



Bluebird Monitor

OBS encourages good stewardship
by **Monitoring** our Trails

Volume 25, Number 5 • Spring 2011



Mission Statement

The Ohio Bluebird Society was formed in 1987 to support the return and the perpetuation of the Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) and other native cavity nesting birds in Ohio. To this end, the Ohio Bluebird Society will strive for the best methods to use, conserve and create habitat for the protection of these species.

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Deadline for 2011 - 2012 Bluebird Monitor Articles

- Summer 2011 - June 1, 2011
- Fall 2011 - August 1, 2011
- Winter 2011 - November 1, 2011
- Spring 2012 - February 1, 2012

2011 Annual Conference

by Marcella Hawkins

The OBS Annual Conference was held at the Shisler Conference Center in Wooster on Saturday, February 26 and drew 150 people from across the state and beyond.

In addition to the four scheduled speakers – Dan Best, Chuck Jakubchak, Larry Rosche and Mike Watson - a special ten minute presentation was given by Ken Cochran, Curator for the Secrest Arboretum, updating everyone on the progress at the Arboretum since the tornado last September.

The Medina Raptor Center brought two red-tailed hawks (one of which was a rare leucistic hawk) and two owls that are in their care for rehabilitation, educating the crowd about the importance of the Center.

Dick Tuttle was the mediator for the Question and Answer session – the panel consisted of Dean Sheldon, Darlene Sillick and Paula Ziebarth.

Greg Beavers, Treasurer for the North American Bluebird Society was also on hand to encourage membership in their group. The fundraiser conducted for OBS by Steve Smith, of Murr Multi Media Productions in Wooster, was successful in producing an additional \$110 in funds from a percentage of his total sales for the day. The fundraiser involved copying photos to a flash



Medina Raptor Center - Leucistic Red-Tailed Hawk



Medina Raptor Center – Great Horned Owl



Ron Duecker (former Advisor) and John Duecker, Membership Chair

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drive while at the conference.

The Blue Feather Award was presented to Earl Carlton, of Carrollton (Carroll County), and the Wildlife Conservation Award was accepted by Bob Faber on behalf of his son-in-law and recipient, Jay Reno Reda of Chardon (Geauga County).

Vendors at the event were: Mel Bolt – Bluebird information and display; Patty Dove – personalized items; Ken and Gretchen Foran, Great Oaks Studio;

Craig & Joyce Fuell – birdhouses, etc.; Robert Hershberger – Time & Optics; Lynda Price – The Wilderness Center; Larry Rosche – book signing; Matthew Shumar – Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas; Steve Smith – A&E Productions; Debbie Steinhauser – Widlcreek Photography; and Mike Watson – Holden Arboretum. If you would like more information of any of these vendors, please send a request to info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org.



Ron Duecker presented the Blue Feather award to Earl Carlton



Jay Reno Reda – Wildlife Conservation Award



Mel Bolt, Advisor with Sharon Lynn, Director

BFEC Annual Bluebird Workshop Kenyon College, Gambier

The room was packed for the Brown Family Environmental Center's (BFEC) annual bluebird workshop on March 6th. Among the 45 people attending were many families, which collectively built 25 bluebird nesting boxes. This year, volunteer Mel Bolt, of Wooster, Ohio, modified his traditional nesting box design to allow for easier assembly by children. The BFEC has been utilizing Mr. Bolt's traditionally designed nesting box on our bluebird trail for many years, given his thoughtful design of every detail. This includes ease of monitoring, which is important for the success of the nest and for human enjoyment. Our workshop would not be possible without the generosity of Mr. Bolt and co-conspirator Dale Glass, who both donating enormous amounts of time and skill.

Nesting boxes should be placed in open areas, which bluebirds need in order to hunt for insects on the ground. Can't put up a box of your own but still want to help? Volunteers are needed to help monitor the 38 nesting boxes along our bluebird trail. Over the last 12 years, these boxes have fledged over 500 bluebirds. Call 740-427-5051 to help continue the tradition. Visit BFEC online at www.bfec.kenyon.edu



Discover Ohio's Arboretums

Cox Arboretum & Gardens Metropark

6733 Springboro Pike

Dayton OH 45449

(937) 434-9005

<http://www.coxarboretum.org>

The Cox Arboretum features 189 acres of gardens and natural areas. Unique specialty gardens include the Bell Children's Maze, Edible Landscape Garden, and the Conservation Corner.

Dawes Arboretum (below)

7770 Jacksontown Road Southeast

Newark OH 43056

(740) 323-2355

800.44.DAWES

<http://dir.gardenweb.com/directory/dawes>

Remarkable cypress swamps, a renowned bonsai garden, and the world's largest lettered hedges are among the highlights of this 1,150-acre site. Japanese gardens are at their peak in spring and the holly gardens are best viewed in winter.



CONIFER GLEN

Holden Arboretum

9500 Sperry Road

Kirtland OH 44094

(440) 946-4400

<http://www.holdenarb.org/cons.htm>

Known for its majestic rhododendrons flowering April-early June, Holden is one of the nation's largest arboretums at 3,400 acres. Don't miss 160 varieties of crabapples in bloom late April to mid-May, the butterfly garden, and Visitor Center.

James H. McBride Arboretum

BGSU 1 University Drive

901 Rye Beach Road

Huron OH 44839

(419) 625-7783

<http://www.eriemetroparks.org/McBride%20Arboretum/HomeJMA.htm>

The arboretum is a kaleidoscope of color in early May when more than 40 varieties of crabapple trees are in bloom. Located at Bowling Green State University - Firelands College Campus.

Mt. Airy Arboretum

5083 Colerain Avenue

5100 Arboretum Road

Cincinnati OH 45223

(513) 357-2604

http://dynamic.cinci-parks.org/cgi-bin/parks.cgi/park_desc?park_id=95

At 1,469 acres, Mt. Airy is the largest municipal park in the United States. One of the most outstanding dwarf conifer collections in the Midwest surrounds a charming lake.

Schedel Arboretum and Gardens

19255 West Portage River South

Elmore OH 43416

(419) 862-3182

<http://www.schedel-gardens.org/schedel/about/display.asp?id=367&subj=about>

This legacy of Joseph J. and Mary P. Schedel features an exquisite Japanese garden, more than 50 varieties of lilacs, 25 varieties of Japanese maple, and plenty more.

