



Bluebird Trails & Tales

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

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2025 BLUEBIRD SOCIETY OF PA
25TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

MARCH 21-22, 2025
HOLIDAY INN
(HARRISBURG/HERSHEY)
604 STATION ROAD
GRANTVILLE, PA 17028

More information coming in a January mailing and at www.thebsp.org/



A Message from the President

Dr. Dean C. Rust, BSP President

Next Level Bluebird Monitoring Tips 3.0

September 29, 2024

Ants, ants and more ants! I have seen this movie over and over on my trails. It may result from a box that has been stuffed with sticks by a male House Wren (HOWRN), an adult bird that succumbed in the nest, or a whole group of baby nestlings that died of hypothermia on a cold wet weekend in April. No matter what caused it, the question is: How to deal with it?

Right about now it would be nice to have a “pressure washer” all hooked up, and in about 3 minutes,

everything would be wet, but squeaky clean. But with no water and no electric power source within 5 mileswhat to do? In this article, I will suggest how to handle some of these situations that we may encounter when monitoring nestboxes.

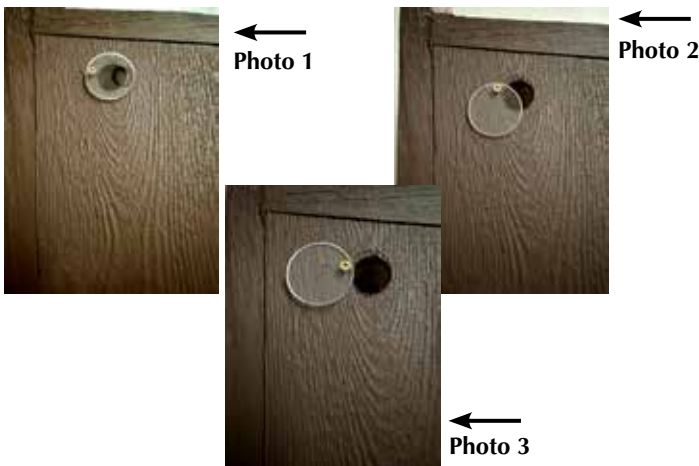
You know you have an **ANT PROBLEM** when you just touch the open box and instantly you have 7,500 ants crawling on your hand and up your arm!! Sound familiar?

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

A Message from the President continued from page 1

1. DO NOT PANIC
2. Scrape everything in and around the nest into a plastic bag.
3. Then use a 4" paint brush and sweep remaining debris into a zip-lock bag.
4. Dust the entire box floor with Diatomaceous Earth. Use it liberally and sprinkle some on the ground near the pole supporting the box.
5. Use Tanglefoot (a very sticky substance) on the pole just under the baffle. A 1-2" band will work well. This will stop ants from coming or going.
6. Congratulate yourself and move on to solve a problem at your next box. Well done!

There is an old saying: "A dry nest is a Bluebird Monitor's best friend." If your nestbox always seems to be wet inside, you may have a problem. Look for what is causing the wetness. Perhaps a leaking split or hole in the roof? If so, replace the roof, or if the nestbox is occupied, attach another roof on top of the leaky roof. Maybe a warped back or side panel has caused a crack where moisture is seeping in – silicone caulk will address it. Air vents may be too large at 3/4" and with two on the right & left side, the winds can blow rain right into the box. (I had this problem at Lancaster Country Club in 2010 – the boxes were always wet). The vent holes in Peterson nestboxes are 5/8" to provide good ventilation, but that can also allow rain to enter the nestbox. The solution was to fasten a round clear plastic disc at 1 1/4" over the western side of the box with a small screw. This little disc addition dried up all the boxes in 2 weeks!



Peterson boxes have vents on both sides. I only placed the discs on the left side (or west side) of the box, which was the direction that the rain came in.

Photo #1: Early spring; cool temps and rain; closed, this setting keeps boxes dry

Photo #2: Late spring setting; half open

Photo #3: Mid-summer setting–hot weather; fully open

Open the side door and look up inside the box. Are there any areas where daylight is shining through? Address those areas with silicone caulk. Always be looking and checking your box for 1. Dryness (a good thing), or 2. Wetness (a problem to be solved).

Have you ever experienced "submerged eggs" in a nest? When this happens, the eggs (1 or more) get pushed down into the nest out of the "zone of incubation," either accidentally or on purpose. Predator birds may or will do this. The mother Bluebird cannot incubate the eggs when this happens. Furthermore, the mother Blue cannot pull the eggs up to the surface of the nest. Any attempt seems to always push the eggs deeper.

When I see this problem, I pull the eggs up to the surface of the nest and compact the nest under the eggs so there are no air pockets. Then a 1 slip a 2" cloth disc with foam backing onto the nest and place the eggs on top of the disc. Observe what happens over the next two weeks. There are no guarantees with this technique, but at least the eggs are given a chance.

What to do when one has a full House Sparrow nest with 5 eggs?

