

Autumn 2021



BLUEBIRD NOTES

North Carolina
BLUEBIRD
SOCIETY

HELLO, BLUEBIRD FRIENDS. WELCOME TO FALL 2021.



Bluebird Greetings

Photos courtesy of Russ Bauman, Buncombe County Coordinator

North Carolina Bluebird Society (NCBS) Mission Statement

Our goal is to support activities that foster the resurgence of bluebirds and other cavity-nesting birds in our home areas. NCBS is an affiliate member of the North American Bluebird Society (NABS). www.ncbluebird.org

President's Message Marti & Bill will take turns providing your report in alternating issues. See page 3 from Bill this time.

Nest Box Data Monitoring Your 2021 survey data is due by November 15, 2021. Form...Page 4;Instructions...Page 13.

2022 Spring Meeting Mark your calendars for May 14, 2022 at Sylvan Bird Park in Scotland Neck, NC. See more on Page 15.

Newsletter Highlights:

- Oscar's Report of the Knightdale Nestbox Activity...Page 5.
- Managing House Wrens...Pages 6-7.
- Eastern Bluebird Rescue Nest Boxes...Pages 8-9.
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Thanks for all you do to help our bluebirds and other songbirds. Best Wishes for a Happy Autumn 2021.

Marti Kane & Bill Zitek

Bluebird Notes

Vol. 36 Issue III

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Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Well, here we are folks—at the end of another bluebird nesting season. It can be either a relief or a let down to have reached this time of year; a relief because the late season heat can wear you down; or a let down because another year of getting out in the field and following the progress of your nest box inhabitants is history and besides, all your bluebird families have left. Those nest boxes that we visited in our weekly monitoring now sit silently, awaiting another spring.

Let's think about this season. What have we learned? When we are out in the field monitoring our nest boxes, we have the unique opportunity to observe and come to understand so much of the natural world we move through. Not many people have this chance. To quote one of our members: "The new monitors, though long time birders, have never been this close to eggs, nests and young before and this experience has given them a whole new perspective on birds..."

While you were monitoring this year, did you see another species using one of your nest boxes? I hope that you will record its nesting activity just as you do for the bluebird and then submit this to our year-end report. This helps us all to track the activity of other cavity nesting birds, to share, and learn from the data.

The purpose of the North Carolina Bluebird Society is to gather the Bluebird community together in activities which will promote knowledge about and be beneficial to the Eastern Bluebird and other cavity nesting birds. Over the years those who have put up and monitored nest boxes have carried out one of the most successful bird conservation projects ever undertaken; bought and paid for by you and people who have gone before you. You are the key to the success of this organization and the help bluebirds and other feathered friends greatly need.



The North Carolina Bluebird Society (NCBS) has members in 50 of our counties who have volunteered to be County Coordinators across the state, which reaches from western-most Cherokee County to the Ocean. You can find them listed in each newsletter and on our website, nbluebird.org. These folks serve to help you and the public with concerns and questions. Some counties do not currently have a County Coordinator. If you don't see a representative in your county, consider adding your name to the list to help with the mission of NCBS in your area. You will have back up from the NCBS officers to help solve problems, receiving the information you need and even a convenient way to give programs.

We are pleased to announce three new County Coordinators. Bennie Catoe joined as the Alamance contact recently and has already provided a report regarding nest box upgrades in her county (page 12). Representing New Hanover County we have Charles Owens from Wilmington, NC. And from Franklin County we have Marti Kane of Youngsville, who also serves on our NCBS Presidents team. Welcome aboard!

Finally, speaking of members who have contributed greatly to the North Carolina Bluebird Society and bluebird conservation, we have just learned that Jim Jochum, Past President and more recently Guilford County Coordinator, passed away. Active almost up to the day of his death, Jim will be missed but his contributions live on. There will be more about Jim in the next *Bluebird Notes* edition.

Marti Kane and I thank you all for the efforts you have put forth for the bluebirds this season. We also are happy to report plans for the next **Annual Meeting** are in motion for **May 14, 2022!** See more details on page 15 and in the winter newsletter. Have a great fall!

