

BRAS Bluebird Newsletter Jan 2023

The months of November and December are usually quiet in our bluebird program. During those two months my husband and I focus on family times and enjoy the holidays! January however is the time we start to plan spring programs and meetings, order supplies, check trail inventory, and plan for spring maintenance on the trails- things which might need to be completed before those nests appear in late March and early April. The first day of spring 2023 is Monday March 20th. That is only a few weeks away! It will be here soon!

Like many of you, we have backyard bird feeders and love watching the variety of birds that visit. The Feederwatch program from Cornell Lab of Ornithology makes it fun to keep track of the different species and numbers of birds that come to our feeders. Entering data once a week is easy and interesting. If you also have birds that come to your feeders and you haven't tried it, you should check it out! <https://feederwatch.org/>

My sister had a thrill in late November when a ruby throated hummingbird showed up at her still blooming flowers! (Usually, hummingbirds are gone from our area by late September). She immediately put up a hummingbird feeder again in an attempt to help this late migrant on its way south. For 4 days she worried about the hummingbird and we went to the experts for advice on how to help this tiny bird survive the freezing temperatures we were experiencing at that time. A special nutrient rich food suggested by rehab expert Tim Jasinski of Lake Erie Nature and Science Center was ordered to use in the feeders. Several conversations were held with hummingbird expert Cathy Priebe. In an attempt to keep the hummingbird feeder nectar from freezing we used portable hand warmers taped to the bottom of the feeders and my sister changed out her feeders about every 4 hours during the day for warmer ones. On the morning of the fourth day the hummingbird was gone with the wind! We hope she found a warm place in the sun by that evening! What an experience!!



Right before Christmas 2022 our area experienced some brutally cold temperatures, snow and wind chills down to minus 35 degrees! It is a miracle to me that any of our familiar backyard birds survived such brutal conditions! Having a selection of seeds and high caloric suet probably helped them survive. The heated birdbath was also a valuable resource for them since every other water source was frozen over. We did observe some unusual behavior among the birds

during those windy bone-chilling days. Birds that normally jockey for position at the feeders were seen huddling side by side in an available sheltered area on the eastern side of a shed. More birds were seen than usual and the normally leisurely feeding became briefer trips to grab food before returning to any shelter they could find. The shed window flower box became a favorite gathering place for not only our bluebirds but also for a blue jay and pair of starlings.



Although Bluebirds do have a white eye ring, the ring which is seen on the bluebird in the lower left photo was created from frost and made the eyes appear eerily outlined. Two thrushes shared the empty Carolina wren nest box- an American robin sitting on the roof as an Eastern Bluebird perched in the entrance hole. In the spring we often see robins chasing bluebirds away from their territory but during this storm they tolerated each other in close quarters.

I think house finches act like “bluebird groupies” since they are so often found near bluebirds. The photo below shows 7 house finches and 7 bluebirds sheltering near each other. The photo below on the right shows a bluebird pair enjoying water from the heated birdbath even in the frigid weather of that dangerously cold storm! It never froze over!



Black oil sunflower seeds, safflower seeds, thistle seed (Niger seed) and shelled peanuts in a special peanut feeder are all foods found in our backyard feeders during the winter in addition to dried mealworms and bluebird nuggets which are provided in a special feeder for bluebirds. A food we make only during cold winter months is a homemade peanut & suet recipe created by Julie Zickafoose, well known artist, naturalist and Bird Watchers Digest contributor. It is too rich for summertime feeding though since it spoils easily in the heat of summer so take it down when spring arrives with warmer days. Julie's "Zick Dough" recipe is easy to make and is a real hit with woodpeckers, bluebirds and many other bird visitors. It can be pressed into suet block holders as pictured below or scattered on platform feeders for easy feeding. If it lands on the ground the birds will go after it there too! The recipe is shown below in case you want to try it.



Zick Dough
Julie Zickafoose's special suet recipe

Combine (in mixer if desired)
2 C. chick starter* (unmedicated)
2 C. quick oats
1 C. yellow cornmeal
1 C. flour

Melt together in microwave:
1 C. lard
1 C. peanut butter

*available at farm/feed stores

Slowly add liquid fats to dry ingredients while stirring or mixing on low until dough forms. If it's too gummy, add more flour and cornmeal until it's soft and crumbly. Serve as a treat in a small dish or dome feeder to protect from rain. Store in jars. Needs no refrigeration. Offer only in cold weather, as it's too rich for summer feeding. —JZ

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DIGEST

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Providing feeders and heated bird baths is helpful especially during the winter and early spring months when insects aren't readily available and seeds and berries on plants, bushes and trees may have been depleted or are ice covered. Planting native plants, shrubs and trees like serviceberries or crabapples on your property is good stewardship and will benefit many types of native wildlife. When planting, Go Native! 😊 Here are two links to find many recommended native plants beneficial to birds. <https://www.audubon.org/news/10-plants-bird-friendly-yard> or check out <https://ohiobluebirdsociety.org/about-bluebirds/gardening-for-bluebirds/>

While we are all waiting for spring to arrive you might want to attend one of the several upcoming programs or conferences related to bluebirds. They provide a chance to connect with other bluebird lovers and also to learn new methods and practices for bluebird conservation. Here is a list of a few recommended upcoming programs:

There will be a program called "Bluebirds 101" on Saturday Feb 25th at the Lorain County Library's Columbia branch location. This class will focus on how to choose the right bluebird habitat, what features to look for in a bluebird nest box and how to monitor your box. Bluebird predators and competitors will be discussed and there will be video of the family life of

bluebirds. Class size will be limited to 40 and pre-registration is requested by calling 440-670-3684 or 440-236-8751. If preferred, registration can be completed online at LorainPublicLibrary.org/events to reserve your spot. Click on the date of Feb 25th and then follow the prompts to fill out the registration form. My husband and I will be the speakers at this program.

The Ohio Bluebird Society will be having their yearly conference in person this year at Ashland University's John C. Myers Convocation Center on Saturday March 4, 2023 from 9am to 4:30 pm. Registration includes lunch but the deadline for registration is Feb 17. A link for more info about speakers and the registration form can be found at <https://ohiobluebirdsociety.org/conference/> This is a conference we highly recommend! We attend it regularly!

There will be a spring meeting for the volunteer Black River Audubon Society bluebird trail monitors on Saturday March 11th so if you are a monitor please mark your calendars for this important date. More info will be sent by email soon.

The Great Backyard Bird Count will be held this year from Feb 17- Feb 20. "Each February, for four days, the world comes together for the love of birds. Over these four days we invite people to spend time in their favorite places watching and counting as many birds as they can find and reporting them to us. These observations help scientist better understand global bird populations before one of their annual migrations." This event, sponsored by Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon and Birds Canada is an online citizen science project which can take as little as 15 minutes of time during those 4 days. It's a fun worthwhile project! Go to <https://www.birdcount.org/> for more information about this event.

In a few short weeks bluebirds and many other birds will begin claiming nestboxes and starting the age old ritual of nest building and egg laying. It is always thrilling to hear of the appearance of the first eggs in our area. In the meantime I would like to challenge you to take advantage of these final winter days by attending a bluebird event, joining a local or state bluebird group and picking up a pair of binoculars as you take some walks in nature. Enjoy the opportunities of today and prepare for the adventures of tomorrow!

"Through developing an attitude of responsibility toward others

We can begin to create the kinder, more compassionate world we all dream of."

Quote from His Holiness The Dalai Lama

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