



Spring is only a few days away and it's time to get out the hiking boots and check those trail nest boxes and any backyard boxes too! We know that the time of the "first egg" is almost upon us!! **Please email me when you get your first bluebird egg and tree swallow egg.** It is fascinating to compare these dates from year to year. Here are our area's first egg dates from recent years, listed by species:

Species	First egg- 2017	2016	2015	2014
Eastern Bluebird	3/31	3/28	3/24	4/6
Tree Swallow	4/25	4/19	5/3	4/18
BCCH	none	4/25	4/15	4/21
Tufted titmouse	none	4/25	none	5/2
House Wren	5/14	5/11	5/4	5/14
Barn Swallow	6/13	5/22	5/16	none
Kestrel	4/23	4/22	4/27	none

It is clear that the Eastern Bluebird is the earliest nester of the many native birds that might use our nest boxes. The only bird which nests earlier is the non-native House Sparrow. They try to out compete our native birds for nest sites, will start their nest building in early to mid -March, and will continue nesting attempts through July and even into August. Responsible bluebird monitors DO NOT allow house sparrows to successfully nest and raise young on their watch! There are many passive and active control measures which should be used to manage House sparrows on bluebird trails. Call or email me with questions or check out these website links:

<http://www.sialis.org/hosp.htm>

<http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/PDF/NABSFactsheetHouseSparrowControl.pdf>

It is better to have NO nest box than to have one which breeds house sparrows!!

The first nest box inspection should be done by early to mid- March. This can reveal problems requiring repair before nesting starts. It is important to actually walk around the nest box to inspect the entire box for cracks in walls or roof that might let in rain. Cracks should be covered with clear silicon caulking (or replace the box if it is badly deteriorated). Check to make sure the pole is still firmly in the ground and is not leaning. Sometimes the freezing and thawing of winter heaves the nest box poles partially out of the ground and they will need to be reset. Look at the predator guard to make sure it is intact. Also check the hole guard. Is it still 1 ½ inch or has it perhaps been enlarged by another bird or mammal and in need of replacement? Run a finger around the inside of the hole guard to check if there are rough splinters which could tear the feathers of the parent birds as they frequently enter and exit the box. A quick rub with

sandpaper inside the opening of the hole guard can smooth away rough areas. The door of the box should be opened and the interior inspected too. Make sure the drainage ports in the floor are not clogged, the box is securely fastened to the pole and that any old nests have been cleaned out. There might be interesting evidence of winter time use of the nest box. Here are some examples of debris recently found on the floor of nest boxes. Do you recognize the implications of these findings?



A



B



C



D

In photo A there is a heavy layer of House Sparrow feces and a few unkempt arching grasses which indicates regular use of this box by a HOSP, probably as a roost at night during the winter.

Photo B shows a mouse nest. These small white footed or deer mice will build a tall nest without a cup out of soft grass, fur, leaf, and other fluffy stuff. They urinate in the box, can carry

disease, and will deter nesting birds since they will eat eggs and nestlings. Mice have been known to carry a potentially dangerous Hantavirus so before removing a mouse nest (and after evicting any mice) spray the nest thoroughly with a 10% Clorox solution, wait several minutes, then remove it with a spatula or gloved hand while standing upwind or wearing a mask. Predator guards on a nest box pole normally prevent most mouse nesting attempts although they can access boxes if tall grasses lean onto the box or pole.

Photo C shows numerous seeds, larger, thicker feces and a few wispy blue-gray feathers. Bluebirds probably have roosted in this box during the winter. 😊

Photo D has a beginning bluebird nest! It is made of dry grasses without seed heads, is neat and uniform in height and will eventually be around 4-6 inches tall and have a central depressed cup when completed. Sometimes bluebird nests are made from woven white pine needles instead of grasses. 😊 😊

January, February and March are busy months in our bluebird program. There are lots of training classes, meetings, and public education. Nest boxes are built or repaired, sparrow spookers are refurbished or constructed and trail nest boxes are inspected and readied for occupancy. New monitors are welcomed, new bluebird friends are made and wintertime sightings of bluebirds are welcomed and shared!



Fritz Brandau and Sanjay Palekar made 24 new bluebird boxes in January.



The training classes for new monitors were held on Feb 3 and 4th at the Brandau home. It was exciting and encouraging to have so many new volunteers join our growing bluebird program!



Fritz and Penny Brandau will be presenting a program titled “Bluebird Basics” on Tuesday March 20th at the Huron County Community Library in Wakeman at 6:30pm and again at the Amherst Public Library on Sunday April 15th at 2pm. These programs will focus on how to choose the right bluebird habitat, bluebird predators and competitors, desirable features of a bluebird house and the family life of bluebirds. Since class size is limited in each of the programs registration is requested. To register for the March 20th program call 440-839-2976. For the April 15th program call 440-988-4230. The programs are open to the public and are geared primarily for homeowners who would like to learn about and enjoy bluebirds on their properties.

On Wednesday March 14th the Black River Audubon Society, Ritter Library and the Firelands Audubon Society will co-host an award winning documentary film called “The Messenger”. It will be held at 6:30pm at the Ritter Library in Vermilion and is free and open to the public. The film “explores our deep-seated connection to birds and warns that the uncertain fate of songbirds might mirror our own”. It is a powerful film with a message we need to heed.

On Sunday March 4th the Black River Audubon Society's Bluebird program held their spring meeting for all trail monitors at the Amherst Library's DeLloyd Room. Many thanks to the library for providing a spacious room for our meeting and for Becky's help in setting up the room! We enjoyed talking about and planning for our work with bluebirds and also heard from Larry Wilson, chair of the BRAS Kestrel Program, and John Ryan, who directs the Purple Martin Program.



One of our new trail monitors, Diane Lehman has been a bluebird landlord at her home for several years and reports a complete bluebird nest in her back yard nestbox already!! It is several inches high, made of pine needles and neatly cupped. Hopefully that first egg will be laid on a warmer day than we have had recently!

My husband and I have noticed a difference in the behaviour of our resident backyard bluebirds in the past 3-4 weeks. All winter we enjoyed watching 3-5 bluebirds regularly visit our bluebird feeders. Usually the males ate first but would not share the feeder with each other and after they left then the females came in to eat. The "girls" were more tolerate of eating with another female. Lately the family group has split up and the dominant pair are the only ones at our feeder. Now we chuckle as we watch the female eat first under the protecting watch of the male who has been seen taking food to her as part of their courtship ritual. The male also

stands on the roof of their nestbox alertly guarding it as the female is starting to build a grass nest. He can be seen wing waving, peering over the roof as she works and occasionally inspecting her progress! More bluebird song fills the air and there is increased activity on warmer days. Watching bluebirds can be addictive! LOL!



Pictured top row- Rick Lockhart and Kit Fleming checking LCCC trail, Ann Selent, Ron Thomas and Valerie Deptula at Bacon Woods trail, and Joy and Jeff Brown at Olsen Nature Preserve trail.

Bottom row- young bluebirder Mari working at Oberlin College trail, Fritz Brandau and Marc Amos working at New Russia Township trail and the watchful bluebird who seems to approve of all this activity! 😊

"I wish you bluebirds in the Spring
To Give your heart a song to sing!"

A. A. Beach & C. Trenet