injury inflicted on a native bird, what should he or she do? What can be done to stop this from happening again?



Bluebird pecked by House Sparrow.



Young Bluebird pecked by House Sparrow.

These incidents, while difficult to witness, underscore the importance of learning the motivations behind bird behavior and attempting to reduce damage to our native birds. Non-native species like House Sparrows and European Starlings pose life-ending threats to native cavity nesters. As stewards of Bluebird Trails, we need to recognize potential dangers and consider humane and effective strategies for managing these situations. Our goal is to put the safety and conservation of our native bird populations first.

As we consider our options, we should discuss and share the options we have. By working together and learning from one another, we can make a positive impact on the conservation of our beloved native birds. We hope to hear from BSP members regarding this issue.

Submitted by a BSP Member

*Editor's Note: Please do not allow House Sparrows to nest in your boxes. They can nest up to four times per season, and they are aggressive, non-native birds. They destroy native songbirds, and House Sparrows are not protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. **It is legal and advisable to remove their nests, eggs, and the birds from the environment.** If you cannot eliminate them, take down the nestboxes or place a hole restrictor on the box of 1 and 1/8 inches so that they cannot use it, but other native species including Black-capped Chickadees and House Wrens will be able to enter the reduced-size entrance hole and raise their broods.*

For more information about controlling/eliminating House Sparrows:

www.nabluebirdsociety.org/PDF/NABSFactsheetHouseSparrowControl.pdf



House Sparrow eggs

*Side view
of House Sparrow nest*



Request for Nominations for BSP Awards 2025

Each year BSP recognizes and honors individuals or entities who have greatly contributed to bluebird education and/or who have promoted the nesting success of bluebirds and other native songbirds.

Award categories are:

- **Bluebirder of the Year:** Our most prestigious award, given to an individual who has demonstrated an outstanding long-term commitment (not just during the past year) to the success of Bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting birds.
- **Blue Feather:** Awarded to individuals who have made significant and sustained contributions towards promoting Bluebirds and the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania.
- **Letter of Commendation:** Awarded to individuals who have made significant contributions toward promoting Bluebirds and the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania.

If you would like to nominate someone for a BSP Award, please provide a brief write-up regarding your nominee, and include their name, county, and their contact information.

Awards will be presented on **March 28, 2026** at the Annual BSP Conference. **Please submit your nominations for the 2025 BSP Awards by 12/31/25 to:** Bluebird Society of PA, Attn: BSP Awards Chair, P.O. Box 756, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055.

Nomination forms will be included in the Fall/Winter 2025 Newsletter, or download and print a form from the BSP website: www.thebsp.org Select **Upcoming Events** and scroll down to **BSP Award Nominations**.

Gardens/Bluebirds-A Collaborative Effort

The Garden Club of York has a Bluebird Trail!

by **Barb Zmolek**

What do you get when you put the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania (BSP) together with the Garden Club of York (GCY)? Hmmmm.....take a few seconds. (*Soft music playing*)Any ideas? You get a Bluebird Trail!

One of the four purposes of the GCY is “to promote and preserve native plants, pollinators and birds.” In the true sense of this purpose, the GCY has taken a step in promoting a habitat of cavity-nesting birds, hopefully mostly Bluebirds, by funding a trail of nesting boxes. How was the trail created? It’s through the collaboration of both organizations.

My husband, Randy Zmolek, is a member of the BSP. I’m a member of the GCY. Both of us have been active in our respective clubs for the past two years. Actually, Randy was recently awarded the Blue Feather Award at the annual Bluebird Convention for installing, rehabilitating, maintaining, and/or monitoring 75 nesting boxes in York County. We often walk the multiple trails together and have been “learning by doing,” including learning how to best welcome Bluebirds in and keep House Sparrows out!

I heard at one of our monthly GCY meetings that the club’s Grants Committee was accepting applications for projects to fund. I knew how much I enjoyed walking the trails and peeking into the nesting boxes, so I felt sure that GCY members would also enjoy it. When I went home and shared my idea with Randy, he was all over it! Should the trail application be approved, he agreed to be the “heavy lifter” of the project, installing the poles and adding his expertise of what it takes to produce a successful trail.

With Randy’s enthusiastic endorsement, the next step was to locate a good site for the trail. Since I would be the one instructing GCY members on how to monitor, it needed to be in close proximity to our home. The site had to be easily accessible to the monitors, have wide open areas of low-cut grass and sustainable food options, and include a water source. The Country Meadows Retirement Community in the Shiloh area of York, PA was the site on which we set our sights.

When approached, Bonnie Geisinger, Director of Community Life at Country Meadows, was genuinely interested. Bonnie is all about new things happening on their campus. She loved the “purpose” of the trail, getting people together, building community, and collaborating!

With the location established, it was time to decide how many nesting boxes the trail could support. A walk around the property with Nancy Putt, the York County BSP Coordinator, showed that the area could support seven boxes. Next, the cost of the project was projected, and the project proposal was written. The GCY Grants Committee had a rubric to follow, so after a few rough drafts, the proposal was submitted. The project was approved in February. Materials were purchased in March, with the boxes coming from the BSP, and the poles were installed at the beginning of April.

I employed the use of two online scheduling tools to organize the monitoring of the trail, SignUpGenius and Doodle Poll. CSY members already used the former to register for all sorts of club “adventures.” Now one of those adventures is “Monitoring the Bluebird Trail.” Two members are able to sign up for a particular week, from the first week in April through the last week in August.

I then send out a Doodle Poll by email to the two members who sign up for a particular week two weeks prior, marking off the days/times that work for me to meet at the retirement home. The recipients respond by marking off the days/times that work for them. Hopefully schedules allow for at least one time to meet. I communicate that time to those who signed up and plans are made.

We got permission from Bonnie to place a container at the desk of the retirement home for our use. It contains a clipboard to record what's in each nesting box, pencils, plastic bags for disposal of sparrow nests, a scraper to clean out a box, nails in case one is dropped and can't be found, and latex gloves, in case someone forgets their gardening gloves. Once we all arrive at Country Meadows at our pre-arranged time, we pick up this container, and off we go, walking the trail.