Bill Zitek, President Team, Cary

2021 NEST BOX SURVEY DATA FORM

Name(s): _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Nest Box/Trail Location (county, city, state) _____

Total number of nest boxes monitored at this site: _____

Field Record Observation Notes Summary

Date of first egg laid (start of season); also indicate species _____

Total number of nest boxes monitored at this site _____

Total number of **bluebird** eggs laid _____

Total number of **bluebird** eggs hatched _____

Total number of **bluebird** fledglings _____

For Other Cavity Nesters, please break out by species. *Example for eggs laid: Carolina Chickadee – 5; Brown-headed Nuthatch – 3; House Wren – 8; Carolina Wren – 4; Unknown – 2;*

Total number of **other cavity nester** eggs laid _____

Total number of **other cavity nester** eggs hatched _____

Total number of **other cavity nester** fledglings _____

Date of end of season's last fledglings; also indicate species _____

Comments: _____

Use additional sheets of paper if necessary. Please use a separate data form for each site you monitor. Thank you so much for monitoring and reporting the data to help track bluebirds and other cavity nesters!

Please return by November 15, 2021 via email or postal address, below. *If you use email, please confirm with Kari that your data was received!*

Kari Gould, NCBS Board of Directors, 702 Hillandale Lane, Garner, NC 27529

Email: nestdata@ncbluebird.org

Telephone number for questions: (919) 349-3283

THE VIEW FROM OSCAR'S WINDOWS

Knightsdale Songbird Activity Report by Oscar, a Bird-Friendly Feline

Fall Greetings, Everyone. I am following up on the report I gave in the Summer 2021 Newsletter. I am an indoor kitty who spends a lot of time looking out my windows. My caretaker/staff is Glenda Ryan (your Webmaster/Newsletter Editor). She got her first nestbox in March of this year. It has added to enjoyment for us both. I am sharing her learning experience and my observations to also help you. See back issues of *Bluebird Notes* at ncbluebird.org/online-newsletters in case you missed part 1 of my story. We were told we have seen more action in our little nest box in one year than many people see in 3 or more years. We had a clutch of chickadees fledge and then bluebirds moved in. Our last report concluded with the excitement of 5 bluebird eggs in the nest box.



We continued to see the Mama & Daddy Bluebirds in a flurry of activity in early June. They were seen flitting about the box and the trees nearby. Glenda was able to get some nice bluebird snapshots on Thursday, June 3, including the one to the left with both Mama & Papa on the nest box. Then on Saturday, June 5, we noticed a small brown bird intruding on the nest box several times. Glenda sent photos to President Team, Marti & Bill, who confirmed it was a House Wren.

Per NABS (North American Bluebird Society) website (nabluebirdsociety.org): House Wrens are known to enter a nestbox, damage eggs and toss eggs out onto the ground. Unfortunately, this situation did happen to our nest box. By the time Glenda checked, there were broken blue shells on the ground and no bluebird eggs left.

Marti Kane, President Team, stopped by to check the nest box on Sunday, June 6. She thought she saw an inner lining (made by female) inside papa House Wren's stick pile in the nest box. House Wrens are native birds and are federally protected. She advised that if a stick pile in a bluebird box has an inner lining with grasses, feathers or other soft materials, she leaves it in place. This means the box is occupied by a pair of House Wrens. She explained that the female will lay 5-8 eggs with lots of tiny reddish or cinnamon-colored dots, concentrated on the larger end of egg. After she lays her clutch, it will take about 13 days for them to hatch. After hatch, usually about 17 more days to fledge.



The wren nest was left in place and monitored. When Glenda reported two small pinkish eggs Friday evening June 11, that sounded like wren eggs to Marti. Six pink eggs were seen Tuesday, June 15. On June 20 the nest had seven pink eggs. On June 28, tiny baby birds were seen squirming around the nest. They continued to get bigger and left the nest on July 14 or 15. Per Marti's calculations, that was their expected fledge time. No indication of a predator was seen, so it is assumed they flew off on schedule.

I hope sharing our nest box learning experience has also helped you. I will say again that I am grateful I have a home to stay safe inside. I have a great window view to watch birds and nature. Don't forget to send in your nest data report by November 15. We are sending in our first one this year. See form on page 4 and instructions on page 13. Oh, and mark your calendars for May 14, 2022 if you want to attend the next Spring Conference. A registration form will be available in the winter newsletter and on ncbluebird.org.

Sending Good Wishes your way for an Awesome Autumn and Happy Thanksgiving. Learn more about me at felinegreetings.com. Glenda's website can be seen at websitebloom.com.

