



Jersey Blues

The Newsletter of The New Jersey Bluebird Society, an Affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society
~ Volume 6, Issue 1 - Spring, 2022

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK ~ by Allen Jackson

I expect by the time you get this newsletter there will be bluebirds that have started nesting. Last year, I recall we had eggs laid by the 19th of March. Hopefully cold weather will not impact our first nesting. Climate change and colder temperatures in the spring can also impact the insect population, which affects hatching of the eggs and the amount of insects available for both the parent and nestlings. As I have said before if you are a bluebird lover you also need to be an insect conservationist.

I am ready to get out and start monitoring my bluebird trail. During the covid crisis, being able to get outside and do my nest checks was a welcome relief from being cooped up. A number of new boxes were installed over the winter. I have located more than 20 new boxes.

New installations for 2022 - I was able to install 5 boxes at Ft. Mott in Pennsville, Salem County. Jeff Kiger will monitor that trail with his children. 3 more boxes were added to NJDF&W's Holly Farm in Millville, Cumberland County. We started out with 2 boxes there in 2020, both of which were productive, and added 2 more in 2021, which also were productive. We then added 3 more boxes for 2022. Lorraine McCay monitors and bands in the Burlington/Atlantic County area. She and I added 2 boxes in Shamong, replaced one at Batsto and added another box at Bass River State Park. Lastly, boxes were added to 2 sites in Jackson and Cream Ridge which will be monitored by Jonathan Hart. Jon is a new member anxious to promote bluebirds in that area. Laura Stone, Andrew Major and I met with Jon and got a lot accomplished. All this is separate from what many other monitors are doing in NJ. All in all, there are lots of positive vibes coming our way for the 2022 season. I am aware that Jim Priest and Jim Watson have been doing on-sites, and I am sure there are many others doing the same. Let us know what you've been up to! Email our Editor at bluebirdljj@gmail.com.

Please take the time to read John Joyce's article beginning on page 11 regarding his work the past 30 years at Joint Base MDL (L is for the Lakehurst Naval Air Station). John and his Natural Resource staff fledged their 10,000th bluebird in 2021. Outstanding example of a great program where accurate records were kept during that period.

Lastly, I encourage you all to go to our website and see the openings for Officers, Board of Directors and County Coordinators. Frank Buddy has stepped down as VP North, so there is a vacancy there. Now more than ever, we need members to step forward to keep our organization running smoothly. Many of our Officers are advanced in age and can no longer continue their work. You probably know that this is my last year as President. I started out as VP and assumed the Presidency shortly after that. I have devoted the past 12 years to the NJBBS but I simply can not continue and need to reduce my work load. As with many organizations, leaders are growing old too fast. Please consider taking your turn to continue with what we have achieved to date. ~ Allen



Photo by LJ Jamieson



Big News! NJBBS is now on FACEBOOK as "New Jersey Bluebird Society."

Please like and share our page to support bluebirds in New Jersey. [Click here to visit.](#)

A big thanks to Bernie Visalli for making this happen! (Read more on page 4.)



Photo by Harry Schmeider

**Here's A Big
Wing Wave
Welcome
to our new
NJBBS Members!**

Atlantic County
Susan Parker

Camden County
Althea Vail

Cape May County
Liz Gale
Bevin Rose O'Grady
JoAnn Wolicki

Cumberland County
Liz Meenan
Mary Watkins

Gloucester County
Craig Castelein

Hunterdon County
Mary Pagana

Middlesex County
Eric & Joanne Shurtleff

Monmouth County
Jean Montgomerie

Ocean County
Martin Hart

Salem County
Jeff Kiger
Lance Thomson

NJBBS OFFICERS

President: Allen Jackson - **Vice President, North:** *vacant*
Vice President, Central: Laura Stone - **Vice President, South:** Allen Jackson
Treasurer: Louise Cockey - **Secretary:** Jenyfra Nelson

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

All Officers above, plus **Past President:** Frank Budney
At Large: Harry Bratty, Shelly Cucugliello, Dave Gilcrest, Jonathan Hart
Lori Jo Jamieson, Gary Pilling, Jim Priest, Bernadine Visalli, Jim Watson
Welcome New Board Member, Jonathan Hart! Read more about Jon on page 13.



Ed Zboyan, a Founding Board Member of NJBBS, passed away on December 16th, 2021. Allen Jackson said, "One could expect to see him along with Frank Budney. He also acted as a coordinator handling many of the counties in the north. What I also remember is when we had our annual meetings, he always footed the bill for our lunches. We are grateful for all Ed contributed to NJBBS."

Interested in hosting bluebirds?

Contact the NJBBS County Coordinator closest to your location:

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
aljaxn@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

Salem Co-coordinators
Bernadine Visalli
856-986-4502
buttonwood61@yahoo.com
Allen Jackson
609-805-4073
aljaxn@aol.com

Warren - McKenna Kels
908-878-7077
mckennakels@gmail.com

**COUNTY COORDINATORS NEEDED in Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Hunterdon,
Mercer, Monmouth, Morris, Passaic, Sussex, and Union Counties.**

**For more information on these VITAL volunteer positions,
please call Allen Jackson at 609-805-4073
or email aljaxn@aol.com. Thank you!**



**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 of promoting 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.

Membership Has Its Rewards! Bluebirds are one of our most desirable species, and sometimes we just need nature to get us motivated. In this case, we hope your concern for the well being of our native Eastern Bluebird has motivated you to join the New Jersey Bluebird Society. Many factors impact bluebird survival, including weather, food/cover, predators, nest competition, pests, and disease. Proper management can be the key to maintaining a healthy and productive bluebird population. If you are reading this newsletter and still aren't a member, here's why you should be joining the NJBBS: We provide you with that up-to-date information. We also provide:

- ~ **A community of people, all ages, all areas of New Jersey, all interested in bluebirds**
- ~ **Education about bluebirds and assistance with nest box trails**
- ~ **Expertise and guidance to trail monitors and backyard bluebird enthusiasts.**
- ~ **Data forms to help document the bluebird activities in your boxes.**

We encourage NJBBS members to submit the number of bluebirds fledged from their boxes at the end of each nesting season. This precious data is used to monitor population trends in New Jersey. So, now that you're thinking about it, why not go to www.njbluebirdsociety.org and become a member?