Members have been quick to sign up to monitor the boxes. GCY members started walking the trail in the first week of April, 2025. Currently, all slots are filled up to the end of August. It has me thinking perhaps we could create another trail next year!

So, if you're familiar with the Garden Club of York, you may think of the colorful, bountiful baskets hanging in downtown York during the summer. Or perhaps you think of the blooms and vines flowing out of repurposed industrial equipment, also seen on the streets of downtown York. In both cases, you would be right! Both projects work to beautify the city of York. But now, the Garden Club of York has added a different kind of beautification project, and it is a collaborative effort: a Bluebird trail!

Editor's Note: Barb Zmolek was recently named the Second Vice-President of the Garden Club of York . She previously served as the Recording Secretary. Barb retired from York College of PA as the Director of Academic Support and adjunct math teacher. She has two adult children who work and live in York, and a husband of 40 years who truly enjoys Bluebirds.



Barb Zmolek



Nancy Shoff records nesting data while Beth Retallack observes a BCC nest at CMRCBBT



GCY members Tammi Bortner and Daphne Leeder monitor a nestbox



Audra Johns and Roxane Ohl view a BCC NEST with 3 eggs. Eight days later there were 7 eggs.



Randy Zmolek installs a nestbox on the GCY BB Trail at CMRC

Hooked on The Bluebird World!

by Sonda Haldeman, Manheim, PA

We had been battling House Sparrows in our bluebird house, and I became unmerciful to their persistence in establishing their nests! I was not looking for House Sparrows for our neighbors. I wanted Eastern Bluebirds!

Then, my husband and I attended an event where we had the privilege of hearing Dean Rust speak. As a result, we implemented his suggestion of using a small cardboard berry box inside of a nest box. To our delight, on May 19, 2024, there were five blue eggs in the nest!



On June 14, 2024, I witnessed three baby bluebirds fledging from their nest. One by one the triplets “tumbled” out of the birdhouse opening and had the courage to fly into the new world outside their home.

It was fascinating to watch this adventure as well as the busyness of their parents as they protected, fed and managed them until they were independent.



What time is dinner served?



Hey, don't forget me!



We were inspired by our bluebird experience, so we attended our first Bluebird Convention on March 22, 2025.



Once again, we had a question for Dean Rust. We had a nest with eggs and some below 32-degree temperatures in the forecast. Dean suggested that we could place hand warmers underneath the berry box to warm the eggs. On the way home from the conference, we purchased hand warmers to put there that evening. There was another night when the temperatures were scheduled to dip. We were surprised, late at night, when we went to place the second set of hand warmers to find mom was on the nest!



4-9-25

On April 25, 2025, the fledgling of one bluebird happened at 10:20 a.m. with the parents continually coaxing the others to follow. At 7 p.m. the third one left. This fledgling zoomed out so quickly there was no photo opportunity. Obviously, this fledgling did not want to spend the night alone!

Carefully watching this journey has expanded our view of the diligent work of bluebirds. They were not interested in the higher quality house but selected the well-seasoned model! Their vigilance is impeccable with Tree Swallows circling above our yard or the nuisance of a House Sparrow. They were quick to "attack" a squirrel defending their territory even when the squirrel was just traveling through with a nut in his mouth! Their constant monitoring and care of the hatchlings included a party of three adults...1 female and 2 males that tirelessly carried food to the hatchlings. And, of course, their meticulous housecleaning skills!



We were so blessed to see this process. We are clearly hooked on the amazing world of bluebirds and expanding their population!



4-13-25



4-19-25

All photos taken by Sonda Haldeman



Teamwork Among the Bluebirds

By Jodi Vasalani

May 13, 2025

Since 2020 I have been monitoring an Eastern Bluebird nest box on my property. The past two years included use of a modified nest box with a camera mounted inside. Having fledged over 50 Eastern Bluebirds during this time, I thought I had a good understanding of Eastern Bluebird behavior. That is until this season.

The nesting season this year started as usual. A pair of Eastern Bluebirds laid claim to my nest box in mid-February by putting in their requisite downpayment of some pieces of grass. The flirting began, sweet warbling, wing waves, the Male bringing gifts of small white feathers or pieces of grass to the Female, and when feeling extra amorous, a juicy bug. Active nest building by the Female began towards the end of March and by March 30th egg #1 arrived. Then curveball #1 occurred. It is typical that once egg laying starts, the Female will lay one egg per day until she's satisfied she has enough. Day two arrived and no egg. It was rainy weather around that time so maybe the Female just wasn't in the mood. The next day egg laying began again until a total of five eggs were laid and the Female began full-time brooding.



During the brooding period everything proceeded as expected. The Male would bring food to the Female on occasion, and she would take time to stretch her wings with short trips outside the box. Hatch day was right on schedule on the 14th day after the start of brooding. Here comes curveball #2. One egg did not hatch. I left the egg be for a couple days. Concerned that it would break and attract ants or flies, I made the decision to remove it. It was clear that the egg was spoiled; it was darker on the narrow end and unevenly balanced. I suspect it was the first egg laid.

For the first seven days after hatching all was proceeding with delivery of meals and "diaper duty" performed by both the Female and Male. Now curveball #3 occurred. The Male and Female know I put some mealworms out every morning, and every morning they are waiting in a nearby tree. Once I clear the area, they fly in to quickly grab some worms and deliver to the hatchlings, rotating in and out of the box, rushing before the House Sparrows can get to the mealworms. On this particular morning, only the Male was there. He was behaving differently. Still focused on feeding the hatchlings, but also going to the pair's usual landing spots in nearby trees calling out. Back and forth from feeding to apparently searching. I watched for about 30-minutes and there was no sign of the Female. I activated the nest box camera (which I had turned off due to the permanent residents at this point) and left for work. From the camera captures, I was able to see that the Female did not return to the nest box and the Male did all the feeding and removal of fecal sacs. Sadly it is presumed that the Female died, either by the beak of the resident Cooper's Hawk, fight with another bird, or window strike. Regardless, she was not seen from that point on.