A Tabby named Oscar, Knightsdale / photos & article assistance by Glenda Ryan

HOUSE WRENS: GREMLINS ON THE BLUEBIRD TRAIL

Oscar's and Glenda's experience with House Wrens is a common one. (See related article on page 5). The following description from the *All About Birds* website of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology says it all: "A House Wren weighs about as much as two quarters, but it's a fierce competitor for nest holes. Wrens will harass and peck at much larger birds, sometimes dragging eggs and young out of a nest site they want – even occasionally killing adult birds. In some areas they are **the main source of nest failure** for bluebirds, Tree Swallows, Prothonotary Warblers, and chickadees." House Wrens have also been known to destroy the eggs of open-nesting birds in addition to the eggs of cavity nesters. They can be very aggressive, especially in the early part of the nesting season, April to May.

House **Wrens**, unlike House **Sparrows**, are *native* birds and are protected by our country's Migratory Bird Treaty Act. In our role as nest box monitors, we try to follow the law and have a code of ethics to do no harm to any native birds. So, even if we'd like to "get rid of" House Wrens, they are *native* cavity nesters. The best we can do is try to manage them and discourage their activities.

Learn to identify the House Wren. Do not confuse the House Wren with the Carolina Wren. The Carolina Wren is larger, with rusty-brown plumage and a prominent white stripe above its eye. The House Wren does not have the white eye-stripe, and is more of a grayish-brown with faint barring on the wings and tail. Their songs are different and their nest materials are different. House Wrens use mostly twigs while Carolina Wrens use dried leaves, grasses, moss, and fur. Unlike the House Wren, the Carolina Wren does *not* destroy the eggs or young of other species.



House Wren

Photos courtesy of the
Wake Audubon Society.

Check out their website at
wakeaudubon.org



Carolina Wren

Be aware of seasonal patterns. The House Wrens nesting in Canada and the northern United States migrate south for the winter. More studies need to be done to determine whether the individuals that nest in our state migrate also. My casual observation is that "our" House Wrens do migrate. I don't see many around during the winter and I suspect that most of the ones I do see at that time are migrants from further north. I also notice that the House Wrens suddenly appear in April on their breeding grounds here. This year, the wrens seemed to arrive early. At Durant Nature Preserve (Raleigh), I observed that a House Wren had destroyed all the Carolina Chickadee eggs in one of the nest boxes by April 6. On April 14, also at Durant, I found a bluebird nest with an egg pecked by a House Wren. I am always listening for the song of the House Wren, but this year, I had *not* heard one singing at Durant before the damage was done.

Watch for House Wren signs. So if you don't always hear a House Wren, how do you know they are present in your backyard or on your bluebird trail? Monitor your boxes closely. Look for twigs in your nest box. No other cavity nester in our area uses lots of twigs to make a nest. Look for damaged or missing eggs. Usually, you will find eggs with peck holes in the nest or on the ground below the box, but not always. The *Sialis.org* website has a short video that shows how a House Wren can peck an egg and remove pieces of it until the egg has "disappeared." If you observe missing eggs on one nest check, and start finding twigs in the box on your next check, you know that a House Wren was the culprit and not a rat snake.

Remove dummy nests. The male House Wren will often fill several nest boxes on your bluebird trail with sticks. These are called “dummy nests.” The female House Wren will choose one of these nest sites, rearrange the sticks, and make a small nest cup of grasses and feathers, usually toward the back of the pile. Then she will begin laying her 4-8 eggs. Here’s where nest watchers can do some management.

Don’t disturb an *active* House Wren nest that has the inner nest cup. However, if you find a “dummy nest” made by the male (lacking the inner nest cup), remove the sticks and scatter them widely. You may have to do this more than once until the male gives up on the box. This can “backfire” as the House Wren may give up on that box, only to attack a nearby active box. Or, the female may make a small nest cup of grasses with no sticks and lay her eggs in that. I have also observed a nest box where the female House Wren laid her eggs directly in a bluebird nest without adding any of her own nesting material.

Place nest boxes in open areas. Some experts recommend that since the House Wrens do not like to fly across open areas of greater than 200 feet, you should locate your bluebird boxes out in the open well away from shrubs or brush. That’s OK if you have a bluebird trail in open farmland or on a golf course, but most of the parks and backyards where I work don’t fit that description. At Durant, I even tried placing boxes in areas of the park where House Wrens had not been seen before. That didn’t work; the wrens found my chickadee boxes anyway and destroyed all the eggs. Not one chickadee box was spared from House Wren attacks this year, no matter where I placed the box in that 230-acre park! When it comes right down to it, not all locations are suitable for a bluebird trail and you may be doing more harm than good by increasing House Wren populations.

Use a wren guard. A wren guard shields the entrance hole so that the House Wren cannot see the chickadees or bluebirds coming and going from their box. The *Sialis.org* website has extensive information about the House Wren and includes plans for making a wren guard. Bernie Daniel, the President of the North American Bluebird Society, makes his wren guard from an old milk jug. (See his photos below).

