

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

House Sparrows are Still a Clear and Present Danger to Eastern Bluebirds in 2023!!

In 1607 there were zero House Sparrows in Jamestown, Virginia. In fact, they were NOT an existing bird species in the whole North American continent until they were introduced from England in the early 1850's. It was proposed that they might help reduce crop insect pests and at first, the HOSPs (House Sparrows) were welcomed by colonists and farmers. The early settlers recognized this little bird and it was a sentimental reminder of their homeland in Europe. Perhaps they were homesick as well?

The new immigrants wanted to establish any wildlife familiar to them. But 25 years into the HOSP experiment, it was realized that a big mistake had been made. The House Sparrow population mushroomed at an unbelievable pace and the sparrows were actually causing damage to the farmer's fruit trees and crops. The most critical negative factor was that they were usurping nesting sites of native birds and attacking cavity-nesting songbirds!! The HOSP was a seed and grain eater and the male, in particular, was mean-spirited, wily, and pugilistic.

The House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) followed people wherever they traveled and settled to build houses and farm buildings. "Domesticus" is a Latin word meaning, "belonging to the house". The HOSP probably originated in the Mediterranean area, expanding their range with man as civilization and

agriculture slowly spread into Europe and Asia. As a seed and grain lover, it is easy to see how this bird could increase its range as constant companions with man and his animals. With farming and domestication of horses, cattle, sheep, hogs, chickens, and ducks, most of which are fed grain, humans provided an ecological niche for HOSP to thrive. Grain is readily available to HOSP as spillage and as incompletely digested remnants via manure. House Sparrows became adept at finding and eating scraps plus discards of human food as well.

Man became a very suitable counterpart for the HOSP; wherever man went, the House Sparrow tagged along. As manmade advancements in clearing land for small farms and towns, the little brown and white birds followed. They were part and parcel of the new American civilization, expanding westward, northward, and southward into a new untamed wilderness. Living near humans provided a ready source of food and nesting sites in loosely constructed outbuildings for livestock.



Bluebird Pair Defending Nest Box from House Sparrow by Mike Dickie

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

A Message from the President continued from page 1

From 1850 to 1874, as people moved and expanded westward, humans were the dispersal mechanism to allow House Sparrows to gain access to vast new areas of the Americas plus Canada and Mexico. HOSP rode boxcars and followed grain routes west, north, and south through the fertile Ohio Valley and across the Great Plains into millions of vast new acres.

House Sparrow populations exploded in the absence of natural checks and balances. It was a perfect storm that proliferated exponentially thanks to man and his quest to conquer vast amounts of land. The House Sparrow is probably the most successful wild bird species in the world in distribution and population. The HOSP is ubiquitous!!! Now what do we do with them?

LIFE & HABITS OF THE HOUSE SPARROW

The HOSP is a natural at being both an invasive and nuisance species. They were then and today always bold, aggressive, brash, and intelligent. They have the perfect life cycle characteristics to enable their populations to explode. HOSP build nests rapidly, reproduce rapidly, lay eggs, and hatch them rapidly, and then fledge and mature rapidly. They do everything with speed. The breeding season for HOSP begins earlier and goes later than other songbirds. Simply stated – they “over-populate” an area quickly.

The House Sparrow’s “pair-bond” between a male and a female is weak; the male HOSP’s bond with his nest box is stronger than his bond with his mate. He may lose a mate, but he won’t give up his nest site without a fight! Here is where the Bluebird Landlord has to elevate his or her game. **THE MALE HOUSE SPARROW MUST BE REMOVED FROM THE EQUATION TO BE SUCCESSFUL WITH BLUEBIRDS.** This is key to dealing with HOSP. When the male builds his nest in a box, he claims it forever! Removing a nest or two is NOT ever going to deter him. A Bluebird Landlord can remove nests literally all summer, from early April until September 1st, and who controls the box? The male HOSP does. As long as he has a nest inside and is sitting on top of his box plus going in and out the front door, and perching nearby, no Bluebird is going

to challenge him. The Bluebird will just move on to another location. Now the box is 100% HIS. And since the HOSP doesn’t migrate, it will be his box next year as well.

DO NOT PERMIT HOUSE SPARROWS TO RESIDE CLOSE TO OR SHARE A YARD WITH BLUEBRDS!! IT DOES NOT WORK.

What kind of nest does the House Sparrow build? And the male builds his nest, unlike the female Bluebird who is the master craftsman for the BLUES. The male HOSP prefers to nest in a box with exactly the same dimensions and entrance hole size as a Bluebird. The male HOSP builds a bulky dome-shaped nest of anything and everything, including coarse grass, weed stems, ribbon, string, feathers, straw, animal fur, paper, and cellophane. Not a pretty nest. Most often the nest has an opening that tunnels deep to the bottom of the nest. The eggs are laid almost on the floor of the nest. The female lays the eggs, usually 4 or 5 cream-colored spotted with brown or grey blotches. Incubation is only 11 days. Remember - they do everything FAST!! They become sexually mature in 4 to 9 months. Bluebirds have to wait until next year to mature and to have young.

THE ENEMY

Male House Sparrows are armed with a “tool of destruction”, their beak. It is a sharp, chisel-like beak. They use it like a weapon when they want to kill. They use their beak to destroy eggs, young nestlings, or parents in the nest box. Their attacks are usually timed at catching a female or male Bluebird in the box with eggs or young. Outside the box, Bluebirds are NOT vulnerable – only inside the box. HOSP are serial killers of Tree Swallows and Bluebirds on the nest with their young. Several severe blows to the skull with their beaks will penetrate the skull of the defenseless bird, and death is quick and certain. The nest contents are usually destroyed as



Male House Sparrow

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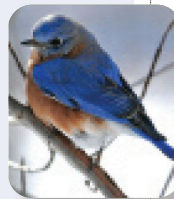
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Our Mission Statement

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.

photo by Barry Johnson



Bluebirds in the Bird Bath - See Article on Page 6

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A Message from the President continued from page 2

well and turbulated. And “Who Done It?” is always an easily solved crime. The perpetrator of the crime will always build a new nest over all the carnage. The male HOSP wanted this box and he will stop at nothing to take it over. This is NOT a pleasant scene to encounter but it requires quick and decisive action. This calls for a VAN ERT UNIVERSAL SPARROW TRAP!!! Set an in-box trap and the PERP will soon be yours.