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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Why Facebook?

During my site visits I am often asked "Does NJ Bluebird have a Facebook page?" or, "Are you on social media?"



That simple question piqued my interest. I started to think we may be missing out on an opportunity to find new members or share information about all the good things we are doing to help increase the bluebird population, with correct housing and monitoring guidelines.

So, I did a little social media investigation, and reached out to a few administrators of other non-profit Facebook pages. There is a bit more to it than I imagined! I wanted and needed to understand the challenges before creating the proposal to the Board of Directors and committing to the project.

In January 2022, my proposal was presented to the BOD. Concerns included who would be responsible for maintaining the page, and who could post comments and photos. With all questions addressed, the idea was approved shortly thereafter. The New Jersey Bluebird Society Facebook page is now live! [Please visit our new page](#), check it out, and be sure to share the page to spread the word!

Special thanks to Gary Pilling for being my sounding board and editor, and for communicating the information to the Board and Members. ~ *Bernnie Visalli, Gloucester and Salem Counties Co-Coordinator*

Join the 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 quality, colorful, quarterly publication of interest to anyone who appreciates bluebirds and other secondary cavity nesters. The NABS 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 about 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 NJBBS and NABS today!



Exciting News from NABS for Young Birders-to-be!

The North American Bluebird Society (NABS) is proud to announce the publication of Get to Know Bluebirds: A Guide for Young Nature Lovers. The book, which is aimed at a younger audience, has been written by Myrna Pearman, retired biologist and nature writer/photographer, with the able assistance of Bet Zimmerman Smith and other members of the NABS Education Committee.

Its pages are graced with beautiful photographs donated by bluebirders from across North America, and it has been designed to make learning about bluebirds a fun and appealing adventure. With this book, NABS hopes to kindle a fire and a love for bluebirds in young people across this continent.

Get to Know Bluebirds: A Guide for Young Nature Lovers is [available at this link](#) as a downloadable (27 MB) PDF file. NABS encourages you to download the book and share it as widely as possible! Their plan is to get the book printed as soon as the necessary funds can be raised and include it as part of their excellent resource offerings.

Surprise! Allen Jackson Presents Certificates of Appreciation

We all know that Allen likes to stay busy, so during the cold months, he decided to make impromptu "house calls" to honor these five hard-working supporters of New Jersey's bluebirds. If you know of someone who goes above and beyond to promote the care and health of bluebirds, send an email to Allen Jackson at aljxn@aol.com.



Cindi Berry - Cindi was outstanding at teaching her students about NJ's natural resources. Her classes at Holly Heights Elementary School in Millville monitored 2 boxes on school property and learned the proper management of bluebirds. After retiring from teaching she took over the bluebird trail at the Landis Sewerage Authority and wasted no time adding more boxes in her area.

Her love of teaching has been a valuable asset, filling a necessary void in our younger generation. Her trail quickly grew from 10 to 25 boxes as she became proactive in bluebird management. Cindi participates in our banding program, which instills interest in the landlords she coordinates with, encouraging them to manage bluebird properly.

John Clending - All John has done is build and establish a massive bluebird trail in Salem and Gloucester County - all at his own expense! In 2020, his efforts resulted in fledging over 1100 bluebirds in 194 setups. He added to that in 2021, increasing the number of boxes to 234 and fledging 1465 bluebird chicks.

That's over 2500 bluebirds in 2 seasons! His efforts to control house sparrows are unsurpassed. It is hard to imagine anyone could accomplish what he has done.



Oak and Jane Gandy - Oak and Jane monitor one of the more productive bluebird trails we have in NJ - Holly Hills WMA - in Alloway, Salem County. They volunteered to be responsible for the trail and without encouragement began building more boxes and working with local residents to add boxes in their area.

They have made the bluebird population in Alloway what it is today. Oak and Jane do all the monitoring and notify me (Allen) when boxes have young to band. Both have been environmental warriors for many years, always promoting ways to benefit wildlife.

Rae Griffiths - Since Rae assumed the Cape May County Coordinator position, the program has continued to flourish. She has done a remarkable job educating the public, ultimately benefiting bluebirds. One of her strengths is communicating with the bluebird landlords in Cape May County.

Rae has done an excellent job banding bluebird chicks while also conducting educational programs to promote the NJBBS. Her experience on many environmental subjects make her a valuable and diverse member. Rae is a natural leader.



James Priest - Jim has been a relentless warrior in Camden County, building boxes, conducting on-sites, training volunteers, monitoring trails and banding bluebirds in his area.

To say he is valuable to the NJBBS program is an understatement. He is always available to help and is responsible for making Camden County a significant bluebird producer. Shown here with his wife, Priscilla, Jim does not hesitate to spend his own money and time promoting our program, and frequently manages a table at environmental events. NJBBS is very proud of what he has accomplished.

BURLINGTON COUNTY

Coordinator, Harry Bratty

Burlington County: Out on the Farm ~ by Harry Bratty

Nels Anderson and I, with guidance from farmer, Jeff Tober, recently put in four new boxes on the Rancocas Creek Community Supported Agriculture Farm (CSA). Located next to the Pinelands Preservation Alliance property in Southampton, Rancocas Creek Farm was launched by Pinelands Preservation Alliance on 72 acres of donated land.



Harry Bratty (L) and Nels Anderson (R) prepare to install nest boxes at Rancocas Creek Farm CSA



Coincidentally, the new nest boxes were installed on the same day as a controlled burning of grassland nearby.



