

BRAS Bluebird Newsletter May 2019

May and June are the busiest months of the year on bluebird trails and at home nestboxes. Bluebirds, tree swallows, house wrens, black capped chickadees! Wow! Counting eggs and chicks can be challenging and fun and time consuming. Each trail walk is full of surprises! Things are changing rapidly from one nestbox check to the next! You never know what you might find when you open those nestbox doors! Here is a brief review of common native cavity nesting bird eggs you might see in bluebird boxes:



Eastern Bluebird eggs



Tree Swallow eggs



House wren eggs



Black capped chickadee eggs

The eggs pictured above are all from native birds. They should be allowed to nest safely in nestboxes. Keeping house sparrows from nesting however is vitally important to the safety of native species. PLEASE don't let nonnative house sparrows hatch eggs in bluebird nestboxes! It is better to have no nestbox than to have one that fledges house sparrows! For photos of house sparrow eggs and adults please check out this link. www.sialis.org/hospphotos.htm.

June 1st is the date that I obtain information about the early season contents of nest boxes on all Black River Audubon Society bluebird trails plus information from those who have bluebird nest boxes at their homes. Please check all of your nest boxes as close to June 1st as possible and report what is actually in each box around that date. I am interested in knowing what species are using the nest boxes (bluebird, tree swallow, black capped chickadee, etc.) and how many eggs or chicks are actually present. Then please let me know if you have already had any fledglings- how many and what species. For example, your report might look like this: "Box 1 has 5 bluebird eggs and has already fledged 4 bluebirds this year, box 2 is empty, box 3 has 6 tree swallow chicks, box 4 has 4 bluebird young chicks." If you found dead bluebird chicks this year please mention that in your note to me as well as how many were lost. I will compile all this information in an "early season report" and send the information to all of you in the next newsletter. Thank you so much!! I really appreciate it! You can email the information to me at pennybrandau@gmail.com. Thank you!



There were three very early bluebird nestings in March that I am aware of in Lorain County. They were all at private homes. Peggy Chitwood of North Ridgeville reported the first bluebird egg in her nestbox on March 26, Diane Lehman of Amherst had her first egg on March 28 and our backyard bluebirds laid their first egg on March 30. Unfortunately, none of Peggy's eggs hatched (probable HOSP predation) and none of our bluebird eggs hatched due to the death of the mother bluebird. She was found dead on the ground in our backyard, no apparent injuries. Diane's clutch DID fledge 4 of the 5 eggs thankfully. The temperatures were in the low 20's on 3/31 and early 4/1 so these March bluebird nestings were nail biters from the very beginning!

The weather in early May was also hard on the survival of many bluebird hatchlings and chicks. Anytime there is a combination of cold temperatures and rain for consecutive days young chicks have a hard time surviving. Food to feed their young is difficult for the parent bluebirds to find. If the nest becomes cold and wet from driving rain the young chicks can easily become hypothermic and unable to gape (open their mouths to be fed) so even if the parents do find food the young can't be fed and will die. I am aware of at least 30 young bluebird chicks which were found dead in trail nestboxes the first two weeks of May. So sad!

Seasoned monitors know to expect almost anything when checking bluebird boxes. From human vandalism to wasps, ants, dead adult or young birds, blowflies, and possibly mice or snakes inside nestboxes (the use of Kingston predator guards will prevent snakes and mice from accessing nestboxes and is recommended). Heat, rain, tall weeds, brush and uneven ground can make trail walks challenging too. And of course, there is also the possibility of ticks. This year seems to be a year of increased tick problems due to the wetter conditions and milder winter. Take precautions for your own safety. Here is some good advice from the Sialis website:

www.sialis.org/lyme.htm **“Quick Tips: Don't get bitten!** Be especially careful during mid-May through mid-July.... Wear light colored clothing, tuck pants into socks, spray clothing with tick repellent, try to do daily tick checks after being in grassy areas with forest edge. [Removing a tick](#) within 2 days of getting bitten reduces your chance of contracting Lyme disease. Grasp the head of tick as close to your skin as possible with a pair of fine tipped tweezers and pull the tick straight outward with a slow steady pressure. If you are bitten by a tick and experience [symptoms](#) 3-30 days later, see a doctor as soon as possible.”