I also found a YouTube video from Cavity Nesters that shows how to make a cardboard wren guard, which can be found at the following link: <https://youtu.be/lldXuOffv04>.

If you use a wren guard, you have to monitor your nest box closely to know when to put the guard on, and when to take it off (so young can fledge successfully). That’s feasible for a backyard nest box, but hard to do if you’ve got a bluebird trail.

Good luck trying to manage these annoying little gremlins!

Please share with our editor any methods you have used at home or on your bluebird trails to discourage House Wrens and protect bluebirds and other native cavity nesters. We will print your suggestions in an upcoming newsletter.

Marti Kane, President Team, Youngsville



BLUEBIRDS & NEST BOXES

Bluebirds and Boxes – Eastern Bluebird Rescue Group Box gets my Vote

Written by John E. Allen, Senior Member, NC Bluebird Society
allenriverford@mi-connection.com

Introduction

Twelve years ago, my grandson requested help with his Boy Scout Eagle Project: To Establish a Bluebird Trail. The project required a mentor too. Soon, we discovered Dr. Mark Stanback of Davidson College. He has published over 50 articles of research related to bluebirds and collects data from 1,000+ boxes. We observed one of his trails at River Run Golf and Country Club.

Eastern Bluebird Rescue Box

Dr. Stanback encouraged us to use a box manufactured by the Eastern Bluebird Rescue Group. Dr. Stanback indicated the increased dimensions of the box provides additional space. This results in more bluebirds fledging as compared to a traditional box of smaller dimensions. My data reflected more eggs and juveniles fledging too.

Boxes can be ordered and shipped using their website: <http://www.easternbluebirdrescue.org/order.htm>. The cost is \$29.95 per box (includes shipping). Or, you can drive to their facility in Warrenton and purchase a box for just \$10 each. Call or email them first. The North Carolina State Employees Credit Union (SECU) was also selling these boxes for \$10 *before* the COVID epidemic. We hope that SECU will start selling the boxes again soon. **Note:** You or someone you know has to be an SECU member to buy a box through SECU.

The Eastern Bluebird Rescue Group box is made of pine wood. It is not as durable as cypress, cedar and oak. However, if the box is prepared for the various weather elements, it is excellent. A Google search for this article indicates pine has to be treated or protected by some kind of wood preserver. In a recent conversation with our Past President Ken Kernodle, I like his idea of using a product like a water sealer instead of paint. His idea corresponds with the literature of how to preserve pine wood for the outdoors and is easy to use. This product could be taken into the field for maintenance too.

Editor's Note: The North American Bluebird Society (NABS) recommends only nontoxic products be used on nest boxes to increase water resistance; e.g., water-based latex paint, raw linseed oil or Thompson's Water Seal. See their factsheet called "Nestbox Recommendations," which you can download from their website: nabluebirdsociety.org.

Make sure you do NOT paint or water seal the inside of a nest box. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology recommends that if you are going to paint or stain the roof and/or the exterior walls, do so in the fall when the fumes will have time to dissipate before the birds occupy the nest box in spring. More information here: <https://nestwatch.org/connect/news/to-paint-or-not-to-paint/>

The Problem We Had

Although we applied linseed oil to each box, the tops of most boxes cracked, split, or rotted. It appears moisture was absorbed by the pine wood where the grain of the wood was exposed. This exposure was created by cutting the pine wood planks into various dimensions before assembly. It appears ultraviolet light from the sun was a major issue too.

Corrective Action Process

First, boxes with damaged tops were caulked or replaced. (*NABS recommends the use of an exterior-grade silicone or a latex caulk for this purpose.*) Second, sheet metal or vinyl was installed on the top of the box. We discovered vinyl was safer, easier to cut and protected the top of the box. A liberal amount of caulk was used to secure the metal or vinyl to the top. The vinyl or metal was cut to overhang one inch over the edge. The tops were painted a light color to reflect heat and camouflage the box into the topography.

Editor's Note: NABS recommends that the roof/top should overhang the box by at least two inches on all sides, with an overhang of 3-5 inches over the front side (entrance hole), if possible. If you add a top like Mr. Allen suggests, you can extend the roof of the standard Eastern Bluebird Rescue Box to the NABS recommended dimensions. Great idea!

