

BRAS Bluebird Newsletter November 2019

Spring and summer are always the busiest times for nestbox monitoring but the past two months have been a blur of many other activities in the Black River Audubon bluebird program.

By September, nesting was finished for bluebirds and most of the nestboxes will remain empty until spring. However, nest boxes make good roosting sites during cold wintry weather and bluebirds might use them for sleeping. Other birds also sometimes roost in them during the winter. My husband and I enjoy watching an adorable female downy woodpecker enter our empty bluebird box each day about 30 minutes before sundown and leave each morning soon after sunrise. Many of you probably have also seen this common occurrence or have found evidence in the spring of a woodpecker's roosting. A few wood chips on the floor or a slightly enlarged hole can be sure signs that a downy slept there! Happily, our woodpecker hasn't felt the need to "remodel" our nestbox yet! Bluebirds don't remodel thankfully!



Late summer sightings of bluebirds are more and more common as our bluebird program fledges hundreds of young each year. Some lucky people will continue to see bluebirds at their homes or on trails throughout the winter. There is nothing quite as beautiful as a bluebird against the backdrop of fresh, white snow too! That sight always thrills me!

On September 8th a potluck picnic meeting for all bluebird trail monitors was held at our home. Twenty-five monitors attended. We had a great time eating, reviewing the past year's work and planning changes and improvements for the 2020 nesting season. "Old" business included welcoming and thanking the 6 new monitors who started volunteering this past spring and now are considered "Old" seasoned monitors: Sandy Kantelas, Meg Ludwig, Glenda and Marty Carbaugh and Mark Prinz. "New" business included a discussion of some practice updates and revised forms plus plans for trail improvements to be done. Dozens of used sparrow spookers were turned in for refurbishment, hundreds of weekly trail notes were collected for entry into Nestwatch, and yearly individual trail summary forms were submitted. Did I mention that we ate a lot of great food too? 😊 Good times with good people!



Throughout September and October several computer whiz volunteers helped with data entry from all 31-bluebird trails weekly nestbox checks (plus a few private homeowners' weekly notes) into Nestwatch (a Cornell Lab of Ornithology citizen science program). Many thanks to Gina Swindell, Charlie Weil, Sandy Kantelas, Stephanie Bevin and Valerie Deptula for their invaluable help entering data on literally hundreds of nesting attempts!! Cornell now has detailed information about each of those attempts and will be able to use it to help better understand how weather, predators, competitors, monitor interventions, nestbox locations and different types of predator guards impact nesting successes or failures. Important information! Worthwhile work!

In addition to submitting detailed nesting information to Nestwatch, the Black River Audubon Society Bluebird program also provides a summary Nest Box Report to the Ohio Bluebird Society. That report included a species list of total fledgling counts from the 31 bluebird trails we monitor, the BRAS kestrel and purple martin programs plus the fledgling totals provided to me by many private homeowners with bluebird nestboxes. That summary form lists 721 Eastern Bluebirds which fledged in our Lorain County area, 11 American kestrels, 19 Black Capped chickadees, 202 House wrens, 410 Purple Martins and 1212 Tree Swallows. Tree swallow fledgling numbers are slightly lower than last year's totals- the loss of 185 young tree swallows in June during the unusually heavy rains account for that change. **We are thankful for a total of 2,575 new native fledglings this year in our area! WOW!!!** It truly takes a village of volunteers to accomplish the wonderful results these numbers reflect!! Our skies are certainly more beautiful thanks to many dedicated bird lovers!

Check out the *Bluebird Program 2019* spreadsheet report for Black River Audubon Society for detailed trail and homeowner information. Please contact Penny Brandau with any revisions or corrections needed. Thanks!

Proposed changes on some of our trails located on Lorain County Metro Parks property were approved by Park management in October and we completed all changes before the first snow fell! Nestbox relocations, additions and improvements were done at Sandy Ridge, Carlisle Visitor Center, Crook Street, and Royal Oaks. LCCC and New Russia Township trails located on non-Park property also had improvements completed by October 31. The purchase of a new gas-powered pole driver by Black River Audubon Society made the work of driving poles into the ground MUCH easier!!