DO NOT JUST DISCARD THE NEST!! THIS DOES NOT WORK AND IT NEVER HAS!!!

Just leave the House Sparrow (HOSP) nest intact and set a Chuck Musser "Flipper Re-setting HOSP Trap" and "RELOCATE/ELIMINATE" the HOSP. Now it is time to discard the nest and wait for a Bluebird to rebuild. If another HOSP builds a new nest, no worries, just repeat the above procedure until finally the nestbox is

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Male Bluebird in Winter
Photo Credit - Mike Dickie

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Our Mission Statement

The mission statement of the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania is simple, yet powerful:

1. Provide and promote educational activities relating to bluebirds, birding, conservation and related subjects.
2. Monitor and conduct research relating to bluebirds, other cavity nesting birds, food sources, habitats, and trails.
3. Build, maintain, and monitor bluebird boxes and trails.
4. Provide opportunities for people to become involved in efforts that assist bluebirds and other native bird species.
5. Provide social opportunities to share information and experiences relating to bluebirds and related conservation topics.



Bluebird Pair in Winter
Photo Credit: Mike Dickie

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If you have an interest in serving as Committee Chair for any Vacant Committee Position, please contact us.

A Message from the President continued from page 2

available for a bluebird to use it.

Every Bluebird Monitor should know how to do a “wet-nest” change or an “ant-infested nest” change. They are basically the same technique. Save a bag or two of dried white pine needles for this procedure and a couple of spare nest cups.

1. Take the Bluebird eggs or nestlings from the nest and place them in a dry, ant-free cup; brush the ants off the chicks
2. Then fashion or mold pine needles into another cup
3. Press them into a “cup-shaped” Bluebird nest and carefully place all eggs or nestlings into their new dry, ant-free nest (*photo #4*)
4. Place the new cup with eggs or nestlings back into a dry box or a box treated for ants

You now have a happy Bluebird family and happy Bluebird parents. Dispose of both the wet nest and the ant-infested nest. You have saved a Bluebird family from “hypothermia-death” or a very uncomfortable existence with thousands of ants!!!

What to do when you have a “heat wave” in summer over a sustained 2 to 3-day period of 98 to 100 degrees? If your box is in a full sun location, the pressure intensifies. Please be aware that inside box temperatures can be 6 to 8 degrees above ambient temperatures. This means that at 100 degrees ambient, your nest box could hit temps of 106 degrees, and that is a lethal temperature for eggs and chicks. What to do?

1. Open the side door and place a temporary hardware cloth screen over the opening (approximately 5” by 8”). Attach with ¾” screws.

This will allow the inside box temperature to be the same as ambient almost instantly. Leave the hardware cloth screen in place until the “heat wave” subsides. In Pennsylvania we only have about one serious heat wave per summer where this action is required.

My final Bluebird Monitoring tip will address how to manage **WASPS** in your Bluebird box. To start, add a 6” MINI MAGLITE LED flashlight (*photo #5*) to your

toolbox. This high intensity little flashlight will help you identify paper wasps hiding in the dark upper corners of your box. Carry it with you on a canvas belt attachment.

Sometimes people wonder why their box no longer attracts BLUES. Quite often, a wasp nest is the culprit. Remove it with a putty knife. If it is active with wasps, reach for Spectracide Wasp & Hornet Foam Spray. Foam the nestbox, wait 5 minutes, and then scrape out the old wasp nest and dead wasps. Lastly, here is a tip



Photo 4 ↑

Photo 5 →



Photo 6 →



to prevent wasps from returning. The paper wasp starts its nest with a small attachment called a petiole. The petiole is the anchor to the whole paper nest and the wasp sticks this stem to the ceiling of the box. (*Photo #6*) You can prevent the petiole from sticking by a simple procedure. Rub bar soap or liquid soap on the entire ceiling and 1-2” down on all four side walls. I like to paint on liquid soap with a 1” brush. You can use bar soap, but that technique can be hard on your knuckles. This “soap technique” stops the petiole from attaching, and the wasp must go elsewhere. Sometimes this must be repeated on a yearly basis.

***Bluebirds require so little and give back so much —
May 2025 Be Your Best Year Ever with The Blues***

From the Editor *by Joan Watroba*

2024-Another Interesting Nesting Season

One would think that after more than 20 years of monitoring bluebird boxes, there would be no more surprises to discover. However, Nature has a way of keeping me amazed. Each year, including the nesting season of 2024, there were very interesting discoveries.

Flying squirrels, white bluebird eggs, dwarf bluebird eggs, purple-stained nestboxes, and multiple Carolina Wren nestings are just some of the surprises found inside of nestboxes.

In the early fall, I opened a nestbox which had been empty the previous week and noticed an unusual nest of shredded bark, and the front was lined with large leaves. As I peered inside of the box, a flying squirrel peeked out at me and then quickly glided out of the box to a nearby tree. What a surprise! If a nestbox is located near trees, flying squirrels can easily access them and may use the box to roost or as a nesting site for their young. If the entrance hole is not large enough, they will chew it to make it larger. However, they can enter the standard round hole of 1.5 inches, which is the same for bluebirds and other small cavity-nesting songbirds. Since flying squirrels are also predators of songbirds and their eggs, it is

recommended to keep bluebird boxes out in the open. I will move that nestbox in the early spring to make sure that the flying squirrels will not access it during the nesting season of 2025.