Box and Excluder (Predator Guard)

Bluebirders have numerous methods for attaching and placing boxes in the field. I attach the box and excluder to a 5-foot long, 1-inch diameter EMT electrical aluminum pipe. The ground pipe is a ¾ inch diameter EMT electrical aluminum pipe, which is cut to a length of 40 inches. It is driven perpendicular with a *rubber hammer* into the ground about 18 inches. The 1 inch pipe with box and excluder slides easily onto the ¾ inch pipe. It secures the box in an excellent manner. Using other hammers will make the ¾ inch pipe a one inch pipe. The aluminum pipe is flexible and easy to adjust by pushing from the top of the box in the direction of correction. I use a level.

Editor's Note: NABS recommends that your box be mounted so that the entrance hole is at least five feet above the ground. Depending on how you mount your box to the pole (with either a top or side mount), you may need an EMT pipe that is longer than 5 feet to ensure the proper height above the ground.

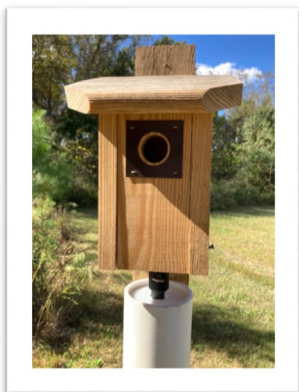
Originally, the excluder (predator guard) was fabricated from 6-inch stove pipe. This was intense labor. However, making stove pipe excluders with a grandson is PRICELESS! Since I do not have grandson help anymore, I purchase squirrel excluders. The squirrel excluder can be found in the bird seed department. The squirrel excluder is a five minute process. Put a 1 inch EMT bracket on the pipe below where the box will be attached. Slide the pipe through the excluder hole....DONE. Cost is \$17.00.

Editor's Note: A 6-inch diameter stove pipe or a commercial squirrel baffle may not be sufficient to keep raccoons or large snakes from climbing the pole. NABS recommends a stove pipe of at least eight inches in diameter, or a metal cone of at least three feet in diameter. Please see the NABS factsheet called "Predator Control," which you can download from their website: nabluebirdsociety.org.

Some Conclusions and Musings

The trail has been a wonderful and rewarding life experience. After completion of the Eagle Scout Project, I got "bluebird fever." Therefore, I inherited the trail after he went to college. It expanded to 30 boxes. Today, because of health issues, it has declined to 16 boxes with easy access, and with another bluebird enthusiast caring for the others. I have attempted to place all my boxes in a location with partial shade and concealed from public view. My worst predators have been malicious individuals destroying the boxes. Predators: People 5, Black Bear 1, Coons 0, Snakes 0, Squirrels 0.

My experience with the Eastern Bluebird Rescue Group Box has been extensive. The box produces more birds and is easy to maintain if properly prepared for the field. The cost of this box, excluder, pipes and other materials is approximately \$35.00. *(The cost depends on the type of excluder or predator guard that you decide to use and whether you purchase a box directly from the factory or have it shipped.)* Have fun with your Eastern Bluebird Rescue box. It fledges more bluebirds!



Examples of Credit Union Nest Boxes

Photo of nest box on the left courtesy of Marti Kane from Turnipseed Nature Preserve, Wendell, NC

Nest box on the the right picture was snapped by Glenda Ryan at Mordecai Historic Park in Raleigh, NC



SNAKE PREDATION IN NEST BOXES

Refuting the Myth of the 5/8 inch Grounding Rod

When I erected my first bluebird box, the prevailing wisdom was that it should be mounted on a 5/8" copper grounding rod. In theory, this small diameter pole would deter snakes from climbing up into the box. In fact, one day, to my shock and dismay, I witnessed a six-foot-long black rat snake in the box (see photo). Note the tail of the snake is wrapped around the grounding rod. The tree in the photo is at least three feet from the box. A couple of days later, not having seen the snake for a while, I decided it would be safe to open the box.



Surprisingly, the snake was still coiled up in the box digesting my precious birds. I persuaded the snake to depart by gently using a hoe. The snake fell to the ground and immediately went straight up the pine tree nearby. In spite of my addition of an inverted funnel over the grounding rod to "snake proof" the box, there were no more nestlings in that box for the remainder of that year and the following year. I am convinced that, to the glory of God, the birds are somehow able to communicate with each other or sense that a box has a bad history. **The moral of this story is don't underestimate the ability of a snake as a predator.** The bluebirds need all the help we can provide in finding a safe nesting site.

