



# Jersey Blues

*The Newsletter of New Jersey Bluebird Society, a Proud Affiliate  
of the North American Bluebird Society Volume 7, Issue 2 - Fall 2023*

## New Jersey Bluebird Society - 2023 Season Summary

(Final as of 10/28/2023) A BIG Thank You to Dave Gilcrest for compiling the data.

County	Bluebirds Fledged 2023	Bluebirds Fledged 2022	Bluebirds Fledged 2021	Bluebirds Fledged 2020	Bluebirds Fledged 2019	Bluebirds Fledged 2018	Bluebirds Fledged 2017	Bluebirds Fledged 2016
Atlantic	491	571	1148	554	575	684	536	571
Bergen	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Burlington	571	531	563	468	268	352	320	142
Camden	187	228	175	137	59	45	0	0
Cape May	480	411	341	357	210	203	235	75
Cumberland	1306	989	970	845	786	649	603	407
Essex	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gloucester	721	628	1260	1064	684	387	261	208
Hudson	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hunterdon	34	40	23	30	35	21	0	0
Mercer	0	14	5	0	0	0	0	0
Middlesex	14	8	19	5	28	61	50	55
Monmouth	187	101	63	61	51	86	88	162
Morris	324	250	299	163	214	265	286	291
Ocean	689	768	756	1068	266	737	730	219
Passaic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Salem	583	504	1269	904	540	243	222	112
Somerset	119	133	130	95	79	15	55	43
Sussex	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Union	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Warren	137	130	163	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5843</b>	<b>5306</b>	<b>7184</b>	<b>5751</b>	<b>3795</b>	<b>3748</b>	<b>3386</b>	<b>2285</b>



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### IN THIS ISSUE OF JERSEY BLUES:

Season Totals	Page 1	Cumberland County News	Pages 10 - 12
Officers/Board of Directors	Page 2	Gloucester County News	Page 12
NJBBS Mission Statement	Page 2	House Sparrow Control	Page 13
NJBBS and NABS Memberships	Page 2	Monmouth County News	Pages 14, 15
Dr. Laura Stone Honored at FREC	Page 3	Meet Jean Montgomerie	Page 15
Preparing Bluebird Habitat for Cold Weather	Page 4	In Memoriam - Leo Hollein	Page 15
Cats Will Not Be Tolerated	Page 4	Ocean County News	Page 16
New Banding Record for Jim Priest & Group	Page 5	Salem County News	Page 17
Burlington County News	Pages 6, 7	List of County Coordinators	Page 18
Cape May County News	Pages 8, 9	Amazing Band Recoveries of 2023	Page 18

# Jersey Blues

*The Newsletter of The New Jersey Bluebird Society.  
We are a North American Bluebird Society Affiliate  
~ Volume 7, Issue 2 - Fall, 2023*

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## **NJBBS OFFICERS**

President - *vacant*

Vice President, North - *vacant*

Vice President, Central: Jonathan Hart

Vice President, South: Bernadine Visalli

Treasurer: Louise Cockey

Secretary: Jenyfra Nelson

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS** All Officers above, plus

Frank Budney, Allen Jackson, Presidents Emeritus

At Large: Harry Bratty, Shelly Cucugliello,

Dave Gilcrest, Lori Jo Jamieson, Jean Montgomerie,

Gary Pilling, Jim Priest, Laura Stone, Jim Watson

## Welcome, New NJBBS Members!

### **Atlantic County**

Skinner, SueAnn

### **Burlington County**

Iglesias, Tracy

Preiksat, Susan

### **Cape May County**

Hartman, Jessica

Keating, Family

Mercado, Jennifer

Stuempfig, Bill

Williams, Kurt & Heather

Williams, Larry & Alyce

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Jones, Clifton

Morello, Susanne

Roselle, Sheila

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Sooy, April

Wojtowicz, John

### **Gloucester County**

Amiriantz Jacquie

Staman, Greg

### **Middlesex County**

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Jones, Michele

### **Monmouth County**

Lakind, Linda

Russo, Mary

Silver, Georgia

*Silver Forge Farm*

Yaeger, Renee

### **Morris County**

Raybauld, Amelia

### **Ocean County**

Forest, Colleen

Hausvater, Helene

Rogers, MaryEllen

### **Salem County**

English, Kimberly

**New Jersey Bluebird Society is pleased to welcome a new Board Member, Jean Montgomerie. She's the Monmouth County Coordinator for NJBBS, and has learned a lot about bluebirds from Laura Stone. But that's only part of the story. Read more about Jean on page 15.**



**Our Mission Statement:** To educate, conserve and promote bluebirds and other cavity nesting birds in New Jersey. **Our Goals and Methods:** NJBBS's 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. **To accomplish these goals, our methods are:** • to provide expertise and guidance to trail monitors and backyard bluebird enthusiasts; • to monitor yearly population trends by surveying the number of young fledged from nest boxes; • to provide public education about bluebirds to interested people in the state.

**If you are reading this and aren't a NJBBS member, you're missing out! Membership Has Its Rewards!** Become a part of a community of people, of all ages, from all areas of New Jersey, who are all interested in bluebirds, like you are. 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. We hope that your concern for the well-being of our New Jersey native Eastern Bluebirds will motivate you to go [HERE](#) and join!



**NJBBS is a proud State Affiliate of The North American Bluebird Society** and there are advantages to being a member of both groups. The NABS organization supports and helps unify the work of state chapters across America. Only members of NABS receive the quarterly *Bluebird* journal, a publication of interest to anyone who appreciates bluebirds and other secondary cavity nesters. And even those of us who consider ourselves "experienced" bluebirders find the resources on their website, [www.nabluebirdsociety.org](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org) to be a goldmine of information. Included are printable (PDF) fact sheets about getting started, nestbox plans, predator control, monitoring guides and feeding recommendations. Please consider joining both NJBBS and NABS today. you become a Member of

NJBBS, you can join NABS for only \$15 for your first year. Details at <https://www.njbluebirdsociety.org/membership.html>.



### Dr. Laura Stone Honored at FREC

On July 21st, the New Jersey Bluebird Society honored Dr. Laura Stone at Forest Resource Education Center in Jackson, NJ for her work monitoring bluebird trails there for over 20 years. A bench was presented to her that will be placed on one of FREC's trails.

Dr. Stone has been instrumental in educating many young people about bluebirds and has also been serving as Ocean County Coordinator for NJBBS.

The event provided a gathering time for members and friends. Bluebird-themed cupcakes were provided by Ms. Jean Montgomerie. A big thank you to Laura Stone on behalf of New Jersey Bluebird Society for all her years of dedication to helping the bluebirds in New Jersey!



