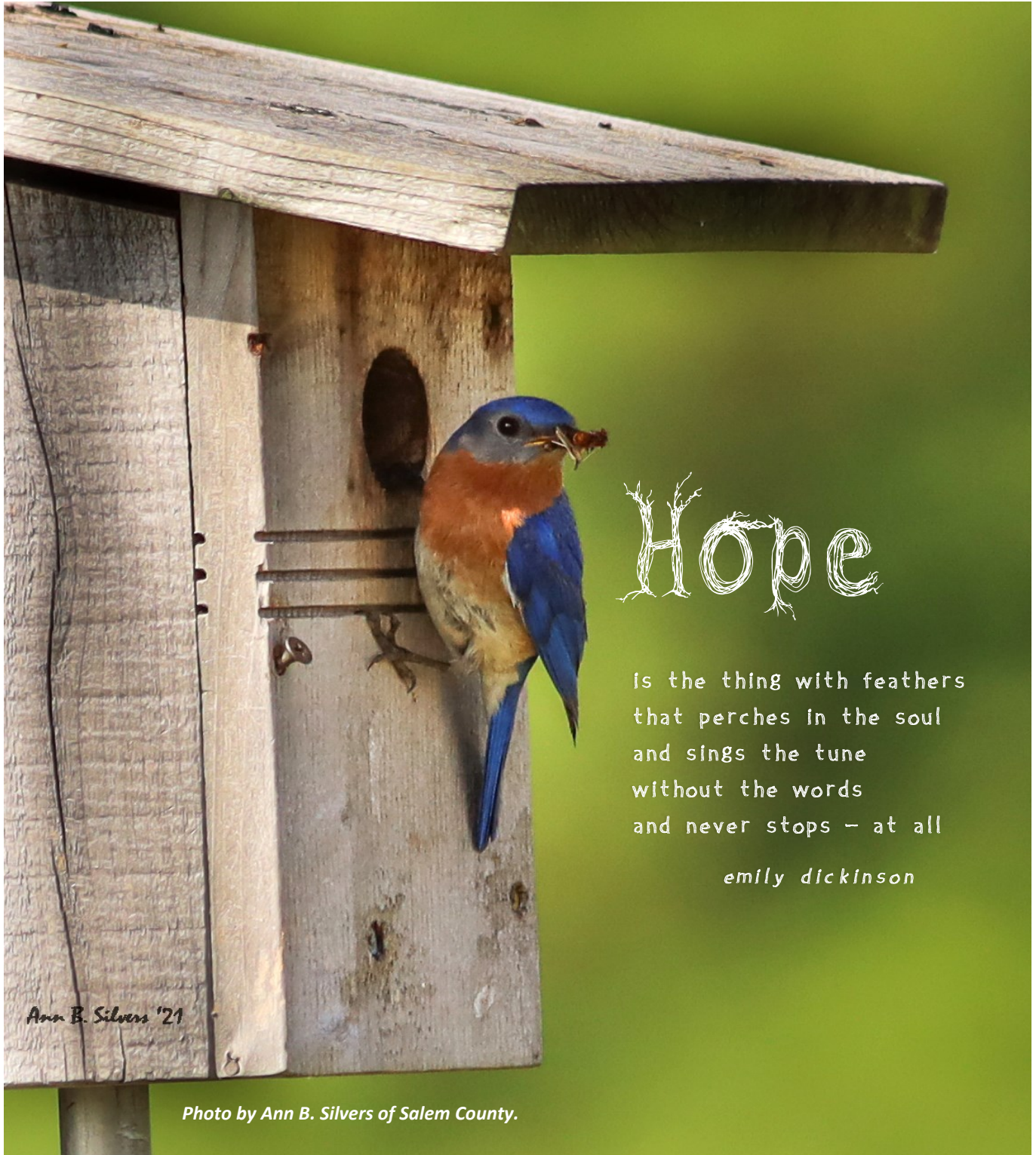




Jersey Blues

The Newsletter of The New Jersey Bluebird Society, an Affiliate
of the North American Bluebird Society ~ Volume 5, Issue 2 - Fall, 2021, Revised



Hope

is the thing with feathers
that perches in the soul
and sings the tune
without the words
and never stops – at all

emily dickinson

Ann B. Silvers '21

Photo by Ann B. Silvers of Salem County.

A BIG WING WAVE WELCOME TO OUR NEW NJBBS MEMBERS!
Good News!
NJBBS just reached 205 members!



Photo by Harry Schmeider

Bergen County

Grace, Judith

Burlington County

Armstead, Valerie
 Kaiser, Mary & Tom
 Monteleone, Elizabeth
 Shayka-Grossmann, Margie
 Skeels, Althea

Cape May County

Campbell, Terrie
 Sykes, Abby
 Williams, Linda

Cumberland County

Barthold, Rita & Jim
 Crispin, Karen
 Davis, Ann
 Gross, Ann & Joe
 Kavanagh, Michelle
 Morgan, Doris & Ned

Gloucester County

Dugan, Thomas
 Frydel, Elzbieta
 Kravchuck, Karen
 Pilling, Dan & Courtney
 Sickler, Melvin & Ginny
 Silvers, Ann
 Urbano, Beverly & Mike
 Wyckoff, Earl

Mercer County

Klein, Melissa

Monmouth County

Bruguier, Elsa

Ocean County

Brown, Laura
 Hart, Jonathan

Salem County

Crispin, Allan & Faye

Somerset County

Paris, Tanja

Sussex County

Aquino, Jill

Union County

Kahn, Leslie

Warren County

Kocher, Grace

NJBBS OFFICERS

President: Allen Jackson
 Vice President, North: Frank Budney
 Vice President, Central: Laura Stone
 Vice President, South: Allen Jackson
 Welcome, New Treasurer: Louise Cockey
 Secretary: Jenyfra Nelson

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

All Officers above, and,
 Past President: Frank Budney
 At Large: Harry Bratty, Shelly Cucugliello,
 Dave Gilcrest, Lori Jo Jamieson,
 Gary Pilling, Jim Priest, Bernadine Visalli,
 Jim Watson, Ed Zboyan

Jersey Blues

The Newsletter of the New Jersey Bluebird Society

Editor: Lori Jo Jamieson bluebirdljj@gmail.com

Webmaster: Gary Pilling gpilling32@gmail.com

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CONGRATULATIONS To Our Caption Contest Winner!
Den DiMarco of Turnersville





Photo of banded eastern bluebird taken by monitor Ann B. Silvers of Salem County.

Bluebird Banding Summary 2021

I just got word from Jim Watson that we banded 3273 bluebirds in NJ this season, an increase of about 1000 over 2020. This is a testament to those of you who banded and the landlords who stayed in communication and got their bluebird chicks banded.

Why do we band? Yes, it is a responsibility to band and does require time and effort. But, the results can be very complementary to our successful program.

Banding helps keep the banders in communication with the various landlords. Many landlords like to get their chicks banded and the end result is their bluebirds are managed better. More than anything, it helps maintain an interest in what is going on in those boxes.

Banding provides biological information about our bluebird population. Most band recoveries are in proximity to the bluebird's natal area. Sometimes we get neat recoveries. For

instance: Salem County Co-Coordinator, Bernie Visalli, banded a bird near Cowtown in Salem County. It was recovered 1 1/2 hours west in Lancaster County, PA. Read more about this on page 13.

Cape May County Coordinator, Rae Griffiths, banded a bluebird in Petersburg, Cape May County that was recovered in Nova Scotia, Canada. It is expected the bird got carried there by one of the storm events that we encountered. The person reported finding the banded bird after it was killed by a cat. Read her season report on pages 10 & 11.

Speaking of cats, some recoveries show us that outdoor cats are definitely a problem here in NJ. In the past year, we had two bluebirds killed by cats where the home owners allow their cats to roam free outside. We get few band recoveries, so when a bluebird is recovered and identified as being killed by a cat, it shows cat predation is indeed a serious problem. Think about how many birds are killed by feral cats where predation numbers are not as easily identified.