Most of the time, bluebirds lay light blue eggs of uniform size and shape, but sometimes the eggs are different than the norm. Up to 4-5% of bluebirds lay white eggs, and a female that lays white eggs will apparently always lay white eggs. For the past two years, I have discovered clutches



Nestbox with Flying Squirrel

of white eggs in the same location of the same bluebird trail, so they are probably from the same female bluebird. The white eggs hatched and produced normally-colored offspring. If you have never seen white bluebird eggs, you may think that they are Tree Swallow eggs. Tree Swallow eggs are also white, but they are more oblong and more pointed than bluebird eggs.



Dwarf Bluebird Egg

Another uncommon bluebird egg that I discovered in the nestboxes were dwarf bluebird eggs. They are much smaller than normal. They are infertile since they often lack a yolk, so an embryo will not form and therefore the egg will not hatch. On one of my trails, a female bluebird incubated a dwarf egg for a time, but eventually abandoned it when it did not hatch. She then went to a different nestbox and laid another dwarf egg, but it did not hatch either.

We were very fortunate to have a successful nesting of bluebirds in our yard nestbox this year. Our habitat is marginal for bluebirds, as it is very wooded with many trees. However, two of the trees in the yard are Mulberry trees, and they provided an abundant supply of berries for both the adult bluebirds and their bluebird nestlings. At the latter part of the nesting cycle, I observed the bluebird pair going back and forth from the Mulberry tree directly to the nestbox. After the young fledged, the inside of the nestbox was stained purple from all of the berries, evidence of the

quantity of berries that they fed to their young. If you are adding any trees or bushes to your habitat, try to select native species which will produce fruit or berries for the songbirds.

Carolina Wrens are delightful songbirds which usually nest in odd locations-flower pots, wreaths on doors, etc. They will occasionally nest in bluebird boxes. I was thrilled to have two separate, successful nestings of Carolina Wrens on a bluebird trail in Dauphin County. They built deep, domed nests of leaves and moss and laid four eggs in each nest, and their young successfully fledged.



Flying Squirrel Nest

Hope that you had a successful nesting season and enjoyed the experiences and adventures along your bluebird trails! We appreciate that you share your nesting experiences by submitting your stories and photos to us so that we can share them with our readers.



Carolina Wren Nest



White Bluebird Eggs



BSP hosts a colorful and informative Facebook Page, and we encourage you to check it out and to submit items to post on it:



www.facebook.com/bluebirdsocietypa

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

June 2, 2024-Outdoor Adventure Expo 12:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.

Talleyrand Park, Bellefonte, PA. This was a great event, about 2500-3000 people attended. I hosted an educational display and talked with many people about bluebirds during this free event.

Joanna Taylor, BSP County Coordinator for Centre County



Nancy Putt talks with children about bluebirds.

experienced monitoring nestboxes and they shared their experiences of both successes and problems. Thanks to Joan Watroba and Joyce Horner for their assistance at the booth and to Steven Horner who was there helping future bluebirders by pounding in nails to assemble nestboxes with a smile.

Next year's Ned Smith Festival will be on Saturday, June 21, 2025.

Nancy Putt, Event Chair
BSP Co-County Coordinator for York County

July 27, 2024-Ned Smith Festival of Nature and Art 10:00 a.m-4:00 p.m.

It was just a perfect day on the Susquehanna River to be attending this festival at MYO Park, which is just south of Millersburg and the ferry crossing. BSP volunteers have been coming to this event for about 20 years to share their love of bluebirds at our booth, plus helping with the PA Game Commission's nest box building activity for kids. This event attracts a huge number of people of all ages who come to enjoy the music, arts and crafts, lots of activities, and delicious food. Many people visited our booth to "talk bluebirds."

We spoke with many who were already fairly

August 10, 2024-Bluebird Program at SpiriTrust Lutheran

The Village at Kelly Drive, York, PA. Had a very successful bluebird presentation with 30 residents of the Village. So much enthusiasm from these folks that we ran past the time by half an hour. One nice lady brought her personal, very old bluebird teapot to the event. How sweet of her!

Ken Smith, BSP Co-County Coordinator for York County





August 10, 2024 - Ken Smith presents Bluebird Program at SpiriTrust Lutheran



October 9, 2024-Manheim Farm Show 1-4pm

Today we built 56 Bluebird boxes at the Manheim Farm Show. These are free to the families that attend and build boxes with us. Dan Thomas, Phil Louie, and myself were the three BSP box builders who assisted the children, parents and grandparents. We also had two high school students who were a big help with this project. This was BSP's 6th year in this outreach.