Secrest Arboretum

1680 Madison Avenue

Wooster OH 44691

(330) 263-3761

<http://secrest.osu.edu>

Secrest features the nation's largest collections of crabapples, which blossom spectacularly in April and May. The Roses of Legend and Romance Garden features more than 500 heirloom rose varieties.

Stanley M. Rowe Arboretum

4600 Muchmore Road

Cincinnati OH 45243

(513) 561-5151

<http://www.ci.indian-hill.oh.us/departments/rowe.htm>

Founded by Stanley M. Rowe in 1926, this arboretum includes more than 1,100 types of trees and shrubs. The arboretum specializes in evergreens, magnolias, crabapples, oaks and beeches.

Stranahan Arboretum

4131 Tantara Road

Toledo OH 43623

(419) 841-1007

<http://arboretum.utoledo.edu>

The University of Toledo's arboretum offers a full array of micro-environments where visitors can find 1,500 specimens of cultivated, mature trees from areas as far away as China, Japan and Norway.

Woodland Cemetery and Arboretum

118 Woodland Avenue

Dayton, OH 45409

(937) 228-3221

<http://woodlandarboretum.org/Intro.htm>

Founded in 1841, Woodland is one of the country's five oldest rural/garden cemeteries. More than 3,000 trees (many more than a century old) grace the arboretum's 200 acres of rolling hills. Numerous historic figures rest here including Wilbur and Orville Wright and Paul Laurence Dunbar.

Trail Tales

Eastern Bluebirds Hold on in 2010 by Dick Tuttle, Delaware, Ohio



On a sunny August 11, 2010 I opened the front panel of Nestbox-108 in Delaware State Park to find a flattened grass nest holding several dozen black cherry seeds. The wild fruit had supplied “bluebird Gatorade®” for four nestlings that had weathered the warmest days of summer as the last bluebird family of the season. They had been due to fledge on August 8 after spending 18 days as nestlings. The success of this last nest ran the park’s tally up to 113 bluebirds, and raised the season’s grand total to 237 blue thrushes raised at seven nestbox trails in Delaware County, Ohio. Bluebirds laid 317 eggs, 244 (77%) hatched, and 237 (74.8%) fledged. Most impressive, once hatched, 97.1% fledged. The 2010 bluebird nesting season lasted 129 days from the county’s first blue egg on April 2, to its last nestling fledged on August 8. After 43 years of recording data, March 28, 1981 stands for the earliest first-egg date and September 11, 1988 is the record for the latest fledgling to fly from its nest.

After I cleaned out the used bluebird nest and screwed the front shut, I prepared the box for winter. I closed or plugged both of the quarter-inch wide ventilation slots that allow cross-ventilation during the hottest days of summer. A six by 1-1/4-inch slotted panel made of Masonite® or recycled plastic, slides under two

screws to cover the one-quarter-inch vent slot above the box’s back panel. To close the vent above the front panel, I stuff it shut with a six-inch strip of felt weather stripping. Usually, the quarter-inch drain holes in the floor are already plugged with hibernating spiders or other arthropods, so I no longer plug drain holes with dowel rods. The practice of winterizing nestboxes to convert them into roost-boxes is a standard practice among bluebird conservationists. Bluebirds that stay

for the winter, or migrate through the area, will roost communally during harsh weather. In the past, I have used a machinist mirror and penlight to count as many as seven bluebirds huddled together to share body heat through a cold, wintery night. Other observers have counted more than a dozen bluebirds entering one box while seeking shelter.

In 1986, I used the coin-toss method to determine which boxes in Delaware State Park

would be winterized, and which ones would be left “open” in a controlled scientific study that revealed that as the winter progressed, wintering bluebirds learned to roost in winterized boxes rather than ones that remained ventilated. To show this, at the end of each month from November through March, I collected and weighed fecal deposits and seed packets regurgitated from bluebird gizzards. I found that bluebirds roost in a few boxes in December, but most roosting occurs in January and February. While winterizing nestboxes increases the chances that roosting birds will survive, food availability is also a huge factor that determines



*A female bluebird sits tight on her nest.
Photo: Bob Orthwein*

survivability, and “spring cleaning” reveals how well bluebirds endured the trials of winter.

In early March, I start to prepare my trails for the upcoming nesting season, and I want everything ready by March 15. For example, I return 102 nestboxes and their predator (raccoon) baffles to two Tree Swallow nestbox grids on the Delaware Wildlife Area. I also add fresh chassis grease to poles in Delaware State Park and other locations, and I reopen ventilation slots above the front panels; the back vents will be reopened in late May. It is when I clean debris from nest chambers that I start to gauge the severity of the last winter. By March 11, 2010, I had salvaged 20 winter-killed bluebirds for the Ohio Wesleyan Zoology Museum. One bird wore a leg band that my class of seven middle school students from the OWJL Academic Camp had attached on June 10, 2008. On March 3, 2010, I found the lone, dead male in a nestbox 230 yards from where it grew with four siblings. I can tell future classes about this find along with the assumption that the bird had fathered families of its own during the 2009 season.

Even after finding 16 winter-killed bluebirds in DSP, one at the Alum Creek State Park office trail, and three in one box on the campus of the Methodist Theological School in Ohio, I felt relieved since I expected to find more dead bluebirds after a winter with several freezing rain events that encapsulated rose hips, poison ivy berries, moonseed, wild grapes and other dried morsels that provide

survival food for wintering birds. Bluebirds cannot chip away thick ice to free food items, but if a bright sun melts the ice coverings by afternoon, then the birds have a chance to survive.



*2010 was a good year for these four-day-old bluebird nestlings to grow and fledge.
Photo: Dick Tuttle*



*Paired bluebird boxes stand in a great habitat for bluebirds and Tree Swallows beyond a “target basket” used in disc golf in Delaware State Park.
Photo: Dick Tuttle*

The winter’s death toll was expressed in my annual mid-May nest count. I counted 36 active nests in my data book that represented 7.7% fewer nests than 39 nests counted in 2009 at the same locations. The 2010 season progressed as bluebirds attempted 73 nests with eggs and 60 (82.2%) families successfully produced an average of 3.95 fledglings per nest. Of 13 failures, House Wrens left no doubt at five nests where they dropped punctured eggs in front of boxes before adding sticks to cover the usurped bluebird nests. Three nests failed for unknown reasons but hawk predation is always a possibility since Cooper and Sharp-shinned hawks are common. Sometimes, if a monitor takes time to “think like a hawk,” they will move a nestbox away from a tree or other structure that hides a hawk’s sneaky approach to pluck an unsuspecting bluebird from its perch. Tree Swallows, House Sparrows, an herbicide application, a mower collision with a

pipe mount, and competition from another bluebird account for one bluebird nest failure each.