Banding adds credibility to our program. It is a way to monitor our program and compare results each year. We can see if our program is growing, evaluating our results annually.

Banding shares information with various partnerships organizations. For instance, we have 40 boxes on 6 State wildlife management areas (WMAs) in Cumberland and Salem Counties. The monitors keep accurate records so information can be given to the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife. This season, in those 40 boxes, we fledged 227 bluebirds. While it is difficult to evaluate the various issues that surface (number of eggs laid, eggs not hatched, abandoned nests, predation issues, etc.), we can fall back on the number of bluebirds fledged per box for the overall success of the boxes/trail. Some boxes have 2-3 successful broods, some none. For the 40 boxes, we averaged 5.6 bluebirds fledged per box. Anything over 4 is considered very respectable.

This is one reason I am more concerned about the numbers of bluebirds fledged. Dave Gilcrest collates our numbers by County in a chart that shows how our populations in each County are doing. As I have mentioned before, NJ leads the U.S. in a trend of almost a 7% increase annually. While there are many factors involved in this trend, our management is certainly part of that success.

Thank you one and all - the monitors, the banders, Jim Watson who enters all the band numbers, Dave Gilcrest who summarizes our season, financial supporters, the organizations and individual landlords who allow us to locate boxes on their property. We are one of only a few affiliates that has a banding program. - *Allen Jackson*



WARNING! Don't paint those PVC predator guards! We had two instances this year of raccoons climbing the guards because the added paint gave them traction. Don't be more concerned about esthetics than function. Those guards are designed to perform a specific function and they do until people paint them a different color. Read about County Coordinator Bernie Visalli's experience with this issue in Gloucester County on **page 12**.



From the President's Desk - by Allen Jackson

First and foremost, I'd like to welcome Louise Cockey as our new Treasurer, replacing Gemma Major. A huge thanks goes out to Gemma, who has done an excellent job keeping our records straight over the past 4 years (or has it been 6 years?) Louise began coordinating with Gemma during the Covid crisis and she, Gemma and I recently met in at TD Bank in Barnegat to officially sign over responsibilities. I am impressed with Louise's enthusiasm for the position! Her bio and photo are below.

Reflecting on the 2021 Season - The 2021 nesting season is over and the final summary should showcase our accomplishments. I expect to see major increases in the number of young bluebirds banded as well as the number fledged. The Data on page 5 confirms it!

Our program works well because of motivated members, partnerships, and because we have a good box program. During the Covid crisis, the Middle Township Middle School was not able to make boxes for us since March 2020. As our supply dwindled, NJBBS members Jim Priest and Dan Angeline powered up their workshops to build the boxes. They had expert assistance from Eric Peterson and Millie Rial. If my numbers are correct, they built about 150 boxes. Without their efforts, our program would have suffered during this time. I am anxious to see our summary report as I know we have continued to grow even during the pandemic. I recently spoke to Dave Moyer, the wood shop teacher, who said his classes will soon begin to make boxes again.

NJBBS Votes to Fund NABS' Grants Program - It is official. NJBBS has informed the NABS' grants program that we will participate by providing money for grants as appropriate. We have set aside \$2000 to cover up to 4 years. We plan to provide up to \$500 each year (or not) for NABS' grant program. The NABS Grants committee will email me the various proposals to review. We then decide if we wish to participate in any of the proposals. The grants are for research, education or conservation. More info about the grants is available on NABS website.

Our season should see increases in most counties thanks to our County Coordinators who respond to the public interested in our program. As we learn more about managing bluebirds and spread the work about bluebirds, it has a positive impact on everything - membership in both NJBBS and NABS, # boxes, # bluebirds fledged, and # of bluebird banded. I look forward to reviewing our banding sheets to better evaluate our season. While I know our numbers banded will significantly increase I believe I am also seeing some negative results. I noted banding 1, 2 or 3 young at many boxes. This may indicate problems with the food supply (insects) which can be tied to climate change. Whether our bluebirds can adjust to these impacts will go a long ways towards the future population of bluebirds. As noted in previous articles, NJ is ranked number one in a trend in the US with a 6.9% increase annually in bluebird numbers. This trend is for the year's 2005 thru 2015. It will be interesting to see when updates are published for 2010 thru 2020. NJ continues to be a leader in many areas thanks to you. I thank you for your efforts, so keep up the good work! - Allen



Meet Louise Cockey, Our New Treasurer - My interest in bluebirds began when my husband and I moved from Bergen County to Ocean County in 2014. I have fed birds for many years and when we moved to our house in Waretown, I continued that practice. I was thrilled to see bluebirds at our feeder and birdbath and have been enamored with them ever since. I contacted Allen Jackson when my first foray into providing a bluebird house turned into a disaster. Since then, I have learned a lot from reading the information on the NJBBS site, watching them in my backyard and of course, from Allen.

I grew up in Baltimore, MD, attended the University of Maryland in College Park and graduated with a degree in Microbiology. A certification in Medical Technology allowed me to work in the clinical labs of several hospitals. After a year in Cleveland, OH as a VISTA volunteer managing a Free Health Clinic, I moved to Seattle, Washington to work on a Master's degree in Microbiology. I finally ended up in Chapel Hill, NC at the University of North Carolina, as one of the managers in the clinical Microbiology laboratory. After a few years, I applied to UNC at Chapel Hill and was accepted into the graduate program for Biostatistics and received an MS. Thankfully, this ended my years of being a student! I was recruited by Hoffmann-LaRoche in Nutley, NJ to do statistical analyses of clinical trials and worked for them for about 24 years.

I am now firmly planted in Waretown and look forward to becoming more involved in NJBBS and getting to know its members.

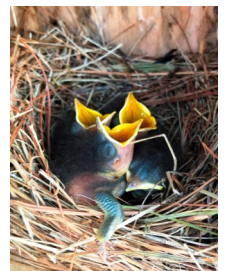


Photo: Last brood of bluebirds for 2021 hosted by Louise that fledged at the end of September

NJBS: Yearly Summary of Bluebirds Fledged 2016-2021

Includes data submitted as of 10/24/21

County	Bluebirds Fledged 2021	Bluebirds Fledged 2020	Bluebirds Fledged 2019	Bluebirds Fledged 2018	Bluebirds Fledged 2017	Bluebirds Fledged 2016
Atlantic	1148	554	575	684	536	514
Bergen	0	0	0	0	0	0
Burlington	563	468	268	352	320	142
Camden	175	137	59	45	0	0
Cape May	341	357	210	203	235	75
Cumberland	970	845	786	649	603	407
Essex	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gloucester	1260	1064	684	387	261	208
Hudson	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hunterdon	23	30	35	21	0	0
Mercer	5	0	0	0	0	0
Middlesex	19	5	28	61	50	55
Monmouth	63	61	51	86	88	162
Morris	299	163	214	265	286	291
Ocean	756	1068	266	737	730	219
Passaic	0	0	0	0	0	0
Salem	1269	904	540	243	222	112
Somerset	130	95	79	15	55	43
Sussex	0	0	0	0	0	0
Union	0	0	0	0	0	0
Warren	163	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	7184	5751	3795	3748	3386	2228



We encourage members to submit the number of bluebirds fledged from their boxes at the end of each season. This precious data is used to monitor population trends in New Jersey. If you didn't receive a form via email, please email Gary Pilling at gpilling32@gmail.com.

If you are reading this newsletter and still aren't a member, here's what you're missing: A community of people, all ages, all areas of New Jersey, all interested in bluebirds | Education about bluebirds and assistance with nestbox trails | Expertise and guidance to trail monitors and backyard bluebird enthusiasts | Data forms to help document the bluebird activities in your boxes!

Now that you're thinking about it, why not go to www.njbluebirdsociety.org and become a member?

Below is a list of our **County Coordinators**. There are blanks here, too, but if you are interested in hosting bluebirds (and other cavity-nesting birds) on your property, please contact the Coordinator closest to you.