Pictured above: Fritz Brandau, Charlie Weil and Penny Brandau with new pole driver at Carlisle Visitor Center trail.

In October a new 8 box bluebird trail was installed on the Oberlin Prairie property on Hamilton Street. The kestrel program had recently installed a new kestrel box also in the Prairie. This beautiful historical property is becoming a significant preserve with a large prairie section, woodland, and plantings of native trees and plants. The Western Reserve Land Conservancy

purchased this property and is doing an amazing job of creating a natural area beneficial to both wildlife and present and future generations of nature lovers.

Pictured below: Putting in the new Oberlin Prairie bluebird trail: Fritz Brandau, Kate Pilacky, Diana Steele, Glenda and Marty Carbaugh. The bluebird that flew over our heads when we completed the work and were standing near the memorial tree for Dean Sheldon was a poignant moment for all of us. It felt like a blessing!



An opportunity to help young people learn more about bluebirds and native cavity nesters has emerged at the STEM school, Ranger High- Tech Academy, in North Ridgeville. We were asked by the 5th grade teachers there to partner with them in teaching their approximately 50 fifth graders about bluebirds. The students then created their own plans for building nestboxes based on their research and information we shared with them. On another day we visited the classroom to review the nestbox plans with the students and teachers. The young people will now create their boxes in 3D before actually making them from cedar wood. In the spring we will return to help them install the boxes in good habitat on their school grounds and some boxes will be placed in a nearby park. One of our bluebird trail monitors, Jim Jablonski, has volunteered to assist the students with the ongoing monitoring of the boxes on their school grounds. They are also learning about Nestwatch and data collection. What a wonderful

project! It enriches school learning in so many areas! Kudos to the teachers for teaching outside the box! 😊



There will be a need for additional monitors in the spring at the Hale Road Loop trail, the Oberlin Prairie trail and the CMA trail near Oberlin. If you are interested in becoming a trail monitor or trail helper please contact Penny Brandau at pennybrandau@gmail.com. There will be a new monitor's training class in late Jan/ early Feb for anyone interested in becoming a part of our trail monitors group. Sign up to join and learn how to monitor a trail!

Sadly, there has been vandalism on three of our trails this past year. At Findley Park someone stole 3 nestboxes (which had to be replaced by Black River Audubon Society). One box disappeared at Caley Park and vandals destroyed one nestbox at the Oberlin Meadow trail and pushed over several poles. It is always hard to understand why some people choose to damage or destroy something beautiful. Fortunately, there are many good people who go the extra mile to make the world better for all of us! May their tribe increase!

There are two upcoming conferences for bluebird lovers in early 2020. My husband and I plan to attend both of them and hope to see many of you there also. Stretch your wings!

The Ohio Bluebird Society will be hosting their annual conference at Ashland University on Saturday, Feb.29th, 2020. Information about the speakers and registration can be found on the OBS website at <https://ohiobluebirdsociety.org/conference/>

The North American Bluebird Society conference will be held March 11-15, 2020 in Kearney, Nebraska, hosted by Bluebirds Across America. This conference occurs at a time when thousands of sandhill cranes migrate through that area and there will be lots of opportunities to see amazing new things and hear well known speakers This sounds like a fascinating

conference! Check out the link for more registration and conference information:
<http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/conference/>

Pictured below are some photos of my father, Ford Smith's, birdbath. In the first photo the bluebird seems to be thinking about joining the other thrush in the bath, then in the second photo he hops in to join the robin. A few minutes later it had become a splash fest with bluebirds, robins and chickadees all enjoying the luxury of communal bathing! 😊



“Thanks to all of you for helping fill the skies with blue” - Bett Zimmerman, 2005

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Comments and suggestions always welcome!