In 2000, I decided to identify the three egg-laying periods within the bluebird nesting season in Central Ohio. I examined all records going back to 1968 and found 31 nestboxes that had housed three successful

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bluebird nests during the same season. The data showed first-eggs from first nests appeared before May 15. Eggs laid between May 16 and July 5 represented the second nesting period, and first eggs deposited on July 6 and later made up the third egg laying period. Using these values, I examined sixty successful nests in 2010 and found that 34 (56.7%) were started during the first period, 24 (40%) in the second, and only two (3.3%) started after July 6. In habitats where vegetation is mowed by machines or grazing animals throughout the nesting season, the first and second nestings for bluebirds are fairly equal, whereas the third nesting period can represent zero to 15-percent of a season's nests, depending on availability of insects as determined by weather and other factors. Summer droughts usually result in poor nesting conditions and the third nesting period might be absent. On the other hand, any combination of weather conditions that supports healthy insect populations will support a prolific nesting season for bluebirds.

When I look at 29 successful nests in DSP in 2010, I find that 16 nests were successful in the earliest nesting period, 12 in the second, and only one nest produced a first egg after July 6. There are mowed lawns in the park, but many bluebirds nest where boxes stand in grasslands that are brush-hogged only once in the late fall after the nesting season. I am very thankful that the park supports the effort to promote nesting bluebirds by trimming large areas around my boxes to keep the habitat from succeeding back into a forest. Once spring arrives, the grasslands start to grow taller to produce a profusion of colorful wildflowers that support healthy

populations of butterflies and moths that have won many fans that stalk both flowers and butterflies with binoculars and field guides in hand. The patches of grasslands also attract "after supper" campers and park visitors wishing to see grazing deer that appear at dusk.

Some bluebird enthusiasts would like to see the grasslands maintained at shorter levels so nesting bluebirds can find it easier to pluck insects from the ground throughout the entire season. Nonetheless, I

agree with the present policy that there should be room for a greater variety of species. Wherever there is a bluebird habitat, I have placed a nestbox for them. Also, to lessen competition from Tree Swallows, I have placed a second box within five yards of the first, so paired boxes are found throughout the park. The park's Tree Swallow tally for 2010 is 417 raised, a considerable portion of 1,002 fledged from all of my trails in 2010.



A sliding panel, tightened with screws, is used to close the back ventilation slot, whereas felt weather stripping plugs the front slot to make it cozier for roosting bluebirds during winter months.

Photo: Dick Tuttle

For several years, a new bluebird-friendly activity, disc golf, has been active in the park. The new 20-basket course is free to the public and covers a large area near the park's marina, then surrounds the ice-skating pond and proceeds to cut through two woodlands leading to include two picnic areas. The Frisbee sport is very popular and requires that the course be mowed, making perfect bluebird habitats in the process. Also, a second disc golf course is being developed in the north end of the park to serve visitors and the camping public that rent the park's popular campsites that number 212. I guarantee that bluebirds will also enjoy their new mowed habitats, and I'll make sure they have proper nesting sites for their families. Happy Bluebirding!

Blooming Bluebirders



Dale Glass, OBS Area Contact for Knox County, hosted a group of friends at his workshop on Sunday, March 20 for the purpose of making nestbox kits.



Dale Glass, Rodney Montgomery, Lou Toscano and Kenny Facemyer cut out the wood.



Complete kits were assembled to include everything needed to put a nestbox together.

The Pathfinder members involved in the workshop were: Julianna Dunn, Benjamin Cheeseboro, Natalia Nino (holding nestbox), Jonathan Robertson, Daniel Dunn and David Nino, Jr.



Rodney Montgomery designed a jig for the nestbox to ensure that all of the boxes would be made precisely the same.



The Mount Vernon area youth (from ages 6 to 13) were invited to assemble of the nestboxes and also learn more about Bluebirds on April 17 at the Mount Vernon SDA Hill Church in Mount Vernon.

Blooming Bluebirders

Ohio Young Birders Club - Nestbox Project
by Darlene Sillick , with an article by Aaron Aront

The Ohio Young Birders Club of central Ohio is only eight months old and already they are doing high profile conservation projects for their community. Under the joint leadership of four advisors, the 11-13 year olds built nestboxes precut and predrilled from Charlie Zepp of Dublin Ohio. The Glacier Ridge Metro Park maintenance staff helped with the preparation of the poles and baffles. Park naturalist Chrissy Hoff worked with co-advisor Darlene Sillick, Powell Ohio to plan out a project that will benefit Tree Swallows and Eastern Bluebirds for years to come.

Park visitors will soon see avian residents move in and start to raise their families in plain sight of hundreds of people from the young to seniors. Darlene had worked out a project plan for the OYBC central Ohio students. She asked Dick Tuttle to help the students on the mid March installation day of a 16 box swallow grid. In about 3 hours the installation project was completed when everyone was coming off the field and the inspectors appeared. The pair landed on box 9 which was built by Aaron our author. Shouts sprang up and the students knew which box they had built and as the birds flew and landed on a new box the box builder proudly called out, he's on my box!



Aaron – our article author



Jacob – one of the Ohio Young Birders Club advisory members reviewing study skins



A job well done!

Please read our young author, Aaron Aront's, description of this project. The advisors, Gerry Brevoort, Tim Daniel, Susan Setterlin and Darlene Sillick along with Columbus Audubon are so proud of the commitment of these young people. We hope to follow up with statistics on the nesting season this fall. Please check out other projects that the OYBC central Ohio are doing by visiting the Columbus Audubon website and checking out groups to learn more. We would like to thank North Face for their grant assistance to our club. We would like to also thank the Ohio Young Birder Club members of central Ohio for the time and efforts they put forth as our conservation heroes of tomorrow!