Even though there can be challenges related to trail monitoring there is nothing like the excitement of seeing new eggs in a nestbox you have been monitoring or watching the eggs hatch and grow until they fledge from the nestbox! Observing parent birds raising their young, being outside enjoying the beauty and wonder of nature, getting healthy exercise, meeting other conservation minded friendly bluebird lovers, learning new things, knowing you are doing something good for yourself and your descendants... the list of benefits of monitoring nestboxes goes on and on!

In March we held a program called “Bluebird Basics” at the North Ridgeville Library for those interested in learning more about bluebirds. We were thrilled that a full room of 47 people attended this class. A children’s book called “A Nest of Bluebirds” by author Rose Marie Botts Scott was donated by the Ohio Bluebird Society and subsequently given to the North Ridgeville Library as a thank you for allowing the use of their facilities for this program.



Hundreds of children and their families participated in the Metro Parks “Adventure Fest 2019” at Mill Hollow Bacon House on May 18th. We were invited to lead a bluebird trail walk that day and enjoyed showing some interested hikers the bluebirds and tree swallows which are nesting at boxes we manage on those grounds. Audubon member Deb Mohr also taught dozens of children about foods different birds eat at a Black River Audubon station table in the Carriage Barn. The bird stamps were favorites for many of the kids!



One of the trails which monitor Diana Steele of Oberlin has monitored for several years is on property which was recently purchased by the CMA church of Oberlin. They have generously allowed continued use of that property for the Black River Audubon Society to maintain and monitor the bluebird trail and kestrel box located there. In return, Diana has enjoyed the opportunity to reach out to and teach the church youth group about the birds living in the nestboxes. Last week she did a second trail walk with several children to show them the contents of some of the boxes. It was a learning experience enjoyed by all!



We never know who will be caring for our bluebirds and other cavity nesters in the future when we are gone but we hope experiences like these will spark a love and desire in members of the next generation to be the next link in caring for our world and all creatures great and small!

Pictured below are a few of the many monitors who are busily volunteering on the 31 bluebird trails throughout Lorain County. There are over 450 nestboxes on these trails and each box is being checked at least every 5-7 days from late March through August by one of the 47 volunteer monitors. If you see any of them in the weeks ahead checking boxes and keeping notes please thank them for making your world more beautiful! ☺



Cindy Amos and her husband Marc are monitors of New Russia Township Cemetery trail.

Glenda and Marty Carbaugh help monitor at High Meadows trail.



Bob MacGillis is the monitor of Wellington Reservation trail.

Adele Straub of Royal Oaks trail and Kathy Kleinman of New Russia township trail.



Sandy Kantelas of New Russia Township trail and Brenda Kammer of Vermilion's Sherod Park
Marty Ackermann and Diana Steele are co-monitors at Oberlin's Westwood Cemetery



Diane Lehman cares for the trail at Mill Hollow Bacon House.

Jeff and Joy Brown manage the trail at Olsen Nature Preserve.

It is always thrilling to hear from private bluebird landlords also. To have a bluebird nestbox in your backyard or on your property is both exciting and rewarding and also challenging at times. The bluebirds nesting on private property are usually observed very closely and cared for carefully also. It is a privilege and a responsibility.

On a recent visit to Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania my husband and I came across a quote by Henry Thoreau (1817-1862) which I would like to share. "A man's interest in a single bluebird is worth more than a complete, but dry list of the fauna and flora of a town."

Anyone who has observed the nesting and breeding and family life of bluebirds has learned the truth of that quote. It is an experience and interest that enriches life in ways you can't imagine until you have done it!



Wishing you Bluebirds to brighten your days!

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