THERE ARE LOTS OF METHODS TO DISCOURAGE HOUSE SPARROWS

Here is a list:

1. Plug the entrance with rubber stopper or duct tape.
2. Remove the House Sparrow nest.
3. Use a Gilbertson PVC Box. (House Sparrow resistant?)
4. Make the box very shallow by adding a 2”x 4” block on the nestbox floor.
5. Avoid the cheap seed at feeders, ie. cracked corn, millet, milo, or wheat.
6. Install a Sparrow Spooker.
7. Use Monofilament Fishing line along both sides of the entrance hole.
8. Try a Sparrow Resistant Troyer Slot Box.
9. Shoot HOSPs with .22cal Birdshot, .410 shotgun or .177 pellet gun.
10. Install a Skylight Box. ***
11. Install a Chuck Musser Repeating Flipper HOSP Trap. ***

Recently, Marilyn Michalski, our BSP State County Coordinator, submitted a 2022 Nestbox Data Report. It was a summary from 167 individuals reporting.

Marilyn writes,

“5. Of great concern is the continuing danger of the House Sparrow. These non-native birds are proliferating in many areas outside city limits. We must do everything possible to curtail their growth. HOSP are still killing many Bluebirds, Tree Swallows and Black-

capped Chickadees – their young as well as adults.”

In that same report was an itemized number of 876 HOSP NESTS removed. By now you must know that I am NOT a big fan of removing HOSP nests because it simply does NOT work. We can do much, much better.

10. Install a Skylight Box*** this is PASSIVE and I have been using this technique since 2010; it works in my hands and I would not recommend it if it did not exceed my expectations. There is a tutorial on my website of how to install a skylight box.

www.bluebirdconservation.com



Skylight Roof
by Dean Rust

11. Install a Chuck Musser Repeating Flipper HOSP Trap*** this is ACTIVE and this works 90% of the time; in 2021 I trapped 62 HOSPs on my 21 trails – 450 boxes. This is an “in-box trap” and is used in lieu of just removing HOSP nests. This works best when



House Sparrow Trap

there are 3 to 5 HOSP eggs in the nest. Oftentimes you will catch the nesting pair and one other male. This trap will not kill the HS, but will trap them inside of the nestbox. If you set a trap, it is important to check it as soon as you see that the trap has been triggered, so that you can remove and dispose

of the HS and its nest and eggs and then remove the trap. If a native songbird has been caught, release it immediately.

Note: This trap designed by Chuck Musser will NOT catch a Bluebird or a Tree Swallow. The opening on the trap is 1 3/16” smaller than the typical 1 1/2” opening. A HOSP can squeeze through the entrance, but not a Tree Swallow or a Bluebird. The 5/16” differential makes all the difference. I have never caught anything but HOSPs with this trap. Remember there is a fully-formed nest with HOSP eggs instead!! This box is under complete control by the male HOSP.

A Message from the President continued from page 5

My Bluebird trails were never safer than they were in 2021. Last year I did the same routine and only trapped 28 HOSP. This is my absolute favorite method of keeping my Bluebirds safe from House Sparrows. This is the #1 device in my toolbox because 1. it works and 2. my Blues are counting on me to keep them safe.

Just one short story before I close this President's Message. In 2011 I learned about an abandoned Bluebird Trail at Landisville Middle School - Hempfield High School. In 2007 this 20 box Bluebird Trail was installed as an Eagle Scout Project by Joseph Stadel in Landisville, PA. This trail is positioned on a 75-acre campus at 200 Stanley Avenue.

My first impression of the trail was the excellent construction of the nest boxes of western red cedar, the 1 5/8" galvanized steel posts with U-bolt attachments and the layout of boxes all 100 yards apart. There was also a map of the Bluebird Trail and a plaque denoting the Eagle Scout Project plus the date of when it was initiated. I got permission from Hempfield High School to be the new monitor of the trail from the Superintendent of Hempfield School District, Dr. Brenda Becker, and Dan Forry, Director of Enterprise and Operations for Hempfield School District.

Upon closer examination the day I started to monitor the trail I realized that probably NO Bluebird pair had ever nested on this trail since day 1. In 4 short years the trail had evolved into a House Sparrow haven and all 20 boxes were "maxed-out" 100% with HOSP nests. Now what? No one had ever monitored the boxes since the inception of the trail. This is exactly what happens when a Bluebird trail is neglected.

I went to work using my two best options: *** see above - #10 and #11 techniques. Within three years my plan worked and I am happy to report that today this Bluebird Trail is one of my favorite trails. I currently have 36 boxes at HHS and there are zero HOSP on this trail for the last three years. In 2022 #90 Bluebirds FLEDGED from this trail. I have even talked to several residents of Landisville, PA who have lived there for over 35 years. And they only began to see Bluebirds flying overhead in the friendly skies and visiting

backyards of Landisville in the last 6 years. There are currently Bluebird's nesting sites in Landisville residents backyards near the school thanks to the amazing yearly production of BLUES from the Bluebird Trail at Hempfield High School.

Dr. Dean C. Rust
President of the Bluebird
Society of Pennsylvania
Spring President's Message
January 20, 2023

Editor's Note: Because House Sparrows and European Starlings are non-native, aggressive birds which are a threat to all native cavity-nesting songbird species, they are not protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act, so it is legal to remove them from the environment.