By the second day, feeding the hatchlings slowed down as the Male was struggling to keep up, the temperatures were dropping and rains continuing on and off. At this time I reached out to a local bird rescue center for advice. Since the hatchlings were about eight days old at this point, they were at a stage where they should be able to maintain their own body temperature. I was advised to keep live mealworms out as much as possible to help alleviate the stress on the Male trying to keep up with feeding four hungry babies on his own. As there was concern with a heavy-mealworm diet and its impact on the bird's bones and joints, I was additionally advised to sprinkle some calcium carbonate powder on the mealworms (sold at pet stores or health food stores). If I noticed any changes in the hatchlings such as being lethargic or not eating, I was to reach back out to the rescue center and they would take in the babies. It was important to keep the hatchlings thriving in their current environment for as long as possible. So for nearly two weeks, I, along with the help of two neighbors who are also Bluebird box monitors, were able to keep a steady supply of mealworms out that were dusted with calcium powder.

In comes curveball #4. During the next two weeks, the temperatures fluctuated from lows in the 20's to high's in the 80's, and every combination of sun, clouds, light rain, heavy rain, high winds, and hail. It was during this time that I witnessed two amazing events. During one challenging weather day, a second Male Eastern Bluebird arrived at the mealworm feeder. The primary Male had no issues with this visitor to his territory, he even didn't seem to mind when the visiting Male looked inside the nest box. Then the visiting Male went to the mealworm dish and started to help the primary Male feed the hatchlings in advance of some heavy rains. The visiting Male spent about 20 minutes helping with feedings and "diaper duty" then flew off. A few days later about an hour before a significant storm on April 29th, the visiting Male reappeared, seemingly sensing the need for help, assisted the primary Male with feeding the hatchlings, even as the high winds and rain started to pick up. With this extra assistance the hatchlings had full bellies to make it through the night.



Because the primary Male was not threatened by the visiting Male, I have to wonder if this was a sibling from a previous season, or maybe even the father. Either way the teamwork among Eastern Bluebirds, and among my neighbors, helped these four hatchlings grow and ultimately fledge over a period of three days (two just weren't ready to leave the comfort of the nest box). To this day the primary Male continues to actively feed the fledglings (which there are now three) with the supplement of some extra mealworms that I put out twice a day, keeping the family together as they grow and learn to hunt for bugs on their own.

While typing this, the Male Eastern Bluebird stopped by the nest box and poked in his head. And as I bring this to closure, a Female arrived to do a quick check in the box then off she flew. I suspect a new lesson on Eastern Bluebirds is coming my way. Hopefully no more curveballs for this season!

Happy Birding!

The “July 15th Rule”

by Mark Ritke

I moved to northwestern Pennsylvania in the fall of 1994, and having always enjoyed watching birds, put up a bluebird box in my backyard the following spring. It was soon occupied by a pair of bluebirds. Watching that pair successfully raise two families that year got me hooked on bluebirds forever. Today, I monitor and maintain over 400 bluebird boxes near my home in Titusville every year. Having been a student of bluebirds for three decades now, I’ve learned a thing or two about them.

One is that female bluebirds in NW PA usually don’t lay eggs after July 15. Having a cut-off date for nesting makes sense; it’s Nature’s way of ensuring that late-season fledglings have enough time to learn the art of survival, to molt into adult feathers, and to store enough fat before winter hits. Not laying eggs after July 15 has been so consistent over the years I refer to it as the “July 15th Rule.” Sure, there are violations of the July 15th Rule every now and then, when a female begins laying eggs a day or two after July 15. But there’s one violation of the July 15th Rule that I’ll never forget.

During the afternoon of August 10, 2023, I was inspecting my Troyer bluebird boxes at the Whispering Pines Golf Course near Meadville and I noticed that Box #1 near the 1st tee needed some maintenance that I could best do at home. I’d last looked inside this box on July 20 and it just had the old nest from the second nesting (I leave the last nest of the season inside my bluebird boxes until spring). Assuming this pair of bluebirds was done nesting for the year because of the July 15th Rule, I disconnected the box from its pole and put it in the back of my car. I then stopped at the nearby Wal-Mart to do some quick shopping before heading home for the day.

When I returned to my car, I was astonished to see a female bluebird inside trying to fly out through the windshield! Since I had left one window partially rolled down, I figured that was how she got inside (you don’t always think straight in a panic). I quickly rolled all the car windows down and she flew out.

Just as I was about to exit the Wal-Mart parking lot, it hit me. That female didn’t fly into my car through the open window, she was likely inside the nest box I took from the golf course. I slammed on the brakes...

Looking inside the box, I saw a new nest (built on top of the old one) with two nestlings that hatched that very morning, the female’s third brood of the year. She was no doubt inside the box brooding her nestlings when I took it down—and she stayed inside all the while I carried it to my car, a distance of 32 yards.

Back in panic mode, I quickly drove to Whispering Pines and put the box back up, hoping that at the least, the male was still around to feed the nestlings. I watched for half an hour but never saw him. It was a worrisome and anxious drive back home to Titusville.

On the way home, I calculated the first of the two eggs was laid on July 26, a flagrant violation of the July 15th Rule. That didn’t do anything, however, to temper the guilt I felt for not looking inside the box before taking it down.

It was a restless night of unanswered questions and little sleep. Would the female know how to make it back to Whispering Pines from Wal-Mart? If she knew the way back, would she return before nightfall? Would she return at all? Was the male still in his territory despite my not seeing him after putting the box back up? If he was, would he feed the nestlings if the female didn’t return? Given how late it was in the nesting season, I had no other bluebird boxes in which I could foster the two nestlings if the parents didn’t return. The guilt was piling up.

I drove back to Whispering Pines first thing in the morning. Watching the box from my car, I saw no sign of the male or female. Because the low temperature that night was an unseasonably chilly 61 degrees, I wondered if the nestlings could survive without being brooded. I decided to look inside the box expecting the worst.