Atlantic - Jim Watson

609-204-3358
wombat3287@gmail.com

Burlington - Nels Anderson

609-268-1817
nels.anderson@comcast.net

Camden - Chuck Kanupke

856-795-5810
chuckkanupke@verizon.net

Cape May - Rae Griffiths

413-695-8291
raegriffiths105@gmail.com

Cumberland - Allen Jackson

609-805-4073
aljxn@aol.com

Gloucester Co-coordinators

David Gilcrest

609-238-8065
dvgilcrest@aol.com

Bernadine Visalli

856-986-4502
buttonwood61@yahoo.com

Middlesex - Susan Meaney

732-213-6870
meaneySusan@hotmail.com

Ocean- Laura Stone

732-300-4604
Lauras36@yahoo.com

Somerset - April Tarantino

732-735-3511
apriltarantino@hotmail.com

Salem Co-coordinators

Bernadine Visalli

856-986-4502
buttonwood61@yahoo.com

Allen Jackson

609-805-4073
aljxn@aol.com

Union - Frank V. Budney

908-687-2169
dbdown@aol.com

Warren - McKenna Kels

908-878-7077
mckennakels@gmail.com

ATLANTIC COUNTY

Coordinator, Jim Watson

SUCCESS AT THE JOHN LAYTON MEMORIAL BLUEBIRD TRAIL ~ by Cheryl Lees

Early this season, Jim Watson, Allen Jackson and I put up 4 bluebird boxes at Reed's Organic Farm (5075 Spruce Avenue, Egg Harbor Township) to establish a bluebird trail in John Layton's memory. John was NJBBS' past Treasurer and a Founding Member. The farm, "A Meaningful Purpose," (see more info below) was established as a collective - a non-profit group created with the mission to renew land, provide shelter to farm animals and produce quality organic food.



During the season, I monitored the boxes with many challenges, including having to deal with house sparrows, nesting tree swallows and house wrens. After a pair of tree swallows fledged their young in box #2, bluebirds moved in, built their nest and laid 4 eggs.

On July 21, along with a group of young adults and their teacher, Melanie Reed, we banded the 8-day old chicks.

Besides this achievement, we were also able to band bluebirds at John and Dotty's sons' homes (Joe and Steve) and at Dotty's home. NJBBS has established this bluebird trail and The John Layton Excellence Award (awarded to Gail Fisher in 2020) to ensure that John's work continues in his memory in EHT.

From first eggs to banded chicks...all photos by Cheryl Lees



Our Story: Meaningful Purpose, Inc. is currently operating at **Reed's Farm**. We are a nonprofit organization that was set up with the clear intent of helping out the local community by creating a hub on a local farm that serves as an animal rescue, a platform for sustainable, organic farming and an employer for individuals with special needs. Our board members take no salary and all donations and proceeds are used in our efforts to rescue animals, farm organically, and helping those with special needs by giving them a meaning and a purpose.

Support Regenerative Farming - What can you grow on 80 acres of prime farmland in Egg Harbor Township? You can grow food, of course. But you can also grow opportunity. You can practice sustainable organic farming in order to feed the land that feeds us. You can harvest the talents and energy of underserved populations, enlist their help and reward their efforts. You can provide a home for farm animals who will otherwise be sacrificed and a hub for interaction and education. And in doing so, you can contribute to the healthy growth of our region and our world. By participating in the efforts of A Meaningful Purpose, the charitable organization behind the Reed's Organic Farm initiative, you can help us feed, nourish, and sustain what's best in us.

Let's do better. Let's be better. Let's grow better.

Fall Market Hours: Friday, Saturday & Sunday: 9am-3pm
 5075 Spruce Avenue, EHT, NJ 08234 609-457-0273 <https://www.reedsorganicfarm.org>

BURLINGTON COUNTY

Coordinator, Nels Anderson



Pine Barren Gentian

Franklin Parker Preserve Nest Box Trail 2021 - submitted by Nels Anderson

FPP is a huge wetland and pine/ oak forested area of 16 square miles managed by NJ Conservation Foundation. With 60 nest boxes in place, there could be more, but with the focus on Eastern bluebirds, locations favoring them is a prime consideration. On the other hand, tree swallows love every inch - and they are cavity nesters as well - so in May and June they are ever present. Bluebirds and tree swallows battle over nest boxes, sometimes to death. Fortunately, bluebirds start nesting in early April, as the first bluebird egg was observed April 6th. Tree swallows wait until May when insects are more abundant so they can easily feed themselves and their young. All tree swallow food gathering is done in the air.

The weekly trip to check nest box activity begins in March and continues on into late August. Each trip covers 47 miles with about twenty of that within the Preserve. I am sure there other places in the Preserve suitable for bluebirds but with all the water, access can be limited.

So, I get to open nest boxes 1,200 times a year here. Inside could be wasps, bees, hornets, bats, tree frogs, mice, flying squirrels, or snakes, but often enough there is a well crafted nest with bluebird eggs or young. Some might think this a tough chore but for me it is a flowery wonderful world decorated with a myriad of wildlife. The only thanks I'll ever need is seeing or hearing bluebirds. *(photos by Nels Anderson)*

Eastern Bluebirds fledged: 118 | Tree Swallows fledged: 86 | Tufted Titmice fledged: 4

Lost and Found - I received a call from Emile DeVito of New Jersey Conservation Foundation late in the afternoon of Sept 13th. A party had lost their way in Franklin Parker Preserve and their only references were "Box 31 and Box 32." The boxes are nesting bird houses each numbered on the sides for bluebirds which I monitor each week through spring and summer. Here is the problem: trying to pinpoint someone to the location of each box could be difficult as there are few landmarks with which to guide and a lot of square miles involved. I did the best I could.

Well, I stewed for a little. I had asked Emile if I should go there, and he said "NO!" So, I was thinking that it might be better to go now, than later at 9 pm.

I went towards box 31 and found two women walking my way. They were happy to see my truck. They asked if I was the rescue team and told them they were walking in the right direction do you need a ride? Donna and Mary said they walked in and they would walk out but certainly appreciated the directions and a bottle of water. Donna said God bless you. I have had a lot of experiences and seen a lot of critters while touring there but had never been blessed before. The other team showed up within minutes and there were smiles all over. What a beautiful pleasant late afternoon episode and so suddenly out of the blue. I had never thought my nest boxes might ever become landmarks.

Emile's final directions were, "Get a map and post one at every nest box, should this ever happen again." Emile has spent most of his life in the wilds of New Jersey and he is usually right. Amen. - *Nels Anderson*

Pine Lands Bluebird Trail 2021 - Nels Anderson

It was a quick start this year after a mild winter, with the first bluebird egg observed April 3rd and the first to fledge May 8th. Nesting activity was good throughout the season; however, some usually productive nest boxes remained empty, so moving a few boxes might be in order. House sparrows are still a nuisance here and there, but seem to be diminishing. Predation was minimal. The last bluebird to fledge did so around August 25th, so that is quite a long nesting season.

With the help of Harry Bratty and Clement Green in Indian Mills, Wharton, and Tabernacle, we totaled 196 bluebirds fledged. The Girl Scout Trail, monitored by Catie Andrews - plus Grandfather, Bill Andrews and Hanna, plus Dad, Larry Foster - fledged 80 bluebirds. Just a few years ago that number would have been much fewer, so we are all proud of them. I thank everyone who played a part in this endeavor, including those who allowed us to tramp through their yards and fields to check nesting progress. That is very much appreciated. How else could we do this?

Many birds fly south this time of year and those who can make a living through winter hang around. I participated in the Christmas Bird Count for many years. Most of those years, bluebirds were counted. I don't always see them day by day, but often hear their soft calls right through winter, and I like that, a lot. I wish the class of 2021 well and good luck through the winter.

CAMDEN COUNTY Coordinator, Chuck Kanupke

Camden County Park Monitors Meet - September 18, 2021



Today we had our first County Park monitor's meeting and the weather was just perfect. Chuck Kanupke, Mike Chezik, Cindy Parise and her husband, Rocco, and my wife Priscilla and I attended the meeting. I'm very pleased with how it went. We discussed the possibilities of moving or removing nest boxes in many of the parks. We focused on ways to improve our work for next year. Even though no hard decisions were made, we have a better overall feeling of everyone's ideas to improve our results for next year. Later this fall Allen and I will walk the parks and decide what we think needs to be done, if anything.