Rancocas Creek Farm CSA

is a new, sustainable farm that Pinelands Preservation Alliance has launched on the 72-acres of land donated to PPA in 2019 by Cindy Yingling, Louis Eni, and Chris Eni. The land, which immediately adjoins PPA's property, had been conventionally farmed for decades in soy. The goals for the Rancocas Creek Farm are to solve severe stormwater runoff into Vincentown Village and Rancocas Creek; heal damaged soils that do

not infiltrate and treat stormwater as they should; create habitat for pollinators and grassland birds; and launch an economically productive chemical-free farm. Learn more at <https://pinelandsalliance.org/join-the-csa/>

BURLINGTON COUNTY

Coordinator, Harry Bratty



Photos by Nels Anderson

More Burlington County News ~ by Nels Anderson

Not much activity to report other than sprucing up boxes or moving them around in anticipation of the upcoming nesting season. Some of my boxes have been out in the weather for quarter of a century, so they need a little extra care and right now am focusing on the 60 at Franklin Parker Preserve.

I had a late start for many reasons - *mea culpa* - however there isn't a single paved road in the Preserve and nothing gets to see a plow. I should have that done in a few days though. I have included a photo I took when I had just started at FPP. A batch of nest boxes each took about an hour to make and back then, with scrounged lumber scraps from dumpsters, the cost was \$1.76 for hardware; labor was no charge. I would think the cost today would be somewhat more.

I have seen and heard bluebirds right through winter, and they often frequent my feeders for a snack. Robins were around all winter as well as they would engulf a Holly tree and strip the berries in short order. There was no ice to shut off the food supply, so am expecting another good year. But the old saying, "Don't count your chicks until they hatch," remains in effect. All my work is confined to Burlington County. I do have help in Wharton, Tabernacle and Indian Mills from Catie Andrews & crew, Clement Green and Harry Bratty, all which is appreciated.

Here we go again!

CAMDEN COUNTY

Coordinator, Chuck Kanupke

Cooper River Trail - Eric Pedersen and Jim Priest decided to make a change to their Cooper River Trail. Last season, the three separate boxes produced only Tree Swallows. On March 11, they paired two of the boxes to see if they have any better luck with hosting bluebirds this year. Check back in fall's edition of *Jersey Blues* to see the outcome!



Jim Priest



Eric Pedersen



Photo showing the distance placed between paired boxes

CAPE MAY COUNTY

Coordinator, Rae Griffiths

A New Bluebird Trail in Cape May County ~ by Rae Griffiths

It is always satisfying when the efforts of several people come together successfully. This is most certainly the case in the establishment of a new bluebird trail along part of the bike path in Dennis Township in Cape May County.

It all started when long-time monitor, Frank Hoff, suggested his friend, Steve Robinson, contact me about putting up some bluebird boxes. Steve was building boxes, and wanted to place some on the bike path not far from his house on Hagen Road in Dennis Township where he had observed bluebird activity. Steve and I spoke, and I sent him some information about box construction, predator guards and ideal habitat and spacing. Within a few weeks, after obtaining permission from the Township, Steve installed 13 of his hand-made boxes along the bike path, complete with predator guards on metal poles donated to him by the Dennis Township Public Works Department.

During the process of setting up the trail, Steve met Bevin O'Grady, a regular walker of the bike path, who eagerly volunteered to take on monitoring the 13 boxes, along with her daughters Eliza and Persephone Pappas. Just this week, Bevin reported that two of the boxes already have bluebird nests started in them! I am thrilled how the collaboration of Steve, myself, Bevin and Dennis Township has come together to benefit bluebirds in Cape May County.

A nest in one of the boxes on the new trail in Dennis Township. Photo by Bevin O'Grady



Bevin O'Grady stands beside one of 13 bluebird boxes she monitors on the bike path off of Hagen Road in Dennis Township. Photo by Rae Griffiths

From The Editor's Messy Desk

Editor, Lori Jo Jamieson

Birding: The New Normal? Yes! We're happy to have started our bluebird season "engines" again, and the "Covid-19 road" before us looks clear and open, based on what the CDC is reporting (at least when I was writing this.) In many instances, it's been life as usual for us blue-birders, since monitoring trails gave us a great reason to get out of our homes during the Pandemic, if those trails weren't on state or federally owned property and subject to closings. Across the country, especially in urban settings, birdwatching increased in popularity during the Pandemic, as did the submission of citizen science data. A great article about this trend is Sara Harrison's , "[Pandemic Bird-Watching Created a Data Boom—and a Conundrum](#)" that appeared in September 30, 2021 *Wired*. Read it to find out what her "conundrum" is!

We ALL Need the Outdoors - Although I'm not physically disabled myself, I've a strong leading to raise awareness of this topic. Beginning well before Covid-19 and intensifying during the Pandemic's rise, organizations such as Audubon, National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club, and Rails-to-Trails Conservancy increased their focus on the needs of disabled birders, hikers and nature lovers in general. A widening, more inclusivity definition of "disabled" is a welcomed trend, and in my opinion, accomplished at the highest levels by Birdability™. Their Scope is described as (*next page*):

"We focus on people with mobility challenges, blindness or low vision, chronic illness, intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental illness, and those who are neurodivergent, deaf or hard of hearing or who have other health concerns."

Well, in that case, I AM disabled, and so are many people I know. Allen Jackson mentions how he and other NJBBS leaders are no longer able to carry the same work load. What used to be a problem for "other people" is now a problem for us, our friends, and family. It's time to be aware of resources and to share them as needed. *(continued on page 9)*

(Messy, continued from page 8) - If you find an online resource for disabled birders, send me a link. If you have personally come up against limitations that made birding impossible for you, tell me about that, too, and include photos! Here's my email address: bluebirdljj@gmail.com.

At the bottom of this Birdability™ page, follow the links to learn how we can be part of this growing inclusivity trend. How about we make "Jersey Blues" a valuable source of information for ALL the birding community? ~ Lori Jo Jamieson

P.S.- You know how I like to share Dr. Roger Lederer's blog. Although he's in the UK, so often what he writes pertains to us here in the USA. This time I chose to share an older post from 2018, "Bird Watching for the Disabled." (page 14).



Vision: Birding truly is for everybody and every body, regardless of disability or other health concerns.

Mission: To share the joys of birding with people who have disabilities, and to ensure birding is accessible for everybody.