The 30 second walk from my car to Box #1 seemed like 30 minutes. My heart was racing as I slowly lowered the front panel and peeked inside...and there she was, the same female that I unknowingly put in my car, the female that once again was brooding her two nestlings, looking back at me with an expression that I'm convinced I interpreted quite accurately: *"Don't you dare take this box down and take it to Wal-Mart again or I'll poke your eyes out!"*

I quickly closed the box and hurried back to my car. About 15 minutes later, the female left the box and began feeding the nestlings. Then the male appeared, and he was soon feeding them, too. All was right in bluebird world again. Both nestlings fledged on August 26.

As the bluebird flies, the distance from Wal-Mart to Whispering Pines is about a mile. Not a lengthy distance by bluebird standards, but perhaps an unfamiliar one. Then again, perhaps not!

I learned my lesson. Never again will I take the July 15th Rule for granted and take a nest box down in August for maintenance without first looking inside. That will forever be known as the "August 10th Rule."

Note: Leave the last nest of the season inside your bluebird boxes until spring. Bluebird families sometimes use their nest boxes as overnight winter roosts, and old nests left inside provide soft beds and help keep them warm.

Editor's Note: After August 15th, I continue to monitor the boxes, but instead of checking them weekly, I check them every 2 weeks until mid-September. Why so late? One season on a bluebird trail at Willow Mill Park in Mechanicsburg, I discovered two nestboxes with new, full bluebird nests and eggs the first week of September. This was a third nesting for both pairs, and the young successfully fledged in late September. It may be a good idea to adopt the September 15th Rule in South Central PA.



Bluebird Fledges on nest box

Photo Credit: Mike Dickie

BSP County Coordinator News - May 2025

REVISED FLEDGE NUMBERS for Beaver County in 2024: County Coordinators in Beaver County – Scott and Ida Parry - alerted me to an error in the “Annual Nestbox Report of 2024.” Instead of zero fledged, as originally listed, Scott and Ida Parry fledged **113** new Eastern Bluebirds. Scott’s fledge numbers were 88, and Ida’s fledge numbers were 25, totaling 113 for Beaver County in 2024. We apologize that their results were accidentally recorded under Clinton County. Their corrected FLEDGE NUMBER puts BEAVER COUNTY into 14th place among Pennsylvania’s 67 Counties. Congratulations to Scott and Ida for an excellent “Bluebird Year in 2024” with more than one hundred new Eastern Bluebirds fledged under their care!

NEW CC IN ARMSTRONG COUNTY: We welcome Kay Owen in Armstrong County, who began her experienced work early in 2025. Kay is replacing Lynn Ramage in Armstrong. Kay can be reached at 724-525-7172.

NEW CC IN BUTLER COUNTY: We welcome Pam Wilson in Butler County. She can be reached at 724-355-8830 or by email: pwil@zoominternet.net

CAMBRIA COUNTY CC: Winnie Illig, 814-533-9237, winillig@hotmail.com

CENTRE COUNTY: **Vacant—CC Needed—Please volunteer if you live in Centre County**

NEW CO-CC IN DAUPHIN COUNTY: Our CC there is Bill Strauss, who has added a new “Co-CC.” We welcome Ken Stuck to the Dauphin County team. He can be reached at 717-599-2727 or ken.stuck@cbrealty.com

GREENE COUNTY CC: Samantha Lambert, 724-583-7030, **updated email address:** lambert.samantha@gmail.com

SCHUYLKILL COUNTY: Rich Rieger –703-969-0451, **updated email address:** zelig88@aol.com

SULLIVAN COUNTY UPDATE: The Environmental Educator at World’s End State Park – Jane Swift – has agreed to ask local Bluebirders to join BSP and contact Marilyn if they’re interested in helping bluebirds as a CC. Because World’s End State Park consists primarily of dense woodlands, it is not suitable for Eastern Bluebird nesting, according to Jane, who will reach out to “birders” beyond the Park boundaries.

HELP NEEDED IN SUSQUEHANNA COUNTY: Our CC Evan Mann needs new monitors in his County. If you are able to help, contact Marilyn Michalski at emeraldmm@verizon.net

Centre County Update: Our CC in Centre County – Joanna Taylor – has resigned from her position as CC and as our Speaker Coordinator. She is directing her interests and talent to a new venture focused on Bluebird Habitat. *We thank her for the excellent service and remarkable outreach programs she created on behalf of BSP.*

For additional news and/or information, call/contact Marilyn at 610-933-0497 or emeraldmm@verizon.net



Male Bluebird

Photo Credit: Marie Lee

BSP Mailbag

5/9/25—Nancy and Joan,

I've been monitoring my neighbor's nest box since 4/14. On 4/21 I did see a bluebird leave the box and the beginnings of a nest was started but since that time I have not seen her. The nest looks complete, but I never saw any eggs. Today when I checked the box nest was full of ants. I plan to go back and try to get rid of the ants and treat the box with diatomaceous earth. At this point should I dispose of the nest and see if another nest is started or should I leave it a while longer to see if the bluebird comes back? Thanks for any advice you can provide!

Lisa Fetterman



Reply from Nancy Fraim on 5/9:

Hi Lisa,

Here are a few suggestions. I think the bluebird may still come back to lay eggs.

1. Remove the nest and observe it closely; are there ants throughout it? If they are mostly on the bottom of the nest, you could split the nest in half, removing most of the ants. Sweep out the nest box and place the diatomaceous earth on the floor. (I usually use two Q-tips dipped in liquid Terro and duct taped to the outside floor under the box. Terro is Borax and ants hate it). Replace the top part of the nest. Check the box in a day or two if you can.
2. If the nest is infested with ants throughout, place a new nest if you have one or fashion a nest from dry pine needles or dried grass. Put diatomaceous earth or Terro as mentioned before.
3. Remove the nest as you mentioned, treat for ants, and hope the bluebirds come back.

Hope these suggestions help. Please call if you have more questions.