**A Tribute to Laura Stone** - I met Dr. Stone maybe 7 or 8 years ago at Jackson FREC. While the details escape me, Dr. Stone agreed to do a presentation on bluebirds at the school where I taught. Over the years, she mentored my students, teaching them how to build and monitor bluebird boxes. One year, the students and I, with special assistance from our woodshop teacher, assembled a box that Dr. Stone provided. With Dr. Stone's help, we put up the bluebird box on campus.



From L to R: Susan Meaney, Dr. Laura Stone, Mary Russo

to some residents in our hometown of Howell who happened to have NJBBS boxes on their properties. The families agreed to allow us to monitor the boxes in their yards as part of Cornell University's NestWatch program, under Dr. Stone's tutelage.

Monitoring boxes is bonding time for my family, and was especially meaningful during the pandemic as it gave us an opportunity to do something together, outdoors. Each week, between the months of April and August, we visit our boxes, take photographs of the nests, count eggs/hatchlings and report the observations to Nestwatch. I'd say our favorite part of nest monitoring is talking with the residents on our visits, who often come outside when they see us pull up to the house.

As a science teacher and parent, it is rewarding to see my children, Lileana and Amelia, volunteering in their community as citizen scientists. We are truly thankful to Dr. Stone for connecting us with nature, our community and each other in this way. She is a very special educator and we are fortunate to have had the opportunity to work under her. *Sincerely, Mary Russo*

More recently, about three years ago, Dr. Stone introduced my family and I



Mary's daughters, Lileana (left) and Amelia (right)

### Cats Will Not Be Tolerated - Bernnie Visalli, VP South

I've always felt that pet ownership comes with certain responsibilities - keeping the pet safe, vaccinated and most importantly, making sure your pet is being a good citizen. What does that mean? If you have a dog, it's simple. You don't allow your dog to be aggressive and bite people.

Cats can be a more complicated issue. In some households, cats owned as pets are inside 24/7. More often, housecats are allowed to roam (indoor/outdoor) or in some cases, to be outside all the time.

So, what does that really mean, other than having a cat come into your yard and use your flowerbed as their litter box?

Cats are a major contributor to native bird deaths. That is well documented in many studies and publications. You can find all the statistics on our website and on our Facebook page.

To be clear, when I make a visit to check a site's potential for nesting bluebirds, I always ask the property owner if they have cats, or if there is a cat colony nearby. It has been my normal procedure, since becoming a County Coordinator. If you have a cat, "but it never goes off the porch", or, "I watch my cat when she is outside," it is not good enough. I will just politely say, "your property might not be a good fit for a nesting box".



Photo by Nels Anderson

### Tips for Preparing Your Bluebird Habitat for Cold Weather

**"Leave the leaves"** to decompose on their own, especially right underneath trees! It's a much-repeated phrase, but for good reason. Trees are hosts to many insects that drop down into those leaves, waiting to emerge in the spring. In the wintertime, bluebirds (and other species) scratch in this leaf litter to find insects.

**Utilize compost piles**, but if you first chop up your leaves with a mower, you'll be chopping up the very organisms you're trying to conserve and protect.

**Educate yourself** while you're spending more time indoors. Recommend reading: books by Dr. Doug Tallamy: *Bringing Nature Home*, *The Nature of Oaks*, and *Nature's Best Hope*.

**Put up a roosting box** to provide shelter, and be sure to install a predator guard, too. Plans and an instruction video are available [here](#), or one may be purchased online.

**Provide a heated bird bath** for the many bluebirds that will overwinter in New Jersey. Find out which model is used and recommended by Pat Sutton at her Gardening Gang website, [www.patsuttonwildlifegarden.com/](http://www.patsuttonwildlifegarden.com/).

**Winterize** your cleaned-out nestboxes by tossing some pine needles in and sealing up any ventilation holes with tape. Leave the entrance hole open. **IMPORTANT:** Cut back any nearby plant materials or you will find yourself hosting a family of field mice. Hantavirus, which causes a rare but deadly pulmonary syndrome, is transmitted by infected rodents through urine, droppings, or saliva.

**Supplement bluebirds' diet** with dried currants or raisins in the winter, when bluebirds are not feeding nestlings. Having plants in your yard that provide berries in the winter months is extremely important.

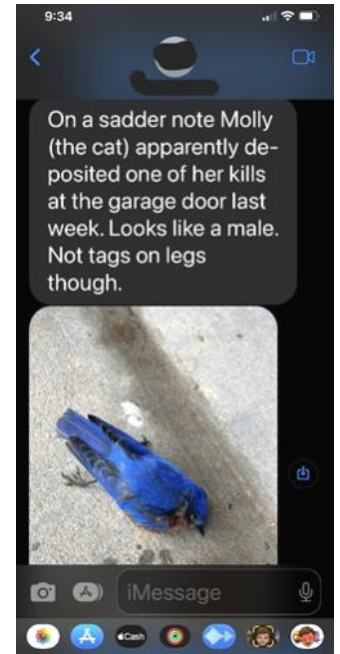
In the next *Jersey Blues*, there will be lots of resources to help you garden for bluebirds. See you in the spring!

Here is a situation that happened this year at one of the sites where I set up the trail and provided the boxes. It had been a very good site with great habitat, and I'd been banding bluebirds there for the past 2 years.

Then, I got this message on my phone. (photo)

Sending me a text message with a photo of a dead bluebird with the non-apologetic text is just not appreciated. When I find out you have a cat, (which I didn't know about) and I suggest the boxes be moved, it turns into "you are no longer welcome on my property". My point was missed completely.

If you have a bluebird trail and still find the cat is more important than the bluebirds, then you should not have boxes. Once you put up a bluebird box, or any other nesting box for that matter, you now have the responsibility to make sure you create a safe environment for the birds to thrive. This is why, for me, it has turned into "Cats will not be tolerated."



## New Record, New Protégé for Jim Priest and His Multi-County Monitor Group

I want to start by thanking everyone that helped us have a great year. With help from Priscilla, Greg and I, we were able to band 420 chicks. That is one great year! 121 more banded than last year! The difference is more than the number of chicks I banded (99) in 2020, my first banding year.

