

BRAS Bluebird Newsletter March 2019

Being on several bluebird trails in the past two weeks has made the words of English writer Charles Dickens (1812-70) especially personal. He wrote in *Great Expectations*, "It was one of those March Days when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold: when it is summer in the light and winter in the shade." It seems that many of our March days this year have fit that description!

Whether you are the bluebird landlord of only one backyard bluebird box or a bluebird trail monitor of 30 or more boxes, you know that personal experience with March weather is vital. It is vital for the bluebirds! The early spring checks and maintenance we do of bluebird boxes can make a life or death difference for bluebirds (or other native birds) which start nests as early as March and April. All nestboxes should be checked in early to mid-March. Nestbox roofs should be free of cracks which could leak rainwater onto eggs or vulnerable nestlings, the entrance holes should be smooth and 1 ½ inches in diameter, the floor drainage holes should be open. The poles should be upright, not leaning. Cracks in walls should be caulked or sealed with silicon and boxes in deplorable condition should be taken down and replaced with newer nestboxes. Predator guards should be in good condition and position.



The Kingston stovepipe predator guard pictured in the photo above on the left should not be touching the floor of the nestbox- it needs to be free to have a slight wobble. This nestbox has slid down the pole over the winter and needs to be repositioned back higher up on the pole.

The nestbox on the right has serious Downey woodpecker damage and will need to be replaced since the door has a new hole in the upper corner which is not repairable.

Pictured below on the left is a nestbox which had been abandoned and forgotten in a grown-up brushy area of a park- it was full of multiple levels of old, wet nesting material, the entrance hole was rough and enlarged, the roof had many large cracks in it and the pole was leaning badly and had no predator guard on it. This box and pole were removed entirely when discovered. The photo below on the right shows what you might discover if bluebirds have

been using your nestbox to roost in during the winter nights. It has a few grasses, several larger white and blackish colored feces and lots of seeds visible. Simply scrape out the debris with your spatula/putty knife and know that you might soon find bluebirds beginning to build a nest in that box! 😊



We found a nestbox on the bluebird trail at Royal Oaks which had amazingly escaped being totally demolished by a falling tree sometime this past winter. The tree had fallen all around the box and had clipped off the overhang of one side of the roof. We replaced the roof and the box is ready for occupancy again! Bluebird trails are always full of surprises, even in March!!



One of the responsibilities of every bluebird landlord is to make sure that the non-native and aggressive House Sparrow is not allowed to nest and fledge their young from boxes you are caring for. Here is a link to a very good Factsheet from the North American Bluebird Society regarding House Sparrows.

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

"It is the responsibility of every bluebird landlord to ensure that no House Sparrows fledge from their boxes. It is better to have no nestbox than to have one that fledges House Sparrows."

It is always sickening to find the results of House Sparrow attacks on our beautiful bluebirds or tree swallows. Last week we found a dead formerly beautiful female bluebird, decapitated in a nestbox due to a House Sparrow attack. I took a photo of her but decided that it was too grisly and disheartening to post... if you would like to see proof of the viciousness of these attacks, I will certainly be willing to share it with you. 😞 Please be a responsible bluebird landlord and monitor and use recommended passive and active methods to control House Sparrows. Bluebirds will always lose the battle when a House Sparrow takes over a nestbox unless you take steps to help them. Monitor your nestboxes at least every 4-7 days from April 1st- August.

March and February were also months which were busy with meetings and training classes in addition to trail maintenance checks. On Feb 10th we presented a Bluebird Basic class at Amherst Library for the DAR ladies and on Feb 12 were invited to speak to the North Ridgeville Garden Club about Bluebirds at the North Ridgeville Library. We totally enjoyed meeting the members of both of these clubs and appreciated their welcoming interest in bluebird conservation!



The training class for new volunteer bluebird trail monitors was held at our home in Amherst on March 10th. Welcome to Sandy Kantelas, Brenda Kammer and Marty and Glenda Carbaugh!!



On March 3, 2019 the spring meeting for all BRAS bluebird trail monitors was held at the Amherst Library. We ate (of course!), talked about bluebirds and trails and even had a “latest in protective dress” fashion show for trail monitors by Fritz Brandau. Slideshow photos of the year 2018 in review were enjoyed also. Restocking of needed trail monitoring notecards, sparrow spookers and informational handouts were also important parts of the meeting.