Nancy Fraim



Reply from Joan on 5/9:

Hi Lisa—Yes—if the nest is infested with ants and ant eggs, I would dispose of it, scrape out the remaining nesting material and ants, and then sprinkle diatomaceous earth on the floor of the nestbox. Note that I see a couple of sticks in the photo of your nest—could be that a House Wren placed them there and could have interfered with this nesting as well. I encountered a similar situation yesterday—a bluebird nest that had been there for several weeks with no eggs, and when I examined it, I saw that it was full of ants, so I removed it and discarded it away from the box and sprinkled diatomaceous earth on the floor of the box. This was the first week of the season that I have seen ants in the boxes, so from now on after the first broods fledge, or if I see any ants, I sprinkle diatomaceous earth on the floor of each box. Also, diatomaceous earth can also control blowfly larvae and earwigs inside of nestboxes.

Joan Watroba

Reply from Lisa on 5/9:

I attended to the box today once the rain stopped, so if the Bluebirds return and lay eggs, I will let you know.

Lisa Fetterman



Reviving the Bluebird Trail at Penn National Golf Course

by Dorian and Lynn Runt

At Penn National Golf Course Community in Fayetteville, Pennsylvania, everyone loves a birdie—whether it be the one on the green or the azure blue one in the sky. Bluebirds are a big deal here in this active retirement community. The residents feed bluebirds, photograph bluebirds, and monitor bluebird nest boxes...just can't get enough BLUEBIRDS! This is the story of how this community and other conservation-focused organizations have worked together to revive a sixteen-year-old bluebird trail.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Around 2002, the golf course grounds superintendent, who had a table saw and a vision, built a number of bluebird nest boxes. His name was Dave DeWitt and he likely saw a number of bluebirds perched on trees scattered around the two hundred mowed acres. Dave must have watched as the bluebirds swooped down to find their prey and concluded that the location at Penn National Golf Course would be ideal for a bluebird trail. HE WAS RIGHT!! Dave's nest boxes were well-made from pine according to the current day specifications. Likely his crew installed these original boxes on free-standing wooden posts around the courses. Next, a volunteer group of residents organized by Ruth Barton (aka "The Bluebird Lady") started to monitor these nest boxes. The results in these early years of the trail were impressive.

IMPROVING AND EXPANDING THE TRAIL WITH SUPPORT AND PERMISSION

Since the Penn National site appeared to provide a great habitat for Eastern bluebirds, a small group of us from the Conococheague Audubon Society wrote a proposal asking for permission to improve and expand the trails. Old nest boxes which had lost their insulating value would be replaced, and some nest boxes would be relocated away from areas of dense house sparrow populations. In late December 2021, our proposal was accepted by Patti Nitterhouse, owner and management of Penn National Golf Course. She also honored our request for twelve additional sites for nest boxes. Ms. Nitterhouse, a conservationist and a board member of the South Mountain Conservancy, views the bluebird trail project to be consistent with Penn National's certification as a national wildlife habitat. Fast forward to today: the current bluebird trail consists of 28 nest boxes and runs along the perimeter of 200 acres of well-maintained golf course. Also, the community got behind us in the effort. Nest boxes started to appear in backyards. It was great to have a community so aligned with the project!

Setting up or even reviving a bluebird trail can be challenging enough, but on a golf course there usually are additional issues to be addressed. Safety for both the golfers and the volunteers should always be a priority, and it is here at Penn National. We have received wonderful guidance from the Penn National staff on these issues. The superintendent of grounds, Tom Shearer, must approve any and all nest box sites so that golf play is not impacted. He also evaluates each site with consideration of safety for our monitors. For example, a nest box behind the tee box is safer for volunteers to monitor than is a site along the fairway which could be in line with a direct drive from a golfer. Maintenance around the nest boxes must also be considered, so locating the boxes in a garden without turf is helpful.



Paired boxes in a mulched, no-mow garden.

Another suggestion is that posts for nest boxes be located approximately three to four feet away from the cart path. Then a pathway for monitors from the cart path to the box can be maintained with a weed-whacker. This year has provided plenty of practice with weed-whacking.

Penn National golf pros Darin Peart and Kevin Reiber have advised us on the best times for monitors to check their boxes on the course. During tournaments or league play, trail work is rescheduled for a different day. Our monitors use good golf course etiquette and even assist in locating golf balls! The Pro Shop and its staff reserve carts for our purpose, and all we need to say is, "We're for the bluebirds." They reply, "We are too!"

FINDING OTHER RESOURCES TO HELP YOU

Your community may be a source of volunteers. Depending on the size of your project, you may need additional help for a variety of tasks such as monitoring nest boxes, writing articles for newsletters, researching various topics, or building nest boxes. Our retirement community loves these opportunities to "give back" now that they no longer need to punch a time clock.

Affiliation with organizations which promote conservation can be helpful too. Our local chapter of the Audubon Society (Conococheague Chapter) has assisted us with obtaining a used walk-behind mower and a post hole digger for trail work. Their website and newsletter advertise our need for volunteers. We train our volunteers who wish to be monitors and provide them with an opportunity to shadow an experienced monitor.

The Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania, with its dedicated staff, provides the public with information needed to help Eastern bluebirds and other cavity nesters. Their publications, the Weekly Nest Box Check Form, and research of best practices for helping bluebirds thrive are invaluable. We have been inspired by their speakers and always receive helpful hints from President Dean Rust and Editor Joan Watroba. No wonder Pennsylvania has the best Eastern bluebirds!



John and Barb Rotz hit the trail.

Two of our monitors, John and Barb Rotz, who are BSP members, have provided much expertise throughout this trail revival. They are willing to take on the tough assignment of monitoring boxes on section of the trail we used

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Reviving the Bluebird Trail at Penn national Golf Course continued from page 21

to call “House Sparrow Country.” We are now seeing the benefits of their efforts with reduced numbers of that horrible species. Also, we have our own House Sparrow expert, John Fry, who assists the backyard monitors with sparrow control so that nest boxes can be reclaimed for the bluebirds. It is hard to find volunteers willing to do the “dirty work” of a trail. Most monitors would rather see the chicks and count the eggs. Can’t blame them. But without a House Sparrow patrol, we risk the possibility of no bluebirds or other cavity nesters to count. Thanks to all bluebird monitors who are willing to take on the more unpleasant tasks on a trail!!