Male Bluebird

Bathing Bluebirds

This photograph was taken on December 29, 2022 in Blue Bell, PA, by Barry L. Johnson using a Primos Hunting Trail Camera. The camera is mounted on a tripod about four feet from the birdbath. Although the air temperature was well above freezing that day, the birdbath is kept from freezing solid in winter via a 50-watt De-Icer from K&H Pet Products. The De-Icer maintains some open water even at 5 degrees Fahrenheit. When everything is frozen and there is no snow, other wildlife, including deer, squirrels, fox, and raccoons drink from it.

Note: I grew up in Missouri where the state bird is the Eastern Bluebird. Never saw one. Lived 14 years in Ohio. Never saw a Bluebird.

I've lived here since 1986, but never saw a Bluebird until March of 2019. Now we have them!

Best,
Barry Johnson



From the Editor *by Joan Watroba*

Experiencing Mindfulness Along the Bluebird Trail

Walking the bluebird trail and checking the activity of the nestboxes can be very relaxing. Spending time outdoors can reduce the stress of everyday life by providing an opportunity to step away from the overload of the modern life and the bombardment of information and news delivered by the media. Enjoying the sights and sounds of the songbirds and the beauty of trees and plants can heighten our awareness of the

natural world and help us to live in the present moment.

Per Merriam Webster, **Mindfulness** is the practice of maintaining a nonjudgmental state of heightened or complete awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, or experiences on a moment-to-moment basis.

Mindfulness is the state of mind being aware of the present world and noticing everything around in the conscious world. It promotes awareness of the present moment and can be practiced at any time. Being outside in nature enhances our ability to be mindful.

“Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better.”

- Albert Einstein



In contrast, **Mindlessness** is the state of being anxiously lost in thoughts of the past or future. I often think of this as the Monkey Mind, which allows these thoughts to jump from one branch to another and makes it difficult to live in the present, the Here and Now. According to Buddhist principles, the “monkey mind” is a term that refers to being unsettled, restless, or confused.

When walking along the bluebird trail, one can be actively aware of nature and being connected to all of the beauty that surrounds us. With mindfulness, one is acutely aware of what is going on in the mind, body, and surroundings (sensations, thoughts, feelings, etc.) without labeling anything as good or bad. Studies have shown that practicing mindfulness can help to manage stress, improve mental health and quality of life, aid in losing weight, improve the quality of sleep, and boost the immunity.

Wishing you many Happy and Mindful Experiences in 2023!

For 18 Mindfulness Activities for the Outdoors, check out:

<https://www.thepathway2success.com/18-mindfulness-activities-for-outdoors/>



Nestbox Modification to Deter House Wrens from Using Nestboxes

by Wally Edsall

In 2021, I used a single Wren Guard across the Front of the box. It was 9 7/8" long and 2 1/2" high. This just covered the entrance hole to the box, which is 2 1/8" deep, top to bottom. In other words, it just covered those 2 1/8" exactly looking straight on at the box. The Wrens got in and pecked holes in all of the Bluebird eggs.

In 2022, I used Wren Guards on both sides and the front of the box; nothing on the back side. The Wren Guards on the Front and East side of the box were 9 7/8" long and 3 1/4" high. This placed the front guard 3/8" below the bottom of the entrance hole. I used the previous year's 9 7/8" x 2 1/2" guard on the West side of the box.

As this Gilwood nest box is hinged at the bottom and opens from the top, I did have to be careful when opening as it hit the bottom of the Wren Guard. I used a thick double wall cardboard cut from an Amazon shipping box for my guards, so that gave me some flexibility when opening the box. A solid guard, such as wood, would not have allowed me to open the box. The three-panel wren guard worked to perfection.

I did not lose ANY Bluebird eggs with this set up, and the Bluebirds had no problems accessing the nestbox to raise their brood. I put this system in place the day that the first egg was laid, figuring once started, Mom would not abandon the nest with the guard in place.

Note: My first bluebird nesting activity usually starts at the end of March, beginning of April. I have never had a problem with Wrens during this first brood, only the second & third in the June / August time frame.

Editor's Note:

Always looking for new ways to deter the House Wren from interfering with the nesting activity of other songbirds. I have flagged this with the photos for the Spring issue so that others can try it. Thanks, Wally for sharing.



Nestbox with Wren Guard - 1



Nestbox with Wren Guard - 2

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

*Be like the bluebird who never is blue,
for he knows from his upbringing what singing can do.*

~ Cole Porter

Bluebird Trail at the Lebanon Country Club *by Adrian Shelley*

Lebanon Country Club, with the assistance of Dean Rust and his son, Shaun, made repairs and improvements to its 35-box bluebird trail situated on the 18-hole private golf course grounds in Lebanon, PA. Dr. Rust also provided the membership with a two-hour presentation on April 3rd titled



Nestbox at LebCC

“The Beloved and Charismatic Bluebird” which offered helpful hints on conservation practices and nestbox stewardship. Dr. Rust also presented LebCC with signage at the first tee box that educates members about the trail and the importance of protecting the species. In 2022, Lebanon Country Club partnered with the Bluebird Society of PA to become an official member of the **Pennsylvania Golf Course Bluebird Trail Initiative**.

Editor’s Note: Thanks to Adrian Shelley, for writing this article. He is an active member of the Lebanon Country Club who invited Dean to present the bluebird program at the Club. Adrian manages the habitat areas on the property, including the wetlands and flower gardens.

Note: The **Pennsylvania Golf Course Bluebird Trail Initiative** was developed by BSP President, Dean Rust. BSP partners with golf courses throughout PA to establish bluebird trails on golf courses in all 67 counties. BSP volunteers work in conjunction with

Bluebird sign at Lebanon Country Club



golf course Managers and Maintenance teams to set up, monitor, and maintain productive bluebird trails. Dean has also prepared a handbook of information on how to establish bluebird trails on golf courses which is available to guide you in this important partnership. For more information on how to get actively involved, contact:

Dean Rust: july7ds@aol.com or 717-669-0167

Thank You!

“Thanks to BSP member, George Bloom for his donation of ten hand-crafted Bluebird nestboxes.

