

## BRAS Bluebird Newsletter November 2021

The window between Thanksgiving and Christmas is usually full of many activities, but for me, bluebird work is not one of them! It is a time when most of the trail maintenance has been completed, data has been entered into Nestwatch and final reports have been sent to the Ohio Bluebird Society. Sparrow spookers line our basement corner, waiting for bright new streamers before spring arrives. I haven't started to plan meetings yet for the following year and the November newsletter is already done (hopefully) This is the time of year when I just enjoy the quiet extra cup of coffee as I watch for "our" bluebirds to visit us each morning. They come for the mealworms or suet breakfast or a drink of that never-frozen water in our heated birdbath. It seems they are often accompanied by their "groupies", the common house finches who shadow them at the feeders and bird baths. Sometimes they peer into their bluebird box or try out the Carolina Wren box just because it's there! They always make me smile.



Bluebirds might roost in a nestbox during a cold winter night but our box has been claimed by a female downy woodpecker again this winter so our bluebirds must be sheltering in an abandoned woodpecker hole or another protected area at night. Since bluebirds often stay in a family group throughout the winter there could be several bluebirds bedding down in a nestbox or natural cavity to keep warm. 😊



A favorite homemade suet recipe from Julie Zickafoose is pictured above along with a photo line-up of birds waiting their turn to dine on Zick Dough! Take a number! 😊

The End of Year Report is attached to this email. I'm sorry it is later than usual getting to you. My summer and fall were full of caring for my 94-year-old father, Ford Smith, before his death on October 26<sup>th</sup>. He was the person who started me on this bluebird journey and who gave us our first bluebird house many years ago. We shared bluebird stories through the years, I helped him with his house sparrow control when he couldn't do it any longer and he always enjoyed learning about and building a "better" feeder or nestbox. He loved the distinction of having the first bluebird egg in Lorain County again this year and always had binoculars by his lift chair to watch the many birds he fed in his back yard. He was caring, generous, funny, smart, creative and sometimes exasperatingly independent! He taught me so many life lessons and I am forever grateful for his love which was shown in so many ways. Pictured below are my dad's first eggs of 2021 (taken on 3/31/21) and a photo of my dad and me taken June 2020.



The 8-page End of Year Report attached to this emailed newsletter gives detailed information about nesting data on Black River Audubon's 31 bluebird trails (458 boxes) plus the 3 private trails that are also managed by three long term monitors (38 additional boxes). All of the detailed nesting activity from these BRAS and private trails has been entered into Cornell Lab of Ornithology's citizen science program website, Nestwatch. These nestings provide a huge wealth of data which is now available for scientific research and study. We entered information about 638 separate nesting attempts which produced 2939 eggs. Of those eggs there were 2366 that hatched and 2136 that fledged. The birds that nested in our boxes this year included bluebirds, tree swallows, house wrens, black capped chickadees and of course attempts by the non-native house sparrow (which are not permitted to fledge young from our boxes).

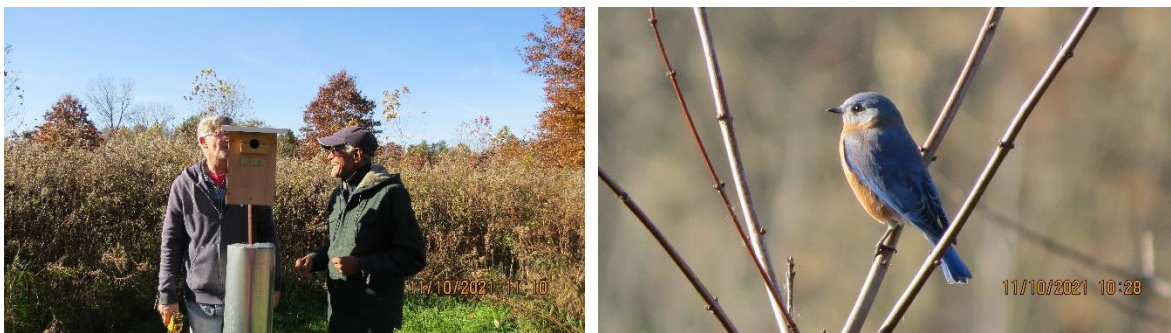
It is a huge undertaking to enter all of these nesting attempts into Nestwatch but there are some wonderful computer- literate and generous helpers who have made this possible. My deepest gratitude goes to Gina Swindell, Charlie Weil, Sandy Kantelas, Stephanie Bevin and Valerie Deptula for the countless hours they spent in September and October entering every detail of the weekly nestbox checks for each of the 496 boxes which are on the BRAS and private trails. They rock!! I have compared them to the fairy tale shoemaker's elves who helped each night complete work that needed to be done- they do it willingly and without fanfare. When I looked at our numbers on the Nestwatch webpage it was amazing to see the number of entries climb each day thanks to their work! Wow!