“BLUEBIRD TRAILS SHOULD BE DYNAMIC”

In her article appearing in the Spring 2025 issue, Joan Watroba stresses that trails should “adapt to the many changes which may affect nesting success.” This article provides the reader with a thoughtful checklist of “To Do’s” to keep your trails and your backyard nest boxes dynamic. The revived trail at Penn National would get passing grades on Replace, Repair, and Relocate. The issue of predator guards remains somewhat unresolved. It is difficult to use baffles on the large wooden posts, but there are other options available. We are certainly concerned with preparing the trail for the challenges of more climate change. We sometimes feel overwhelmed thinking of the man and woman power and the funding needed for our trail deficiencies. If we had the amazing energy of Joan Watroba or Dean Rust, we might be able to pull it off. But we will use the article’s suggestions as a long-term plan. We will prioritize the most critical of the tasks. And each of these suggestions, such as replace, repair, or relocate, can be achieved over a period of time. If a nest box has no current resident bird, a relocation along a trail could occur right now. For example, on our trail, there is a wren-preferred nest box close to an area of brush. There is no bird inhabiting the box now, and so it will be a priority to RELOCATE in the hopes of attracting bluebirds for a possible second brood.

THE CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

The spring weather in our area has been really challenging, with wild temperature swings. During the spring of 2023, our trail suffered the loss of thirteen chicks, each about twelve days old. They died of hypothermia. We vowed to never let that happen again. We replaced all of the original nest boxes, some of which were over fifteen years old. We also made our ventilation system adaptable to the season.



Nestboxes with adjustable vent covers

An alternative to the popsicle stick vent closure is to plug the ventilation slot with strips of spongy foam for frigid temperatures, then remove them for a warm day. We have also experimented with insulating foil-covered bubble wrap attached to the exterior of the nest box. (This product is used for auto window shields and around duct work.) We did not do a controlled experiment with this product to determine to what extent, if any, it did control heat inside the box. Thus, we could not draw conclusions about its effectiveness. However, we wonder if this product installed on the exterior roof of the nest box might be deterring sparrows from using the box at all. We have had no sparrows in the nest boxes that have this product attached to the exterior roof.

PENN NATIONAL COMMUNITY GETS BLUEBIRD FEVER

It is exciting to see so many people fascinated with the BLUEBIRDS! Many residents have installed nest boxes in their yards. They possess lots of knowledge about *Sialia sialis*. Yet some of the most rewarding experiences can come just from observing these magnificent birds at your feeder or seeing them splashing around in your bird bath. We do not all need to be backyard landlords nor trail monitors to enjoy them. Since many backyards are not enough territory for food to support a clutch of bluebirds, several residents came up with an idea. They are working cooperatively by sharing a nest box installed close to both backyards, thereby expanding the hunting grounds and sharing the experience of watching the egg laying, the hatchlings emerge, the parents feeding the chicks, and the final prep for fledging. These residents get to watch the full movie, with only half the work. Neither neighbor must hire a "bird sitter" when going on vacation.

We have provided the Penn National residents with information about bluebirds so that they can appreciate even more this once-threatened species. There is more information at the Gazebo by the golf cart pick up area. Check it out!

Our bluebirds may have done more for us than we have done for them. They have pulled us together with a common goal and a mission. With our cooperative efforts to help them, we can ensure that the skies over Penn National remain BLUER than ever.



The future looks bluer

BSP Newsletter Submission Contest/Winner

Congratulations to Sonda Haldeman, Manheim, PA

Thank you for submitting your wonderful article, *Hooked on the Bluebird World!*, to this issue.

You will receive a full year of BSP Membership.

We encourage our members to submit newsletter items to us. To submit by regular mail, send to: Joan Watroba, 2408 Bumble Bee Hollow Road, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055 or submit email submissions to: bluebirdhappy365@outlook.com

One submission is randomly drawn at the cutoff date for each seasonal issue: January 7, May 7, and September 7.



Congratulations Sonda!

BSP Events Report: Check out the BSP Facebook Page for more events and updates

March 8 — Bluebird Program at Founders Golf Course/Penn National, Fayetteville, PA

I was pleased to have the opportunity to present a Bluebird Program to about 35 attendees in the Community Room at the Founders Golf Course at the request of Dorian Runt. She is an active BSP member and is a very knowledgeable bluebird enthusiast. Dorian has set up and manages a monitoring program with volunteers who monitor nestboxes on and in the vicinity of Founders Golf Course. Some of the program attendees were new to bluebirding, and others have been monitoring nestboxes for some time. Volunteers sign up to check the nestboxes on a regular basis and they report the nesting activities. After the PowerPoint presentation and demonstrations, there was ample time for questions. Many attendees shared their joy of bluebirding and shared trail monitoring tips with the group. Thanks to Dorian for her donation of beautiful bluebird items for the BSP Conference auction which was held later in the month. **Joan Watroba, BSP Cumberland County Coordinator**

Event Feedback: Dear Joan—Your presentation at Penn National was jam-packed with useful information and inspiration. The audience loved your energy! (Contagious!) I hear that the BSP Conference was loaded with new ideas as well! Keep those wonderful newsletters coming! Hope our paths (trails) will cross again.

Sincerely, Dorian Runt

March 17 — Bluebird Program for the Palmyra Garden Club

I gave a 1 hour Bluebird presentation to 55 attendees at the Palmyra Garden Club who meet in a Social Room at Finkenbinder Funeral Home & Crematory. My program was from 12:30 to 1:30 following a great lunch. Garden Clubs have a very high interest in Bluebirds! They had many great questions. **Dean Rust, BSP Lancaster County Coordinator**

Event Feedback: Dean, It was a great day yesterday with the presentation that you did for the garden club. I love bluebirds, too. Thank you again for spending time with us.