Dean Rust, BSP Woodworking Chair





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. on these dates:

January 23, 2025

April 24, 2025

July 24, 2025

October 23, 2025

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

PA Farm Show 2025:

January 9, 10, and 11 (Thursday-Saturday)

BSP will host an educational and merchandise booth at this event during these 3 days only.

Location: 2300 North Cameron Street, Harrisburg, PA
<https://www.farmshow.pa.gov>

The PA Farm Show is 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 delicious PA food choices in the food court.

Volunteers are needed to host the BSP educational/ BSP Merchandise Booth. (Note: We will not be offering the bluebird nestbox kit assembly activity this year.)

Interested in Volunteering? 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 scheduled with another one of our volunteers who has helped us in the past. It is a great opportunity to learn more about BSP and bluebirds!

25th Annual Bluebird Society of PA's Conference
March 21 & 22, 2025 (Friday night and Saturday)

Holiday Inn Harrisburg/Hershey, 604 Station Road,
Grantville, PA

BSP is happy to host the 25th Annual conference in South Central PA, Dauphin County. The meeting space, food, and lodging are all available at this beautiful and spacious venue. BSP has hosted conferences here in the past and has been very pleased with the venue, and a block of rooms has been reserved at a discount for conference attendees.

The Annual BSP Conference offers excellent speakers, demonstrations, vendors, a live and silent auction, a delicious luncheon, and an opportunity to learn from and socialize with people who share your love of bluebirds and enjoy the wonders of the natural world. The event will feature a Friday evening program and Social and a full day of activities on Saturday. A special communication regarding the conference, including registration information, speaker bios, and itinerary, will be sent out to all active BSP members in early 2025. Registration forms and itinerary will also be posted on the BSP website: www.thebsp.org under **Upcoming Events** and on BSP's **Facebook Page** closer to the event. Hope to see you there!

Nancy Putt, 2025 BSP Conference Committee Chair
717-712-3951 bluebirds@pa.net



Bluebird on Branch
Photo by Leslie Thompson

Bob Steininger, New Trail Monitor at Upper Providence Township, Montgomery County

by Bob Steininger, Recreation Coordinator, UPT—Montgomery County

I started working for Upper Providence Township (UPT) in January of this year as the Recreation Coordinator. My main responsibilities are overseeing summer camps and all UPT rentals—pavilions, ballfields, and indoor spaces. I was hired mainly because of my decades of experience in youth programs. However, after being at UPT for a couple of months, my supervisor, Sue Hoffman, asked me if I would be interested in monitoring the bluebird boxes at our Anderson Farm Park, previously monitored by my predecessor. Having spent many of my years teaching Environmental Education, I was happy to accept the opportunity to not only do something meaningful, but to have an excuse to get outside once a week in the Spring, as well as the Summer—and enjoy nature.

As it turned out, my experience went beyond my initial expectations. While I enjoy birding at a casual level, mainly just curious about the birds I see when I go on vacation and enjoying those that visit my yard, I had never been a monitor before. I found myself looking forward to checking the nestboxes each week, eager to see what kind of progress was made in nestbuilding, if there would be any eggs, and finally, the development of the chicks. I felt a connection with the birds, more so than from casual observance. I was rooting for all the little chicks to grow quickly so they could fledge, and was saddened when I found two that didn't survive. It became my weekly ritual, and I was disappointed when the nesting season ended. Except for the two chicks that died, it was a successful year as we had 40 Eastern Bluebirds and 23 Tree Swallows fledge. Luckily, I get to do it all over again next Spring, and I am looking forward to another successful season!

***Sue Hoffman, Director of Parks & Recreation, and
Bob Steininger, Recreation Coordinator and Bluebird Trail Monitor,
standing next to one of the ten bluebird trail nestboxes
which were constructed and donated by
BSP member Richard Leatherman.***

***Marilyn Michalski of BSP
restored this Bluebird Trail in 2021.***



A Tale of Bedevilment, Bliss and Banding by *Lisa Fetterman*

I monitor 2 nest boxes in my backyard as well as 3 nest boxes that I erected along the edge of a West Chester University (WCU) field adjacent to my yard. This summer I became acquainted with Dr. Jennifer Uehling, a biology professor from WCU. Dr. Uehling recently joined WCU's faculty and is a licensed bander whose research includes studying the diet and foraging behavior of Tree Swallows and other cavity-nesters. This spring, she set up a few nest boxes in the field adjacent to my yard, and I was lucky enough to watch as she and her students took physical measurements, collected fecal matter, and banded Tree Swallow nestlings.

Sadly, this year the 5 eggs from my bluebird's second nesting attempt succumbed to a predator, which I now believe was a House Wren. The pair promptly began a third nest attempt in one of the boxes I had erected along the WCU field. On the advice of Nancy Fraim, once the first egg was laid, I added a wren guard, and 3 additional eggs appeared! After several anxious weeks, the 4 eggs hatched, and once the nestlings were 10 days old, I removed the wren guard and continued to monitor their progress. I was thrilled when Dr. Uehling contacted me about banding the 4 bluebird nestlings from this nest box. The pictures below are from the banding done July 9th, and since that time, I have seen juvenile banded bluebirds at my mealworm feeder!