The End of Year Report also gives information about many private homeowners who have bluebird boxes on their property and who have shared their nesting data with us. I hope many of these private bluebird landlords are also entering their data into Nestwatch. It's fun and rewarding and educational.

The report's final page gives the total numbers of fledglings of all species from the trails and private homes. It is amazing to me to see that in 2021 there were 283 House wrens that fledged, (218 in 2020), 1521 tree swallows, (1268 in 2020), 38 black capped chickadees (None in 2020) and 719 eastern bluebirds (834 in 2020). We did lose many bluebird eggs and young chicks due to cold rainy weather in early May this year. Our total fledglings in 2021 were 2561 and in 2020 the total was 2320 birds. That is an incredible number of new native birds which were able to successfully nest and fledge from boxes managed by knowledgeable volunteers! It truly takes a village of volunteers but the reward is inestimable!

Every fall Black River Audubon Bluebird Program identifies trails which need some maintenance and improvements are completed usually before the snow flies. This year 40 new nestboxes were made to replace older worn boxes on many of the trails. You might see some of these new boxes at Hale Road, Bur Oak, Indian Hollow, Bacon Woods, Columbia, Findley, High Meadows or LCCC. Additionally, some nestboxes were relocated or even removed due to inactivity or predation issues like those at Crook St.



Pictured above, top row is Fritz and Penny Brandau at Bacon Woods with two new nestboxes. Middle row is Sanjay Palekar and Fritz Brandau at Columbia. A male bluebird watches from a nearby tree.

Pictured below are photos which show monitor Bob MacGillis putting up new boxes at Hale Road and monitor Gwyn Beil re-numbering some of her boxes after relocations at Bur Oak.





In November my husband Fritz and I took a one tank trip to visit a place called “the Bluebird Farm” in Carroll County, Ohio. The county seat of Carroll County is the town of Carrollton -that is where the Bluebird Farm is located.



It was a quiet midweek day when we visited. The restaurant was closed and there were no crowds but we enjoyed a hike around the grounds and followed some of the painted bluebird trail markers. 😊 The amphitheater and covered bridge are probably well used on warm summer days. I was happy to see that their bluebird boxes were safely protected by Kingston stovepipe predator guards! The Bluebird Farm is an older property with some aging areas but was still interesting and peaceful. We hope to return on a warm summer day to listen to a concert in the amphitheater and scan for nesting bluebirds!

There are a few things to look forward to in the months ahead (in addition to the holidays) .

The December Black River Audubon meeting will be held with host and naturalist extraordinaire Tim Fairweather on December 7 from 7pm -8:30 pm at Sandy Ridge Reservation in North Ridgeville. Come prepared to join in with a bird trivia game and enjoy a photo show of some highlights of Sandy Ridge from the past couple of years. It's free, no registration required.

We will be looking for a new monitor for the 12 box bluebird trail at Indian Hollow Metro Park in Grafton in the spring. If you are interested please contact me by email. Training and materials will be provided.

The Ohio Bluebird Society will be hosting their yearly conference virtually again this year due to Covid concerns. You can still watch some of the presentations from last year's conference on the OBS website at <https://ohiobluebirdsociety.org/conference/>. Lots of good information on the website and more to come in 2022. The date for the 2022 conference will be March 5<sup>th</sup>.

A very good article about supplemental feeding of birds can be found at <https://nestwatch.org/connect/blog/does-supplemental-feeding-help-nesting-birds/> It's a Nestwatch article which sought to answer the question of how feeding wild birds impacts their reproductive success. Our Nestwatch entries help provide data for these kinds of studies.



My Christmas wish for each of you is that you would find joy in the simple things: health, family, friends and a meaningful way to help others ( including our beloved bluebirds 😊 )

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