Heidi Neiswender, Palmyra, PA

April 9 — Bluebird Program

At 8:30 a.m., I gave a Bluebird Presentation to 30 residents of Pleasant View Communities in Manheim, PA. **Dean Rust, BSP Lancaster County Coordinator**

April 11 — Bluebird Basics Program—Dillsburg Library

On Wednesday, April 11, I gave a bluebird presentation at the Dillsburg Public Library for three enthusiastic attendees. Part of my program included the Stokes “Bluebird Basics” and North Carolina’s “Inside the Nest Box” videos. After the videos, there was time for questions and answers. **Nancy Putt, BSP York County Coordinator**



April 14—Bluebird Program On Monday at 10 a.m. on April 14th, I gave a Bluebird Presentation to a group of 50 residents of Fairmount Homes in Ephrata in their chapel. I was pleased to receive and accept an honorarium check for \$50 for our BSP funds. Their Chaplain, Eugene Weaver, was particularly interested as he has 3 Bluebird boxes at his private residence. It is always fun to share my love for the BLUES!!! **Dean Rust, BSP Lancaster County Coordinator**

April 16 — Bluebird Trail Walk and Meeting -Fort Hunter Park, Harrisburg, PA Three Board Members of the Friends of Fort Hunter and I enjoyed a bluebird trail walk of the newly-rehabbed Bluebird trail at Fort Hunter Park in Harrisburg, PA. We viewed the nesting activity in the 4 of 12 boxes which already had activity. One had a Bluebird nest with **6 eggs**, one had a complete Bluebird nest, one had a Carolina Wren nest with 5 eggs, and one had a Chickadee nest of moss with fur on top. After the trail walk, I provided a brief presentation to the full Board of the Friends of

Fort Hunter and thanked them for providing 12 new, beautiful, cedar, hand-painted boxes and for several mounting poles. I also told them about the nesting and habitat needs of bluebirds and the other native birds that may nest in the boxes and also informed them about the dangers of House Sparrows. I will be mentoring two of the Board Members who expressed interest in monitoring these nestboxes, and eventually they may be willing to take responsibility for this trail and report the data to BSP. More information and photos of the bluebird trail at Fort Hunter were included in the Spring 2025 edition of the BSP Newsletter. **Joan Watroba, BSP Cumberland County Coordinator**

April 18 — Bluebird Presentation I was invited to give my bluebird presentation at Homewood Living at Plum Creek in Hanover. Resident Gordon Grady manages the Bluebird Society of Plum Creek's 15 volunteers who monitor the 55 nest boxes on their very large campus for seniors. I arrived early and had a tour of some of the nestbox locations. One nest box was opened and we were surprised to find it full of pretty large baby bluebirds. Four other boxes were found with the most massive sparrow nests.....we removed them. There were 40-plus enthusiastic attendees who were interested in learning more ways to help the bluebirds and other cavity nesters and to eliminate English house sparrows. **Nancy Putt, BSP York County Coordinator**

April 19—Centre County Bluebird Workshop On a bright spring afternoon, 10 enthusiastic participants gathered for a two hour outdoor bluebird workshop in Centre County, hosted by BSP County Coordinator Joanna Taylor in partnership with the Penns Valley Conservation Association. The bluebird workshop included an outdoor presentation followed by a demonstration and a short walk featuring a 15-nestbox bluebird trail.

Program highlights:

- Comprehensive guidance on bluebird stewardship – from selecting and siting nestboxes to proven mounting methods.
- Managing aggressive competitors – practical strategies for deterring European Starlings, House Sparrows, and House Wrens.
- Season long monitoring – why consistent checks from March through July are critical for success with bluebirds.

- Hands on demonstrations – a showcase of nestbox designs and the latest innovations in predator and competitor deterrents.

Impact:

The workshop inspired nine new memberships—including one youth member—strengthening our local bluebird community and ensuring safer nesting sites across Centre County.

Thank you to everyone who attended and to Penns Valley Conservation Association <https://pennsvalley.net> for their partnership in making this event a success!

Joanna Taylor, BSP Centre County Coordinator



May 2 — Bluebird Trail Walk, 10:00-11:30 a.m.

Six members of Woodcrest Villa and I did a “walk-about” at the Bluebird Trail at Calvary Church. Lots of Bluebird nests with eggs and chicks were photographed with iPhones. Eight nest boxes were opened and examined, including a Black-capped chickadee nest with 6 eggs. It was a gorgeous morning to be out in nature seeing God's creations. **Dean Rust, BSP Lancaster County Coordinator**



BSP Conference 2025 Highlights

The Annual BSP Conference was held on March 21 & 22, 2025. This year we celebrated our 25th anniversary in the Harrisburg area where BSP first got started. So many volunteers have been successful keeping everything going this long, and our conference has always been a wonderful time to get together with members around the state to share information about our bluebirding experiences and to visit our numerous vendors and educational displays. We were thrilled that more than 115 enthusiastic bluebirders attended this special event.

This year we returned again to the Holiday Inn, Harrisburg/Hershey (Grantville) location, and we kicked off our Friday night with an excellent presentation by our BSP Member/Store Manager, Susan Durgin, whose presentation focused on reaching future generations and her PowerPoint entitled "Bluebirds in My Neighborhood."

Saturday started out with our President, Dr. Dean Rust, presenting the BSP Awards to recognize the wonderful work of fellow volunteers. He followed with his informative new PowerPoint presentation "The Bluebird Monitoring Experience," a Show and Tell of detailed methods he uses while monitoring his 20 trails and over 400 nest boxes. Next we heard from representatives of the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). Carly Broder, Natural Resource Program Specialist, gave an overview of the State Park's statewide Cavity Nesting Trails Program. Megan Fodor, EES at Nescopeck and Hickory State Park, spoke with a slide show on their activities and findings. She was joined by trail monitor "Bluebird John," John Jacoby, who shared some of his unique experiences on his trail in wild bear country. After our delish luncheon buffet and captivating live auction, we finished with Red Creek Wildlife Center presenter Lylee Leonard and her "star" educational rescue birds—a turkey vulture and a screech owl. **Many thanks to everyone who attended and helped to make this such an enjoyable and successful event!**

Nancy Putt, BSP
Conference Chair 2025



Thanks to everyone who donated items and solicited donations for our Fundraising Auctions which were held during the conference. As always, there was a beautiful assortment of items, and almost everyone went home with something special. We certainly have many talented woodworkers and craftspeople, as many of the items were made and donated by our members and attendees.