Our system has proven to work, and the bluebirds are doing great with our help. Without it, they may have continued to decline in population. All the work we do is worth it. Our area bluebird population is growing. I know it is hard to deal with those house sparrows, but bluebirds need our help to get their population back up. So again I thank you all for all that you do. I'm looking forward to a better year in 2024. ~ Jim

Greg introduces himself to the group: *"I'm Greg Staman, Jim's new protege and apparently, designated scapegoat. If any of you folks find you've experienced an error on trails, it's probably my fault as well! In all seriousness, Jim has been a great mentor, I've gained a wealth of experience (and confidence) under his tutelage, and I'm happy to be of service if anyone finds themselves needing assistance."* Welcome, Greg!

### Jim Priest's Season Report for 2023

County	# Eggs	Chicks	Banded	Fledged
Atlantic	35	32	32	32
Burlington	70	54	41	54
Camden	226	189	182	182
Gloucester *	251	208	165	196
<b>TOTALS for year</b>	<b>582</b>	<b>483</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>466</b>

\*Gloucester County includes Rich Gess's 4 boxes.



Priscilla and Jim Priest talk bluebirds at Gloucester County's Waterfest held in Scotland Run Park last June.

**Fun Was Had by All** - On Oct. 1st, we had a nice group gathering at our place, of our bluebird monitors and some heads of state. We had a beautiful weather day and some excellent food and deserts. The food was catered from Villa Deli in Sicklerville and the desserts were brought by many of the folks.

Allen was here and spent a lot of time talking with each individual little group about the control of House Sparrows and what has been accomplished this year, making for a very nice day. Everyone was very pleased that he did that.

The bluebirds are definitely doing better in this county. I wish more folks could have made it. Maybe next year we can do it again.

*"So where are your photos of the picnic, Jim?" "Oh, sorry 'bout that, we were having such a great time, I forgot to take any!"*



Jim bands chicks at the historic Glassboro Train Station. Photos by Rick Gess.



**Recommended Viewing on NABS' Youtube Channel** - The past President of NABS, Bernie Daniel, is a scientist who had a career working for the EPA. He has guided so many with biological information about our bluebird population. It is well worth the time listening to his presentation, originally given to the East Central Illinois Bluebird Society on April 26, 2023. Please take the time to review this information, as it can be tied into so many other issues we face these days in taking care of bluebirds.

Go to the NABS Youtube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsKVfwdzEPjQxusGBi74t5g> and choose the video, "Population Distribution and Trends for the Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*)".

# Burlington County

Coordinator, Harry Bratty | 856-630-6765 | hmbratty@gmail.com

## 2023 Pinelands Bluebird Trail Report



It was a great year for bluebirds in the Pines and thankfully there were lots of help. **Cate Andrews** covered the Girl Scout Trail, **Clement Green** handled Wharton, and **Harry Bratty** and myself monitored Medford, Shamong, and Tabernacle.

The first to fledge did so early May and the last mid August. There are always ups and downs in an endeavor of this size. Holes poked in eggs or dead young in a nest can be a heart breaker, but then checking the next box with a new nest complete with eggs uplifts the spirit.

Clement moved some boxes in Wharton and had almost instant success. Unlike groomed yards, areas in the Pines gradually change so that bluebirds will no longer nest there, so relocating is necessary. Harry's efforts on "The Farm" uncovered a whole new nesting area and story.

Checking nest boxes provides a real insight to bird behavior, from nest building and eggs appearing to young hatching and growing from bubble gum size to fully-feathered in just over two weeks. Often the mother bird will remain on the nest as the door is opened - staring this big monster down. I just close the door and back away.

Our combined efforts coupled with the birds' ability to duplicate themselves resulted in **a record year with 308 bluebirds fledged**. I do wish this crop a mild winter and safe haven. In six months or so they will be building nests of their own.

Thanks to all who help in any way especially the many who provide space in their yards for cavity nesters and allow us to tramp through on a weekly basis. ~ *Nels Anderson*

## 90 BOXES, AND A QUARTER - CENTURY OF NESTING ACTIVITY

Species Fledged	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Bluebirds	57	132	149	150	91	95	66	152	159
Chickadees	40	38	41	38	62	104	95	72	47
Tree Swallows	24	25	27	29	27	28	36	45	29
Species Fledged	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
Bluebirds	206	195	219	207	212	206	124	76	
Chickadees	53	75	44	59	28	79	42	43	
Tree Swallows	35	20	333	41	39	20	32	24	
Species Fledged	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
Bluebirds	148	186	198	256	224	276	286	308	
Chickadees	66	69	43	33	13	34	17	21	
Tree Swallows	15	31	19	10	16	17	16	40	

# Burlington County

Coordinator, Harry Bratty | 856-630-6765 | hmbratty@gmail.com

**What's It All About?** I spend a lot of time here (*Franklin Parker Preserve*) checking the birds, feeding the bugs and schmoozing with nature. One time I was hiking with a couple, and Emily Kingsbury took the photo of me in the big chair. And I took one of her and her dog, Griff. ~ Nels Anderson



Photo by Emily Kingsbury



Photo by Nels Anderson

## There Are Bluebirds Nesting Where? ~ Lorraine McCay

This is my third year monitoring several bluebird boxes in New Jersey's Burlington and Atlantic Counties. One of the locations is at Premier Sports Center, where I spend a lot of time training my Rat Terriers in the sport of agility. The habitat was suitable and, with Allen Jackson's help, we installed a nest box.



The first year a pair showed up very quickly and had three successful clutches. In the second year, the battle started. A pair of House Sparrows showed interest in the box, and started to build their nest. I repeatedly removed the nest material and finally, in June, they gave up. The bluebirds immediately moved in and had one successful clutch.

This season, the House Sparrows were persistent again. They would build a nest and I would remove the nest, over and over again. I left the box open for a week hoping they would give up, but they would just try again once the box was closed.

During this entire time, bluebirds remained in the area. I would hear them - and hope they had found somewhere to nest. The habitat there is limited, so I was not able to install a second box nearby.

In July, a friend sent me a picture from the Sports Center of a birds nest located inside a dog waste dispenser - right outside an entrance door. When I checked this out, sure enough, it was bluebirds that were nesting! I was amazed that they were using this particular structure, and so close to the door with people and dogs often walking past. The owners had not restocked bags in the dispenser for some time, so it was not being used.

There's a happy ending to this story: the bluebirds successfully fledged three chicks from this nest.

# Cape May County

Coordinator, *Rae Griffiths* | 413-695-8291 | [raegriffiths105@gmail.com](mailto:raegriffiths105@gmail.com)



*Rae Griffiths at Vine Street Pavilion, Belleplaine State Forest. Photo by Bernie Visalli.*

## **On Their Way to Cape May . . .**

On July 25th, Rae Griffiths, Cape May County Coordinator, hosted Bernie Visalli, VP South Jersey NJBBS for a tour of some of the sites Rae is monitoring.