Being a caring bluebird landlord can be a roller coaster of angst and heartbreak, but the dedication also comes with delightful rewards!

Note: This research is permitted under federal and PA state permits, and under a protocol approved by WCU's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee.



Bluebird Trails Wanted & Bluebird Trail Monitors Needed

There may be many BSP members who would like the opportunity to monitor a bluebird trail in their area, and other bluebirders who have identified a local trail that needs a monitor.

In either case, please contact the BSP County Coordinator for your county, and they may be able to find a nearby bluebird trail that needs a monitor, or obtain a monitor to take over the monitoring of an existing bluebird trail.

A list of BSP County Coordinators is posted on the BSP website: www.thebsp.org

Under the **About BSP section**, select **BSP County Coordinators**.

Under the **Helping Bluebirds section**, there is a list of golf course trails, and some of them need monitors.

Two Bluebird Trail Monitors Needed:

Gifford Pinchot State Park, Lewisberry, PA

Contact: Elizabeth Kepley-McNutt, Park Naturalist
717-638-6134 or email: ekepley-mc@pa.gov

Or Nancy Putt, BSP County Co-Coordinator for York County
717-712-3951 or email: bluebirds@pa.net



*Bluebirds on Fence
Illustration by Susan Renkel*

BSP Newsletter Submission Contest/Winner

Congratulations to Tina Moyer, Penn's Creek, PA!

Thank you for submitting your wonderful article, *A Robin and Bluebird Nesting*, 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 Tina!

A Robin and Bluebird Nesting by Tina Moyer, Penn's Creek, PA

This year, for Bluebird nestings, things did not seem promising. I had trouble with House Sparrows and earwigs. I really assumed I was not getting a Bluebird nesting. Was I surprised!

We have a homemade cabin on a trailer in our yard. Every year, the birds try really hard to make a nest in the eaves. We try to keep them from doing it, but this year we gave in. We even moved the cabin under a tree, thinking that would deter them. A Robin kept insisting on building a nest. My better half gave up and let her have it.

I could see the tree and cabin from my kitchen window. Every day I saw activity from the Robin and a pair of Bluebirds. My Bluebirds would start a nest in the bird box in my backyard and then just give up. At the nest at the cabin, I kept seeing the Bluebirds and insisting that they were going to that nest. I started to go out and check every day. I would see the Robin on the nest, and a few times saw the female Bluebird on the nest, but then she would leave the nest. It got to the point that every time I checked, it was the Robin that was sitting on the nest. I finally gave up and just assumed at that point that there were Robin eggs in the nest. However, I would always see both the Robin and Bluebirds by the tree. Then I thought that maybe the Bluebirds had a nest in a cavity in the tree.



Nesting Location

As of June 5th, 2024, there were 4 blue eggs in the nest. One egg was bigger than the other three, but I really did not think much of it. I became obsessed due to the activity at the tree and at the nest above the cabin door on the eave. I kept saying they were Bluebird eggs. It sure was unbelievable to even imagine, because the Robin was always on the nest every time I checked. So I said when the babies hatch, I will check and see if they are Robins or Bluebirds.



Baby Bluebirds in a Robin's nest

On June 20th, 2024, all eggs were hatched, and I only had three baby birds. To me, they looked like baby Bluebirds, yet the female Robin was on the nest. So, I still was not sure what they were—Robins or Bluebirds.

One day I heard a bit of commotion and two days later I checked again. There were only two baby birds in the nest. I showed some people the pictures and asked what they thought. They said they were baby Robins. Since the Robin was on the nest and it was a Robin's nest, it made sense for them to say they were baby Robins.

I would always see the Robin and the Bluebird close by, especially when I checked on the nest.

On July 1st, 2024, something told me to go check on the nest. I certainly had two baby Bluebirds. I'd never had the experience of seeing



Bluebird

a Mom Robin, Mom Bluebird and Dad Bluebird share responsibilities. I checked on July 4th and one baby Bluebird had fledged—and yes, the Mom Robin was still close by. The second Bluebird baby was standing off to the side of the nest, so I figured that it, too, would fledge the next day. On July 5th I checked, and the second baby Bluebird had fledged.

It truly was an experience to watch and observe both the Robin and Bluebirds take care of the babies. Next time I will monitor the nest like I would have done if it were a Bluebird box. It was something I have never witnessed before, and truly extraordinary! Nature sure does have a way of showing how birds can come together and co-parent.



Robin on Nest under Eaves



Robin



All Photos taken by Tina Moyer

New Bluebird Trail in York at Louis & Jody Appell Estate & Gardens

Submitted by Randy Zmolek

A new ten-box Bluebird trail was installed in July of 2024 at the estate and gardens of the late Louis and Jody Appell in York, which is presently managed by the Powder Mill Foundation. After a private Garden Club of York tour of the beautiful estate, Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania (BSP) member Randy Zmolek and his wife, Barbara, commented that there were several excellent locations for bluebird boxes.