Following are photos of some of just a few of our trail monitors who have already been at work checking boxes:

Dianna Steele at Oberlin College Meadow trail, Tim McDaniel at Forest Hills Golf Course trail, Marty and Glenda Carbaugh at Sandy Ridge, Val and Fred Farschman at High Meadows trail Jeff and Joy Brown at Olsen Nature Preserve, Sanjay and Indira Palekar at Columbia trail Cheryl McCourt at Indian Hollow trail, and a male bluebird who appears happy with all this activity on his behalf!! 😊



Happy faces!



If you see a monitor on one of the 31 bluebird trails throughout our county this spring or summer please thank them for their dedication and knowledge- they are passionate about helping and have invested lots of time and energy and love into making this world more beautiful for all of us and our children and grandchildren.

If you are new to bluebirding or just want to refresh yourself on the common birds which might use a bluebird nestbox check out this link. It describes how to monitor a box as well as the characteristics of the nest, eggs and birds you might see. It has some good photos too!

<http://www.nbluebirdsociety.org/PDF/NABSFactsheetMonitoring.pdf>

One thing I always like to hear about is the dates of first eggs! Please email or call me when you find your first bluebird egg! Last year the first bluebird egg in our area was laid on March 21st at Diane Lehman's home in Amherst. That was EXTREMELY early for this area! In 2017 the first bluebird egg in our area was laid on March 31 at the home of Ford Smith in North Ridgeville. Who will see that first new blue egg in 2019? Please send me a note and photo if possible! It should be happening soon!! Its also fun to hear about the first tree swallow egg or any other native species which is using a bluebird box! Please let me know!

A recent Cornell Lab of Ornithology Nestwatch eNewsletter mentions a new study based on Ohio's Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows and sheds light on how future climate scenarios might impact nesting birds. The study included over 4,417 Nestwatch records from Ohio over a period of 16 years and examined how the timing of egg-laying overlaps with insect pest emergence in Ohio. It is great to know that even though our Black River Audubon Society group has only been submitting nesting records to Nestwatch for the past 8 years, our data has undoubtedly helped in research studies like this. You can read the Feb 2019 Nestwatch article by Robyn Bailey here: https://nestwatch.org/connect/blog/buckeye-birds-track-temperature-and-precipitation/?utm_source=Cornell+Lab+eNews&utm_campaign=bf5930797e-NestWatch+eNewsletter+Feb2019&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_47588b5758-bf5930797e-302303817. Interesting research!

There is always something new to see, discover or share when we are observing the amazing world around us! One of the reasons we love bluebirding so much is because there is always something new or some surprise every time we walk a trail.

Two days ago, my husband, Fritz, and I decided to check our kestrel box at LCCC since it had been almost two weeks since our last check. (Two weeks is the recommended period between kestrel nestbox checks. Bluebird boxes should be checked every 4-7 days) We were hoping that starlings WILL NOT take over the kestrel box as they did last year.

As we approached the LCCC meadow from the northwest we saw a bird sitting on one of the bluebirds nestboxes near the ball field. A quick check with binoculars confirmed that it was a female kestrel! We wondered why she wasn't on HER kestrel box but as we approached the kestrel box, we soon discovered that a pair of Eastern Bluebirds were happily surveying the LCCC meadow from the vantage point of the kestrel box! We knew others would also get a chuckle out of the story and might enjoy seeing the apparently mixed up house hunting birds! Fortunately, there was no evidence that the bluebirds are actually attempting to nest in the kestrel box at this point! We did see the male kestrel flying east of the kestrel box but he wasn't getting involved in property disputes at this time! LOL!



Bluebirds make me smile and I hope they brighten your days too in the coming months! I wish you the joy of bluebirds!

Newsletter and photos by Penny Brandau pennybrandau@gmail.com 440-670-3684

"His soft warble melts in the ear, as the snow is melting in the valleys around. The bluebird comes and with his warble drills the ice and sets free the rivers and ponds and frozen grounds...the leading edge of spring." Henry David Thoreau.