They were delivered to Nancy Putt’s home in Dillsburg, Pennsylvania, in December of 2022 by his daughter Nikki.

These nestboxes are intended for use by BSP’s County Coordinators.

We thank George and Nikki for these wonderful donations! “

Sincerely,
Marilyn Michalski, BSP State Coordinator

Cover Those Skylight Roofs with Cardboard in Excessive Heat

by Phil Durgin

Skylight roof nestboxes appear to be an effective technique in deterring House Sparrows, and more people are starting to use them. The thinking is that skylight roofs deter House Sparrows because they prefer a dark nesting area. Bluebirds don't seem to mind the skylights, but there is concern that on hot days skylight boxes may get hot enough to kill chicks or prevent eggs from hatching. To test whether a simple solution--stapling a piece of corrugated cardboard over the skylight roof--would work, I set up a 3-box test on one of the hottest days of the year. (July 23, 2022)

All of the boxes were of the BSP/Lenker design and all were new. One had a regular 3/4" wood roof, one had a 3" diameter skylight cut out of the 3/4" wood roof and covered by a thin piece of plexiglass, and one had the same 3" diameter plexiglass skylight cut into the 3/4" wood roof, but with a piece of corrugated cardboard stapled over the roof.



photo by Phil Durgin

All three were mounted on the same kind of mounting stake, all facing the same direction. (See photo)

To simulate eggs, I used green grapes placed on a paper towel. I put two grapes in each box and took the temperature of each with an infrared thermometer. I took 5 readings, every hour starting at noon. All the readings were done when the sun was shining. All of the readings followed a similar pattern; the regular wood and cardboard-covered boxes were virtually identical, with the grapes in the uncovered skylight box being consistently about 5 degrees warmer. Below are my highest readings (2 p.m.)

Air temperature (in shade): 93 degrees

Roof temperature: 119 degrees

Inside Temperature of Different Boxes

Roof	Regular	3" Skylight	3" Skylight covered with cardboard
Grape temperature (average)	102	107	102

Bluebird nestlings and eggs can't survive temperatures above 107, so clearly, it's important to give them some protection if you have skylight boxes out in the open. (In none of my readings was the sun directly shining on the grapes. But if it were, I suspect the temperature of the grapes in the uncovered skylight box would have been significantly higher.) The good news is that there's a simple fix; just staple a piece of cardboard over your skylight when the weather starts getting hot.



It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see.

Henry David Thoreau

Excerpts from the 2022 Bureau of State Parks Cavity-Nesting Trails Summary Report *From Teresa A. Kromel, Chief Outdoor Programming Services, DCNR:*

Thanks to our dedicated volunteers and staff, 53 state parks monitored 2,323 man-made cavities (including nest boxes, gourds, and purple martin houses) and fledged over 9,100 birds, including Eastern bluebirds, purple martins, tree swallows, wood ducks, kestrels, and several other species. This year provided many challenges, as the birds were dealing with extreme weather conditions (including several heatwaves), which greatly affected hatching and fledging success rates.

Summary of Nesting Data:

Eastern Bluebird 2931 • House Wrens 1803 • Tree Swallow 2756
 Chickadee 145 • Titmouse 13 • Kestrel 5 • Purple Martin 765
 Wood Duck 697 • Merganser Species 50 • Other Swallows 5
 Non-Native 48

Editor's Note: BSP's former Nest Box Reporter, Shirley Ann Halk was recognized for 35 years of service monitoring nestboxes at Swatara State Park-Congrats, Shirley!



photo by Mike Dickie

BSP Members-Contact Carly Broder (cbroder@pa.gov, 717-783-3344) if you are interested in monitoring nestboxes within the State Parks Cavity-Nesting Trails Program.

Mountain Bluebird Sighted in PA

November 5, 2022

A Mountain Bluebird in Northampton County, PA!

An afternoon of birding “netted” Dave DeReamus a spectacular find!!! A rare Mountain Bluebird! Yes, in Pennsylvania. Dave was heading home when he decided to make one last stop at the Newburg Road retention pond area. Counting Killdeer, Dave noticed what appeared to be a bluebird atop a planted tree. Instead of seeing an expected Eastern Bluebird, he noticed the bird was an overall grayish color and had a noticeable eye ring. For a second, Townsend’s Solitaire flashed in his brain, but then he noticed the turquoise blue color in the tail. Finally, it registered that he was looking at a female Mountain Bluebird! He grabbed his camera as quickly as he could, hoping that it wouldn’t fly away, and blasted several photos from the car. After getting what he was pretty sure were good enough documentation photos, he sent a text out on the GroupMe app to let others know. Luckily, the bird stayed, allowing a good number of birders to see this first Northampton County record and even a first for

the Lehigh Valley! These are several of Dave’s photos - of this bird from the “western” United States.

Thank you, Dave DeReamus for the amazing story & photos. Congrats on this “rare” find!

[#mountainbluebird](#) [#rarebird](#) [#northamptoncountypa](#)

Kim Springer, BSP Facebook Administrator



Mountain Bluebird
 Photos by
 Dave DeReamus



Female Mountain Bluebird

Bluebird Holiday Workshop

Four years ago, I thought that winter was a quiet time in the Bluebird world. I see now that this is a myth. Bluebirds and Bluebirds lovers crop up everywhere. Bonding over insect suet has become a common pastime.

On December 3rd, a Bluebird Holiday workshop held at the 4H center in Collegeville, PA was attended by twenty-three people. They left not only with a lot of knowledge, but with a new nestbox for Christmas. A common comment was "I didn't know what I didn't know until I attended this workshop."

Master gardener and BSP speaker, Betsy Nutt started off the program with an interesting and informative talk about Bluebirds. The Nestbox assembly session following was led by Dawn Stelts with the able assistance of Rich Leatherman, a longtime BSP member and Co-County Coordinator for Montgomery County, and nestbox builder extraordinaire. Rich worked directly with attendees to craft the perfect box.