Time was limited due to the heat and the predicted storms in the forecast. In the time allowed, they began their tour in Estell Manor (Atlantic County) at historic Head of the River Cemetery. Their first Cape May County stop was Sunset Flower Farm in Belleplaine.

Rae and Bernie next visited Belleplaine State Forest, which encompasses northern Cape May County and eastern Cumberland County. Trail sites were located at the Vine Street Pavilion and Field Headquarters. At the park's Nature Center by Nummy Lake, they met up with Maryann Manzelmann, another active NJBBS trail monitor.

Bernie noted, "There are sometimes challenges at particular sites, which is why it's always a good idea to discuss the situation and come up with a plan. We all have differing experiences, and at one time or another, someone will have had to deal with them all. I appreciated seeing the contrasting environment from the counties I deal with on a regular basis. It was great to meet Rae and I'm looking forward to working with her in the future. In the works is a fall meet-and-greet with CMC monitors!! There are big opportunities in CMC, and we can't wait to make it happen!"

## **2023 End of Season Summary for Cape May County**

**TOTAL Bluebirds Banded – 400 (346 in 2022) TOTAL Bluebirds Unbanded – 87 (73 in 2022)**  
**Cape May County – banded: 385 | unbanded: 87; Atlantic County – banded: 15 | unbanded: 0**  
 Died after banding & before fledging – 9; Reported dead after banding and fledging - 1  
**TOTAL Bluebirds Fledged – 478 (411 in 2022) | TOTAL KNOWN SURVIVED - 477 (409 in 2022)**

**THE SEASON IN A NUTSHELL:** As always, I want to start this report with a sincere THANK YOU to all of the monitors who diligently observed their boxes, texted and emailed me with photos and/or updates on their box activity and coordinated visits with me to band their chicks. We once again had our most successful season in Cape May County on record, which can be attributed to the increased monitoring and reporting efforts. In 2023, we added 11 new monitors to the program with 7 of these new sites experiencing successful bluebird nesting! The first chicks of the season were banded on May 7th at the Dennis Township Recreation Center trail, though several boxes had earlier nesting success with the chicks fledging unbanded because of my travel schedule in the early spring. The last chicks I banded were on August 29th at the home of Carol Van ArtsDalen, who had one of only a couple of individual boxes that had 3 successful broods this season.

I did a lot of reevaluating of sites this season in an attempt to reduce house sparrow problems. This resulted in the removal of 5 boxes, with one more box removed due to consistent human interference and the relocation

of 4 others. I added 2 boxes to sites that have strong bluebird activity, but also deal with tree swallow competition in an attempt to keep all the birds happy with good results. (see \* Belleplaine State Forest.)

The 13-box trail along the Dennis Township Bike Path established by Steve Robinson last year saw expanded bluebird success this year. In 2022, four of the boxes along the trail produced two broods each for a total of 34 chicks fledged. This year, four boxes had two broods. One box had one brood and one box almost had 3 broods totaling 43 chicks.



*Two different nests of young bluebirds ready to be banded. Photos by Rae Griffiths.*



# Cape May County

Coordinator, *Rae Griffiths* | 413-695-8291 | [raegriffiths105@gmail.com](mailto:raegriffiths105@gmail.com)

Sadly, what I believe to be a large black rat snake managed to bypass the predator guards on a couple of boxes and we lost 6 chicks, fledging only 37. Other boxes along the trail housed tree swallow and chickadee nests throughout the season again this year, and we even had some early woodpecker activity in one box before the bluebirds finally took over!



*Rae's friend who was visiting from MA helped band the four chicks at Rae's Seaview home.*

Many private, backyard sites had two successful broods this season and several others, including mine, produced one. Several sites showed signs of a third nesting early in August that never finished. Either the nest remained empty or the eggs never hatched.

Only three sites had three complete broods this year, but we did have five sites fledge a "six pack" (a nest with six chicks)!

I am happy to report that we have a new monitor at the Cape May Point State Park and have relocated boxes there to more suitable bluebird habitat on the property.

We also had our first nesting at Cox Hall Creek Wildlife Management Area in many years. Unfortunately, the nest was predated by house sparrows, but we are working with the land managers there to move the boxes to better areas for bluebird success.

## Here's to 2024! REMINDERS:

- As monitors, I 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 [njbluebirdsociety.org](http://njbluebirdsociety.org) or with the attached form. Feel free to contact me if I can help at all.
- I also highly encourage you to consider becoming a member of the North American Bluebird Society as well ([nabluebirdsociety.org](http://nabluebirdsociety.org)). You will get their gorgeous quarterly magazine, *Bluebird*, that is filled with lots of great articles about our beloved bluebirds, beautiful photographs and news about conservation efforts throughout the country.

*Submitted by Rae Griffiths, Cape May County Coordinator*

## MORE SUCCESSFUL SITES:

**Amanda's Field – Petersburg:** 4 boxes, 15 fledged.

**\*Belleplain State Forest:** 4 boxes with 2 added mid season – 23 fledged. After an early successful bluebird nesting at the Nature Center at Belle Plain, tree swallows won the box and proceeded to nest there. Hoping to accommodate the bluebirds for a second nesting, I installed a second box at the Nature Center on the afternoon of Friday, June 16th and by Monday afternoon, June 19th, there was a complete bluebird nest with 2 eggs in it!! 4 chicks successfully fledged from this box in late July.

### **Bixby Farmstead, Tuckahoe**

18 boxes, 29 fledged, plus many tree swallows!

### **Cape May County Mosquito Control, CMCH**

4 boxes, 14 fledged.

### **Dennis Township Middle School**

4 boxes, 19 fledged.

### **Dennis Township Primary School**

3 boxes – 17 fledged.

### **Head of the River Cemetery, Atlantic County**

5 boxes – 15 fledged, and several tree swallows, too.

### **Shellbay Family Camping Resort, CMCH**

8 boxes – 26 bluebirds fledged, and we had a nest of Carolina chickadees!



*Long-time monitor, Ellen Seward holds a bluebird chick during banding at the CMC Mosquito Control property.*



*Inspiring the next generation of bluebird stewards, young Jude holds his first bluebird!*

# Cumberland County

Coordinator, Allen Jackson | 609-805-4073 | aljxn@aol.com

## 2023 Mauricetown/Port Norris Bluebird/Purple Martin Report ~ Peter Manzelmann



*Peter Manzelmann explains nesting habits of bluebirds.*

It was another successful year with lots of bluebird and purple martin activity. The bluebird trail at the Mary Ella Morie Mauricetown Community Park across from the US Silica Sand Plant was again very successful. After a slow start, the park produced a total of 17 fledged bluebirds from two pairs of adults. Tree swallows were also very actively competing with the bluebirds for nesting boxes. In the end, both species were successful in finding space to raise their young. No chickadees nested this year in this bluebird trail.