The Three Spokes of Our Work

There are three spokes that make up our work at Birdability™. Rather than columns or pillars -- which run parallel to each other -- these spokes are part of a wheelchair's wheel, and they keep feeding into each other as the wheel keeps on rolling. We need our physical environment to be accessible, and we need our social, cultural and institutional environments to be welcoming, safe and inclusive for all those potential new birders so they know they are genuinely wanted, and to make sure they come back! We work on these three spokes simultaneously to help ensure that birding truly is for every body.

- 1. Improve the physical accessibility of birding locations.** This includes trails, bird blinds, observation platforms, feeder stations and car birding routes. Our Access Considerations Guidance Document shares, in detail, what features make up a truly accessible birding location.
- 2. Empower a welcoming and inclusive birding community.** This covers everything from how an outing leader can promote friendliness and an encouraging atmosphere on a bird outing, to recommendations to organizations about basic disability access needs they can address on an organization-wide level.
- 3. Introduce people with access challenges to birding.** 'Build it and they will come' might work sometimes, but it's no guarantee. We encourage bird clubs, nature centers, Audubon chapters and everyone else to intentionally reach out to local disability support groups and other organizations and actively invite folks with disabilities and other health concerns to come and share the joys of birding with you!

Help Birdability™ work towards a welcoming and inclusive birding community and the outdoors!

Learn what features make up an [actually accessible trail](#). Contribute birding locations to the [Birdability Map](#), a crowd-sourced map of accessible birding locations, with details of the accessibility features of them. Read about ideas for you to be a [more welcoming and inclusive birder](#). Sign up to receive the [Birdability™ newsletter](#) to keep up to date with new resources, events and more. [Donate](#) if you're able and would like to support our work.

Our Scope

Through education, outreach and advocacy, Birdability works to ensure the birding community and the outdoors are welcoming, inclusive, safe and accessible for everybody.

We focus on people with mobility challenges, blindness or low vision, chronic illness, intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental illness, and those who are neurodivergent, deaf or hard of hearing or who have other health concerns.

In addition to current birders, we strive to introduce birding to people with disabilities and other health concerns who are not yet birders so they too can experience the joys of birding. Learn more at <https://www.birdability.org/>

CUMBERLAND COUNTY

Coordinator, Allen Jackson

In Support of Shelly Cucugliello - Allen Jackson and NJBBS want to acknowledge efforts by Shelly Cucugliello to start a bluebird club in the science class at the Cumberland County TEC high school where she teaches. Her only option was to have the students convene on Friday afternoons. Twenty students stepped forward to learn about bluebird management. Her program was well-planned out and she felt she had the support of the school system.



There were six setups already on site that were in horrible condition. Shelly thought they had been abandoned since there was no evidence of documented nest checks. The boxes had clearly not been cleaned or maintained. She asked me to come evaluate the existing boxes as she had difficulty even opening them to do nest checks. My recommendation was to replace all six, as they did not meet nesting box, mounting pole or predator guard design standards. In fact, rain had gotten down inside the poles, froze and split the pipes and predator guards on three of the six setups. (see photos) Over a period of a couple of weeks, six new setups were in place. Shelly's bluebird club numbered the boxes and started conducting nest checks.



The old setups allowed rain to enter the mounting poles, which froze and split the pole, destroying the predator guards. Photos taken by Allen Jackson.

Shortly thereafter someone noticed that the previous boxes had been removed and reacted angrily. Much of the issue may have been past conflicts between me and another person, but apparently, grant money had been used to purchase the material. The people who applied for the grant did not know what they were doing.

Shelly returned to discover that all six of the new setups not only were removed, but the old neglected junk setups were put back up. The administration did not support Shelly, nor the twenty students who joined the bluebird club. What message does this send to these teens? Their school doesn't care about them or their interests?

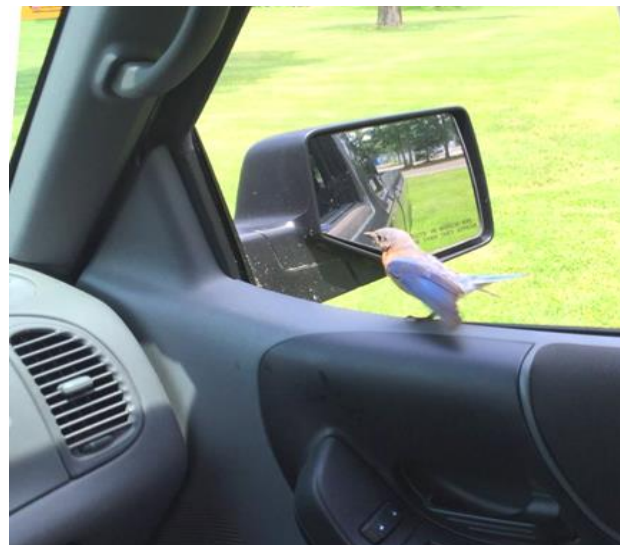
Sadly, it's the bluebirds that will pay the ultimate price in the long run. Too many people think that just putting a nesting box up with no management is acceptable. It is a sad day when bluebird programs are established without proper guidance or direction. Shelly's actions and planned program were based on knowledge learned from NJBBS's best practices to establish and manage a bluebird trail, as well as her experience gained as a founding member of NJBBS over ten years ago.

Even though she received no support from the administration, she donated the 6 boxes to the school and even wrote a \$200 check to the NJBBS to pay for the materials. ~ Allen Jackson

FLASHBACK - "Out and About" - Photos from "Jersey Blues" Fall 2018 Issue



What's a bluebird to do on a hot and humid South Jersey afternoon?



If John Layton's around, you jump in his truck and enjoy the air conditioning!