Lastly, I talked people through the basics of box installation, siting, predator guards and supplemental food options. The bravest among us headed out for a quick walk in the rain to visit boxes on our Learning Gardens trail.

Later, I was contacted by the garden club at a local Elementary school. They are interested in adding a bluebird trail on their campus. A short presentation to the group in early January answered a lot of their questions.

Parents, teachers and students are now looking forward to learning how to maintain and monitor that trail once it is installed. The free BSP Junior Memberships for children were extremely popular.

As I finish this, the resident Bluebirds are dropping in for dinner. Fortunately, the days are getting longer. We can wait a little longer even though we are all dreaming about Spring.

Darlaine Manning, Montgomery County Coordinator



Darlaine Manning demonstrating a pole baffle to deter predators



Betsy Nutt presenting bluebird program



Richard Letterman assisting participants with nestbox assembly

Pennsylvania Farm Show - 2023

The PA Farm Show 2023 was a good time for volunteers at the BSP Educational/Store Booth-some of the highlights are the FOOD/milk shakes, wine-tasting, the ANIMALS and EXHIBITS, and talking with SO many people about BLUEBIRDS!!! Many of the people I spoke with already had one or more boxes on their property.....and of course, many of their questions were “How do you get rid of the HOUSE SPARROWS? We have helpful information on this topic and emphasized “be diligent and monitor those boxes!” This year we attended the Farm Show for only three days, January 12-14, but I believe that we were in a better spot, with lots of visitors. With the box-building event located right next to our booth, box builders Phil Durgin, Bill Strauss, Jay Smullen, and Dean Rust helped the children to put together 30 nestbox kits. These kits were cut out by Phil, using mostly donated wood. All that we do here at the Farm Show indirectly helps our “blue feathered friends” and other native cavity-nesting songbirds. We hope that our 29 New BSP Members find “Bluebird Joy”.

Many THANKS to our 16 volunteers at this event:

Dean Rust, Bill Strauss, Jay Smullen, Dale Cook, Phil and Susan Durgin, David Price, Nancy Putt, Charlotte Knudsen, Georgia Kagle, Joyce Horner, John Shumway, Richard Reiger, Darlaine Manning, Wilma Light, and Carol McCann.
Nancy Putt, Event Chair



Farm Show 2023



Farm Show 2023

2022 Seasonal Newsletters are now Posted on the BSP Website

Now that the year 2022 is behind us, the BSP seasonal newsletters, *Bluebird Trails and Tales* are now posted on the BSP WEBSITE:

www.thebsp.org

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



Mailbag —

Monday, December 26, 2022

To Joan Watroba:

From David Rudy

Subject: Bluebirds in Winter

Hi Joan - Question - Where do the Bluebirds go when they disappear for a couple of weeks when it's cold?

Thanks, Dave Rudy

Hi Dave - Many bluebirds travel in flocks and go into the deep woods to feed on plants which produce berries. They often roost in cavities in the trees or in dense evergreen trees. Sometimes they



roost inside of nestboxes. For that reason, in the Fall, I place soft, dry, pine needles in several of my nestboxes to provide some insulation from the cold. In the event of prolonged freezing

temperatures, they may fly a bit south. If you offer supplemental food including mealworms (live or dried), commercial suet cakes, homemade suet, shelled sunflower seeds, or fruit and nut specialty mixes, you may see them more often.



October 8, 2022

To Dean Rust:

From Bob Peak

Subject: 2022 BSP Fall/Winter Newsletter

Hi, Dean. It's good to hear from you. Thank you for including me as a recipient of the BSP newsletter...I appreciate it. Perusing the newsletter clearly reveals that good things are happening within your organization.

Your bluebirding history is interesting...I'm amazed the first box is still producing bluebirds!--I guess it's mainly due to the TLC you've given it. (It looks like you

found a great spot for it.) In your comments, you have included **many** useful tips for prospective (and veteran) bluebirders...I think they'll be helpful to many people. Judging by the numbers, you have had a **very** good year for fledgling production. Like you, our annual goal is to get 1,000 bluebird fledglings on the federal properties where we have 170+ nestboxes, but the breeding bluebird population was so zapped by the 2021 Polar Vortex that we are still in a recovery phase. At the local state park, our yearly goal is 500 fledglings (from 60 boxes), but we did not get close to that number this year. On the bright side, the fledgling numbers increased

over 80% in both areas in 2022, so we are certainly hopeful the upward trend will continue. It will likely take several more years to get back to previous levels...and that's **IF** we have no additional late winter ice storms or other catastrophic events in the near future. As you said in your comments, it's a marathon, not a sprint. Thanks again for sharing the newsletter...I always enjoy looking through a good one!

Best regards, Bob

Editor's Note: Per Dean, Bob Peak is a 30yr-plus Bluebirder from Kentucky. He has written articles for NABS, most recently in the Summer issue of their publication, Bluebirder.

Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania Financial Report 2022

Submitted by Joyce Stuff, BSP Treasurer

Revenue

Administration.....	0.00
Store.....	965.10
Membership Dues	12,115.00
Donations.....	2,638.45
Speaker Income.....	730.00
Fundraising.....	1,485.00
Woodworking.....	1,709.00
Conference.....	4,585.00
Total Revenue.....	\$24,227.55

Expenses

Administration.....	2,561.33
Store.....	1,609.62
Membership	2,254.28
Fundraising.....	175.00
Woodworking.....	3,498.31
Conference.....	7,740.90
Education	1,195.59
Newsletter	4,491.90
County Coordinator.....	107.21
Research.....	200.97
Total Expenses.....	\$23,835.11

BSP Financial Statement for 2022

Checking Account Balance as of 12/31/2021	\$50,523.69
2022 Revenue	\$24,227.55
2022 Expenses.....	-23,835.11
Checking Account Balance as of 12/31/2022.....	\$50,916.13
Cash On Hand (store cashbox)	\$100.00
TOTAL CASH ASSETS as of 12/31/2022	\$51,016.13

BSP Newsletter Submission Contest/Winner

Congratulations to: **Wally Edsall**

Please select an item from the BSP Merchandise Store at: www.thebsp.org and then contact the BSP Newsletter Editor, Joan Watroba at: bluebirdhappy365@outlook.com or by phone 717-766-2102 to select your prize and arrange for delivery.