Bill Highsmith, Nash County

Five Quick Tips to Keep (Most) Rat Snakes out of Your Boxes

1. **Always put your box on a pole, not a tree or wooden post.** All rat snakes are excellent tree climbers and wood is the easiest thing for them to climb. However, as Bill found out, a pole alone will *not* do the job. Not even a greased pole!
2. **Use a predator guard.** Remember the old Bluebirder's motto: "If you don't protect the pole, a snake will get into the hole." The North American Bluebird Society recommends a stove pipe baffle of at least *eight inches* in diameter, or a cone baffle of at least *three feet* in diameter. Even these large baffles are *not* effective against snakes more than five feet long such as Bill's visitor. Additional guards are needed. (More on that in an upcoming newsletter.)
3. **Mount your box so the entrance hole is at least five (5) feet from the ground. (NABS recommendation)** If your box is mounted lower than five feet, your birds are in danger from large snakes (more than five feet in length) as well as from mammals that can jump into the air, such as foxes and free-roaming cats.
4. **Do not place your box directly under a tree or shrub, or within five (5) feet of a climbable object.** I have seen rat snakes drop more than 15 feet from a tree branch onto the ground (or onto your box) with ease. A large snake (six feet) might be able to extend two-thirds of its body (four feet) into the air. Therefore, make sure your box is at least five feet away from a post, shrub, fence or other climbable object.
5. **Keep grass or ground cover very short within a six-foot radius (or more) of the nest box.** Don't give the rat snake any cover in which to hide! Mow or cut grasses and other plants regularly and do not allow them to grow up around the pole or box. I always carry grass clippers with me when I check my bluebird trails. Place sand around the base of the pole if possible.

During the warmer months, rat snakes do much of their hunting at night.. Most of the larger rat snakes do not curl up in a box the way Bill's rat snake did. A big snake will wrap its body around the outside of the box, stick its head and part of its body into the entrance hole and gobble up your birds, including mama bird if she was unlucky enough to be in the box with her eggs or chicks. Then, the snake will drop to the ground and go away to a safer place to digest its prey. Snakes often leave no evidence behind. All you will find later is an empty box! At least Bill caught the snake in the act of predation so he had no doubt about what happened. And to his credit, Bill did not kill the snake.

Write to us about methods you have used to ensure your nest boxes are safe from snakes. Send information and photos (if you have any) to editor@ncbluebird.org. We will include your ideas in an upcoming issue of *Bluebird Notes*.

Marti Kane, Franklin County, President Team

POLK COUNTY GREETINGS & MONITORING TIPS

Hello everyone! My name is Evangeline LaMore. I am the Polk County North Carolina Bluebird Coordinator. I hope everyone had a nice spring and summer that included lots of bluebird sightings.

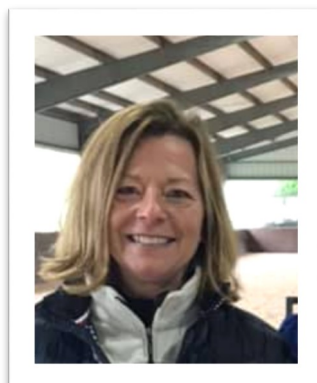
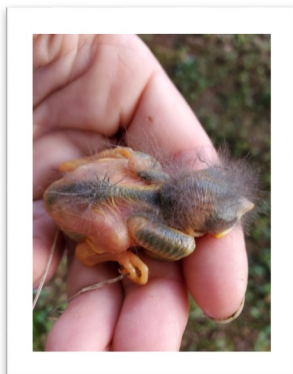
My husband and I moved to Tryon, NC, 15 years ago from Connecticut. While living in Connecticut I volunteered at “Earthplace,” a nature center in Westport. They had a wildlife rehabilitation department and needed volunteers to help with the daily duties of rehab. For 7 years I went every week to help feed baby birds, clean cages and make meals for all the critters. I eventually acquired enough hours of volunteering to take the state exam to obtain my state permit to rehabilitate small mammals. This permit allowed one to take in mammals only. My interest was birds and I was able to rehab birds under the umbrella of the nature center’s permit for migratory songbirds.

Once we moved to North Carolina I did not want to lose all the hours of experience I had accumulated, so I started the process to get my USF&W Federal Migratory Songbird permit. It took some doing, but I finally was approved to receive the songbird license. I have been helping songbirds ever since, along with some raptor rescue as well. Each state has different requirements. If you live near a center for wildlife, please consider volunteering!

I thought I would share some pointers on how to monitor your bird boxes.