As we critique our locations, we only get better. Over 2021 our parks have had a 60% increase in fledged chicks, which is great. So I guess we are doing something right! We are hoping next year is better yet. I can not thank my group enough for all they do. I want to specially thank Cindy for the incredible gift of a 2021 bluebird book with all the photos through the season. Such a wonderful thought. Thanks everyone! - Jim Priest



"Show and Tell" at Wild Birds Unlimited

In September, Dave Gilcrest, Allen Jackson and Chuck Kanupke presented a program at Wild Birds Unlimited in Sicklerville. Some people who attended have been helping us with our work in Camden County.



Community Outreach!

This past spring, Matt Giovetsis, and my wife Priscilla and I represented NJBBS at two events at Scotland Run Park. On **May 24th's Earth Day Celebration**, we met someone who later had a nest box installed in their yard. **June 6th's Waterfest** was a very hot day, but we made the best of it, signing up three new bluebird landlords!

We gave out lots of literature and made folks aware of us, and that we are helping to increase the bluebird population. So I considered both days to be winners, and an excellent way to tell folks about NJBBS and what we do for the bluebirds. -JP



A newly hatched chick



Jim bands a chick



A first for Jim: 4 white bluebird eggs, at a Spinelli Farms nest box



L: Matt Giovetsis helps put up boxes. R: Jim Priest and wife Priscilla relocate a nest box away from a tree to prevent snake predation



10 Chickadee eggs in New Brooklyn Park

CAMDEN COUNTY

Coordinator, Chuck Kanupke

Camden County Bluebird Update - by Chuck Kanupke

In 2018, the Camden County bluebird group was established by the NJBBS. This formation is a story of collaboration and cooperation between several organizations and, at its heart, a host of citizen volunteers. In the fall of 2017, Allen Jackson approached the Audubon Wildlife Society (AWS), Audubon, NJ, proposing that AWS consider launching a bluebird habitat endeavor targeting Camden County. Since I already had many years of experience monitoring and coordinating the World Series of Birding and the NJ Pinelands Audubon Christmas Bird Count, I thought this would be a worthwhile project. In 2017, I joined with Allen to monitor the BB nest boxes NJBBS installed on the Atlantic City Expressway in Camden County.

As this was in progress, we were approached by a Boy Scout seeking to earn his Eagle Scout badge by updating an antiquated nest box trail at Camden County's New Brooklyn Park, Winslow Township. It was agreed that the project would be to repair and install nest boxes in the park.

In 2019, we selected locations in New Brooklyn according to habitat, safety from predators, and recommended distance between boxes in accordance with park operations to reconfigure the existing layout. In 2020, we installed boxes in pairs and singles with predator guards. We completed installation just in time for the 2020 nesting season. It was cool to view the perched male BBs watching our work. In some cases, as soon as we departed, they and their mate took residence to construct their nest.

In the formative period, we collaborated with the Wild Birds Unlimited retail stores in Cherry Hill and Sicklerville. We conducted "meet and greet" in-store seminars which provided the opportunity to "show and tell" the benefits for blue bird habitats and their populations. The next step was recruiting and training volunteers for monitoring and locating new habitats suited for blue bird populations. There were no problems finding volunteers. Many attendees became excited about this project and volunteered to participate in monetary donations, monitoring nest boxes and assisting to locate new properties for box installations.

In 2019, Jim Priest, a retired Navy Veteran, joined the Camden group. Jim brought significant bird/habitat management experience to the team. In his Navy career, Jim was stationed on Midway Island, one of the oldest atoll formations in the world that provides nesting habitat for millions of seabirds. And, Midway is the location for one of the most significant naval battles in our history. At Midway, Jim performed various birding and habitat tasks including banding Petrels and other birds. Jim is on the NJBBS board, and provides assistance in banding, record keeping, selecting locations and installing boxes. Following Jim's "best practices," new volunteers are prepared to monitor both boxes and bluebird trails. In addition, Jim also monitors his own trail.

Currently, we have over 30 citizen volunteers who have nest boxes installed on their properties or assist with monitoring, maintenance, etc. Partnerships are important to our growth. Connecting with Winslow Township Administration, we've added new trails and refurbished habitats in four Township public parks. In 2020, we assisted in the renovation of the Frank Donio Park trail replacing worn-out nest boxes and guards with 4 new boxes. The Donio trail was established over 20 years ago. We've partnered with Camden County Parks to install a trail along the Cooper River. We have installations at Tavistock County Club and Burlington Golf Club. Just recently, we've launched several locations within Rancocas Conservancy properties. And, we've teamed-up with a Girl Scout troop in Mt. Laurel who've partnered with their parents and volunteers to construct, paint, install and monitor their Mt. Lauren Community Gardens trails.

In 2021, Camden fledged 175 Eastern Bluebirds. We are proud of our beautiful bluebird trails and our team accomplishments. Our blue bird achievements would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of many volunteers, collaboration with the county agencies, building on the experience and expertise of others, and resources from the NJBBS and other organizations. Thanks. Chuck Kanupke

Camden County news continues on page 17

2021 Season by Jim Priest		
Location	Eggs	Fledged
New Brooklyn Park	83	59
Donio Park	26	19
Gloucester Twp Community Park	22	11
A/C Expressway Exit 33	33	30
Winslow Twp, other Parks & Spinelli Farms	54	39
Camden County Back Yards	17	17
Total for Camden County	235	175
Gloucester County Back Yards	44	33
Burlington County	44	31
Atlantic County	4	2
Totals for the Season	327	241

CAPE MAY COUNTY

Coordinator, Rae Griffiths

2021 End of Season Summary for Cape May County - Submitted by Rae Griffiths, Cape May County Coordinator

2021 Bluebirds Hatched – 363

Hatchlings Lost to Predation/Weather/
Human Disturbance- 22 including 7 banded

Bluebirds Fledged – 341 Banded – 311 | Unbanded - 37

Cape May County – Banded: 295 | Unbanded - 30
Died after banding - 2
Atlantic County – Banded - 16 | Unbanded - 1
Died after banding - 5

New boxes placed - 5 New sites added - 7

Boxes with two broods - 17 Boxes producing three broods - 5
Sites producing 3 broods between paired boxes - 2
Sites producing 2 broods between paired boxes - 9
Sites producing one brood - 17

some success. At least seven sites had HOWR competition for the box(es), but several of them still managed a successful bluebird nest despite these determined little birds. At least three sites had issues with snake predation this season. Head of the River Cemetery lost an entire brood of banded chicks to a snake that was discovered curled up in the box digesting them upon cleanout! (*see photo below*)

Successful Sites

Shellbay Family Camping Resort in Cape May Courthouse is the southernmost site with successful nesting in Cape May County in the last several years. Monitored by Richard Ryder and myself, the six boxes at Shellbay produced 29 fledglings this season despite some HOSP and possible snake predation. We are hopeful that continued success at this site will help bluebird recovery in the southern part of the county.

Tom Berger diligently monitored the four boxes at Amanda's Field and the one box at the Gandy Farmstead Historic Site again this year. 13 hatchlings successfully fledged from Amanda's Field, as well as a clutch of four from the box at Gandy Farmstead after a successful brood of chickadees earlier in the season (*see photo below*). Interestingly, the box at Amanda's Field that was most successful in 2020 didn't see any activity this season. Both Tom and I noticed renewed human activity around that box as COVID restrictions eased. We will be watching it closely in 2022 to determine if it seems prudent to move it to a quieter location in the park.

Atlantic County

The five boxes at Head of the River Cemetery in Atlantic County produced 12 bluebird fledglings between them, with two broods being lost to snake predation. (*see photo below*).