BSP is thrilled that many members are submitting material for the BSP newsletter, and we want to encourage more members to do so. By submitting your questions, nesting experiences, photos, and field observations, we will be able to offer a wider variety of articles and materials that are of interest to our readers.

To submit by regular mail, write: Newsletter Submission Contest on the front of the envelope and send to Joan Watroba, BSP Newsletter Editor, 2408 Bumble Bee Hollow Road, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055

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

One submission will be randomly drawn at the cutoff date for each newsletter edition: January 7, May 7 and September 7, and you will have your choice of any item offered in the BSP Merchandise Store.



photo by Mike Dickie

BSP Nestbox Results for 2022

THIS ARTICLE SUMMARIZES DATA FROM 167 INDIVIDUALS WHO SUBMITTED REPORTS BY USPS MAIL or ON-LINE to the BSP WEBSITE. Nancy Fraim tabulated 67 "on-line" responses to www.thebsp.org. Marilyn Michalski logged in 100 mailed reports.

I. TOTAL PENNSYLVANIA NESTBOX RESULTS - 2022:

TOTAL NESTBOXES MONITORED & REPORTED IN 2022:
3938

NUMBER OF PA COUNTIES SUBMITTING DATA:
34 OF 67 COUNTIES (51%)

EASTERN BLUEBIRDS FLEDGED IN 2022: 7165

NUMBER OF BLUEBIRD EGGS LAID: 9000

NUMBER OF BB EGGS THAT HATCHED: 7443

NUMBER OF WHITE BB EGGS: 155

TREE SWALLOWS FLEDGED IN 2022: 3329

HOUSE WRENS FLEDGED IN 2022: 2002

CHICKADEES FLEDGED IN 2022: 342

HOUSE SPARROW NESTS REMOVED: 876

II. FLEDGE NUMBERS BY COUNTY – 2022.

1. LANCASTER = 1851
2. CHESTER = 1082
3. DELAWARE = 564
4. ALLEGHENY = 442
5. DAUPHIN = 433
6. CUMBERLAND = 402
7. YORK = 400
8. MERCER = 382
9. CENTRE = 233
10. MONTGOMERY = 225
11. WESTMORELAND = 203
12. FULTON = 166
13. FRANKLIN = 144
14. BEAVER = 94
15. LYCOMING = 83
16. SCHUYLKILL = 74
17. BLAIR = 53
18. BUTLER = 49
19. CLARION = 40
20. LEBANON = 33
21. BERKS = 32
22. PERRY = 30
23. AND 24. FAYETTE & BEDFORD (EACH 27) = 54
25. BUCKS = 20
26. TIOGA = 15
27. ADAMS = 7

ABOVE: 27 COUNTIES EACH WITH BB FLEDGE TOTALS OF 7 OR MORE IN 2022

7 COUNTIES EACH FLEDGED 6 OR FEWER BLUEBIRDS:
CAMBRIA, CAMERON, CLEARFIELD, ELK, ERIE, JEFFERSON,
AND SULLIVAN.

33 COUNTIES IN PENNSYLVANIA SUBMITTED NO REPORTS IN 2022.

We need Nestbox Reports from every PA County. As the new State County Coordinator, I have worked to obtain a CC in every County. President Dean Rust, Nancy Fraim and Kim Springer have given valuable help in the search for new CC's.

III. COMPARISON OF ANNUAL RESULTS: 2021 & 2022

TOTAL# OF NESTBOXES MONITORED:

2021 = 3749 2022 = 3938

(189 more boxes than in 2021).

TOTAL # OF EASTERN BLUEBIRDS FLEDGED:

2021 = 6992 2022 = 7165

(173 more BB fledged in 2022)

TOTAL # OF TREE SWALLOWS (TS) FLEDGED:

2021 = 3292 2022 = 3329

(73 more Tree Swallows fledged in 2022)

TOTAL # OF HOUSE WRENS FLEDGED:

2021 = 1907 2022 = 2002

(95 more wrens fledged in 2022)

TOTAL NUMBER OF CHICKADEES FLEDGED:

2021 = 200 2022 = 342

(142 more fledged in 2022)

TOTAL NUMBER OF BLUEBIRD EGGS HATCHED:

2021 = 7660 2022 = 7153

TOTAL NUMBER OF WHITE BLUEBIRD EGGS:

2021 = 94 2022 = 155

IV. CONCLUSIONS

1. The 167 submitted reports (2022) indicate that the Eastern Bluebird population is stable. Our 2021 and 2022 Nestbox Reports indicate a slow increase in EABL population.

>> **BSP Nestbox Report continues on page 17**

BSP Nestbox Results for 2022

continued from page 16

2. The low number of Chickadee fledges (342 in 2022) is alarming, but we are moving in the right direction with 138 more fledged this year, as compared to 2021. We should promote the nesting of this small bird and discourage the nesting of House Wrens, who often destroy the eggs/hatchlings of Chickadees and Eastern Bluebirds.
3. We have continuing threats from the House Sparrow. This non-native bird is proliferating in many areas outside city limits. We should do everything possible to prevent its nesting. The 2022 reports named a wide range of deterrents in use.
4. Thanks to Nancy Fraim and her daughter Jennifer Shealy for developing BSP's "on-line" option for submitting Annual Nestbox Reports – an enormous benefit!
5. This report has been sent to Carly Broder, Coordinator of the DCNR Cavity-Nesting Trails Program, and Teresa Kromel, Chief, Outdoor Programming Services Division, PA Bureau of State Parks - DCNR.
6. In the future we encourage BSP members to submit NESTBOX RESULTS **ON LINE**, using www.thebsp.org and going to "...more." We believe the on-line REPORT FORM is easy to use, and its use saves us many hours of entering data by hand.

