

BRAS Bluebird Newsletter October/November 2022

It has been a **very** busy fall in the Black River Audubon Bluebird Program and so this newsletter is later than usual in getting to you. So sorry! I hope you enjoy hearing about some of the activities and events which have kept us busy and seeing photos of some of them!

Late bird nestings, an end-of-season trail monitor meeting, trail maintenance projects (which included removing one trail, adding another new trail, relocating many boxes, replacing many old boxes with new ones and generally just preparing for winter) have been some visible projects. Other behind the scenes but labor-intensive work was the entering of literally hundreds and hundreds of nesting attempts into the Cornell Lab of Ornithology Nestwatch program website by a team of dedicated computer volunteers, compiling a comprehensive end of year spreadsheet of all trail and many private bluebird landlord nesting results for 2022 and preparing newsletter updates and reports. Without the tireless work and help of many dedicated volunteers these needed tasks could not have been accomplished. "Thank you" seems too insignificant to convey how much we appreciate the help which has been given!



The end of July had continued bluebird fledglings which kept the parents busy! In August some bluebirds decided to squeeze in one more nesting and so we had our latest fledgling dates on record with two trails fledging bluebirds into September! These were remarkably late for our program! Sharon Substanley of Olsen and Diane Lehman of Bacon House were still checking bluebird boxes in early September! Sharon actually had two bluebird nestings which fledged around Sept 4th and Sept 6th and Diane Lehman's fledged around Sept. 14th! Wow! That's late!



On September 11th we held our end-of-season bluebird trail monitors meeting. This year it was held at Beaver Creek Park at an outdoor pavilion and we enjoyed a great potluck dinner together before talking about our trails and bluebirds! We have missed the comradery of these meetings because of Covid so it was wonderful to talk together again face to face! Summary sheets of each trail were collected along with the weekly trails notes which are entered into Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Nestwatch program. Suggestions for needed trail repairs and maintenance were put on a large worksheet to be completed this fall, and ideas for solutions to some of this year's trail challenges were explored. No one went home hungry either! 😊



One of the needed trail maintenance projects included removing a 12-box trail at Oberlin College. The chance for bluebirds or even tree swallows to successfully nest there has become poor due to increasingly heavy house wren competition in almost every box. The habitat is definitely wren friendly. Thankfully, permission was given by Oberlin College to allow us to drive our pickup truck on the trail to load the boxes, poles and predator guards and we had a great group of bluebird trail volunteers who met to help take down the boxes on Sept 30.

Pictured in the first photo on the following page is Sanjay Palekar and Marty Ackerman removing a box from its pole. The photo on the right shows the workers that day: Fritz Brandau,

Sanjay Palekar, Charlie Weil, Marc Amos and Marty Ackerman. Even though each of these men manage trails at other locations they readily showed up to help out where needed that day!



Adding a new trail in the Grafton area was fun! Charlie Weil suggested that he would like to see a few boxes along the beginning of the Wayne Shipman Memorial trail at Indian Hollow. After we contacted the city of Grafton and received their generous approval the new 6 box trail was installed on Sept 29th with the help of Charlie Weil and Sanjay Palekar. It will be exciting to see what birds choose to nest in these new boxes next year!



Along with adding and removing trails there was quite a bit of individual box maintenance done this fall. Leaning poles due to lawnmower strikes had to be straightened. (Example: New Russia Township Park pictured). Some with too much damage needed replaced.



Some trails had new boxes put up to replace old worn ones and also had some relocated to better locations. LCCC trail was one of these which had several new replacement boxes put up. Monitors Kit Fleming and Rick Lockhart also helped relocate some others in order to move them closer to the mown walking areas. Using a pole driver to put nestbox poles in the ground is hard work!



Two of our monitors, Mike Smith and Bob MacGillis, relocated some boxes on their trails after nesting season as part of their trail management. We were able to walk with them later to see the work they had done and to record the new Nestwatch data for next year. This data includes the GPS location of each box, nestbox floor height from the ground, direction the box faces, habitat within three feet and habitat within 100 yards, size of the box entrance hole and any predator guards used.

Mike Smith manages the 23-box trail at North Equestrian Center but also has a privately owned 31-box trail on his property on West Road. He showed us some relocated boxes and also a box in a pine grove that was occupied by a flying squirrel! She had enlarged the entrance hole and made a cozy nest inside the box! Those large black eyes!!



Bob MacGillis manages two trails also for Black River Audubon Society. Both of those are larger trails too, the 30-box trail at Wellington and the 26-box trail at Hale Road. It takes a serious

commitment of time and energy each week for these two experienced monitors to walk their trails. Bob is pictured at Hale Road in the left photo and at Wellington in the right photo.



A female bluebird was seen on a snag as we passed and a muskrat lazily swam nearby! 😊

Preparing for winter involves reassessing the past nesting activity of nestboxes, the location and condition of the boxes and any needed repairs or relocations. In some cases it also involves closing off entrance holes so that non-native house sparrows don't roost in boxes during the winter. In areas where there are significant house sparrow populations it can help to cover the entrance holes until April 1st so that bluebirds have a fairer opportunity of claiming boxes. We also trap house sparrows all year long at our home in order to keep the HOSP population down. Our goldendoodle pup, Izzie, helps inform us anytime we have a house sparrow in the trap!



Bill Prescott (monitor of Indian Hollow with Dick Lee) is pictured with his granddaughter in the photo below. The photo on the right below shows monitor Bob Bement (Dalton Park, Wakeman) and potential new bluebird landlord Betty Cunningham. Love these new faces!



There are no photos to show the work which was done this fall by some invaluable computer savvy volunteers! However, their work of entering information on hundreds and hundreds of nesting attempts into Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Nestwatch program took all of September and most of October to complete.

When they were finished and the last trail info had been recorded it was impressive to realize incredibly detailed data had been made available from our bluebird program for future scientific studies done by Cornell. The entries were for 659 actual nesting attempts, 2914 eggs laid, 2503 total young and 2278 total fledglings. All of the thirty trails (451 boxes) from Black River Audubon bluebird program were entered into Nestwatch plus 2 private trails (36 boxes) plus several private bluebird landlords who submitted their detailed nesting information to us. That is invaluable data! Woohoo! *It is impossible to adequately thank those who worked long hours entering nesting data into Nestwatch but I would like to personally recognize Gina Swindell, Megan Griffith, Valerie Deptula, Charlie Weil, Sandy Kantelas and Stephanie Bevan for their cheerful and dedicated help! Thank you! Thank you!!*

I submit an end of year report spreadsheet every year which lists fledgling information from all of our individual trails plus fledgling reports from many private bluebird box landlords in our area. This spreadsheet is posted on the website of the Black River Audubon Society and the numbers from this fledgling report were also submitted to the Ohio Bluebird Society for their yearly state-wide fledgling count.

The total native cavity nesting fledgling count this year summarized in my spreadsheet shows that 849 eastern bluebirds, 13 black capped chickadees, 276 house wrens, 1514 tree swallows, 3 great crested flycatchers, and 30 barn swallows fledged in our area. (Most were from trails, many were from private homes). That makes 2685 total fledglings reported within the Bluebird Program. It also noted information from Purple Martin coordinator, John Ryan, who reported 478 purple martin fledglings within his program. A LOT of native birds!! 😊😊😊

It truly takes a village to have this kind of successful nesting program! The work done this year has yielded an incredible harvest of native birds! It is an investment in the future as well as a joy for today. May the joy of bluebirds remain with you in the months and years ahead!



"The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago.

The second best time is now..."

Chinese proverb

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