Comments

2021 proved to be another wonderful year for bluebird activity in Cape May County. 39 active monitors monitored 124 boxes in Cape May County and 5 in Atlantic County. Seven new bluebird enthusiasts joined as monitors/sites this season. Welcome to Terrie & Stew Campbell, Anne Cowan, Laurie Elmer, Kim Jespersen, Stan Sperlak/The Sperlak Gallery, Abby Sykes/Star Hollow Stables, and Linda Williams. Of these new sites, three saw bluebird nest activity. Congratulations Anne, Laurie and Linda! Kim had my first ever Tufted Titmouse nest, and Terrie & Stew saw successful tree swallow nesting on their property. Here's to continued success next season for all, and hopefully even more bluebirds!

The first chicks of the season were banded on April 28th at Head of the River Cemetery in Atlantic County. The last chicks were banded on August 26th at Big Timber Lake RV Camping Resort in Cape May Courthouse. Four sites had HOSP predation with at least six other sites having HOSP presence in boxes. I continued oiling eggs this season with



One of three "six packs" this season



A sleepy brood of 5-6 day old chicks



Annie Becica holds newly banded chicks at Big Timber Lake GC



Tom Berger and his daughter help band at Gandy Farmstead



An unwanted visitor to a box at Head of the River Cemetery

CAPE MAY COUNTY

Coordinator, Rae Griffiths

(continued from page 9) Plans are being made to move these boxes away from trees that seem to be aiding in snake access. Toward the end of the season, bluebird hatchlings were also observed in a bright pink decorative box at the cemetery. We can only hope those birds fledged successfully despite being without a predator guard. At least three successful broods of tree swallows also fledged from the cemetery this season.

Over on Hands Mill Road in Woodbine, five boxes located between the North Country Knits Sheep Farm and the Sunset Flower Farm produced 30 fledglings this season with 18 more fledging from four boxes at nearby Belleplain State Forest. Five more boxes on the property of Jason Hearon nearby yielded 20 more!

The Dennis Township Primary School continued to be a successful site again this season with 21 young bluebirds fledging between 3 boxes. One clutch of three eggs never hatched. I speculate that an adult bluebird found dead on the school grounds was one of the parents and the other abandon the nest after its partner's death.

The Bixby Farm on Rte. 50 in Woodbine has had active bluebird monitoring for over a decade! This season, the roughly 18 boxes scattered over the extensive property produced 35 fledglings. The box at the nearby home of Laurie Elmer, produced another 6, making this whole area very productive bluebird territory!

Congratulations to Carol Van Artsdalen, Chris Devaney, Shellbay Camping Resort, Sunset Flower Farm and Dennis Township Primary School. These five sites had boxes that fledged three successful consecutive broods this season.

Other Interesting Notes and Reminders

- In March, Lisa Salimbene who helps monitor at the Dennis Township Middle School reported a groundskeeper had found a dead banded bluebird at the Dennis Town-

ship Primary School, which I later confirmed had been banded there on 8/3/2020. While that young bird didn't stray far from its banding location, just this past week, we learned that a hatchling banded at Amanda's Field on 6/18/2020 was recovered in Advocate Harbour, Nova Scotia this past July!!! Sadly, it is believed this bird was killed by a cat (Keep your feline friends indoors!!), but it goes to show you that there is so much to learn about our birds, and banding helps us do that.

- I noticed much more territorial behavior from bluebird parents this season than I did last season. In 2020, Gail and I did most of the box monitoring together so I can only guess that the presence of two people had some affect on their bravado! I observed the strongest aggression in areas where I have observed snakes near the boxes and wonder if this makes the parents particularly protective. In a couple of instances, I abandon banding efforts in favor of keeping myself safe and reducing stress on the parents. Never a dull moment with bluebirds!

- Bluebird boxes can be nest sites or provide temporary shelter to many animals. This season, I had reports of white-breasted nuthatch, tufted titmouse, downy woodpecker, tree swallow, Carolina chickadee, house wren, and of course house sparrows in boxes around the county. Monitor Ruth Bergstrom even reported discovering a tree frog in one of her boxes! Always be on the lookout for wasps too.

- As monitors, we sincerely hope you are members of the New Jersey Bluebird Society. If not, or if you need to renew your membership, you can do it online at njbluebird-society.org. Feel free to contact me if I can help. Consider becoming a member of the North American Bluebird Society as well (nabluebirdsociety.org). You will get their beautiful quarterly magazine with lots of great articles about our beloved bluebirds.



Petersburg Bluebird Travels 934 Miles - A bluebird that began its life in Cape May County, NJ ended that life in a small community called Advocate Harbour, on the shores of the Bay of Fundy in Nova Scotia. The little bird was found dead by Steve Hewens, after being caught by a cat. Curious about the leg band, he researched the number on the tag and contacted the Bird Band Lab.

The bird had been banded at Amanda's Field in Petersburg, NJ in Upper Township. It was one of five chicks banded from that box on 6/18/20. The box is located by a soccer field and was placed in that location in July 2019.

As Rae mentioned in her End-of-Season report, please keep your felines indoors - for their safety and for the preservation of wildlife.



GLOUCESTER COUNTY

Co-coordinators, David Gilcrest & Bernie Visalli



L: Note the painted guard. R: Half the nest is missing.

The Danger of Painting Predator Guards - A Conversation

Bernie: Here's a site with success last year. Nest check on Thursday was photo with nest. Today is the box with half nest removed. They were due for eggs, so assuming they had a few. Raccoon? Snake?

Allen Jackson: Could be a few things. I had a Gilwood box in the backyard similar to the ones you had at Grant's property. I watched a starling trying to get in the box last month. It couldn't get inside, but was able to reach in and take the eggs out. I think it is a raccoon that reached in and took the eggs and nesting material out. I don't like when people paint the predator guards a different color. That means that the guard is not as slippery and is not being waxed each year. While they may have a more pleasing guard to look at, they have made one that does not work to prevent predators from getting to the box.

Dave Gilcrest: I agree with Allen. A snake would not remove the nesting material. Raccoon scooped out the eggs and half the nest with them. I think that type of decorative spray paint leaves a rough finish that could help predators get around the predator guard.

[Editor's Note: A PVC guard's function is to prevent predators from getting a grip to climb. It is not meant to be décor, or to "blend in" with its surroundings. If appearance is a concern, maybe at a more public bluebird trail, why not use signage - with QR? Link the code to more information and educate visitors about "that white thing" that they're seeing. Google it! LJJ]



A New Monitor and Photographer - Gloucester County now has a member Ann Silvers, who takes awesome photos. Our "Hope" cover bird photo was taken by Ann. She is monitoring **Tranquility Trail, in Woolwich Township**, Gloucester County, and is helping to turn around that trail. Great work, Ann! See another of her photos on page 20.



Beautiful bluebirds photographed by Bernie Visalli. A note on the center photo: This past August, Bernie and her mom vacationed in Kitty Hawk, NC. They stayed in a gated community on a marina. Here's who they saw every morning!



New Jersey Bluebird Society: Our Mission Statement, Goals & Methods - Our mission is to provide education and guidance in order to conserve and promote Bluebirds and other cavity nesting birds in New Jersey. Our primary goal is to produce a healthy and productive bluebird population in New Jersey by establishing trails that are located in suitable habitat while utilizing and promoting recommended bluebird management practices (proper housing, protection from predators, and nest monitoring.). We also recognize the importance and necessity to promote management of bluebirds in backyards. We provide expertise and guidance to trail monitors and backyard bluebird enthusiasts, monitor yearly population trends by surveying the number of young fledged from nest boxes, and provide public education about bluebirds to interested people in the state of New Jersey.

So...Why Bluebirds? Bluebirds are secondary cavity-nesters, meaning they cannot excavate their own nesting sites in trees. They have struggled to survive due to loss of habitat to development and changes in land management. Since they readily accept nesting boxes humans provide and because they respond well to habitat management, we are in a unique position to benefit these beautiful birds. Bluebirds are primarily ground feeders, with insects making up as much as 90% of their diet during the spring and summer months. They perch to hunt the ground for grubs, grasshoppers and caterpillars. Open areas with sparse or low vegetation provide the best potential habitat for bluebirds to find insects. Other important factors are places to perch and structure for fledglings to fly to on their first flight. Agricultural areas, parks, even back yards and cemeteries can provide this habitat.