This report was written by Marilyn Michalski, BSP's State Coordinator. emeraldmm@verizon.



photo by Lorrie Preston

BSP Upcoming Events

Save the Dates!

BSP Board/Membership Meetings:

Thursday Evenings

at 6:00 p.m.

on the following dates:

- April 27, 2023
- July 27, 2023
- October 26, 2023



photo by Nick Kerlin

Meeting Location:

Giant Supermarket,
3301 Trindle Rd, Community Room, Camp Hill, PA

* Meetings are also offered online via Zoom, but please contact Phil Durgin, BSP Vice President at 717-732-5325 or email: pdurgin@comcast.net prior to the event to confirm the meeting mode and to receive an invitation to join the meeting.

April 29, 2023 - (Saturday) 10 a.m.-4 p.m. -FREE EVENT **Wetlands Festival**, Wildwood Park, Harrisburg, PA <https://explorewildwoodpark.org/event/wetlands-festival/>

Explore Wildwood Park's treasured wetlands for the 23rd Annual Wetlands Festival! A day of free, fun, and educational activities with special musical guests and food trucks. Enjoy wildlife exhibits, walks, and a wide variety of local and regional environmental organizations. Interact with live animals and make crafts to take home! There is something for everyone! Bluebird Society of PA will host an exhibit, and BSP members will be available to share information about how to increase bluebird nesting success. Volunteers are needed.

Contact: Nancy Putt, Event Chair, bluebirds@pa.net or 717-432-2647

July 29, 2023 - (Saturday) -Ned Smith Festival for Nature and Art - FREE EVENT MYO Park, Millersburg, PA www.nedsmithcenter.org

BSP will host an educational display and assist with the nestbox building activity. **VOLUNTEERS NEEDED**-Please contact Nancy Putt, Event Chair, bluebirds@pa.net or 717-432-2647

UPDATES: OUR BSP COUNTY COORDINATORS

In **Armstrong County** we thank Lynn Ramage for her continuing work as CC. We extend our sympathies to her on the loss of her husband in 2022.

In **Bradford County** we welcome Rich Gulyas as the **new** County Coordinator. He joined BSP in December of 2022.

In **Bucks County** we thank William Moyer for his many years of service as the County Coordinator. Following his retirement we welcome a new CC in Bucks – Paula Walter - who will establish a new Bluebird Trail in 2023 at Snipes Farm & Education Center.

In **Clinton County** we welcome Mary Hirst as the new County Coordinator.

In **Franklin County** we thank Joyce Stuff for her many years of service as the County Coordinator. We welcome our new CC Mary Ellen Piper.

In **Huntingdon County** we welcome Jenn Moore as the **new** CC. Jenn is the Environmental Educator at Greenwood Furnace State Park in Huntingdon, PA.

In **Lebanon County** we have a **new team** of Co-County Coordinators: John Stoltzfus and Susan Wheeler. They have plans for extending Bluebird Outreach in 2023.

In **Lycoming County**, we thank Fred Stiner for his many years of service as CC and for his dependable monitoring and reporting of results. Fred is retiring. We are searching for a new CC.

In **McKean County** we have **new** CC Gregory Dean, who joined BSP in 2022.

In **Mifflin County** we welcome **new** CC Gordon Parker, owner of a nature store called “Honey Creek Bill & Beak,” in Lewistown, PA. Gordon monitors a bluebird trail in Kish Park, and he is an accomplished photographer. This issue contains one of his bluebird photos.

In **Wyoming County**, we welcome **new** CC Dave Brown, who accepted the position in August of 2022.

COUNTIES WITHOUT A COUNTY COORDINATOR.

Please help us:

As diligent as we have been about establishing CCs in every one of Pennsylvania’s 67 counties, we still have VACANT COUNTIES. PLEASE send me names/contact info. for potential candidates in the following counties:

GREENE - LYCOMING - JUNIATA - LACKAWANNA - PIKE -SUSQUEHANNA

Thank you! Marilyn Michalski, State CC.
610-933-0497. emeraldmm@verizon.net.



We Are BSP!

Please welcome **Gordon Parker** as our new BSP Mifflin County Coordinator. Gordon owns a specialty birding store in Lewistown called Honey Creek Bill & Beak where he often receives phone calls & visitors in need of birding advice and help.

Gordon retired from the Navy after 20 years, owned/operated an optical shop with his wife for 20 years, & then opened & has run his bird store for the last 7 years. He also does some bird photography. Gordon got interested in birds about 26 years ago when trying to find something other than the TV for his children to watch all the time. He installed a window, suction-cup feeder on to a window in their apartment. Gordon says he was fascinated with all the birds coming to this feeder and bought a book to ID them. He notes that he was watching the birds, but the children weren't interested. His “AHA!” bird was a... wait for it... A Brown-headed Cowbird! He said, “People always laugh when I tell them that.” (I did laugh too!) When he moved into his house, he'd found the previous owner left an old, bright red, dilapidated bird house. He never thought anything would actually nest in it, but sure

We Are BSP! continued from page 18

enough the next spring - Bluebirds moved into the box. This is what sparked Gordon's interest in Bluebirds.

Gordon decided to (volunteer to) put up Bluebird boxes at Kish Park also in Lewistown. This process involved having the township supervisors approve his project, and the park had to approve it also. Gordon installed 5 boxes about 5 years ago. He said he has 4 very productive boxes that usually house Tree Swallows & also Eastern Bluebirds. There are other natural cavities throughout Kish Park that Bluebirds have used for nesting. Gordon also has 5 boxes at his home where he's lived for 26 years & is always excited to have Bluebirds there.

If you'd like to check out Gordon's store, here is the website: <https://honeycreekbillandbeak.com/> (which is a work in progress).

The Facebook page is **Honey Creek Bill & Beak**. The store focuses on all things outdoor bird: seeds, feeders, nest boxes, houses, stone and hanging bird baths, binoculars, spotting scopes, field guides, etc.