Aaron wrote the following article to report on his project:

In March, 2011 OYBC Central Ohio Chapter started a service project to build and set up nest boxes.

Building nest boxes was fun. Before we started the project, Darlene, one of our chapter's advisors, taught us about the birds we were helping. The birds we wanted in our nest boxes were bluebirds and swallows. They are called secondary cavity nesters. We were helping these birds to find places to nest. We watched a movie of what happens

inside a bluebird nest box. We even got to touch real birds that had been stuffed and were on loan from Ohio Wesleyan University.

Then we went to the basement to start building. There were seven kids, a lot of adults and seven power drills, so in no time we had nineteen birdhouses. Then we crammed them all into Darlene's car.

We had finished the first part of our service project. We were halfway done! The next part was to put up our nest boxes at Glacier Ridge Metropark.

It was March 19, the day to put up the nest boxes we had made. When we got to Glacier Ridge we saw a big field in front of us. Then we went over to meet everybody else. There were five young birders. There were park volunteers, parents, and advisors who were all happy to lend a helping hand. We met Dick Tuttle who is an experienced bluebirder and also experienced at putting up nest boxes.

Dick taught us to set up bird houses according to a grid pattern. A grid catches people's eyes as they move past it because the nest boxes align in many ways. Then we learned the Pythagorean Theorem can help make precise 90 degree angles.

The first step in putting up the grid was to set where the first nest box was



Prep for the 16 box installation



The work team



Emily tightening the screws on box 9

to be. Then we hammered a tall pole into the ground. Next we put on the baffle. Finally, we screwed on one nest box.

Meanwhile, another group was measuring out where the other nest boxes would go. We measured 75 feet one way and then 75 feet another way, forming a right angle. Then we used the Pythagorean Theorem to get our right angle precise. From our first right angle we formed a box, and then we added a box onto that, always staking where nest boxes were to go. We had two teams, a measuring team and an assembly team. After a while we started to communicate more and that made the job much easier. We started to see one big square forming that was four boxes long and four boxes wide. Soon we were on our last nest box. When we had finished it we stood back to admire our work. We had put up sixteen nest boxes. Suddenly, in flew two tree swallows!

Our nest boxes are next to a school at Glacier Ridge Metro Park north entrance. There is a paved path next to where we put our boxes, so even people with disabilities can come to see birds. At the end, I felt good because I knew that I had helped a lot of birds as well as people with disabilities and kids in school who will come to enjoy the birds.

MONITORING A BLUEBIRD NEST BOX

from the Brown Family Environmental Center Website
www.bfec.kenyon.edu

1. Monitoring a nest box means opening the door, observing the nest, eggs, chicks, etc. and making any correction which will assist the birds in raising their brood. Monitoring will not cause the parents to abandon the nest box nor will it result in harm to the chicks.

Figure 1



2. Observe the type of nest in the nest box. Usually you will find Bluebirds, however, other birds such as House Sparrows, Tree Swallows, House Wrens and other small birds will occupy the nest box. (Figure 2)

3. Make note of the day the first egg is laid and the day of the last egg. This will allow you to determine when the 14 day incubation begins. After 14 days of incubation the

chicks will hatch and remain in the nest box another 18 to 21 days.

4. Two to three days after the chicks have hatched, remove any unhatched eggs from the nest. A broken egg in the nest will attract ants which will pester the chicks.

5. When the chicks are 12 to 15 days of age, do not monitor the nest box. When opening the door on some types of nest boxes the chicks are startled causing them to prematurely escape the nest box. Even if they are placed back into the box, they will continue to escape. Once on the ground their life is in jeopardy because of predators.

Nest boxes with the door hinged at the bottom are preferred because they allow monitoring up to the date of fledging. After 15 days open the door only enough to peek into the box to confirm all is well with the chicks.

6. Bluebirds nest two times a year in Ohio. During the second nesting, a blowfly (green fly) lays its eggs in the nest at about the time the chicks are hatched. The larvae from these eggs feed on the blood from the chicks. During the second nesting before the chicks are 12 to 15 days old, lift the nest from the bottom looking to see if the blowfly pupa (a small elongated blackish shell) is on the floor of the nest box. (Figure 3)

Figure 2



Figure 3



7. When blowfly larvae are found in the nest box, the nest should be changed as outlined below.

- (a) Place the chicks in a container with a cover so they remain warm and calm in the dark area.
- (b) Remove the old nest, place it in a plastic bag and include any larvae from the floor of the box.
- (c) Make a new nest of dry grass, place it in the nest box and form a cup shape in the nesting grass.
- (d) Return the chicks to the box, one at a time.
- (e) Place your hand over the entrance hole for about two minutes to allow the chicks to settle down.
- (f) Permanently dispose of the nest in the plastic bag in a manner so that the blowfly pupa cannot mature to adult flies.

8. House Sparrows are a continued threat to Bluebirds and the other small cavity birds. House Sparrows must not be allowed to nest in a Bluebird box. It is legal to limit their use. (Figure 4)

Figure 4



Male



Female

8. House Sparrows will usurp the nest from the current occupier by pecking holes in the eggs, killing the young chicks or attacking & killing one or both adult birds.



Figure 5 Pecked Bluebird eggs



Figure 6 Sparrow killed Bluebird

9. Suggested passive ways of deterring House Sparrows from using the nest box follows:

- (a) Daily remove the nest material from the nest box.
- (b) Shake the eggs real hard and allow the female to incubate them until she abandons the nest.
- (c) Using a straight pin or safety pin to prick a small hole in each egg and allow the female to incubate them until she abandons the nest.

- (d) Replace the real eggs with fake eggs.
- (e) Plug the entrance hole for a period of time to allow the House Sparrow to find another location for nesting.

10. House Wrens (Figure 7) are also a threat to Bluebirds. They will usurp the nest by pecking holes in the eggs and tossing them to the ground. They will fill the box with sticks (twigs) and make a grass nest on top. They are protected by law so it is best to let them fledge their young and then remove the box to a more suitable location for Bluebirds.

11. After the chicks fledge, remove the old nest from the nest box. This will remove any parasites, bird droppings, etc. from the box. Bluebirds will build a new nest for the second nesting.

