

BRAS Bluebird Newsletter March 2022

Spring is here meteorologically and astronomically. Hope feels more present than in the past two years. A lot of that is probably due to the lifting of the heavy Covid restrictions and the lessening of deaths related to the virus. I don't know anyone who wasn't personally affected by the pandemic and of course some are still battling the effects of it. There is a new normal now.

It is so wonderful to see the return of migrating birds like tree swallows and the claiming of nestboxes by bluebirds. I am looking forward to hearing about the first bluebird egg in Lorain County in 2022. That has always been a sign to me that spring has truly arrived. Please send me your news and egg photo so I can list it in our next newsletter! We have had first eggs on March 28th for the past two years. What will be the date for our first bluebird egg in 2022?



Adele Straub is the bluebird trail monitor for Royal Oaks and she was thrilled to find an “almost complete” pine needle bluebird nest on March 21 during her trail check. She might be a top contender for that first egg this year! Who else is in the running?

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 cracks in the roof or walls 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, 3 inch putty spatula, 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. Ivory soap bars can be rubbed on box ceilings to deter wasps. Dry grasses in a bag or plastic coffee can are helpful to have on hand in case a nest change is required due to ants or blowfly infestation. March is the best time to collect those long dry grasses and save them in case they are needed in the weeks ahead. Avoid any with pesticides use.



Photo A



Photo B



Photo C



Photo 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).

On March 15 our Black River Audubon Society bluebird monitors had their spring kickoff meeting. It was great to get together again after two years of cancelled meetings!





We are very happy to welcome three new monitors to our trails. Bill Prescott will be monitoring Indian Hollow with the help of Dick Lee. Sharon Substanley will be taking over the trail at Olsen Nature Preserve (mentored by Penny and Fritz and also Bob Bement) and Marianne Hocking will be helping Glenda and Marty Carbaugh at Burrell House. New monitor from 2021 Joe Gensert is also returning to work with Charlie Weil at Carlisle Visitor Center trail. Welcome!!



Pictured above are Dick Lee and Bill Prescott on their first trail check this year at Indian Hollow. The photo above on the right shows experienced monitors Eugenia Bobo and Janet Demarinis checking out their new trail at Oberlin Preserve.



Marty Ackerman discovered a tree had fallen on one of the boxes at his trail at Westwood Cemetery during his early March trail check. He and Fritz replaced the box, pole and guard at this site. Monitor Diana Steele and our goldendoodle pup Izzie observed the box replacement!



The trail at Sherod Park is monitored by Brenda Kammer (pictured with her granddaughter) and Meg Ludwig. Some boxes were relocated there to make room for a new playground.

It has been a busy March already!

If you or someone you know might be interested in learning basic information about bluebirds there is a class coming up soon. On April 2 there will be a program called Bluebird Basics held at the North Ridgeville Library at 3 pm. It is open to the public but preregistration is requested due to class size limitations. This will be taught by Penny and Fritz Brandau and will focus on how to choose the right bluebird habitat, what features to look for when choosing a bluebird nest box and how to monitor your nestbox. We will also talk about bluebird predators and competitors and will show video of the family life of bluebirds. Register by calling 440-670-3684 or emailing Penny at pennybrandau@gmail.com

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. The nest should be reduced in size to approx. 1 inch high then 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 totally 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 onto the box or pole. Since mice can carry a potentially 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! 😊



I hope you have welcomed our native bluebirds into your life! The joy of seeing them raise a family successfully because of your involvement and help is immeasurable!

Wishing you bluebirds!

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