Gordon Parker - CC Mifflin County

Please contact Gordon by email at: localbirdsview@aol.com or telephone at: 717-513-3980 if you live in Mifflin County and have any Bluebird-related questions that need answered.

Welcome Gordon! We are looking forward to many more people in Mifflin County becoming members of the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania.

Best regards, Kim Springer, Mercer County Coordinator and Facebook Co-Administrator

Baby Bluebirds Rescued

Submitted by Deb Smith

Baby Bluebirds were rescued yesterday!

A lovely lady named Sue Shirk from York County wrote to the BSP Facebook Page yesterday-7/8/22. She had a nest with four baby blues on her property. The mother had been killed by a stray cat, and then the male stopped coming to feed the babies. One was already deceased.

No local Wildlife Rehabbers could take the babies, so I told Sue if she was willing to drive them here to Dauphin County, I would take them to **Red Creek Wildlife Center** in Schuylkill County. She said she was on her way! We then decided to drive together so that she could say "Goodbye". (All was well until we hit traffic and saw the flaming cab of a tractor trailer!) Cannot thank Sue enough for helping these little ones ~ cannot thank Red Creek enough for accepting the

babies!

Here is the link to the list of PA Licensed Wildlife Rehabilitators if anyone is ever in need:

<https://pawr.com/>

**Pennsylvania Association of Wildlife Rehabilitators
Professionals Caring for Wildlife of the
Commonwealth**



Sue Shirk's Bluebird Babies

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HOUSE WRENS: Destructive Interference by Marilyn Michalski

The Northern House Wren is often heard before it is seen. After wintering in Southern U.S., it arrives in Pennsylvania in April. The bubbly song of the “Jenny Wren” signals the return of danger to cavity-nesting birds.

The House Wren is a small, energetic bird whose brown feathers are plain in comparison to its larger cousin, the Carolina Wren, which has a white eyebrow stripe and reddish-brown back. The House Wren (HOWR) is the plainest of all wren species. It nests in all kinds of “cavities.” When a male House Wren locates a potential niche for his nest, he puts sticks in it – twigs about 3 to 7 inches long. He also puts sticks into nestboxes already occupied. His action of filling up many nestboxes prevents other birds from nesting, especially bluebirds and chickadees. The wren does not hesitate when he finds eggs already laid; he will poke them and toss them onto the ground. We find these pierced eggs lying dead underneath their nestboxes. When we wonder what happened to our bluebird eggs, already laid, we can be pretty sure they were removed by the House Wren. The only other predator of bird eggs – leaving no trace of its work – is a snake.

When a female House Wren selects one of these “stick nests,” she lines it with soft grasses and then lays 5 to 7 small pinkish-brown eggs. After two weeks of incubation, the eggs hatch and the adults feed the young, which fledge in about 15 days. A pair of wrens can repeat this process two more times a summer – producing up to 20 new House Wrens each nesting season. This prolific reproduction rate has resulted in overpopulation. House Wrens are abundant, and their take-over of nestboxes has become common. If their population rise continues, we may experience lower rates of Bluebird and Chickadee fledging.

The House Wren’s needle-tipped beak is a weapon. Without hesitation, wrens puncture the eggs of any bird using a nestbox. Once a wren pierces the membrane, the egg dies. We often find punctured eggs below nestboxes – a disturbing sight. The wren is



especially deadly to chickadees, who nest only once a year. Some of us are experimenting with panels that block the view of the entrance hole on nestboxes. These “wren guards” or covered entry holes are 50% effective. Currently, “Bluebirders” are searching for ways to prevent wrens from taking over nestboxes. New innovations and successful deterrents to wren predation are needed.

CURRENT RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Relocate nesting boxes away from homes, patios, and shrubbery. Why? Wrens like clutter.
2. Install nestboxes out in the open – away from buildings and greenery. Use “open fields” with a tree about 20 to 30 feet away for the bluebirds to perch on while guarding their box.
3. Remove sticks and twigs from all dummy nests. (those without a nesting cup or wren eggs)
4. Experiment with “Wren Guards” on nestboxes -- check web sites for ideas.
5. If wrens manage to lay eggs in a nestbox, REMOVE their nestbox immediately after their nestlings fledge. Other birds will be harmed if a nestbox is used more than once by wrens.
6. No one who admires bluebirds/chickadees should supply a nestbox for House Wrens.



Bluebird Society of PA Membership Form

Regular/Family (16-64yrs)	Senior/Couples (65+)	Organization/Corporate	Lifetime
1 year -\$15	1 year - \$12	1 year -\$100	\$375
3 years-\$40	3 years -\$30	3 years -\$275	

***When you Renew for 3 years, you can take advantage of our discounted rates shown above!**

*** See BSP website for Junior Membership opportunities.**

Mail to:
Bluebird Society of PA
P.O. Box 12
Exton, PA 19341

New Member Renewal Donation

Name _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____ County: _____

Phone No.: _____ (required in case newsletter is undeliverable)

E-mail Address: _____ (required if questions or e-mailed delivery of Newsletter)

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

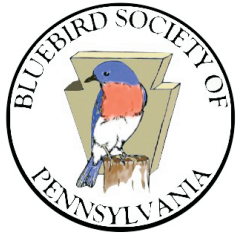
If you are a new member, have you received your new membership packet? Yes No

How would you like to receive your newsletter? Regular mail E-mail

Please tell us how you learned about us: _____

- I would like to help with:
- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> County Coordinator | <input type="checkbox"/> Nestbox Monitoring |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nestbox Construction | <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Photography | <input type="checkbox"/> Research |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Speakers' Bureau | <input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Farm Show (Jan) | <input type="checkbox"/> BSP Conference Spring |

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PO Box 12
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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



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/

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It will bring them the seasonal publication, Bluebird Trails and Tales, and will deliver Bluebird Joy and Happiness to them all year long.

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



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