Figure 7



OHIO BLUEBIRD SOCIETY DONATIONS

Our thanks goes out to the following donors:

Total Donations - \$70

- McGuire, Bernie & Debbie
(in memory of Ed Simpkins)
- Newberger, George

Ask Madame Wingnut

What Happened to My Bluebird?

by Paula Ziebarth



Here is a letter from one of our members:

Dear Madame Wingnut,

I have a friend who has had a single bluebird box in his backyard for over 5 years. He usually has success. In 2010 after 5+ days without seeing his nesting pair he opened the box and found the adult male sitting on the next incubating the eggs but dead. The bird was stiff.

He took two photos which I enclose. One shows the bluebird box removed from its post and placed on its side upon a fence post for photographic purposes. The nest and male bluebird (poor color developing) were originally facing the front entrance hole with the nest sitting on the floor of the box. Photos two shows the bird and nest removed from the box and placed atop a fence post, again for photographic purposes. This is the position and appearance of the bird on the nest when discovered. The left wing was in this perpendicular position against the box wall.



No infestations of insects, worms or larva, etc. were noticed. The bird had apparently died while incubating the eggs and had remained in the same position until discovered. What was the cause of death?

Thank you,
Ed Pierce
Akron, Ohio



Dear Ed,

In response to your letter dated January 31, 2011 it is difficult to definitively determine the cause of death in a case like this one, but my best guess is a House Sparrow (HOSP) attack. After 5 days dead in the box, the forensic trail can get a little cold, but here is what I see and the questions that run through my head from the photos you sent me.

1. This photo definitely looks like the female Eastern Bluebird (EABL) to me. Females will have the bright blue tail feathers, but duller gray plumage elsewhere. Also, male EABL cannot incubate eggs as they do not have a brood patch. Some other species of birds share in the incubation and brooding of their eggs/young, but not EABL.
2. Second photo shows obvious signs of trauma and attack. Feathers behind the head and on the back are very ruffled, and this is a normal point of attack for HOSP. They also go for the eyes and head. Additionally, I see a couple cracked eggs in the photo, another hallmark of HOSP attack.
3. Could she have just died on the nest from disease or old age? This is highly unlikely for a bird in breeding condition, and again, signs of trauma indicate this was not the case.

4. You can rule out climbing predators as cause of death as any climbing predator would have eaten bird and/or eggs. A mammalian predator would also have pulled some of the nesting material out of the hole.

5. Why did EABL remain on the nest? With one hole for entrance/escape, it may have been impossible to escape a well placed peck from the HOSP as he entered the hole, effectively blocking the EABL's exit. Parent birds also are very protective of their eggs and young, so this one may have remained to defend the nest, even if given an opportunity to flee. If the mate had been nearby, he would have defended her from the attack or warned her of inbound HOSP so she could escape the box. I doubt he was around.

So based on this line of reasoning, I believe HOSP attack is most likely scenario. Now here are some other observations/concerns from the photos and letter you sent me.

1. You mention your friend removed the box from its post to take the photos. If the post was a baffled T-post, great. If the post is wood without adequate baffle system, proper mounting and baffling of box in the future will prevent raccoons and other climbing predators from depredate the box. That did not occur in this instance, but thinking toward successful nestings in the future.

2. Where was/is the mate of the dead EABL? Although HOSP can certainly destroy a nest with both parents in attendance, the male generally guards his incubating female rather diligently. Your friend saw neither male nor female EABL for 5 days before finding the problem, so I am guessing something happened to him, leaving his mate a "sitting duck" as it were. Your friend probably would have noticed the agitated (grieving?) mate in or on the box if mate were still around.

3. Background of photo shows some pretty long grass. I don't know where box is actually sited regularly, but siting it in short mowed grass will insure that EABL will not have to venture far from the nest site to find food. If the mate was forced to go a distance to find food, that would leave EABL in box unprotected.

I live in the suburbs in the Columbus area, so am no stranger to HOSP. We have a lot of them here and I actively control them in my yard and on my trails. My City of Powell trail is my most successful EABL trail and HOSP are an ongoing problem. I would be happy in another article to explain what has worked for me here if anyone is interested.

For your friend, a couple of quick suggestions for dealing with HOSP would be:

1. Make sure nestbox is sited as far away from desirable HOSP habitat as possible. Siting nestbox as far from pine

trees, brushy areas, houses or outbuildings will reduce HOSP problems.

2. Although nestbox is an obvious HOSP attractant, stop feeding them if you are doing so to help drive them elsewhere. I do not feed seeds or suet during nesting season. There is plenty of natural food available to song birds during nesting season so they don't really benefit from our handouts at this time. If you enjoy seeing song birds at feeders during the spring/summer months, feeding sugar water for Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, thistle seed for American Goldfinches, and just a handful of mealworms for your Eastern Bluebirds is maximum fare at the feeding station, keeping unwanted nestbox competitors to a minimum. Fall/winter feeding can be expanded to whatever you like.

3. Set out a trap box for HOSP in an area they would find attractive. A nestbox with a 1 ¼" entry hole will allow HOSP to enter, but keep EABL safely out. Site box near pine trees, house, outbuildings, or bushes where you have seen HOSP congregate or roost. Inbox trapping of nonnative HOSP should only be done when you can be vigilant in watching the box as native birds can find their way in there. Although EABL cannot fit through the hole, native chickadees and House Wrens can.

4. If unable or unwilling to trap HOSP, consider setting out nestbox with 1 ¼" hole for them and render their eggs nonviable. NEVER allow HOSP to raise a family as they, and their young, will return the following year to take nesting sites. When HOSP are allowed to propagate, EABL will soon go to safer nesting grounds and abandon your nestboxes.

I hope your friend has better luck this season. Spring is in the air and here we go again!