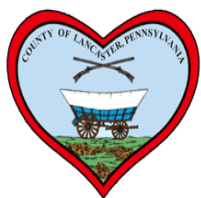
North American Bluebird Society - There are lots of advantages to being a member of both **NJBBS** and **NABS**. Joining NABS entitles you to receive "Bluebird", their colorful quarterly publication. This is a quality periodical of interest to anyone who appreciates bluebirds and other secondary cavity nesters. The North American Bluebird Society organization supports and helps unify the work of state chapters across America. For a small membership fee, everyone in NJBBS is encouraged to also join NABS and get a better understanding of what our bluebird friends are doing in North America.

If you are new to the world of bluebirds, NABS's website, www.nabluebirdsociety.org is a goldmine of information, including printable (PDF) **fact sheets** on getting started, nestbox plans, predator control, monitoring guides and feeding recommendations. Even those of us who consider ourselves "experienced" find these resources to be very useful for our own use and as information for new monitors. **Please consider joining both organizations today!**

Update on Jim's "Winter Coats" - Jim Priest

Well, I have been trying out some of my winter coats (as I call them). I put them on 7 boxes with no problems that I know of. All boxes had chicks and so far I have banded all. I left the "coats" on afterwards for a few days since we had rather chilly days and nights.

The photo was taken at B. Barsotti's home. We had just banded 5 chicks, and as you can see, the "coat" had no affect on the bluebirds. We sat there for about 1 1/2 hours and they kept going in and out feeding the young. *More Camden County news on pages 8&9.*



A LANCASTER BLUEBIRD BAND RECOVERY

A deceased banded bluebird was found in Lancaster County, PA by Waylan Shirk, age 11, who is a "horse and buggy" Mennonite. Since his family does not have a computer they asked their neighbor, Mary Shirk, to report the band.

The bird was found dead on the road, flat from being run over by a vehicle, around 6 a.m. in the morning on April 23, 2021. Bluebird was a female. She and her mate were frequently seen hanging around the Shirk's bluebird box in their front yard. The pair had not built a nest inside the box at that time but the male is presently still being seen there singing, but with no female. So, it is assumed she was the one that was hit by a vehicle.

Mary printed off the information for Waylan from the banding web site along with the certificate they sent. She placed the band in a small plastic container for him. He and his family are sad of the find, but he is also proud he could help with the identification. They are hoping that the male finds a mate and will nest in their bluebird box.

Caernarvon Township is located in the northeastern part of Lancaster County, PA, near the Berks and Chester County lines, surrounded by a farming community of Mennonite and Amish farmers. Mary also has a large bird feeding station all winter long and into the summer and has been blessed with bluebirds here also.

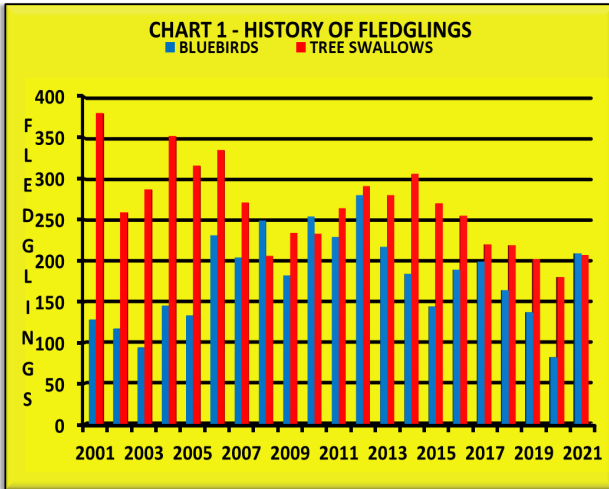
The bluebird reported 4/23/21 was banded 5/25/20 at the Cowtown Rodeo site in Woodstown, NJ. Bernadine Visalli monitors a trail there as well as many other locations in Salem County. *More Salem County news on page 16.*

MORRIS COUNTY

Submitted by Leo Hollein & Tom Gula

2021 BLUEBIRD NEST BOX REPORT - Bluebirds Have Productive Nesting Season

Bluebirds had an above average nesting season, fledging 209 young in 2021. This is the largest number since 2013,



when 217 bluebirds fledged. **Chart 1** presents the history of Refuge bluebird and tree swallow fledglings from 2001 to 2021. More bluebirds than tree swallows fledged for the first time since 2010. The reduction in open water due to a Pool 1 draining reduced food resources for raccoons and other animals that seek prey along the shoreline. This makes nest boxes vulnerable to increased predation.

The bluebird nesting started earlier than normal due to the milder weather in early Spring. The peak egg laying date (day with greatest number of eggs laid) was April 17. The average peak date for the Refuge is April 27. An earlier start provides more time for bluebird pairs to raise 2 clutches. There were hot and cold spells during the Spring as well as plentiful rain. The weather did not negatively impact bluebird nesting success. It did produce an abundance of

growth in the fields. Bluebirds nested in 68% of the box pairs. Thirteen bluebird pairs fledged young from two clutches in 2021. Three pairs laid 3 clutches. Two fledged one clutch. The other pair did not fledge any young.



RARE "DWARF" BLUEBIRD EGG FOUND

Bluebirds as well as other avian species occasionally deviate from the standard process of forming an egg in their oviduct. The result is an unusual egg that could have no yoke, two yokes (peanut shaped), two shells or another type of malformed egg. This is only the second dwarf egg found in a Refuge bluebird nest in over 1200 bluebird nestings since 2001. No other types of malformed eggs have been found in the Refuge bluebird boxes. **The photo at left** shows a clutch of 3 bluebird eggs. All are blue. Two are normal sized while the other is about a third of normal size and rounder. The smaller egg may have a rougher shell. This egg does not have a yoke. It is infertile. The two normal eggs in the nest with the dwarf egg are viable. These eggs can hatch and produce bluebird fledglings.



TWO CLUTCHES OF WHITE BLUEBIRD EGGS REPORTED

Two clutches of white bluebird eggs were found this season. Both clutches of white eggs were laid by the same bluebirds in the same pair of nest boxes. The bluebirds successfully fledged young from these eggs. White bluebird eggs are not as rare as dwarf eggs but are infrequent enough to be noted. In the Refuge white bluebird eggs have been found in about 2% of the bluebird nestings. These white eggs are not found every year. If the female bluebird that laid the white eggs survives, it is likely she will return to the same box pair next season and have more white egg clutches. Female bluebirds normally add a pigment in their oviduct to produce a blue egg. If the gene for this pigment is missing, the bluebird will always lay white eggs. There is no downside to white bluebird eggs because bluebirds lay their eggs in nest boxes or natural tree cavities where they are not visible to predators. Blue eggs are a likely carryover from the time when

bluebirds nested in open nests like their robin relatives. The blue color was kept when bluebirds became cavity nesters.

Nest Box Monitoring Returns to Normal - All volunteer activity in 2020 was suspended in the Refuge from mid-March to mid-June due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of weekly visits for three months prevented an accurate count of nesting activities especially for bluebirds who are the first species to nest in the boxes. As in the years prior to 2020, nest boxes were monitored on a weekly basis in 2021. By monitoring weekly, accurate data is obtained on the number of nesting attempts, as well as the number of eggs, hatchlings and fledglings.

MORRIS COUNTY

Submitted by Leo Hollein & Tom Gula



Map 1, created by Tom Gula, presents the locations of the 135 nest boxes monitored in 2021. Bluebirds nested in box pairs indicated by blue dots. The yellow dots indicate the box pair was used by other nesting birds. The grassy areas around the Visitor Center and off Woodland Road are the prime bluebird nesting territories in the Refuge. Thirty-three nest box pairs had both tree swallow and bluebird nestings. Fifteen individual boxes were not used for nesting during the season. Many boxes hosted multiple nestings.