After discussions with Christopher Paules, Director of Horticulture and Facilities, a decision was made to pursue approval to have BSP install a bluebird trail. Randy showed Paules the BSP typical Lenker box and a decision about the type of pole was reached. Approval was quickly received. Randy contacted Nancy Putt, BSP York Co-County Coordinator, and the two toured the grounds and marked locations for the boxes on June 14th.

Randy traveled to Dillsburg to pick up the boxes from Nancy's garage and took the few remaining hole guards. Randy made the remaining guards and bought 1" EMT conduits from Lowes to be used for the poles. He painted the poles brown as requested by Paules, mounted one of the boxes/poles at the gardens, and then waited for final approval for the project.

Again, approval was quick and the remaining nine boxes were completed and installed throughout the gardens on July 29th, two weeks after the initial one was installed. Inspection of the initial box surprisingly had a bluebird nest and one blue egg. It has been a great relationship with Chris Paules and the Powder Mill Foundation. Randy has happily agreed to be the monitor for the bluebird trail at the gardens.



*Chris Paulus (left)
and Randy Zmolek*



*Nancy Putt and
Randy Zmolek*

Request for Nominations for BSP Awards

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 22, 2025**, at the Annual BSP Conference. **Please submit your nominations for the 2024 BSP Awards by 12/31/24** to:

Bluebird Society of PA
Attn: BSP Awards Chair
P.O. Box 756, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055

Nomination forms are included in the Fall/Winter 2024 Newsletter, or download and print a form from the BSP website: www.thebsp.org

Select **Upcoming Events** and scroll down to **BSP Award Nominations**.

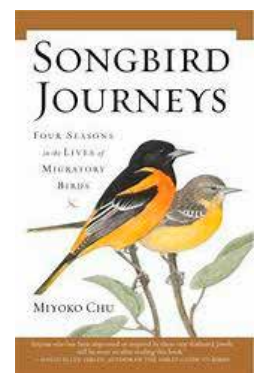
Book Review—Songbird Journeys by Miyoko Chu

Do you wonder, now that it is winter, where your summertime feathered friends are? Have you noticed changes to the kinds of birds that visit your feeders during the colder months? If any of the birds you see in the summer are migratory birds, they have most likely congregated in large groups and ventured on a very long journey. And the juncos that you haven't seen all summer are escaping the colder months in Canada to enjoy winter in Pennsylvania.

Miyoko Chu lays out the history of the scientific study of bird migration from the first days of anecdotal observations, through the beginning use of radio transponders, and the advanced data now collected from weather radar. Additionally, bird calls made during migration can be captured electronically to allow scientists to identify specific species that are flying by at a particular time and location. Scientists now know more about how birds are able to navigate as well as the unbelievable calorie requirements needed for migration and raising their young during the breeding season.

Birders will also be pleased to find suggestions for bird watching hot spots throughout the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean, as well as numerous opportunities to participate in citizen scientist programs, as BSP members do with their annual nest box report.

Submitted by Susan Durgin



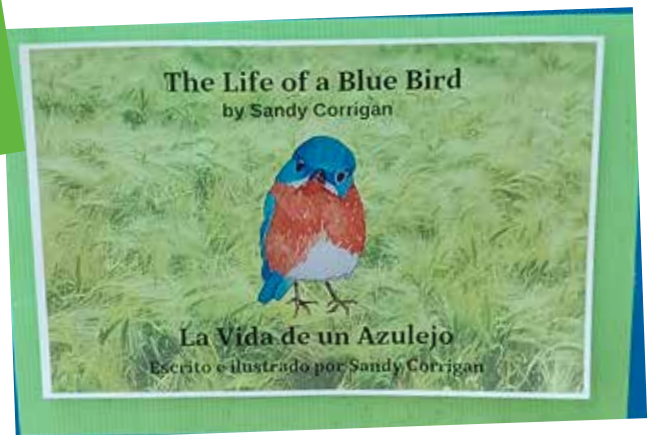
Bluebird Storyboard at Norristown Farm Park

by Sandy Corrigan

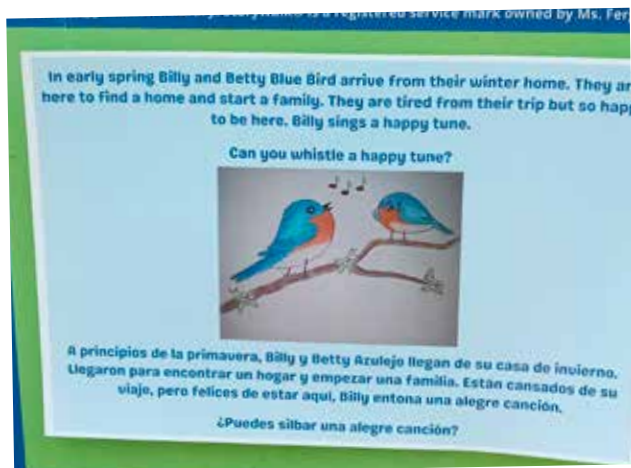
I have something that might be of interest to our members. I won a contest last year called the Montco Storywalk Contest for a children’s story that could be used on Montgomery County Park storyboards. It was to encourage literacy and outdoor exercise and is something the county parks have been exhibiting. This project was sponsored by the County Office of Public Health, the County Parks and Trails, the Norristown Public Library, and the Literacy Council of Norristown.

