

BRAS Bluebird Newsletter March 2020

The spring that so many of us have looked forward to has finally arrived! This spring is different in many ways from the one we imagined, however. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to the shutdown of many things that we took for granted. It is an extremely challenging and unprecedented time. The impact is only beginning to be felt in our country.

However, the migration and nesting of birds is on a timeless schedule and is happening even as these words are being typed. I hope that each of you are finding time to take a walk in nature while still keeping the recommended social distancing of course! It is good physically, mentally and psychologically. My husband and I have been on several walks in the past few days and are encouraged to see the parks being used! Bluebirds are starting to nest in many boxes and tree swallows have been seen returning from their migration. It's time to check your bluebird boxes and get them ready for occupancy! I can't wait to hear about your first bluebird egg! Call me!!



Spring nestbox maintenance should be done this month and includes opening your nestboxes and cleaning out any winter debris from roosting birds. Check the box for roof or wall cracks and caulk them with clear silicon tube caulking or replace the box if necessary. Leaky roofs can lead to wet, hypothermic nestlings later so please make sure your boxes are not cracked. If the nestbox pole is leaning or has heaved out of the ground due to winter freezing and thawing, then reset the pole. If the hole has been enlarged by woodpeckers or small mammals a new hole guard should be placed on the box so that the hole size remains 1 ½ inch diameter. Collect supplies needed for monitoring nestboxes: screwdriver, putty knife, possibly mechanics mirror along with monitoring notecards or sheets to record your data. Sparrow spookers, Van Ert traps, gloves, and a large mesh laundry bag are all useful when monitoring nestboxes.





Nest C



Nest D

Can you name the creator of the nests shown in the 4 photos above? Call them Photo A, Photo B, Photo C and Photo D. Each one would need different monitoring actions if found in your nestbox. (Check for answers at the end of the newsletter).

Pictured below are the five new trail monitors who took the New Monitors training class on March 1. Left to right: Meg Ludwig will be helping monitor at Sherod Park in Vermilion, Rachel Kalizewski is a naturalist at French Creek Nature Center and Burrell House, Janet Demarinis and Eugenia Bobo will be monitoring the trail at Hale Road and Jill Wettersten will be found helping monitor at Kendal of Oberlin. If you see any of these new monitors, please welcome them and thank them for helping to make our trails successful!



On Feb 23 there was a well- attended public class for anyone interested in learning about Bluebird Basics. It was held at the Amherst Public Library. We were thrilled at the interest and engagement from the 45 attendees! Lots of current or aspiring bluebird landlords in that crowd! 😊 May their tribe increase!



On March 8th another meeting was held at the Amherst Library venue. This program was the annual Spring Trail Monitors meeting. Black River Audubon Society has a very active, involved group of trained bluebird trail monitors who manage 32 public trails and 2 private trails in our area. There are 53 trail monitors in our group! We are always happy to welcome more conservation minded volunteers. It truly takes a village to monitor the 470 nestboxes on our trails! It is extremely satisfying and interesting work. Every trail walk has surprises!



Here is a helpful link from National Audubon Society which might give you resources to fill any extra hours. Check out <https://www.audubon.org/joy-of-birds> for their bird themed care package. I hope you find some interesting things to do and learn in this link!

On Feb 29th the Ohio Bluebird Society had their annual conference at Ashland University's John C. Myer Convocation Hall with around 220 attendees from all over the state of Ohio. There were 7 members of Black River Audubon Society who signed up to attend (one missed it due to work conflicts) so our Lorain County was well represented. A full agenda of knowledgeable and

varied speakers, good food, a large and profitable silent auction, and the chance to talk with other bluebird lovers from other areas made this day very special and worthwhile.



Black River Audubon Society (and Ohio Bluebird Society members) Fritz and Penny Brandau, Mike Smith, Rob Swindell, and Diana Steele and her youngest daughter attended the conference. Diana and her daughter hosted a presentation table for the Ohio Ornithological Society during the conference.



One other recent meeting which five members of the Black River Audubon Society attended was the national North American Bluebird Society conference which was held this year in Kearney, Nebraska during the time of the worlds largest Sandhill crane spring migration. Fritz and Penny Brandau, Rob and Gina Swindell, and Jim Jablonski all agreed that it was magical to see literally thousands and thousands of Sandhill cranes on the Platte River! It was an experience I'm sure none of us will ever forget! Much appreciation to the group "Bluebirds across Nebraska" for hosting this NABS conference! They were hard working, flexible and generous bluebird lovers!

Drumroll!! And now it is time to give the answers to the four nestbox photos pictured on pages 1 and 2....

Photo A shows wood shavings on the floor of the nestbox. A downy woodpecker was undoubtedly roosting in this box during the winter nights and did a little “interior” redecorating, hence wood chips are seen on the floor of the box. 😊 There is nothing you need to do about this other than to gently clean out the wood shavings, check to make sure the hole didn’t get enlarged and look for any other possible pecked areas that might need repair. When bluebirds decide to start nesting in that box the downy will stop using it.

Photo B shows a beginning messy nest and white small feces from the non-native, invasive House Sparrow. A Van Ert inbox trap should be set (and checked at least hourly while it is set) in order to permanently remove this nest builder before it kills a native bluebird or tree swallow. Once the house sparrow has been caught and humanely euthanized the trap should be removed and the HOSP nest in the box should be cleaned out.

Photo C shows a white footed deer mouse nest. These little mammals will nest in nestboxes but should be discouraged from doing that by installing Kingston Predator guards on the nestbox poles and trimming the ground vegetation around poles to prevent tall grasses from leaning into the box. Since mice can carry a possibly dangerous hantavirus care must be taken when cleaning their nesting material from a box. It is recommended that the nesting material be removed while wearing gloves and a mask and after spraying the nest with a 1;10 clorox solution several minutes before removing the nest.

Photo D shows a moss and fur lined nest made by a native black capped chickadee. These are cute, beneficial little birds who nest only once a year and are usually finished nesting around Memorial Day. They are often ousted from the nestbox however by larger birds like the nonnative house sparrow or even native bluebirds or tree swallows. You can help them retain ownership of the box until their nesting is complete if you place a 1 1/8 inch hole restrictor over the larger 1 1/2 inch hole. This will exclude the larger birds and permit the smaller chickadee to finish her nesting attempt. The restrictor could then be removed once the young chickadees fledge and the box could still be easily used by bluebirds or tree swallows. Win- win! 😊

Today is the first day of spring 2020. None of us know what the weeks ahead will bring but all of us can try to make this world a better place by caring for ourselves, others and the world we have been gifted. Wishing you bluebirds and good health!



Pictured on the previous page: A female eastern meadowlark and an early arriving tree swallow on a nestbox roof. These beauties were seen today, March 19, 2020 near Oberlin, Ohio.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” - Margaret Mead



“To me, a bluebird is like a skeleton key. If you want to see and enjoy nature, a bluebird will open the door for you.” - Al Batt

I hope many doors open for you in the weeks and months ahead as you work to make this world a better place for all of us and future generations. God bless!

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Comments or suggestions welcomed