Bluely yours,

Paula Ziebarth
Aka Madame WingNut



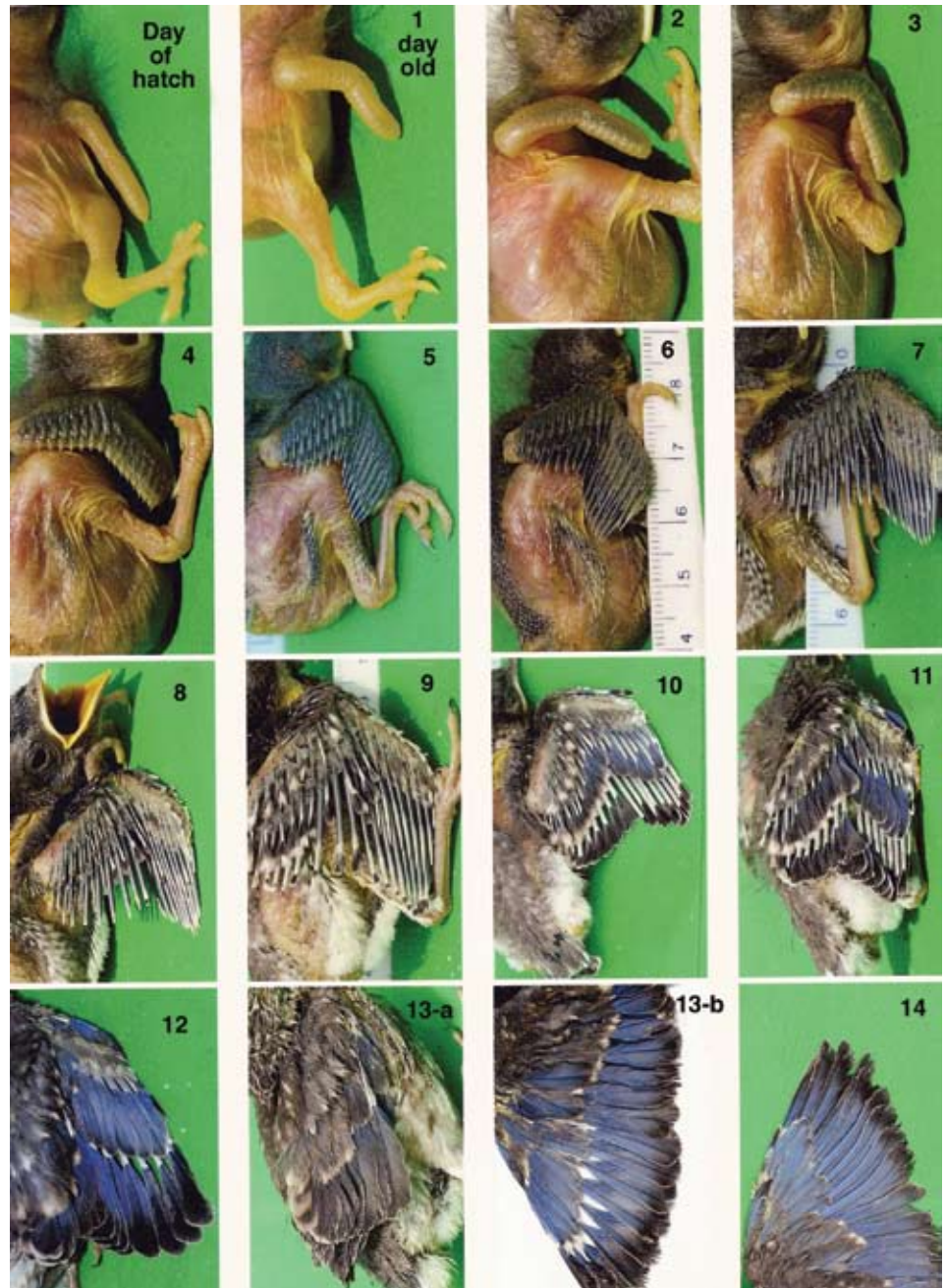
An experienced monitor of more than a dozen trails in central and northern Ohio, Madame WingNut enjoys fielding your questions in a humorous, but informative way. Some believe she has a screw loose. Her questionable title notwithstanding, she insists that the only house of ill repute she presides over is the unfortunate nestbox that attracts the unruly, nonnative House Sparrow.

Send your questions to Madame Wingnut at info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org or by mail to PMB 111, 343 W. Milltown Road, Wooster, OH 44691.

Bluebird Chick Development - First 14 Days

by Jack Bartholmai & Pat Ready from Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin: www.braw.org

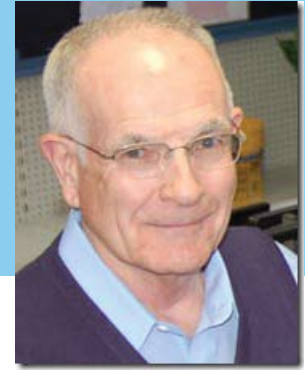
This series of images uses “wing development” as an aid in age estimation. Conditions such as food supply, temperature, number of siblings and other factors might alter the development time a +/- of at least one day for each image after day one. When chicks first hatch they are naked, eyes are closed and they barely can raise their head but they are able to open their mouths to be fed. Between the 5th and 10th day the chicks are most vulnerable to cold temperatures when the female stops brooding them. If they get too chilled and listless they won't raise their heads when the adult birds bring them food and may starve. Both adults may stop feeding them and abandon the nest if they don't respond. Monitoring should stop after the 12th day to prevent premature fledging. Normally by the 18th day they are fledged.



All photos by Jack Bartholmai

Basic Nest Box Construction For Beginning Bluebirders

by Mel Bolt



Constructing nest boxes for bluebirds is a simple process of cutting boards to size, boring a hole and assembling the parts in the right order using nails or preferably screws and waterproof glue between the joined boards.

Nest boxes for bluebirds have been used for over 150 years, Connie Toops recorded in her book "Bluebirds Forever" on page 85, a note from the diary of Henry David Thoreau's for September 29, 1842 contains the notation, "Today --- the bluebirds young and old have revisited their box". Prior to nest boxes, bluebirds nested in natural cavities created by wood peckers, or by Mother Nature excavating cavities in tree trunks where limbs broke off, or in the top of wooden fence posts. Bluebirds thrived very well using these natural cavities for raising their young until alien house sparrows and starlings were introduced into our country in 1850-1 and 1890 respectively.

If we could determine the dimensions of these cavities we could design the perfect nest box for our bluebirds. However, these cavities were different sizes, different shapes, had varying entrance hole sizes and were at different heights from the ground. We learn from these variables that bluebirds are not design conscious and that location of the nest box is more important than the design.

Our past experiences with bluebirds using nest boxes have helped us establish some simple but basic requirements that will meet their needs for raising their family. My view of these needs can be met if the nest box includes the following features.

1. It should keep the nest and chicks dry. A wet nest or wet chicks reduces the body temperature of the chicks subjecting them to hypothermia, especially in cool weather. This will most likely cause the death of the chicks in the nest.