I chose to write and illustrate a story about bluebirds. It consisted of 9 colorful story pages and included illustrations and activities for children. This year the county printed it all up on storyboards along with Spanish translation, and it was displayed at the Norristown Farm Park.

Although the signs were taken down in early October, I have included photos of the storyboards which illustrate the complete bluebird nesting cycle. My drawings were made using the photos taken by myself or friends and capture my experiences monitoring the Bluebird Trail at Evansburg State Park.



Sign 1



Sign 2



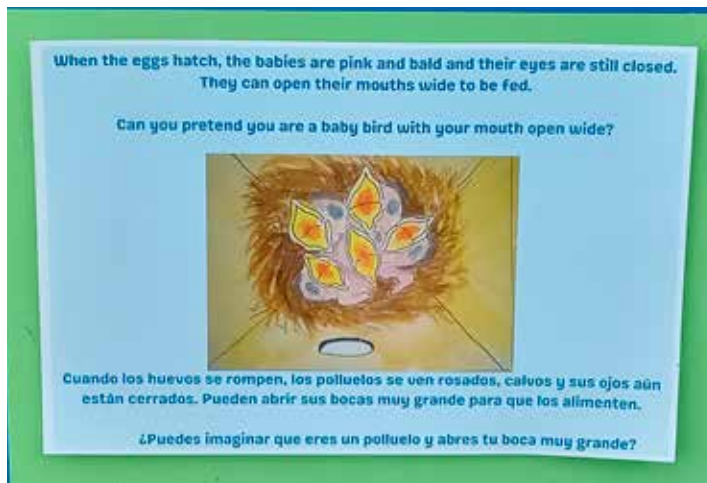
Sign 3



Sign 4



Sign 5



Sign 6



Sign 7



Sign 8



Sign 9

“The Storywalk® Project was created by Anne Ferguson of Montpelier, VT, and developed in collaboration with the Kellogg-Hubbard Library. Storywalk® is a registered service mark owned by Ms. Ferguson.”

BSP Mailbag

6/30/24 From: George Bloom To: Joan Watroba

I got your email, Joan!! The first brood hatched and fledged! (all but one egg) Cleaned out the box the second day it was empty. My male bluebird started hanging around on the second day after cleaning and I noticed Mrs. Blue hanging around on the next day. Well, I have 5 beautiful blue eggs in the box and they are toasty warm as of an hour ago!!! 🐣🐣🐣 I'm a happy friend of my bluebirds!!! ♡ George

7/1/24 From: Joan Watroba To: George Bloom

Hi George-Thanks for your positive bluebird nesting news! Appreciate your support and for providing a nesting site for the beautiful Blues!

7/24/24 Follow up from George Bloom to Joan:

I'm happy to say, Joan, that the second brood has flown the coop!! I didn't get to see it, but in my observations up to Saturday all activities up to that point were leaning in that direction. All systems were "go" that day. Sadly, I fell and had some hospital time but my wife checked today and they were gone!! The box was vacant yesterday, so I expected good results!! My next move is to be able to get out of bed and clean the birdhouse and hope for brood number three!!! The blues are doing all the work!!! George

7/24/24 Reply from Joan Watroba:

Hi George – Thanks for the update about your bluebirds! Happy to hear that your 2nd brood has successfully fledged! I had a few second broods fledge last week, and am hoping for some third nestings, too! The female will usually return within 2 weeks after the prior brood fledges if she is going to start another nesting cycle. Take it easy for now and I hope that your recovery from your recent fall is smooth. Thanks for what you do for the bluebirds!

From: Nicole A. Jarrett To: Dean Rust, BSP President

Good morning, Dean. Is it normal for juvenile bluebirds to be taking on the responsibility of feeding babies that had just hatched days ago? I'm so confused. Let me back up. We had a hunk of firewood with a nice natural knot in it and I asked my boyfriend to turn it into a functional bluebird house, and to my surprise, within 2 weeks we had a pair of bluebirds moving in. Before I knew it, there were 5 beautiful blue eggs. They have since all hatched and they are noisy, hungry li'l babies. However, I have not seen "mom" or "dad" lately, but there are a pair of juvenile bluebirds flying in and out of the nest feeding the dear sweet li'l babies... is this normal? I have read your book, but I didn't see anything about this kind of behavior. I'm not quite sure where they came from, but the more the merrier!! Happy trails...Sincerely, Nicole...proud Bird Nerd from Columbia, PA.