- You may want to journal and take notes on each box. Number your boxes. Write the date, the weather, the temperature.
- Once a week check is good, unless you see an obvious problem. A good time to check is early afternoon, as the female typically lays eggs in the morning.
- Approach the box from the side and give a tap or knock to be sure the parent is not sitting on the nest. Open the box and take note of how many eggs there are.
- Also check to see if there are ants, wasps, or mites and remove them if possible.
- Also, do you see the parents? Does all seem normal? Conduit pole baffles are a must to deter unwanted predation!
- It takes about 2 weeks for incubation after the last egg is laid, and another 17-18 days before they fledge. Best not to check boxes when the nestlings are nearing fledge time. They may jump the nest too early!!!

If you have any issues that you cannot resolve, give me a call. I would be glad to help if I can!
(828) 863-4248 Happy Observing!



NEST BOXES & NEST TRAILS

Alamance County Bluebird Monitors Follow the Trails

During the 2021-2022 season Alamance County and the city of Burlington increased the number of bluebird boxes in the parks to a total of 132. Additionally, they invigorated the monitoring program for a most successful year. Following are highlights of the parks/trails that benefitted from this effort to expand bluebird observations across Alamance County.

- Forty-nine boxes were added at the city-owned golf course, The Valley (formally Indian Valley), with four alternating monitors checking weekly. The new trail at the Valley Golf Course has presented opportunities for bluebird discussions with the golfers.
- Old and damaged boxes were replaced at Springwood Park. Only one snake was found in a box at this location of the 27 that make up the trail.
- Downtown Willowbrook Park had been undergoing a renovation and new bluebird boxes were finally replaced for use. This location is fortunate to currently have a trail of 18 boxes.
- Cedarock Park now has 30 nest boxes. This is a wonderful expansion from the ten bluebird boxes placed here in 1987. We send thanks to Burlington Bird Club member Fran Outhwaite, who began this trail and started the monitoring program.
- Shallow Ford Park (8 boxes)

House and Carolina wrens have been found at several parks, but not disturbed, as they are federally protected cavity nesters. The new monitors, though long-time birders, have never been this close to nests, eggs and young before and this experience has given them a whole new perspective on birds and birding. Sixteen monitors have participated in the program this year to record data. Several have even brought out-of-town visitors along. Bennie Catoe, County Coordinator for Alamance County

The Board would like to welcome Bennie as a new representative of NCBS. Please join us in a big round of applause for all she has done to help bluebirds in her short time with our organization. Thanks, Bennie!

Cherokee County Bluebird Trail Visited by Andrews Garden Club



On August 3rd the Andrews Garden Club toured the Bluebird Trail of NCBS member Carmen Moore. This trail, on Carmen's farm near Andrews, NC, has 17 nest boxes.

Carmen is happy to report that nearly 100 bluebirds fledged this year from this location. She feeds bluebirds mealworms each day. Members enjoyed this scenic tour, which included seeing bluebirds having a snack.

Editor's Note: Farms are a wonderful place for nest boxes and trails. The wide open spaces give our feathered friends plenty of room for flying to the boxes. And, of course, the setting near nature is excellent.

See more at NABS website nabluebirdsociety.org and ncbluebird.org to learn about good places to install nest boxes/trails and so much more regarding how you can help bluebirds continue to flourish.

Carmen is pictured in the front. Back row of photo: Erla Jones, Patty Cook (County Coordinator), Beth Hay, Carol Reid (Vice President), Nenia Thompson, Terri Gribble, Joe Thompson, Pete Cook

A Bluebird Mystery in Laurel Park!

By Anne Hartig, Henderson County

Editor's Note: OK, all you Bluebirders, put on your thinking caps and help solve the mystery of Laurel Park. Story below. Send your ideas and/or bluebird mysteries of your own to our editor.

Laurel Park, an incorporated community of 2,300 residents in Henderson County, officially started monitoring bluebird boxes this year. Last year, an Eagle Scout* replaced some older bird boxes from 2013 and installed new ones in the park areas of our community. Many of these boxes are located in beautiful Rhododendron Lake Nature Park. None of the boxes were systematically monitored, although boxes were cleaned at the end of the season.



This year the Parks and Greenways Board of Laurel Park was given the task of monitoring our official 28 boxes located throughout the community. Several monitors checked boxes on a weekly basis. We have had bluebird and chickadee nests, hatchlings, and fledglings. Many bluebirds returned to the same box after the first brood fledged. However, only one box of bluebirds had three broods - so far.

One mystery, however: a nest with five bluebird eggs was abandoned but later came to life! On May 16, two eggs were reported. On May 23, when the box was next checked, there were five eggs. On June 14, the five eggs were still there, unhatched. The nest was assumed abandoned, no bluebird activity. On July 13, a bluebird was spotted coming out of the box. Imagine my surprise when I opened the box and there were five hatchlings!