Five Volunteers Monitor Nest Boxes in 2021 - The trail provides volunteer opportunities for those who wish to work with wildlife. Since the Friends became responsible for the bluebird trail, eighteen different volunteers (7 male and 11 female) have monitored part of the bluebird trail for at least one season. This is a significant commitment of time because volunteers visit their nest boxes once per week from early April through mid-August. The data (nest, species, eggs, hatchlings, fledglings, and observations) from the visit is entered into a spreadsheet and sent to the coordinator who summarizes the data and distributes it weekly to the nest box monitors.

Many thanks to Jim Mulvey, Nancy Felicito, Tom Gula and Christine Pirog who monitored nest boxes and reported their findings during the 2021 nesting season. A special thanks to Tom Gula who helped with maintaining the bluebird boxes as well as recording the GPS locations of boxes with new locations for 2021 and developing Map 1.

- Leo Hollein & Tom Gula

OCEAN COUNTY Coordinator, Laura Stone



Meet Luci Street, one of Cloverdale Farm County Park's Youngest Volunteers

In 2020, Luci helped the staff at Cloverdale Farm County Park to monitor our bluebird boxes as part of her Girl Scout Bronze Star Award Project. She was able to see over 37 Eastern Bluebirds fledge that year through her monitoring efforts.

This year Luci reached out to ask us if she could assist us again monitoring the bluebirds because she loved the experience last year and the volunteer hours and training would go to her Cadet Service Bar. Of course the staff said "yes".

Luci ended up putting in over 30 hours this summer doing bluebird monitoring. Here are some pictures of her 2021 monitoring season in which she was able to help record and document 44 birds fledge of which 33 were Eastern Bluebirds.

We are happy to have this budding birder on our team and even prouder that she just inquired about the possibility of taking on her Girl Scout Silver Star Award with us with her focus on the Eastern Bluebird!



Cloverdale Farm County Park - 34 Cloverdale Road, Barnegat, NJ 08005 - (609) 607-1861

Park Opens 7am. As of 11/7 closing time is 5:00pm. The Visitors Center opened in May of 2015, and contains exhibits that highlight the natural beauty and historical significance of the park. It is open from Friday through Sunday, 10am - 4pm

Cloverdale Farm County Park was purchased from Katherine Collins in 2004, who operated the cranberry bogs and tree farm on the property for over 50 years with her husband William. The 90-acre property has been continuously run as a cranberry farm since the late 1800s. Perhaps the most attractive aspect of the park is its natural beauty. Besides cranberries, the bogs are home to wildflowers, birds, and a host of other flora and fauna. This provides an opportunity for photographers and nature enthusiasts in any season. The 1.4 mile self-guided nature trail meanders through the farm into undisturbed woodlands that offer an escape from everyday life.

SALEM COUNTY Co-coordinators, Allen Jackson & Bernie Visalli



Salem County Co-coordinator Bernie Visalli observed and photographed some unusual eggs found in two boxes on the same trail, about a mile apart in **Pilesgrove Township**. Note that the small egg in the left photo is about 1/4 size of the other eggs and darker blue. Oblong egg at right was the only one in the nest. Both pairs of bluebirds in these boxes were on brood #2 and still in the laying mode.

SOMERSET COUNTY

Coordinator, April Tarantino

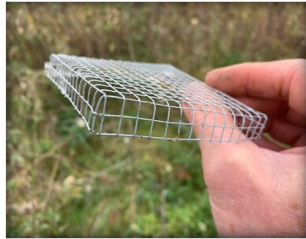
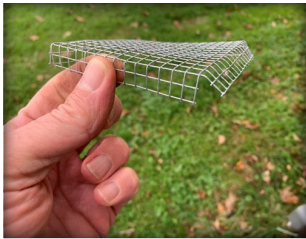
Blowfly Mitigation at Duke Farms

submitted by Clifford Berek, Avian and Sustainability Coordinator, Duke Farms Foundation

During the 2019 Bluebird Season, Duke Farms experienced a total loss of all bluebird chicks to Blowfly. This insidious pest is part of the Diptera family of insects. The female can lay 150-200 eggs which are usually white or yellow in color and measure between 0.5 and 1.5 mm. The eggs hatch in less than a day and produce maggots or larvae called gentles. They will parasitize the baby birds and consume most of the liquid in the body leaving the appearance of a mummified chick.

Year	Bluebirds Fledged at Duke Farms
2017	24
2018	9
2019	0
2020	8
2021	39

Clearly, after 2019 drastic measures were needed, since many bluebirds return to the same area to breed in subsequent years. Not much information was available, but home gardeners have been using Diatomaceous Earth to protect their plots from soft bodied insects. Although it has the appearance of a fine powder, it has sharp edges that will cut and kill the soft larvae. In the spring of 2020, Duke Farms undertook an experiment to see if we could use Diatomaceous Earth to help kill the blowfly while not affecting the bluebird chicks. In order to separate the powder from the nests small mesh chicken wire shelves were built.



These shelves were then placed at the bottom of the cleaned-out nest box and the breeding pair made their nest right on top of the shelf. The Diatomaceous Earth was then sprinkled on the floor of the box. The earth is refreshed each spring. When making these shelves, be careful about sharp edges where the chicken wire has been

cut. We cut as close to the horizontal support wires as we could and as needed filed away the sharp edges.

As seen in the chart of fledged chicks at Duke Farms (above), we are cautiously optimistic that this solution is working, but we will continue to monitor, and will update as needed. Questions or ideas can be directed to Clifford at cberek@dukefarms.org



A Letter of Gratitude for Bluebirds in Gloucester Township *(continued from page 9)*

Mayor Mayer, I am a long-time Gloucester Township resident, and I became involved with the New Jersey Bluebird Society last year. At one of our meetings, I heard about the bluebird houses that have been placed in Winslow Township parks in recent years with a lot of success. I was so surprised when I found out that Gloucester Township did not have any bluebird houses!

Back in April, I contacted the Public Works Department to inquire about installing some bluebird houses in the Gloucester Township Community Park. I spoke with Bob Morris and put him in contact with our local coordinator, Jim Priest, to provide more information. Soon after, Bob, Jim, and I met at the park and houses were installed.

Jim Priest builds and installs the bird houses and spends the entire bluebird season banding the baby bluebirds. He is very dedicated to improving the number of bluebirds in New Jersey! As a volunteer, I monitor the houses once a week and report to Jim about what is going on in the houses. Once we determine that bluebirds have nested, we monitor for eggs and hatchlings. Between 7 to 12 days, we put a tiny metal band onto their leg. At this point we monitor for them to successfully fledge and then clean out the house so it's ready for another nest, which can happen 2 or 3 more times in a season!

I'm happy to share with you that we initially installed 3 boxes in May and added 2 more in June. These houses produced 11 new bluebirds for Gloucester Township!



We believe this is a great start and will continue to grow year to year. I wanted to thank you for approving our project. Please enjoy the photos of the bluebirds!

Sincerely,
Cindy Parise

WARREN COUNTY

Coordinator, McKenna Kels



Old setups removed

Merrill Creek Reservoir - 2021 Season Report - Submitted by McKenna Kels and Lori Jo Jamieson

Team Bluebird spent many hours building and installing a trail of 25 nest boxes* and focused on replacing that season total of “zero” for Warren County since 2016. Success! Merrill Creek Reservoir fledged 84 bluebirds, along with 41 tree swallow fledglings. A number of chicks were banded when the qualified bander was available.

In the beginning of the season, we had a persistent problem with wasps building nests in a handful of boxes, discouraging bluebirds or tree swallows from moving in. Once we got rid of the wasps, the birds moved right in. There were two boxes with eggs that mysteriously went missing, even with PVC predator guards in place. We plan to change the location of these boxes for 2022.



Old and new paired boxes on single pole



None of our three paired box setups were successful. One of these pairs was installed 20 feet apart on a hill up from the reservoir in existing tree swallow territory. Another box was added to an existing box in a meadow.