BSP Mailbag con't.

7/19/24 From: Dean Rust To: Nicole

Nicole, Thanks for the email and for having a caring interest in bluebirds. Super glad you have my book!! 😊
Something must have happened to the parents? Like a hawk got them or a window strike?? Anyway, YES, young juvenile Blues can step up and take over the feeding responsibilities for a whole group of nestlings!!! They are ALTRUISTIC. Doing things for others and not getting any special recognition or reward for it. Look up the word (reference it) in my book in the back several pages. Check out page 140 in the glossary of my book—ALTRUISM. Top right paragraph!!

7/19/24 From: Nicole To: Dean

Thank you, Dean, for your response. ALTRUISM is the word of the day and quite fitting for what I have witnessed—these “little blue angels” working tirelessly to help feed the hungry little babies. I have also seen mockingbirds hanging around, and they went after a Red-tailed Hawk yesterday, causing quite a ruckus. I’m wondering now if the parent or parents weren’t snatched up by the Red-tailed Hawk, as you mentioned could have happened. I know we usually see the mother in the evenings. I will look for her tonight, but if I don’t see her, I suppose something bad has happened. It has been quite a blessing watching these bluebirds every day!! I am so glad to see that these juveniles altruistically stepped up to the plate to tend to these young sweet li'l babies!! I would be honored to have their story be in your newsletter. Thank you so much for your time!! We will be in touch!!
Thank you again, Nicole 🐦



Juvenile Bluebirds
Photo Credit - Mike Dickie



Share Your Love of Bluebirds with Others!

A **GIFT MEMBERSHIP TO BSP** is the perfect gift for a special person in your life. It will bring them our NEW colorful publication, ***Success With Bluebirds***, seasonal issues of our newsletter, ***Bluebird Trails and Tales***, and will deliver Bluebird Joy and Happiness to them all year long.

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

The Power of a Female-Bluebird, that is!

(A layman's observation)

by John Rotz

We have a unique situation in that we can sit at our kitchen table and watch a bluebird box that is used regularly, thereby creating the observations outlined below. Much of the activity I will describe took place in a box built by Dr. Dean Rust that we purchased at the 2022 Annual Bluebird Conference auction.

In early March of 2022, a pair of bluebirds began laying eggs. Unfortunately, we found the male lying dead in our yard after 3 eggs had been laid. Not a feather had been touched to evidence an attack, but his eyes were very sunken. A week later the female had a new male and laid two more eggs. Four of the five eggs hatched, and when the hatchlings were one week old, we found the female dead in our yard with the same appearance that the male had. While the new male was dedicated to feeding the hatchlings, they died a slow death because he was unable to brood them. A new female came on the scene and the pair fledged eight in two more nests that year.

During the winter the male's leg was broken by an attack or accident. In spite of his injury, the pair laid four eggs. Knowing that the eggs were going to hatch while we were away on vacation, we decided to reconstruct the entrance to the bluebird house so that the injured male could assist with taking care of the hatchlings. We made this alteration knowing full well that we were compromising the safety of the nest. However, when we returned from the shore, a healthy male was assisting in the feeding of the four hatchlings and we never saw the injured male again. We immediately removed the hole reconstruction and four bluebirds fledged. This couple proceeded to fledge two additional nests for a total of twelve bluebirds in 2023.

The couple stayed around for the winter and began laying eggs in mid-February of 2024. The male was extremely protective of the box; however, he was taken out by a hawk after the female was sitting on five blue eggs. We anxiously watched to see how the female would handle this situation. But never fear! By the time the eggs hatched, she had a new male that was very dedicated to assisting her in the raising of five hatchlings. To our surprise, she had a second male assisting in the feeding as the hatchlings became older. After fledging these five bluebirds, the couple laid a second nest of five eggs that fledged. We were not aware of a second male assisting with this nest.

In July, the female laid four blue eggs with the same male. We were concerned about the success of this nest because of the heat wave we had in July, with temperatures in the high nineties and projections to reach a hundred degrees Fahrenheit. It should be noted that the first two nests were in Dr. Rust's white-roofed box that is in the sun—but the female built this last nest in a box that is within ten feet of Dr. Rust's box but shaded from the afternoon sun by a tree! On August the 9th, as Hurricane Debby passed by, the pair fledged four healthy baby bluebirds. This created a total of fourteen bluebirds fledged by this couple during the summer of 2024! Needless to say, we have quite a few bluebirds in the neighborhood.



First Nesting Site



Second Nest with Eggs



Bluebird Hatchlings



*Dad Bluebird on Bench
watching the babies fledge.*



Dad Bluebird feeding one of the babies a week later

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

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:

- | | | |
|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> County Coordinator | <input type="checkbox"/> Nest box Monitoring | <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nest box Construction | <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> Local Events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Photography | <input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Media |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Speakers' Bureau (education) | <input type="checkbox"/> Web Design | <input type="checkbox"/> Technology |

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