OCEAN COUNTY Coordinator, Laura Stone

2015	99	88%	263	7667
2016	99	98%	354	8021
2017	98	94%	408	8429
2018	87	97%	338	8767
2019	97	97%	387	9154
2020	94	95%	400	9554
2021	101	94%	457	10,011

Lakehurst Bluebird Trail Reaches Milestone ~ by John Joyce

The year 2021 marked a milestone for one of the most successful bluebird trails in New Jersey. During this past breeding season, the “trail” that was started in 1991 fledged its 10,000th bluebird hatchling! The trail is on the Lakehurst section of Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst (JB MDL). The trail began at the suggestion of Bill Hanley, an engineer at what was then the Naval Air Engineering Center (NAEC) Lakehurst. He approached me because I was the Installation Natural Resources Manager and he expressed an interest in starting a bluebird nest box program.

In the summer of 1990, Bill and I visited with Tom Mulvey, a bluebird enthusiast who had a very successful trail on the adjacent Colliers Mills Wildlife Management Area. Tom had about 20 boxes on his trail, but what really stood out was the very high rate of bluebird occupancy in his boxes. At that time in New Jersey, Rusty Asdourian was doing volunteer work for the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife, collecting annual bluebird box data from participating individuals. He was tracking the size and success of bluebird trails and also data such as habitat types and predator guard use. The state average for bluebird occupancy at the time varied around 23-25%.

Bill and I started out with 21 nest boxes in 1991. NAES Lakehurst had many areas of open fields with scattered trees, intermittent brush areas, tall native grasses and huge swaths of forest edge, so conditions were ideal for bluebirds. Due to already favorable habitat conditions on the base, nest box occupancy was excellent right from the start. On our trail we defined occupancy (or “nesting”) as any bird that was there long enough to lay an egg. Our bluebird occupancy rate was 62% in that first year, and it only dipped below 60% three times in the next 24 years. We stopped tracking occupancy rates after 2015, but for the nine years prior to that it was never lower than 72%. While we would love to take credit for this notable accomplishment, the abundance of favorable habitat certainly had much to do with our elevated occupancy numbers! **See data chart on page 13.**

The trail grew quickly, doubling in size by 1994 and doubling again by 1999 to 88 boxes. Since 2000, a combination of old age, occasional mower impacts and theft have kept the nest box numbers fluctuating between 90 and 100. Our first boxes were a combination of front opening and side opening boxes. We also tried top openers. Through the years we developed a preference for front opening boxes that hinged from the bottom. This allows for good views of the nest when conducting weekly monitoring, eliminates the hazard of hatchlings falling out during box checks (an issue when the door is hinged from the top) and allows easy clean outs when the hatchlings have fledged the nest.

During the last ten years when we were replacing old boxes, we have purchased only the Peterson style nest box. With its narrowed bottom reducing the amount of nesting material needed by the nesting birds (less work for the female) and ventilation holes on the top to reduce temperatures inside the box, we feel it is the best box for the birds. I have always subscribed to the theory that the female will have more energy to raise young if she does not have to expend so much energy building the nest, but we never conducted any studies to confirm if it actually increased our bluebird production.

Competition for nest boxes in New Jersey often involves the problem of English sparrows taking over the boxes, but we rarely had this problem. Tree swallows were by far the second most common species using our trail, but nesting numbers in our program were usually at least a 3:1 ratio of bluebirds to tree swallows. During the life of the program, we have fledged 2657 tree swallows. Wrens and Carolina chickadees were the other two common competitors, but their box usage was almost always well under 10%. We have fledged 661 Wrens and 376 Carolina chickadees since the inception of the trail.

A more challenging problem, as it is for many new trails, was predation. In the early years of the program, only a handful of boxes had any predator guards, and if they did it was just a doubling of the entrance hole depth to make it more difficult for larger avian predators like crows to get their head into the box to destroy eggs. It could also hamper raccoons which are capable of reaching through the hole with their very dexterous front paws to pick out eggs. As the years went on, we retrofitted all the boxes with hole guards and started to address the problem of terrestrial predators. *(continued on page 12)*

OCEAN COUNTY Coordinator, Laura Stone

(Lakehurst, continued from page 11) All of our nest box poles were the traditional U-shaped (with a "wing" on each side) sign posts with holes in the rear portion of the poles on one-inch centers. Corn snakes, northern pine snakes, black rat snakes, raccoons, opossums, flying squirrels and mice are all present on the Lakehurst section of JB MDL and are capable of climbing these sign posts. Snakes and raccoons can be particularly adept at removing eggs without really disturbing the nesting material at all. We knew we had some of these problems since we had caught both pine snakes and mice in our boxes and encountered the muddy footprints of raccoons on the roofs of the boxes.

Our solution was to fabricate dozens of the umbrella-type pole guards to install on the posts. This stopped much predation, but the hole in the middle of the guard that enabled us to slip it down over the poles to the mounting bracket was still large enough for snakes and mice to access the nest box. Our solution was to buy boxes of six-inch diameter pipe caps at Home Depot and have them specialty cut in a machine shop in the exact shape of the posts so we could slip the custom cap over the pole top and down on to the top of the predator guard. It worked extremely well and practically eliminated the threat that terrestrial predation posed to our nesting birds. *(continued on page 13)*



Peterson-style setup with custom pole guard and cap to discourage snake predation.



From left to right: Jon's wife Monica, daughter Madelyn (7), daughter Alison (10), family dog Scout (f) and Jon Hart.

Meet New Board Member, Jon Hart! Jon is a (nearly) life long resident of Jackson, and grew up exploring the Pine Barrens and the coastal waterways of New Jersey with a deep interest in wildlife. Driven by the desire to help others connect with the natural world, he completed Mountain Leadership School with the Appalachian Mountain Club, as well as an Outdoor Leadership Course with North Carolina Outward Bound, which led to a 10 year career in the outdoor industry.

In 2011 with the expectation of his first child with wife Monica, Jon changed career paths and joined the growing craft beer industry, and is currently a representative of a national brewery.

In 2011 Jon and Monica settled back in their hometown of Jackson, along the headwaters of the Toms River, and welcomed daughters Alison in 2012, and Madelyn in 2014. It was here that they first observed Eastern Bluebirds in the area, and after some trial and error, have had successful nesting pairs each year since 2015.