2. It should be well ventilated. The nest box is exposed to the hot summer sun causing the inside temperature to rise. Too much heat can cause the death of the chicks by suffocation. On the other hand, during cool early spring weather the extra ventilation is not required so all vents should be sealed by covering or plugging with tape, cotton or other material that is convenient.

3. The entrance hole should be 1-1/2" in diameter. Bluebirds can easily enter this size hole but the alien starling cannot since they require a minimum of 1-5/8" diameter hole. (House sparrows are not deterred by the 1-1/2" hole as they are smaller than bluebirds and can easily enter a 1-1/4" hole.)

4. The floor space should be 16 to 25 square inches (4"x4" or 5"x5"). This will provide adequate room for the female bluebird to build a nest large enough for her clutch of chicks to grow and develop without overcrowding. More importantly, it provides room for the young chicks to stand on the rim of the nest and exercise their wings without damaging their primary wing feathers prior to that very important maiden flight from the box.

5. The box design should provide for easy monitoring. Nest boxes must be monitored frequently as a means of helping the chicks survive. Trail people monitor about once a week whereas backyard people will monitor two or three times a week. Most box designs have the front of the box as a door. They are generally hinged at the top and open from the bottom. Monitoring with this box design should cease after 15 days from the hatch date of the chicks. A better design would be to hinge the door at the bottom and open it from the top. This will allow you to look in the box up to the day

Continued on the page 16

Continued from page 15

of fledging. This is because the chicks see the light at the top of the door when it is opened and they tend to hunker down in the nest rather than getting excited and exiting the box as is frequently the case with the other door design. Another advantage of a box with the door hinged at the bottom is that it is easier to attach to the box predator control and sparrow control devices.

Compared to natural cavities the above five items provide much more opportunity for bluebirds to raise successful broods. In my view any other features added to the nest box are either for the alleged protection of the birds or they are for human convenience.

Once your next box is constructed it must be mounted, preferably on a steel pole, at your eye level to facilitate your monitoring of the box. Install your box in an open area with low vegetation and perching sites such as trees, power lines, antennas, etc. Don't forget to provide protection on the box or on the pole for climbing predators such as raccoons, cats, snakes, etc.

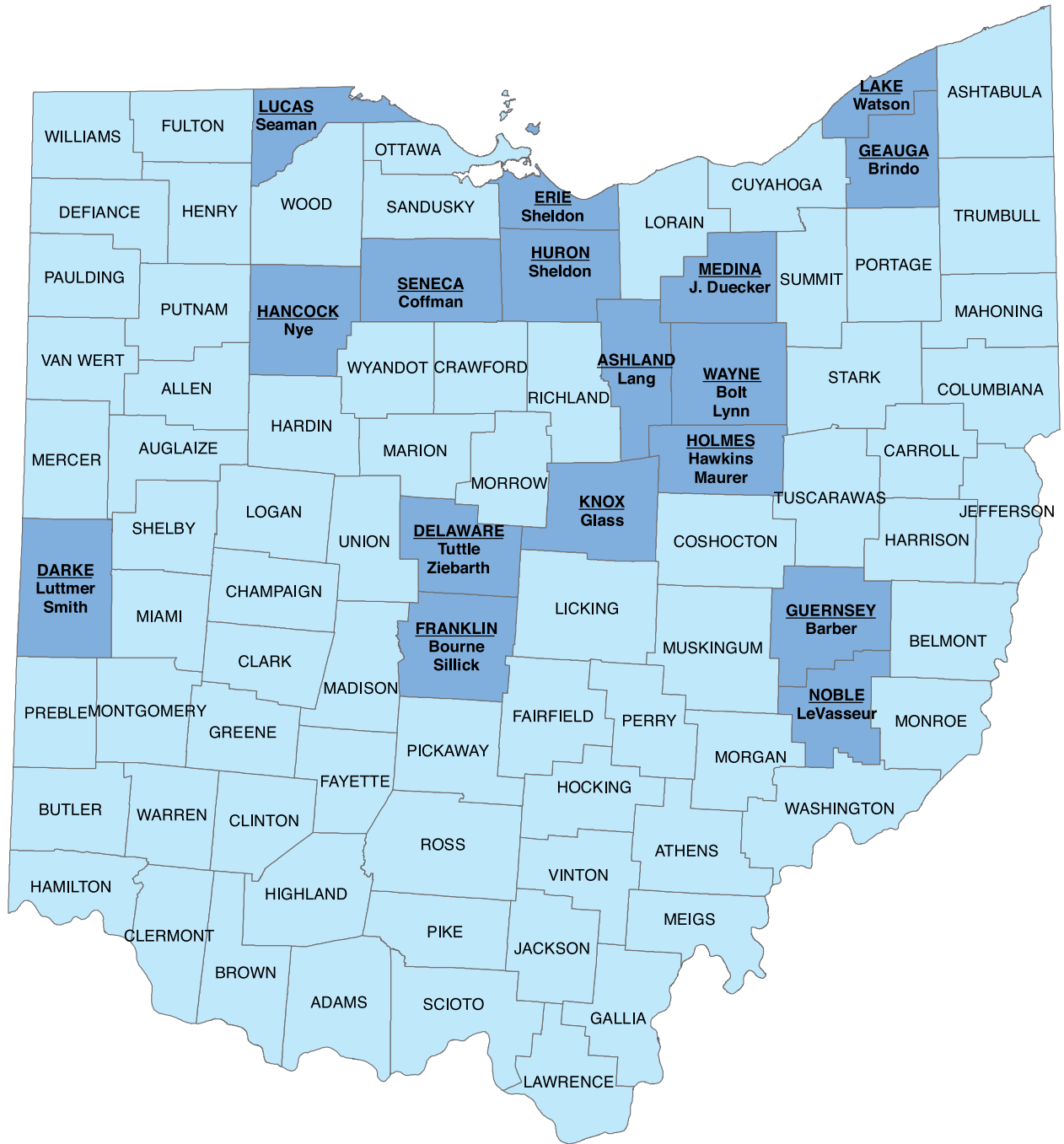
You now are ready to begin experiencing the joy of bluebirds. As you get first-hand experience with them and you continue reading about the experiences and pleasures of other bluebird enthusiasts, you too will begin to enjoy bluebird's acceptance of human intervention and the joy of watching their life cycle from courtship through fledging of their young.

