

New Jersey Bluebird Society's

# Jersey Blues

Volume 8, Issue 2 - Fall 2024



Photo by Joshua J. Cotten on Unsplash

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**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 of bluebird habitat is key to a successful nesting season. We hope that your concern for the well-being of our New Jersey native Eastern Bluebirds will motivate you to go [HERE](#) and join!

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**MISSION:**  
 To engage in such educational, scientific and charitable pursuits as may be beneficial to the prosperity and well being of the three species of bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting bird species.

**NJBBS is a proud State Affiliate of The North American Bluebird Society** and there are advantages to being a member of both groups. NABS supports and helps unify the work of State Affiliates across America. Its members receive the quarterly *Bluebird* journal, a colorful publication filled with photos and helpful articles. Even those of us who consider ourselves "experienced" bluebirders love the resources on their website, [www.nabluebirdsociety.org](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org). Included are downloadable, useful PDF Fact Sheets about bluebirding. Please consider joining both NJBBS and NABS today. Member of NJBBS, can join NABS for only \$15 for your first year. <https://www.njbluebirdsociety.org/membership.html>.

**NJBBS OFFICERS:** President - *vacant*; Vice President, South: Bernadine Visalli; Treasurer: Louise Cockey; Secretary: Jenyfra Nelson; Membership: Gary Pilling

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS:** All Officers above, plus Frank Budney, Allen Jackson, Presidents Emeritus At Large: Harry Bratty, Shelly Cucugliello, Dave Gilcrest, Lori Jo Jamieson, Gemma Major, Jean Montgomerie, Gary Pilling, Jim Priest, Laura Stone, Jim Watson

## Jersey Blues

*The Newsletter of The New Jersey Bluebird Society*  
**Volume 8, Issue 2 - Fall, 2024**

[www.njbluebirdsociety.org/](http://www.njbluebirdsociety.org/) We are a North American Bluebird Society Affiliate

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**SEASON TOTALS WILL BE SENT IN A SEPARATE EMAIL**

## A Certificate of Recognition for Jim Priest

By *Bernnie Visalli, VP South*

Describing Jim as just a “Monitor” is not giving him his due. Since joining New Jersey Bluebird Society in 2019, Jim has become one of our most active and important members. Jim is now what I like to call our “Master Box Builder” and coordinates “his little group” of monitors over four counties, taking care of 130 boxes in total.

Jim met Allen Jackson during a banding session in Hammonton, Atlantic County. Before he knew it, he was monitoring bluebird boxes on the AC expressway. That led to banding birds in 2020, and the rest is history.

Jim’s love of nature and birds started at an early age. During deployment on the Midway Islands from 1964 to 1965 he assisted researchers that came there to study Albatross, Bonin Island Petrels and even Monk seals! He was able to finagle a meeting with the esteemed Harvey Fisher, PhD, who at the time was Pacific Ornithologist at the University of Hawaii and Curator of Birds at the Bernice P. Bishop Museum in Honolulu - and later at Southern Illinois University. He also was able to meet and assist Chandler Robbins, who is a world-famous conservationist. [Chandler Robbins Inspired Generations of Scientists and Birders, 1918-2017 | U.S. Geological Survey \(usgs.gov\)](#)

In a short period of time, Jim was able to assist with the banding of hundreds of birds. He got the nickname “Bloody Finger Jim” because to capture the Petrels who nested underground, he would reach in the burrow, and the birds would promptly bite him! Many years later, when Jim visited with Chandler at his home in Maryland, the lightbulb went on: “YOU’RE ‘Bloody Finger Jim’”!



her, nose to nose with the 600 lb. seal. We don’t know who was more frightened at that point, but Jim said her breath was enough to melt his eyeballs when she gave that big seal yell like we have all heard on the nature shows.

Jim is a great asset to New Jersey Bluebird Society as our Box Builder extraordinaire, building about 100 boxes a year and 400+ to date. He has a great workshop and is always ready to explain, lend a hand or provide guidance for those of us who are amateur wood workers. We would not be able to keep up with all the site visits and new members if it was not for the generosity of Jim. I know I personally appreciate him coordinating and doing site visits for the western side of Gloucester County and his can-do attitude is infectious. He never says “No” when a request is made and is often found at a table promoting New Jersey Bluebird Society at various events.

That is why we are honoring you, Jim, with a Certificate of Recognition for your outstanding generosity, dedication, and continuing commitment to the survival of the bluebirds of NJ. ***Please read Jim’s response on page 6.***



*Pictured left to right: NJBBS Treasurer Louise Cockey, Jim Priest, Priscilla Priest, and Bernnie Visalli, VP South.*

The Albatross are fascinating since they have fidelity to the same breeding spot (within inches) and they also lay their egg on the same date every year, which is amazing if you consider 300,000+ birds going to the same island at the same time.