Having come across some of Laura Stone's bluebird trails around Jackson, Jon found his way to NJBBS and joined in 2021. In February of 2022, with the assistance of Allen Jackson, Laura Stone,

and Andy Major, Jon set up what will hopefully be a successful bluebird trail at 170-acre Bullock Farms in Cream Ridge. Jon also discussed ways to benefit bluebirds at Colliers Mill WMA. *(bio and photo provided by Jon Hart)*



Were you there . . . at just the right moment? If you've captured great images of Bluebirds with your digital camera or phone, send them to me, attached to an email in jpeg form, to BluebirdLJJ@gmail.com. Please include who took the photos, where and when they were taken, and a description of each photo. I hope to use them in an issue of "Jersey Blues." Thank you.



OCEAN COUNTY

Coordinator, Laura Stone



(Lakehurst, continued from page 12) - The data we collected on a weekly basis focused on species, number of eggs laid, number of hatchlings and how many birds successfully fledged the nest. At the conclusion of the 2021 breeding season, the cumulative total of bluebirds fledged reached 10, 011! Since 2006, the trail has eclipsed 400 bluebirds fledged in ten different years, actually topping 500 bluebirds in 2012. We did have some significant gaps in our monitoring in 2016-2018, so I suspect that we may very well have reached this number a year or so earlier, but we are very proud of the astounding success of our program.

In addition to bluebirds, we fledged almost 3700 tree swallows, wrens and Carolina chickadees since the advent of the program. I myself generally monitored about 20 boxes each year, but the majority of boxes were monitored by a group of dedicated volunteers ever since the program expanded to 72 boxes in 1996. In addition to Bill Hanley, I have to also thank many long-time volunteers for their efforts, including several folks who had volunteered for over 10 years doing weekly monitoring: Chuck Dube, Scott Swain, Larry Garrison, Larry Runner, Rob Rinderer, Dave Wolf, Bucky Shimp and Paul Mahon. Paul is a staff biologist on JB MDL and he took over management of the bluebird trail in 2018 and I retired in 2020. Many of these folks have also retired, but some like Bill Hanley and Scott Swain have still returned to the base every year despite having been retired themselves for many years. It was truly a group effort and we appreciate the dedication of all these volunteers.

~ John Joyce - NAEC (later known as NAES) Lakehurst and JB MDL Natural Resources Manager, Retired

NAES Lakehurst Bluebird Trail at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst (JB MDL)

YEAR	# BOXES	USED	Bluebirds FLEDGED	Bluebirds TO DATE	TS FLEDGED	TS TO DATE	HW FLEDGED	HW TO DATE	CC FLEDGED	CC TO DATE
1991	21	95%	58	58	25	25	17	17	0	0
1992	25	100%	69	127	33	58	5	22	0	0
1993	29	86%	120	247	34	92	8	30	0	0
1994	46	100%	142	389	73	165	8	38	0	0
1995	46	97%	193	582	32	197	28	66	0	0
1996	72	97%	162	744	85	282	66	132	0	0
1997	73	95%	159	903	84	366	26	158	0	0
1998	86	94%	251	1154	66	432	38	196	25	25
1999	88	95%	278	1432	95	527	5	201	15	40
2000	89	95%	323	1755	81	608	37	238	17	57
2001	91	99%	395	2150	76	684	23	261	13	70
2002	93	99%	386	2536	101	785	27	288	10	80
2003	92	95%	262	2798	129	914	14	304	38	118
2004	91	99%	347	3145	128	1042	32	336	43	161
2005	93	100%	258	3403	188	1230	25	361	6	167
2006	94	99%	413	3816	143	1373	24	385	5	172
2007	94	99%	452	4268	120	1493	4	389	3	175
2008	95	99%	458	4726	96	1589	15	404	9	184
2009	96	98%	471	5197	87	1676	21	425	9	193
2010	96	100%	385	5582	112	1788	9	434	17	210
2011	91	97%	458	6040	117	1905	21	455	31	241
2012	98	99%	536	6576	83	1988	0	455	21	262
2013	100	99%	488	7064	92	2080	0	455	5	267
2014	94	93%	340	7404	111	2191	7	462	0	267
2015	99	88%	263	7667	109	2300	30	492	28	295
2016	99	98%	354	8021	105	2405	17	509	20	315
2017	98	94%	408	8429	73	2478	25	534	6	321
2018	87	97%	338	8767	34	2512	4	538	20	341
2019	97	97%	387	9154	45	2557	30	568	16	357
2020	94	95%	400	9554	58	2615	23	591	8	365
2021	101	94%	457	10,011	42	2657	70	661	11	376

SALEM COUNTY

Co-Coordinator, Bernadine Visalli & Allen Jackson



A bluebird nest box installed at Watts Organic Farm in December 2021.

Notes from the Field ~ *Bernnie Visalli*

I had a great visit recently with Watts Organic Farm! Their bluebird trail was expanded, and I am so excited to partner with organic farms like this in South Jersey. Here's a Facebook post from December 2021, soon after they had decided to add a bluebird trail to their property:

Watts Organic Farm - *One of the main objectives on this farm is to create a healthy ecosystem on the farm, one way we are doing this is by working with the New Jersey Bluebird Society to create well-suited homes for Eastern Bluebirds!*

Today we installed our first bluebird box along one of our fields, which, if all goes well, will be a home for 2-4 spawnings of bluebirds this upcoming spring and summer. "Why bluebirds?" you might be wondering. Here are some reasons why we are striving to increase the bluebird population:

- 1)** *Bluebirds are a native species that is often harassed by non-native bird species, therefore with a little bit of aid their populations will increase instead of decrease.*
- 2)** *The main food source for blue birds are beetles, moths, larvae, and caterpillars which are the 4 most problematic pest on most farms and gardens.*
- 3)** *They are beautiful to look at and listen to, which will improve the overall appeal of our farm.*

Here is to a bright future for our farm as we continue the process of living with our native species to create a beautiful and thriving ecosystem here on our farm. Visit Watts Organic Farm on Facebook [HERE](#).