*Purple Martin expert Allen Jackson shares his knowledge with members of Citizens United Maurice River. Pictured is the new T-14 set up.*

In mid-June, Allen Jackson and Peter Manzelmann led an informational tour for Citizens United Maurice River at the bluebird trail with more than a dozen interested folks attending. They learned about the project and about the ecology and habits of our nesting bluebirds and purple martins. It is important to note the wonderful support we have received from US Silica, as they provide some needed supplies and the use of their land. Thank you, US Silica!

In addition to the bluebird trail, we also have seven other bluebird boxes and six martin set-ups throughout the communities of Mauricetown and Port Norris. These bluebird boxes produced 28 fledglings. Unfortunately, one bluebird box across from the Mauricetown Post Office experienced "sparrow revenge". In the process of repeatedly removing house sparrow nests from a nearby martin set-up, the sparrows attacked a nearby bluebird nest and destroyed all five eggs! Those house sparrows! The box eventually housed tree swallows and then a late season house wren took up the space.

The purple martins made a huge splash this year as we provided more martin gourds and even a beautiful T-14 set up across from the Mauricetown Post Office. The martin gourd racks are located at the Port Norris Township Hall, Mary Ella Morie Park, the Hundt residence, the Mauricetown Riverside Park, and the new T-14 on Highland Street. All the gourd racks were filled with nesting martins.

Unfortunately, we two had two black rat snake incidents (Hundt gourd and at the PN Township Hall.) We also had an odd situation where a piece of stick was caught in the entrance to a gourd and a martin was trapped and thus died.

*(continues on next page)*

*Black rat snake in a purple martin gourd behind the Commercial Township Municipal Offices. It had a martin in its belly. "Yikes!! Scared the crap out of me when I reached in the gourd! I captured the snake with the bird inside and walked it around to show the town clerk what I had found. She did an 'oh my'! - Peter Manzelmann. The winch on that gourd set up was too low and thus the snake had a path to predate one of our precious martins.*



# Cumberland County

Coordinator, Allen Jackson | 609-805-4073 | aljaxn@aol.com



*Peter and US Silica employee, April Sooy, with predator guards.*

In summary, throughout the spring and summer it was wonderful to watch the bright blue flash of the bluebirds and to witness the aerial activities of the insectivorous-eating martins as they soared and swooped in the sky above us. In the beginning of August, the purple martins did their annual staging near the Mauricetown Bridge. It was amazing to watch them appear out of nowhere and soar, glide, and gently flap into the phragmites as the sun set.

May the bluebirds have a safe and happy winter in our backyards. May the martins have a safe trip down to Brazil. We look forward to all of them returning in the spring to give us another glorious year of bird activity.

Special thanks to our master, Allen Jackson for his expertise, help and banding. Special thanks to US Silica for their contributions. We are grateful for the support from Citizens United Maurice River, Commercial Township and the Environmental Commission for their endless support.

And lastly, to the landowners who are now beginning to monitor their own boxes and gourd set ups. It is all a big team effort! Thank you all!

## Bluebirds for Veterans ~ Allen Jackson

The Countryside Garden Club (CGC) has designed and built a special Blue Star Memorial Flower Garden at the New Jersey Memorial Veterans' Home in Vineland, Cumberland County. The Club maintains this garden for the enjoyment of the Veterans who reside there. A commemorative plaque designates the garden as "a tribute to the armed forces that have defended the United States of America."



*Allen Jackson bands a bluebird chick as RJ Morrison and Matthew Daher look on. Photo by Susan Morello.*

The flowers attract hummingbirds, butterflies, pollinators, and recently, a pair of Eastern Bluebirds. In 2022, a nestbox was installed after CGC member Carol Deuber asked Allen Jackson if he could place a bluebird box at the Memorial Garden. In less than a year, a pair of bluebirds found the box and decided to call it home. In fact, four young bluebird chicks were fitted with special leg bands on July 11, 2023.

To celebrate the occasion, RJ Morrison, Volunteer Services Assistant for Life Enrichment, and Matthew Daher, Assistant Chief Executive Officer at the Veterans Home, joined Susanne Morello of the Cumberland County Rutgers Master Gardeners and Allen to commemorate the added serenity of having nesting bluebirds at the site. As their population flourishes, plans are to expand the bluebird trail on the facility.



*(L to R) Allen Jackson, Matthew Daher and Susanne Morello in front of the Memorial Garden and its bluebird box.*

**Allen's Always Growing the Program!** I added 2 boxes on Barretts Run Road in Hopewell Township, Cumberland County, on the property of Winnie and Ed Bradford. Interestingly, Winnie had watched me band at a purple martin colony at least 15 years ago. She contacted me about banding a brood of bluebird chicks and was receptive to improving her setups. I believe their property could host 2 pair of bluebirds. Hurry up 2024! ~ Allen Jackson

# Cumberland County

Coordinator, Allen Jackson | 609-805-4073 | aljaxn@aol.com

**A Banded Martin Story** - On September 21, 2023, I organized a wildlife pontoon boat trip on the Maurice River for our family. We were short two people from filling the boat with 18, so my daughter asked a couple she was friendly with named Kat and Zac. The couple lives in Delmont, NJ on Route 47, close to the Cumberland/Cape May County line. They have a small gourd rack for purple martins but would like me to help them with bluebirds. It was the first time I met them, but they were very friendly and we talked a lot during the boat trip.



The next day, Zac decides to clean his gourds and found a dead martin with a leg band. Turns out it was one of the last martins I banded (at Cape May Point State Park) on July 6, 2016. That bird was 7 years and 3 months old. Pretty old - even for a martin. ~ Allen Jackson



*This purple martin gourd setup is home sweet home to a brood of bluebirds. Photo by Pixabay.*

# Gloucester County

Coordinator, Bernadine Visalli | 856-986-4502 | buttonwood61@yahoo.com



**Holtzhauser Farms** is a local peach farm located in Mullica Hill, Gloucester County. My family has been buying peaches from them for as long as I can remember. Last year when visiting for my weekly peach

fix, I had on my NJ Bluebird shirt since I was out banding that day. As always happens, that started a conversation with the farm owner, Tom.