Live Auction receipts \$1898.00
Silent Auction receipts \$345.00

\$2243.00 fundraising total from auctions

Thanks to David Birmingham, Auctioneer, and Pat Larthey, Auction Clerk, who have donated their auctioneering services during BSP Conferences for more than 20 years. They are always enthusiastic and ensure that the auctions are enjoyable and profitable. Thanks to the attendees who volunteered to serve as auction runners and cashiers. We could not do this without you. Special thanks to Susan Durgin, who prepared several Door Prize gift bags containing beautiful bluebird and nature-related items, and to President Dean Rust, who always brings a special President's Bluebird Basket which is raffled off at the end of the conference.

Joan Watroba, Auction Chair

Bluebirder of the Year - Bill Strauss Nominated by Dean Rust

Bill Strauss has made significant and sustained contributions towards promoting Bluebirds in Pennsylvania, especially in Dauphin County. Bill has been a spokesperson for the Bluebird Society of PA as the Dauphin County Coordinator since 2012.

Bill is one of the few County Coordinators in PA who sends me a quarterly report of what he has been actively doing in Dauphin County. Bill helped me in the transition at Spring Creek Golf Course and Hershey Country Club in 2015 when I took over the monitoring of those bluebird trails.

Bill also helped me to install the Bluebird Trail at the Lebanon VA Hospital facility. Bill has been active at the annual Wetlands Festival at Wildwood Park, the Camp Hill Prison Trail with Bill Frantz and the Harrisburg Christian School. Bill has actively attended our BSP Board Meetings and Annual Conferences regularly through the years. Bill has been active in our box-building events and served as Chairman of our BSP Woodworking Committee. He also worked at many PA Farm Show box-building events. Bill has mentored many young men, especially Jay Smullen and his two brothers in installing Bluebird trails and building nestboxes. Bill and Jay refurbished the Hershey Gardens Bluebird Trail with many hours of hard work four to five years ago. One of the Smullen boys also revamped the Lenker Trail a few years back. This is only a small description of Bill's impact on BSP!!!

For all of these reasons, **Bill Strauss** is a worthy recipient of the **BSP Bluebirder of the Year Award for 2024**.

Blue Feather Award - Phil Louie Nominated by Dean Rust

Phil Louie has made significant and sustained contributions toward promoting Bluebirds in Lancaster County and has been a spokesperson for the Bluebird Society of PA over the past 4-5 years.

Phil has been the monitor of the Bluebird Trail at Bent Creek Country Club since 2021. Each year, the numbers of "Bluebirds Fledged" has increased under his guidance. In 2024, Bent Creek Golf Course fledged more than 80 Bluebirds out of just 16 nestboxes. Phil is dedicated to monitoring each week



with a report and photos.

He has also been the monitor of the Four Seasons Golf Course trail since 2022 and has 14 nestboxes at this location. He has totally "revamped" this bluebird trail with all new nestboxes and predator guards and his fledge numbers are growing there each year. He has battled House Sparrows at both locations with due diligence. Phil Louie is a credit to "Bluebird Monitoring" in Lancaster County and loves to talk about his bluebird trails with anyone who will listen and also enjoys playing golf. For all that he does to promote bluebird success, Phil Louie is a worthy recipient of the BSP Blue Feather Award for 2024.

Blue Feather Award - Randy Zmolek Nominated by Nancy Putt

Randy Zmolek and his wife, Barb, of Dover joined the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania at the BSP Booth at the PA Farm Show, where they learned more about caring for nestboxes in their backyard. They had recently retired and were pursuing their interests. Randy became more interested in doing even more to help the Bluebirds. After a private garden tour at the Appell Estate, which is now managed by the Powder Mill Foundation, which will become a public garden in the future, Randy saw that there were a few bluebird nestboxes in need of repair and he saw a number of good spots for installing more. He pursued this project with the Head Horticulturist who he knew from church. After receiving approval, he located good spots and placed new bluebird boxes. Now he has a 10-box bluebird trail there that he monitors.

When Randy contacted Nancy Putt, BSP County Coordinator for York County, for assistance in purchasing new boxes from BSP, Nancy mentioned the need for a monitor for 31 nestboxes along a 3-mile Wellness Trail at the UPMC York facility. He and Barb always enjoy walks along this trail and they live nearby. Randy then agreed to monitor the trail and to maintain the nestboxes there, so now he is checking 41 nestboxes on his two trails as well as those in his yard. The Zmoleks were also the winners of the President's Bluebird Basket at the 24th Annual Conference. Randy is certainly hooked on Bluebirds! For all that he does to install, monitor, and maintain nestboxes to promote Bluebird nesting success, **Randy Zmolek** is a worthy recipient of the **BSP Blue Feather Award for 2024**.



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Bluebird Society of PA Membership Form

Regular (single/couple)

1 year- \$15
3 years- \$40

Organization/Corporate

1 year- \$100
3 years- \$275

Lifetime

\$375 (individual only)
*Renew for 3 years & Save

Mail to: Bluebird Society of PA, P.O. Box 12, Exton PA or complete the **NEW** online form at www.thebsp.org

_____ New Member _____ Renewal _____ Donation

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ County: _____

Phone: _____ (required) Email: _____ (required if email delivery or ?s)

Donation (optional): \$ _____ Total Amount Enclosed: \$ _____

If you are a new member have you received your Membership Packet? _____ Yes _____ No
How would you like to receive your newsletter? _____ Email (saves trees) _____ Regular mail delivery

Please consider sharing your talents by volunteering to help with:

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| _____ County Coordinator | _____ Nest box Monitoring | _____ Newsletter |
| _____ Nest box Construction | _____ Newsletter | _____ Local Events |
| _____ Photography | _____ Fundraising | _____ Social Media |
| _____ Speakers' Bureau (education) | _____ Web Design | _____ Technology |

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