Bird Watching for the Disabled - March 19, 2018 - by Dr. Roger Lederer

Being temporarily dependent on a wheelchair for going any distance and committed to leading a bird walk, I wondered how I would handle the situation. I have always said that one of the nice characteristics of birdwatching is that it is accessible to almost anyone no matter their physical condition. So this trip gave me a chance to personally experience looking for birds while my mobility was restricted. I took a group of 15 people on a walk on a paved trail, avoiding the gravelly paths I usually take. Considering the group consisted mostly of inexperienced birdwatchers, and that my wife was pushing my wheelchair so I couldn't scan the brush as I usually do, we still spotted about 20 species of birds, including a great look at a Bewick's Wren singing to beat the band.

This experience made me think more about access to birdwatching opportunities for the disabled. Various parks or suburban neighborhoods are great places to walk as there are a lot of paved or at least relatively smooth paths bordered by trees and shrubs. But even if there are some rough patches, there are places one can find to just sit and watch.

If you Google "bird watching for the handicapped," you get 1,250,000 hits – quite a few articles and resources. One is from the School of Medicine at West Virginia University which discusses the needs and resources for handicapped birders in the context of occupational therapy and has further links. There is a Disabled Birders' Association now called [Birding For All \(UK\)](#). The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds provides helpful hints for the disabled to watch birds. There is also [Birding on Wheels](#), a directory of wheel-chair accessible sites for birdwatching.

Although the fastest growing outdoor sports are things like rock climbing, paddling, lacrosse, and snowshoeing, more people birdwatch in the U.S. than participate in any other outdoor activity; access is one reason why.

One odd thing happened on my wheelchair trip. One of the attendees asked me, as leader, if she should put on her boots in case we were going to do some serious climbing or scrambling over rocks. I said, sitting in my wheelchair, "I don't anticipate that."

Native Plants for Birds: It's A Different Strategy ~ Condensed from an article by Jim Cubie, Bird Friendly Yards²



I am a strong supporter of native plants for birds. The native plant promotion system we developed in our club has been very successful – 45% of members have planted native plants. However, building a bird friendly yard with native plants is different than planting native generally. The worst decision you can make in your yard for birds is to remove native trees and shrubs and plant a pollinator garden. It comes down to this:

If you are planting for birds, the goal must be to provide the maximum amount of native green foliage, or biomass. If you do not start with a yard that is safe for birds, the native plants will not increase bird populations. We cannot stem the drastic declines in bird populations (30% since 1970's) unless we both reduce bird deaths and add to the bird population. "You can't fill the tub unless you plug the drain."

It's About Biomass - Native plants are so important to birds, because as Doug Tallamy has shown, they provide far more food for birds than introduced foliage. In an email from Doug Tallamy, he wrote, "all people want to talk about is pollinators. Birds need the native trees and shrubs which provide the biomass they need."

The primary food that adult birds feed their young are Lepidoptera— moth and butterfly larvae. These larvae eat leaves, and since trees and shrubs provide far more leaves than garden plants, they provide far more food for nestlings. Bird parents must find 8,000 insects to fledge a nest, and more yet to feed the juvenile birds. Even hummingbirds acquire half of their food by eating insects. The scientific basis for the advocacy of planting native to increase the bird population is found in the research of Desiree Narango.¹ Narango makes this point as follows:

"Given that the majority of terrestrial birds rely on insects as a primary food source for reproduction and survival, the persistence of insectivorous bird populations is inextricably linked to insect conservation."

Narango's research shows that increasing the native portion of woody vegetation to 70% provides enough food so that two more nestlings survive per nest. Two more nestlings per nest can make a big difference because it can make possible a sustainable population (i.e. stop decline). This is the case because, as noted above, native plant biomass provides much more food for the parents to feed their young. Garden plants, by way of comparison, create very little biomass. That is why Narango's research was based on the measurement of woody vegetation.

A Dangerous Yard is Not Bird Friendly - Planting native for birds is different for a second reason. If your yard is not safe for birds, increasing native vegetation will not increase the bird population. The reason is that windows are also part of your yard. Home windows kill an average of two birds per year – and about twice that number if one feeds birds. In the feeding range of a pair of chickadees there may be from 1 to 8 homes. Thus the deaths caused by windows in their feeding range may be between 2 and 16 birds. Narango's research shows that increasing native plants provides enough food so that only two more nestlings survive per nest. If the windows in the yard are killing from 2 to 16 birds in a bird's feeding range, adding 2 more nestlings cannot increase bird populations. Of course, cat predation is just as harmful.

A Different Point of View - Let me end by making a point about cost effectiveness. I estimated the cost of replacing my exotic shrubs in my yard. It was over \$2,000. I already had a native tree, or adding one would have added several hundreds to the overall cost. I can install Acopian on 10 windows for \$35 DIY. I can apply them for \$122 even if I buy them commercially and have them installed by a handyman. Keeping a cat inside is free.

Jim Cubie, a retired Nader consumer advocate, recently published The Consumer Guide to Window Strike Prevention, as a no cost, downloadable pdf: <https://birdfriendlyyards.net/consumerguide/>. The many window collision prevention options can be confusing to consumers, but since residential window strikes cause about 40% of bird crash deaths (over 100,000,000), getting good information is critical. His guide explains what methods work, which don't, and compares the cost of many options. Included are DIY directions, links to DIY YouTube videos, and links to commercial suppliers. You may reach Jim at jimcubie@birdfriendlyyards.net.

¹ Nonnative plants reduce population growth of an insectivorous bird. Desirée L. Narango^{a,b,1,2}, Douglas W. Tallamy, and Peter P. Marra Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19716; and Migratory Bird Center, Smithsonian Conservation, Biology Institute, Washington, DC 20008. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1809259115

² Read Jim Cubie's original article in its entirety at <https://birdfriendlyyards.net/2021/06/27/differentstrategy/>

SOMERSET COUNTY Coordinator, April Tarantino



A typical nest box set up.



orchid display



Lori Jo with Clifford Berek at the Orientation Center, an off-grid building and former horse stables for Duke Farms (note horse head above doors). Photos by Lori Jo and Peter Jamieson.