As the conversation progressed, I asked if he ever saw bluebirds on his farm. "Do we!!! We are loaded with them!" was his excited reply. "I even have bluebirds in that old martin house my brother built years ago".

Since they were using a really old martin house, we knew they were desperate for some good housing. We made a date for a meet up in early spring before all the farm work started to take a survey of the land to see where the boxes could be located and not interfere with the farm work.



Fast forward to April 2023: I installed three test boxes and we had a nest and eggs a week later! Another box had chickadees, which successfully fledged. Unfortunately, with the early arrival of the tree swallows, they took over that first nesting box that had bluebirds eggs. So far at the time of this writing (July), the two other boxes have successfully fledged bluebirds. Plans are to expand the

trail on the farm next year and mitigate the TS problems.

On a side note, I was there in late June to do banding and Tom let me know he had a pair of BBs in that same martin house. I always carry a spare set up, just in case there is an emergency and need to do repairs. I asked if I could put up a nestbox - even though they were busy building in the martin house as we stood there and chatted. We talked about a good location since there is a lot of activity with customers driving in for peaches.

Ann Silvers was along for the ride that day, for photo opportunities, thank goodness, and she got some great shots to back up the story. We put up the new box across the driveway from the martin house and went out on the



farm to do some banding. After we were done and as we were driving out, Tom came out waving his hands. "They are already in the new box!!".

As often happens, put up a new box and the bluebirds are on it before you can put your tools away. Ann volunteered to go check on the box to see the progression since it is around the corner from her house.

**June 29th** - Nestbox installed.

**July 1st** - A FULL nest in box.

**July 2nd** - Eggs appear.

Looking forward to expanding this site in 2024. ~ Bernnie Visalli



## HOUSE SPARROW CONTROL ~ Allen Jackson and Lori Jo Jamieson

The success or failure of your bluebird program depends on how well you control any house sparrows that compete for your nestboxes. Now is a good time to become familiar with this subject, so you're prepared for the 2024 season.

House sparrows are an invasive species and not protected under The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. Below are some methods NJBBS members use with comments about their effectiveness.

- **Nest removal** - This is an act in futility. You have to deal with the sparrow on a daily basis and may only make the sparrow mad, resulting in House Sparrow Revenge Syndrome, where the sparrow returns to destroy the eggs, kill young or kill the parents who have started a nest in "their" box. Alternately, the displaced sparrow may attack and kill the occupants of a nearby box. A case of HSRD took place this season at the Mauricetown Post Office (see article on page 8). Also, using this method keeps the box from being available for the bluebirds to nest.
- **Egg spraying** - Some groups recommend using an oily spray like Pam to coat the eggs so they don't develop. This may work, but the nestbox is unavailable for the bluebirds to use for over a month, and may lead to only one bluebird nesting rather than 2 or 3.
- **Trapping and Euthanizing** - Without a doubt, Van Ert Traps are the most effective method. Van Ert Universal Sparrow Traps are available for \$10.50 each plus S&H from [aep.perkins@gmail.com](mailto:aep.perkins@gmail.com) or by calling **515-418-3787**.



*Bluebird eggs nearly ready to hatch, destroyed by an angry house sparrow.  
Photo by Dean Rust.*

**Instructions for use** - Using the trap requires adding 2 screws inside the box under the entrance hole - just leave the screws in the box permanently. Purchase a mesh laundry bag large enough to cover the entire box.

Only set a trap when a house sparrow is building a nest during the season. They are the most vulnerable during this time and easiest to trap. Set the trap, removing any nesting material that could interfere with its operation.

**IMPORTANT: The trap must be checked at least every hour because there is the possibility that a bluebird or other native cavity nester may enter the box.** Many times, the house sparrow will go back in immediately. If you can see the bright orange dot at the entrance hole, the trap is sprung.

To remove a trapped house sparrow from a box, place your mesh laundry bag over the entire box, cinch it below the box, then open the door with the bag closed around the box. **Confirm it is indeed a house sparrow and not a bluebird or other cavity nesting species!** The house sparrow will fly out and be captured in the bag. From outside the bag, grab the bird firmly with your free hand. Hold it with the mesh bag wrapped securely around the bird and remove the bag from the box. Do not try to reach in with your hand as house sparrows are extremely fast and evasive. If there is a way for them to escape, they will. You may trap both the male and female at the same time, but concentrate on the male which is the most aggressive against bluebirds. Once the house sparrow is out of the equation, the bluebirds are almost certain to start nest building.

**M**ost people find euthanizing HOSP the second worst thing associated with being a bluebird landlord. The worst thing is opening a nestbox to find dead and mangled native bird nestlings or adults.

~ Bet Zimmerman Smith,  
[www.sialis.org](http://www.sialis.org)

**Eliminating a captured sparrow** - Sadly, once you've seen the bloody results of a house sparrow attack in one of your bluebird nestboxes, employing this permanent solution will become much easier to consider. The Humane Society of the US recommends cervical dislocation at the neck. Other methods include shooting, chest compression, and gassing. More details about methods of euthanizing house sparrows can be found at <http://www.sialis.org/hospdispatch.htm>.

Here is some important advice, also from [sialis.org](http://www.sialis.org): If you decide to trap and euthanize house sparrows, be discreet. Do not euthanize birds in public places in front of strangers or children.

Note: euthanized birds are sometimes accepted by a raptor recovery center, a wildlife rehabilitator that handles fox, coyote or fishers, or by a falconer. Check with your local organization for details.

### Links to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Website:

[The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918](#) - [List of Birds Protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act \(updated 2023\)](#)

*This article also includes excellent material sourced from [North American Bluebird Society](#) and [sialis.org](#).*

# Monmouth County

Coordinator, Jean Montgomerie | 646-808-5158 | jmontperson@gmail.com

## The Nestbox Mystery at Allaire: Whose Eggs? Follow the Clues and Take a Guess!



**EXHIBIT A** - Nestbox 4: The Scene of the Mystery at Allaire State Park. Measurements of the very weathered box later showed an opening slightly larger than 1.5 inches in diameter, and at a height of four feet above the ground.



**EXHIBIT C** - Nestbox 4 on 4/20/23 : The Mystery Eggs. First photo when all the eggs appeared. Three bluebird eggs and two ??? Note: Slightly larger and less deep blue. Hmmmm...



**EXHIBIT E** - 5/19/23: Three of the nestlings have fledged. These two are almost ready to fledge, but are still in the box. The bluebird parents were busy feeding these birds, who both fledged by May 24, 2023.