* The NC Bluebird Society gave James Lilly, the Eagle Scout, a grant for many of these nest boxes.
-Joe Sanders, Henderson County Representative

Time to Report Your Nest Box Data!

The data form for reporting your nest box information for 2021 is included in this newsletter (page 4). Make copies as needed. Please fill out a form for each bluebird trail or nesting area that you monitor. Return to Kari Gould by November 15 so that she can compile all the data for us. We hope to share everyone's information in the winter edition of *Bluebird Notes*.

This year's data form is similar to last year's form with one change. This year we are asking you to report on each "other cavity nester" separately instead of lumping them together as was done in the past.

What is an "other cavity nester"? It is a native bird, other than a bluebird, such as the following:

- Carolina Wren
- House Wren
- Carolina Chickadee
- Tufted Titmouse
- Brown-headed Nuthatch
- Tree Swallow



You may have monitored a bluebird trail where more than one species of "other cavity nester" used your nest boxes. If that's the case, you will list each species separately and put the total number of eggs, chicks or fledglings by its name. See the example on the form. If you don't know what species used your nest box, you can label it as "unknown." Questions? Kari's phone number is listed on the data form.

Thank you for contributing; your information is valuable! Together our data tell the story of how the bluebird and other cavity nesters are doing in this age of climate change and rapid urbanization.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Annual Meeting — Saturday, May 14, 2022 from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. Our Annual Meeting will be held at Sylvan Heights Bird Park in Scotland Neck, NC. The main speaker will be Dr. Dean Rust, author of *The Beloved and Charismatic Bluebird*. We are looking forward to seeing everyone in person again, sharing our bluebird stories and touring this beautiful bird park together. Stay tuned for more details and a registration form in the winter edition of *Bluebird Notes*. Mark your calendars now if you want to make sure you save this important date!



Photos above courtesy of M. E. Dossenbach, Pittsboro

Next Board Meeting – Thursday, October 28, 2021 from 7:30 – 9:00 pm. This is a Zoom meeting where our Board of Directors conducts the business of our society. ALL members of the NC Bluebird Society are welcome to attend! Please contact Marti Kane if you'd like to view or participate in this meeting. She will send you the Zoom link as well as meeting id and passcode.



Photo above courtesy of Elke Hoffmann, Bahama

NCBS MEMBERSHIP

NCBS memberships options are one or three years.
Dues: \$10.00 per year or \$25 for three years

Gift membership from _____ to:

Name _____

Address _____

City, State & Zip _____

County _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

A member's email address will be used only for NCBS official business and considered private and confidential.

[] Check box if you prefer to access the *Bluebird Notes* via the Internet instead of a printed copy by postal mail.

Please complete this form and send it with your check payable to "NCBS" to:

**North Carolina Bluebird Society
 4600 Chandler Grove Court
 Raleigh, NC 27612**

Additional tax deductible donation \$ _____

New Membership []

Renewal []

Check Amount: \$ _____

Please indicate if you also have an interest in:

- _____ Assisting with the annual meeting
- _____ Serving as a NCBS Board Member
- _____ Helping with the newsletter
- _____ Monitoring a bluebird trail
- _____ Conducting a bluebird workshop
- _____ Contacting my local paper with news
- _____ Volunteering to be a NCBS County Coordinator
- _____ Other (please explain)

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AUTUMN 2021 WISHES OF HOPE, JOY, AND PEACE

We hope the spring and summer months of this year brought you the sights and sounds of our precious bluebirds and other sweet songbirds. We are sending wishes that you have time to relax as the days left in 2021 begin winding down. The bluebirds below nestled in the beautiful fall scenery set the tone for enjoying the spectacular color show that nature will be providing soon. Thanks to Buncombe County Coordinator, Russ Bauman, for sharing these images and so many other awesome bluebird snapshots with us.

We were able to create some cool merchandise with many bluebird photographs by Russ. You can find some fantastic gifts that the bluebird enthusiasts, bird watchers, and nature lovers on your list will be sure to appreciate. Shop online for a convenient and safe way to get some of your year-end holiday chores checked off. Links to the online store can be found from our website: [ncbluebird.org](https://www.ncbluebird.org). You can also get to the store directly with the following link: <https://www.cafepress.com/northcarolinabluebirdsociety>. NCBS Memberships also make great low-cost holiday gifts. See page 15 for membership subscription information.