A Visit to Duke Farms ~ by Lori Jo Jamieson

Last week, I finally made it out to Duke Farms. An impressive estate-turned-preserve located in Hillsborough, Somerset County, Duke Farms serves as a model of environmental stewardship. I was pleased to meet Clifford Berek, Duke Farms' Avian Studies & Sustainability Coordinator. In last Fall's *Jersey Blues*, Clifford wrote about his successful blowfly mitigation and how he brought the number of bluebird fledglings at Duke Farms from zero in 2019 to 39 in 2021.

Duke Farms' bluebird trail is made up of 45 nest boxes, with more to be added. No nest box location map is available to the public in order to protect nesting birds, but many setups are visible from walking trails.

A real highlight from my day was visiting the Orchid Range, the first ornamental building constructed at Duke Farms. It houses both subtropical and tropical orchid displays, focusing on plants native to the United States. I couldn't stop taking pictures of those beauties.

Speaking of beauties, visit [Duke Farms Eagle Cam](#) and watch the this season's Bald Eagle family. Consider planning a day trip here and begin by visiting the Duke Farms [website](#) or follow them on [Facebook](#).



Spring Visitor - Earlier this year, Jim Priest installed a nest box setup at **Craig Castelein's** home in Gloucester County. Craig is looking forward to having bluebirds nesting on his property. He photographed this male EABL, an early Spring visitor.



Sherri Lee Photography

This ethereal capture of an EABL pair was taken by Sherri Lee Ramsey. She originally posted it on "Bluebird Landlords," a private Facebook group that I'm a member of. Its beauty and depth of soul prompted me to ask Sherri Lee for permission to share it with "Jersey Blues" readers. Enjoy.

WARREN COUNTY

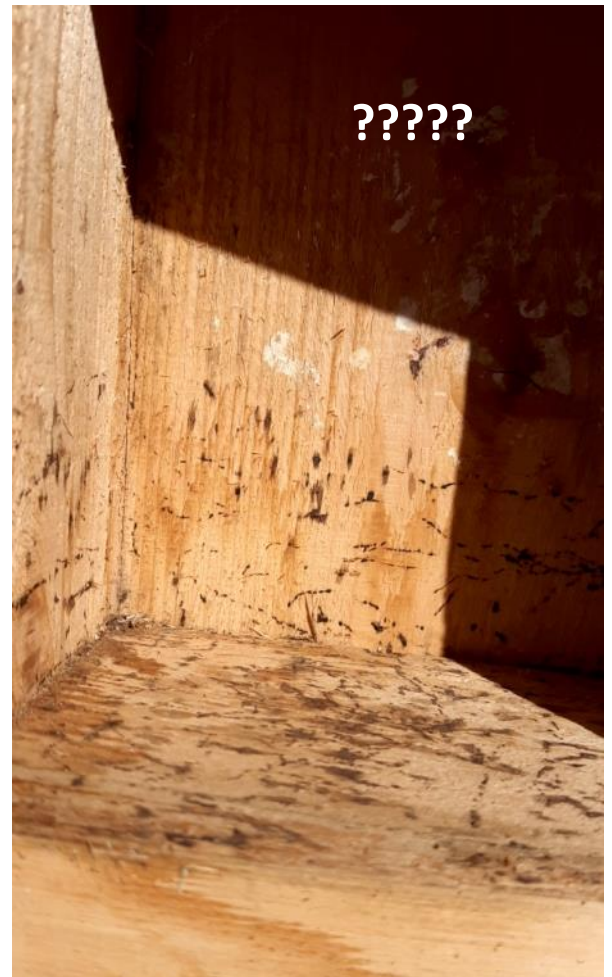
Coordinator, McKenna Kels



Certificates of Appreciation Presented for Bluebird Project at Hector A. Cafferata, Jr. Park - On October 13, 2021, Mansfield Township Certificates of Appreciation were presented to Jason, Nathan, and Shannon Misertino and Luke Barrett for their weekly monitoring of seven nestboxes for cavity-nesting bluebirds and tree swallows. As part of monitoring the boxes, they kept a database of eggs laid, hatchlings hatched, and fledglings. Standing at left is Mansfield Township Mayor, Joe Watters.



Mystery Marks



While on a trail check recently at New Jersey Audubon Wattles Stewardship Center in Anderson, Warren County, I found wood chips in several boxes. The entrance holes were slightly enlarged as well. I sent photos to Allen Jackson, and he advised me that it was the work of a woodpecker, probably a downy, harvesting nesting material. Makes sense.

What I can't figure out is the source of black marks in the same boxes. I've stumped several experts. Any ideas? Has anyone seen this in their nest boxes? Please **send an email to bluebirdljj@gmail.com** and I'll hopefully have an answer for the Fall "Jersey Blues." Thanks!

How NOT to Install a Bluebird Nest Box - No, it doesn't mean you're a crazy blue-birder if you notice neglected, crumbling, derelict nest boxes. They're everywhere! But, how many times have you seen these setups in the backyard of a friend, neighbor or family member? Many of us have been trained - or have trained others - about using proper box specs, mounting methods and predator guards; However, the hardest part is confronting these people about the dangers in which they put their "beloved" bluebirds. Here's a tongue-in-cheek photo collection for some levity, but be warned: **this page contains sarcasm and is not meant as actual advice!** ~ *The Editor*



How to Help Predators Gain Access to Your Nestboxes: Provide vines, shrubs, fences, small trees, rough wood siding, (with pvc pipes), and thick posts. Absolutely no slippery predator guards, ever! If all else fails simply place the nestbox on the ground until next season.



Calling All Boxes! Have you been neglected and abandoned by Bluebirds and Trail Monitors? **Find A New Purpose in Life!** Become a cozy home for ants, a squirrel, or a family of field mice. Here's an extra special purpose: if there is no Poo Fairy nearby, chip in and provide a place to leave those annoying little black plastic bags.