**EXHIBIT B** - Typical bluebird eggs laid in nestboxes at Allaire Park the same year. Average size: 0.7 x 16.3 mm



**EXHIBIT D** - 5/12/23: The Five Hatchlings in Box 4; out of the three visible in this photo, two have bent beak corners; the other smaller bird has flat beak corner.



**EXHIBIT F** - American Robin Fledgling, Highlands, NJ taken 7/16/2023 with Canon R7+RF - 100-400mm

~~~~~

**Hatch to Fledge average times:**  
**Eastern bluebird: 17 days.**  
**American robin: 13 days.**



**CONCLUSION:** IF the two eggs were robin's eggs, they were laid at least one week after the three bluebird eggs, based on the fledge dates. And the robin pair completely left the eggs after they were laid in the box as these birds were not seen in the vicinity of the nestbox.

### What do YOU think?

By Jean Montgomerie, Monmouth County Coordinator, NJBBS.  
Photos by Jean Montgomerie except where noted.



American robin nest and eggs from New Jersey.  
Eggs: 29 x 20 mm average size, slightly larger than bluebird.

A Robin Nestbox. Exposed design with wide openings.

# Monmouth County

Coordinator, Jean Montgomerie | 646-808-5158 | [jmontperson@gmail.com](mailto:jmontperson@gmail.com)



An incredible photo by Freehold Township HS monitor Georgia Silver



Bluebird in flight. Photo by monitor Rita English



Howell HS senior monitor Kaitlyn with Jean M. at Soldier Memorial Park



Surprise!  
A late clutch of eggs!  
August 15  
Howell Box #3

## Meet our newest Board Member, Jean Montgomerie

Jean spends an amazing amount of time and effort on so many different projects. Besides serving as the Monmouth County Coordinator, Jean is a substitute teacher at all six Freehold Regional High Schools, where, in 2021 she got involved with students in the Animal and Botanical Magnet Program. (This was during Covid.) The students earned credit hours for community service, and they need 30 hours of service each school year to be accepted into the National Honor Society. The Bluebird Nestbox Monitoring Program is perfect for this, and Jean trains the students. She also purchased a Nestbox setup with a nest cam for the Agricultural Program students to enrich the Magnet Program there.

Last year, she constructed the 6-box Patriot Bluebird Trail in Freehold Township, which has become a major success. High school student Georgia Silver monitors, along with Linda Lakind, a new monitor found from a Facebook Group that Jean created, "Ocean/Monmouth Bluebirders (NJBBS)". Jean also assumed management of a 16-box trail at Freehold Township's Durand Arboretum after it was abandoned by those who built it. And, as of June 2023, Jean monitors the State Tree Nursery and FREC for Laura Stone. She had previously monitored it (15 boxes) in 2021 with Laura as training for three high school students enrolled in the Bluebird Nestbox Monitoring Program.

In Howell this year, she installed a new 3-box trail, and assists teacher Mary Russo with NestWatch issues on a Howell Residential Bluebird Nestbox Trail - 6 boxes that Laura Stone set up long ago.

Jean holds a Master's Degree in Biology/Ecology from Rutgers University. B.S. Biology from Temple University. After 26 years, she retired as an Environmental Specialist with the NJ Pinelands Commission Staff. Jean also was a Naturalist at Allaire State Park for Summer 2021. NJBBS is very glad to gain Jean's vast experience and knowledge for the Board!

## Morris County *In Memoriam*



### Leo B. Hollein, Jr.

Leo Hollein, who led both the bluebird and wood duck box programs at Great Swamp NWR since 2001, passed away in January 2023. He will be greatly missed by all those who knew him, but his outstanding legacy on behalf of the wildlife of the Refuge will continue into the future.

A long-time NJBBS member and bluebirder, Leo contributed much to NJBBS and NABS. He was a good writer, succinct and accurate in his findings. *Jersey Blues* readers may recall his detailed season reports, complete with graphs and an aerial map of nestbox locations. Photo courtesy of <https://friendsofgreatswamp.org>

# Ocean County

Coordinator, Laura Stone | 732-300-4604 | Lauras36@yahoo.com

## New Nestbox Trail in Ocean County! ~ Bernie Visalli, VP South

In all the years of doing site visits, I have never met a group so excited to have nesting boxes installed. After a long year of lobbying, getting approvals and box placement permissions, there is a new bluebird trail started at Greenbriar Oceanaire Golf Course. Greenbriar is a gated community built around a beautiful golf course.



**Last Box (3) Installed, July 3, 2023**

The setting is fantastic, with great bluebird habitat. We saw many bluebirds on the course as we installed the boxes.

The Wings and Wildlife Club (members of this community) have a mission to create habitat for native birds, and adding these bluebird boxes is the first step. Future plans of the club are to install wood duck boxes and create native plant/pollinator areas along the course. As you can imagine, it has taken a lot of hard work to get to this stage. I was more than happy to be involved in helping them get started on this fantastic initiative.

There are three boxes installed on three different “holes”, all out of the field of play and taking into consideration the homeowners, so as not to block their view of the course. This is an exciting opportunity, and the hope is to have the homeowners take interest in monitoring the boxes in the future. As in any project it takes a village to get the ball rolling! Thank you to John Garnett and Don Edwards from Golf Advisory Committee of Greenbriar Oceanaire Golf Course, the Wings and Wildlife Club, Richard Barber (President) and Dick Lipman.

And last but not least, we’re so grateful to Louise Cockey - Wings and Wildlife Club - AND Treasurer of the New Jersey Bluebird Society. Without her getting involved, this project would not have been possible. Many thanks to all who showed up to help on an excruciatingly hot day. The hospitality shown was greatly appreciated!



**Tough Chicks in Warren County!** While monitoring my trail at the [Wattles Stewardship Center](#), my heart sank as I discovered that during the past week, a black bear had bent a pole and its nestbox the whole way over and down to the ground. Sadly, it had happened before on this rural property. Of course, the parents were frantic as I slowly straightened the pole and opened the damaged box, expecting the worse. . .

Surprise! A nest full of disheveled, plump bluebird chicks remained unharmed and had gotten accustomed to their new living angle in the nestbox. This is the look I got for the “readjustment”. ~ Lori Jo Jamieson