The third pair of boxes were attached to a single pole - creating a new version of a rather tattered pair that had been removed. (see photo at left). Although there were bluebird and tree swallow nests started (and at one point, tree swallow eggs), no chicks fledged and the eggs went missing. We did not anticipate losing sight of this unique setup, literally, when a leased field of big bluestem swallowed it up. Three other boxes were overgrown as well, thus prematurely preventing any access to the entrance. New sites are planned for 2022.

Next up for Team Bluebird is winterizing the boxes and looking for appropriate sites in Merrill Creek’s many meadows. We hope to fine tune the trail and increase numbers for 2022. *See the article “Jersey Blues” Spring 2021 for details.



Merrill Creek Reservoir - <https://merrillcreek.com> - is a 650-acre reservoir surrounded by an additional 2,300 acres of woods and fields. Its basic purpose is to provide stored water that can be released to the Delaware River to make up for the evaporative water usage at certain electric generating units in times of low flow in the river. In addition to that basic purpose, Merrill Creek Reservoir provides a tranquil setting of water and land that allows people to interact with the natural environment. For directions, visit <https://merrillcreek.com/directions>.



L: Sealing a nest box at Wattles Stewardship Center in Port Murray, NJ. R: A winterized box on my trail at the Jerry Brunetti Environmental Center in Riverton, PA.



How and Why I Winterize Nest Boxes - by Lori Jo Jamieson

To provide shelter for cavity-nesting birds in the cold months, I seal any ventilation holes, but not the entrance hole, on each nest box with metal tape, available online and at hardware stores.

A handful of clean, dry pine needles is added for warmth and comfort. In some cases, depending on the box design, the door may be removed and installed upside down. This allows cold air to exit quickly and not flow down on any inhabitants. An easy option is to simply purchase a roosting box. I received one as a gift.

To discourage mice from gaining access and using nest boxes, any plant material should be cut back and removed from around the box. Mice and other rodents can carry dangerous pathogens, like hantavirus.

Hantaviruses are a family of viruses found worldwide. Deer mice and other wild rodents can shed hantavirus in their urine, droppings, and saliva. Nesting birds (and people!) can become infected when they breathe in contaminated air. If you suspect having to remove a mouse nest, remember to wear a mask and gloves - and face the entrance hole away from your face when you open it. Mice can and will jump at you! Facing downwind, clean out nesting material. Spray inside the box with a 10% bleach solution and leave it open for a day to dry. Monitor in a week for new nests. On the next page, I’ve included an excellent article from Sialis.org that previously appeared in “Jersey Blues.” Remember, even in winter, monitoring can be crucial. See you in the Spring!

SIALIS.ORG: ROOSTING: How do birds that don't migrate stay warm in the winter?

Birds have enough feathers to keep them warm in the winter IF they have enough food and IF they remain dry and out of severe winds. To stay warm, they fluff up their feathers, draw their head in or tuck it under a wing, and shiver. They may scrunch down by bending their legs, or tuck one foot up under their feathers to further reduce heat loss. They may also huddle together with other birds. During the night, the body temperature of birds like bluebirds and chickadees may drop 10-15 degrees, and their metabolism slows down to conserve energy. (This is called nocturnal hypothermia.)

Bluebirds spend about 50% of their lives roosting. (*Pitts, T. David*) A roost is a place or support where birds settle down to rest or sleep. A communal roost is a bunch of birds roosting together. Some birds roost on branches of trees like pines, cedars or oak, or in shrubs/vines. Others roost in cavities. A roost box is like a nestbox, only it is designed specifically for roosting.

Steve Gunn has designed a simple roosting box to be made from a single 1 x 6 board, 5 feet long. (plans below).

There are not a lot of reports of large flocks of bluebirds using roost boxes, but bluebirds often roost in a regular nestbox, especially in northern states. They may also roost in a box in the daytime during particularly inclement weather (e.g., high winds.) Evidence that a box is being used for roosting includes downy feathers (which sometimes fall out when birds are preening and fluffing), fecal material, and seeds/food residue. Birds often enter a cavity to roost just before sunset. They may enter or leave several times before settling in for the night. They leave right after sunrise.

Advantages of a Box for Roosting A box or cavity not only provides protection from the elements - it also helps keep them safe from hungry predators. Thus it may be best to just leave boxes up all winter so they can be used for roosting if desired.

Also, that way you won't have to go out in January or February to put them back up before nesting starts.

Weather-proofing standard nestboxes helps, as the birds sit on the floors. To some extent, deeper nestboxes will keep the drafts from chilling birds on the floor of the nestbox.

Options to prepare a box for winter roosting: a nestbox will do. It doesn't need a hole in the bottom of pegs - if it's really cold, and multiple birds roost together, they will stay warmer on the floor of the box. Seal up the ventilation holes (don't forget the floor). Duct tape on the OUTSIDE can do the trick nicely (if it sticks to the waterproofing). You can use rolled caulking (e.g. "Mortite") but again only on the outside of the box!

Add an inch or so of SMALL wood chips (avoid sawdust and commercially sold cedar bedding, and do not put in large wood chips that might get stuck in the hole and trap a bird inside) or a layer of soft grass, or some moss. Or you can line the floor with silver foil (which insulates and seals), bringing it up to the front of the nestbox under the entrance hole, and then add some dry grass. You can also put a 1/2" styrofoam, cut to fit, on the bottom of the nestbox.

Location and Predator Protection:

Mount roost boxes on poles with predator guards to keep the contents from being eaten, and to prevent mice from wintering in the box. Face the entrance away from prevailing winds - south is probably best for greatest warmth.

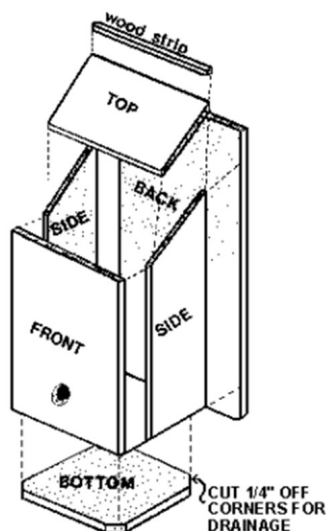
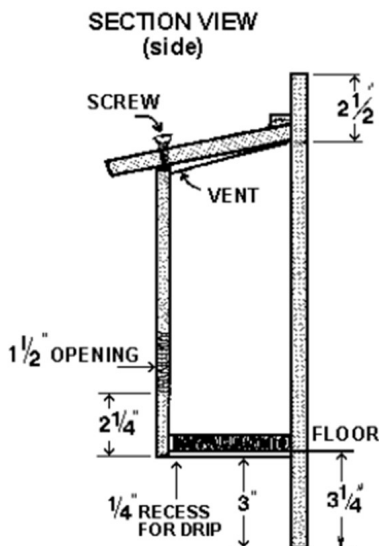
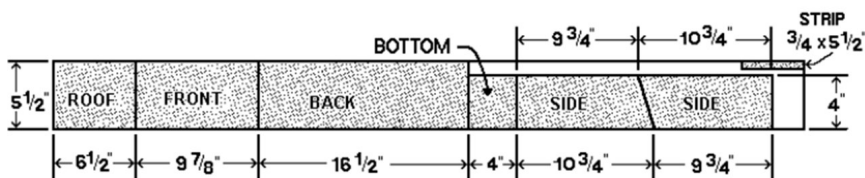
HOW TO BUILD A WINTER ROOST BOX



Drawings by
Steve Gunn

Missouri Department of Conservation

ALL PARTS FROM A SINGLE 1 X 6 BOARD 5' LONG





Photographs above were taken by Jenyfra Nelson. All rights reserved.



This "family portrait" was taken by Steve Bergman of Egg Harbor Township in Atlantic County. His nesting pair fledged seven chicks this season. Inset: Steve wisely installed a homemade predator guard after seeing snakes in his yard.



Were you there at just the right moment? Share your great images of bluebirds with NJBBS members! Only send images which you have personally taken. Include when and where they were taken. Please send jpegs as an email attachment to: BluebirdLJJ@gmail.com. Photo by Jenyfra Nelson.



Ann Silver's photograph seems to stop time.