OBS Area Contacts (as of March 29, 2011)

County	Name	Phone #	Alt. Phone #	E-mail
Ashland	Lang, Linda	419.945.3005		nrws_lang@tccsa.net
Darke	Luttmer, Bob	937.526.5477		bonnie561@embarqmail.com
Darke	Smith, Tom	937.996.1629		bluebirdman@embarqmail.com
Delaware	Tuttle, Dick	740.363.6433		ohtres@cs.com
Delaware	Ziebarth, Paula	614.848.3784		paulaz@columbus.rr.com
Erie	Sheldon, Dean	419.752.1451		seedbed@accnorwalk.com
Franklin	Bourne, Lum & Meriam	614.882.1188		meriam.lum@worldnet.att.net
Franklin	Sillick, Darlene	614.761.3696		azuretrails@columbus.rr.com
Geauga	Brindo, Jay	440.343.9275		jbrindo@aol.com
Guernsey	Barber, Tom	740.439.4284		klbarber62@roadrunner.com
Hancock	Nye, Fred	419.387.7465		evaferdy@tds.net
Holmes	Hawkins, Marcella	330.465.6987	330.276.0909	gofish710@embarqmail.com
Holmes	Maurer, Kyle	330.317.4995		kylemaurer63@yahoo.com
Huron	Sheldon, Dean	419.752.1451		seedbed@accnorwalk.com
Knox	Glass, Dale	740.397.5573		dglass@ezlinknet.com
Lake	Watson, Mike	440.946.4400, Ext. 132	419.813.2628	mwatson@holdenarb.org
Lucas	Seaman, Tammy	419.868.5111	419.349.5162	erictammy@sbcglobal.net
Medina	Duecker, John	330.598.1576		jduecker@neo.rr.com
Noble	LeVasseur, Doug	740.685.5220		emdlev@clover.net
Seneca	Coffman, Jim	419.448.4753		jrusscoff@gmail.com
Wayne	Bolt, Mel	330.262.0448		mellen@sssnet.com
Wayne	Lynn, Sharon	330.263.2437		slynn@wooster.edu

Ohio Bluebird Society

Counties with Director, Advisor, or Area Contact



Counties w/ Director, Advisor, or Area Contact
 Counties w/out



created by Mike Watson; The Holden Arboretum

Member News



WELCOME - TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

(August 16 through
December 6, 2010)

Nancy Adams
Paul Bailey
Lewis Beman
Sandy Bigham
Betty Jo Blackwood
Penny Brandau
Kim Carlson
Wayne Chumat
Susan Cook
David & Pat Dutton
James & Traci Ely
Sherry Hale
Marcia Hartman
James Hildreth
Teri Kolp
John McMillan
Harold Meade
Winfield Meek
Cristian Miranda
Richard Moore
Patrick O'Bryan
Larry Rosche
Judy Semroc
Dianne Solis
Renee Sparks
Shelley Tender
Lou & Mary Whitman
Charles Yoder

Calendar of Events

If you are having a Bluebird event in your area, please e-mail the information to info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org to have it put on our website calendar of events.

Gift of Membership

An OBS membership is a thoughtful gift for the Bluebird lover any time of the year. Please e-mail, write or call - see OBS Communications Block.

Sparrow Eggs

In talking with a fellow member a couple of weeks ago, we started talking about sparrows and how to control them. His suggestion intrigued me – take the sparrow eggs out of the nest, boil them, then put them back in the nest. He said they will sit on them all summer long – just so they aren't broken or become infested. Interesting.....I may have to try it.

PayPal

Reminder – you can pay your membership dues on PayPal. If you have any questions about this, please e-mail info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org or call our number at 330.466.6926.

Bird ID

Do you have a bird that you can't identify? Go to <http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/search> for help.

Feeding

If you have been feeding your Bluebirds mealworms all winter, don't forget to keep some on hand for the next month or so. We will still have some very cold days and May has its share of cold, rainy days – a time when some parents could use a little help.

Nestbox Maintenance

Our feathered friends will be checking out the nestboxes – make sure they are ready for them by conducting an inspection of the condition of each nestbox.



Facebook

Ohio Bluebird is now on Facebook! Search for Ohio Bluebird Society to join our group.



Ohio Bluebird Society Membership Application

- | Membership Class | Annual | 3-years |
|---|--------|---------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student (under 21) | \$10 | \$25 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior/Sr. Family | \$12 | \$30 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regular/Family | \$15 | \$40 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational | \$40 | \$100 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting | \$100 | \$275 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life | \$300 | |
- Tax deductible gift to OBS \$ _____
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- I am interested in participating in OBS activities

Name: _____

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Ohio Bluebird Society

Mail to:
OBS
PMB 111, 343 W. Milltown Rd.
Wooster, OH 44691-7214

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OBS Board of Directors and Advisors

DIRECTORS

Jay K. Brindo: 440.343.9275
JBrindo@aol.com

Sharon Lynn: 330.263.2437
slynn@wooster.edu

Kyle Maurer: 330.317.4995
kylemaurer63@yahoo.com

Mike Watson: 440.946.4400 ext. 132
mwatson@holdenarb.org

ADVISORS

Mel Bolt: 330.262.0448
mellen@sssnet.com

John Duecker: 330.598.1576
jduecker@neo.rr.com

Linda Lang: 419.651.4196
NRWS_Lang@tccsa.net

Dean Sheldon: 419.752.1451
seedbed@accnorwalk.com

Dick Tuttle: 740.363.6433

TREASURER, CHAIR OF SPECIAL EVENTS

Marcella Hawkins: 330.465.6987
gofish710@embarqmail.com

MEMBERSHIP CHAIR

John Duecker: 330.598.1576
jduecker@neo.rr.com

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OBS Communications Block

E-mail:

info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org

Website:

www.ohiobluebirdsociety.org

Phone:

330.466.6926

Address:

PMB 111, 343 West Milltown Rd.
Wooster, Ohio 44691-7241

Annual Request:

Please send a "test" e-mail to OBS (info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org) so we can make sure we have your current e-mail address. Thank you.



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You will not need to have a username and password to view all of the pages. Passwords are for joining, renewing memberships, or updating contact info online only.

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