# Salem County

Co-Coordinator, Allen Jackson | 609-805-4073 | [aljaxn@aol.com](mailto:aljaxn@aol.com)

Co-Coordinator, Bernadine Visalli | 856-986-4502 | [buttonwood61@yahoo.com](mailto:buttonwood61@yahoo.com)



**C**opper Knoll Farms is a very scenic lavender farm located in **Pittsgrove, Salem County**. Kimberly and Chester English run the farm and are into sustainable farming which means they are stewards of the land. They are getting rid of invasive plants,

understanding the importance of maintaining a healthy forest and are interested in how wildlife plays a part in the ecosystem.

Kimberly met Allen Jackson at the Wheaton Village Eco Fair May 2023 and expressed interest in becoming a bluebird monitor. Soon after, Allen and I did a site visit (we share coordinator duties in Salem County) to see what kind of habitat they had. We were both excited to see what they had to offer: both wooded and open space with a very quiet location set back from the road. Kimberly and Chester host purple martins, too, and we observed a bluebird trying to take over a gourd!

The next week, I installed 3 boxes on the site, with one close enough to the racks so the bluebirds would

hopefully see it and leave the purple martin gourds alone. A day after the site visit, Kimberly reported there was interest in the box. A nest had already been built, and eggs followed that very week. She was happy to report every box fledged young this year (total of 9). We even took a fun ride on her ATV to investigate potential box sites to add next year. I am super excited about expand this site in 2024!



Kimberly English of Copper Knoll Farms.

**K**imberly English is also an accomplished artist, and can't wait to see how she incorporates bluebirds in her artwork. She also keeps her followers up to date on the bluebird activities on the farm with great educational videos.

Please check out the farm's website for upcoming events and her bluebird videos on Facebook and Instagram.

[copperknollfarms.com](http://copperknollfarms.com)

## Could There Be A Bluebird Housing Shortage?!

This past August, in Quinton, Salem County, I installed 2 nestboxes in a small rural housing development adjacent to the inactive Wild Oaks golf course. The boxes were located near some mailboxes, and one box had a newspaper holder underneath it. Yes, a bluebird decided to nest in that paper box (my second such incident).



I frequent 2 other houses in this development (Hassler family) to band chicks in the 4 boxes on their properties, usually banding 2-3 times in each box. With the increase in area bluebirds (thanks to the Hassler family), the bluebirds are seemingly in need of more housing. Dave Hassler contacted the adjacent property owners (Jim and Patrice F.) about adding a box on their property. I returned and installed 2 more nestboxes, and now expect to band even more chicks next year. There is a possibility of enlarging the trail if a monitor steps forward to be responsible for managing it.

If you're interested, please call me at 609-805-4073. ~ Allen Jackson

(L) A new setup installed nearby for bluebirds nesting in an abandoned newspaper box (R).

## News from Fort Mott in Pennsville

In early June when Bob Dickinson



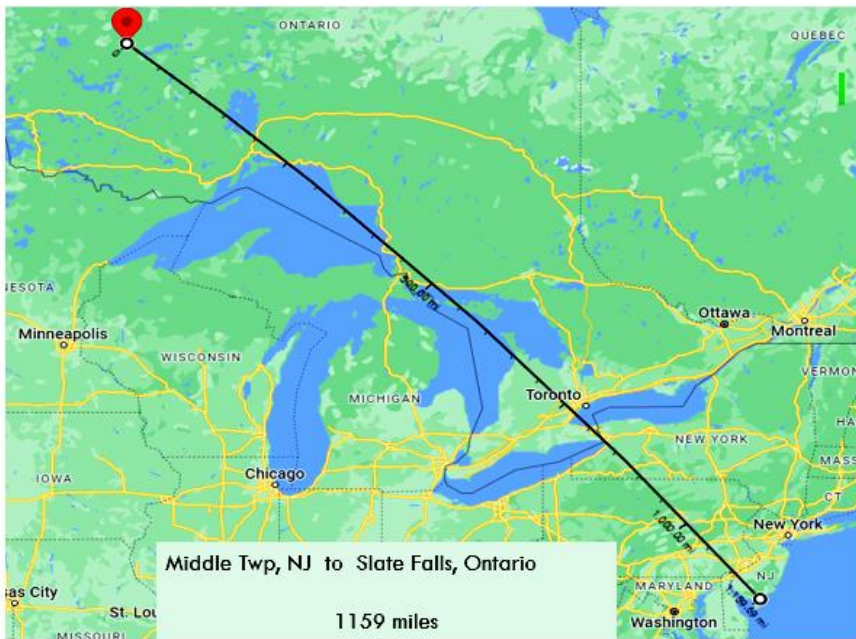
went over to check on the nestbox trail at Fort Mott, he discovered a box with five bluebird eggs.

On June 23rd, Allen met with Joe Moore,

(who first recommended establishing a trail there) and along with Ft. Mott Supervisor Andres Grant, they banded three chicks. The nest also held one unhatched egg and a young hatchling that probably never made it past its first or second day.

Despite having limitations on box locations, it will be nice to see if a healthy bluebird population can be established there.





### Amazing Band Recoveries of 2023

In 2021, I banded a brood of young bluebirds in Dorchester, Cumberland County. In the same general period of time, Rae Griffiths banded a brood from Amanda's Field on Route 50 - just east of Tuckahoe, Cape May County.

We then had two strong storms that came through our area, moving southwest to northeast. I believe one of these storms carried our novice bluebird fledglings up in a northeasterly direction - mine to Lakeville, MA, east of Providence RI - and Rae's to Nova Scotia.

My bird survived the relocation and possibly bred in MA during 2022, before being found dead in early 2023.

Rae's bird was killed in 2021 by a house cat that had been let outside to roam during the day. (*Read Bernie Visalli's cat story on page 4*)

The third band return is also quite interesting. It was also banded in 2022 by Rae in Middle Township. This bluebird fledgling must've been carried by a powerful storm originating offshore in the southeast that traveled in a northwest direction, ending up in Slater Falls, Ontario, Canada. That's approximately 1,770 miles away. The bluebird was banded in August 2022 and recovered in June 2023. Notice that it was carried north of Lake Superior, the most northern and western positioned Great Lake, and west of the southern tip of James Bay, close to Manitoba Province. ~ *Allen Jackson*

**Would you like to get involved with bluebirds? Are you interested in hosting bluebirds on your property, or monitoring a nestbox trail? Please contact the NJBBS County Coordinator listed below who is closest to your location.**

**Atlantic - Jim Watson**  
609-204-3358  
wombat3287@gmail.com

**Burlington - Harry Bratty**  
856-630-6765  
hmbratty@gmail.com

**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 - Bernadine Visalli**  
856-986-4502  
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**Middlesex - Susan Meaney**  
732-213-6870  
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**Monmouth - Jean Montgomerie**  
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**Ocean - Laura Stone**  
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**Salem Co-Coodinators:**  
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**Somerset - April Tarantino**  
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908-878-7077  
mckennakels@gmail.com