One of his adventures during his deployment took Jim to Kure Island with Hawaii Fish and Wildlife to help tag eleven Monk Seals. They devised a “cape” made from a canvas tarp material they would throw over the seal. It was Jim’s job to tackle the seal to keep it still while they tagged and did all the research tasks. One big female seal sent one of the seal holders flying and Jim found himself, still on top straddling





## **HALLOWEEN:**

### **A VERY SCARY TIME FOR WILDLIFE!**

Fake spider web decorations pose a threat to wildlife and the environment for several reasons: entanglement, non-biodegradability, flammability, and harm to the environment.

It's recommended to keep them indoors, place them inside windows, check daily for wildlife impact, and avoid hanging them in areas where birds fly.

Fake spider webs can trap small animals, birds, and insects, such as hummingbirds, owls, butterflies, bees, and warblers. The webs can get caught on their wings and limbs, and can cause injuries or even death if they can't escape.

Consider other ways to decorate your home for Halloween, such as repurposing items you already have, like cardboard graveyards or pumpkins.

*Originally posted on New Jersey Bluebird Society's Facebook Page by Dawn Goo*

## **SURPRISE!**

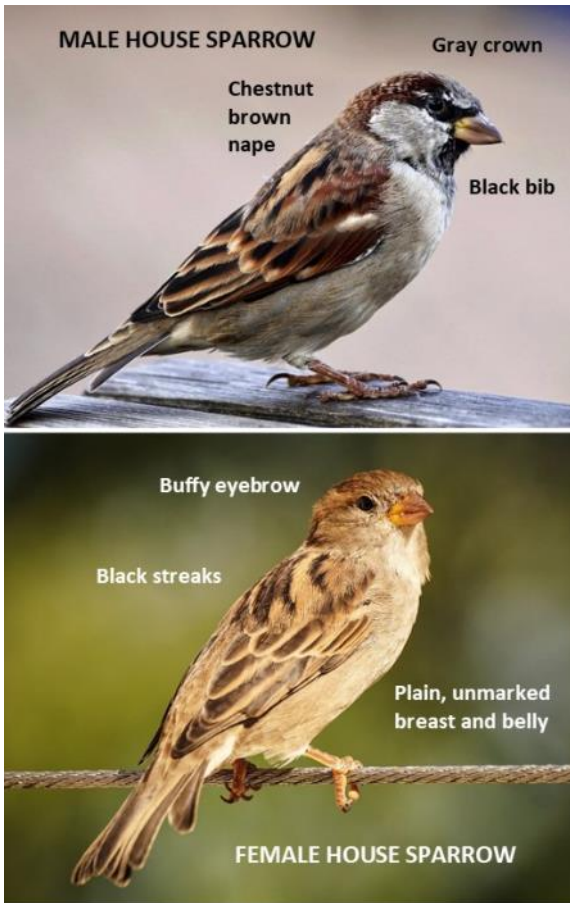
A Northern Gray Tree Frog was in the bluebird box at our rustic cabin in Comstock NY (border of VT and NY). It was in its striking green phase and curious why I was opening the box. It was his/her space now, after another successful bluebird nesting this past summer. - Submitted by Peter Manzelmann, Cumberland County



## **Kestrels Join the Club!**

In late June we banded two Kestrels on our Salem County property. For over ten years now, Steve Eisenhauer of Natural Lands Trust has been tirelessly working to ensure these birds continue to thrive. As good fortune would have it, Steve told me about this bluebird-addicted guy named Allen Jackson. So of course, now we have bluebirds as well as martins!

*- Submitted by Robert Dickinson, Salem County*



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## House Sparrows – Our Biggest Foe - By Bernie Visalli, VP South

Many of us have experienced the loss of eggs, hatchlings, or even adult bluebirds to the dreaded House Sparrow. House Sparrows are not native to the US and can be legally eliminated.

*(Note: House Sparrow is the only sparrow species that will use a nest box. Since the pandemic, many of us have noticed an explosion of House Sparrow issues on many sites that never had them before. I have a feeling it can be attributed to people being at home for that extended period and deciding to put up a bird feeder.)*

Poor quality bird food is the favorite of the House Sparrow. Any type of mix that contains millet, milo and sunflower seeds will attract them to your yard. A good rule of thumb is to remove feeders during breeding season (spring through fall). Bird feeders also attract hawks, and we don't want a hawk picking off a feeder-visiting bird. Every bird taken by a hawk is a nest failure no matter what type of bird it may be. Bird feeders become a buffet for the hawks, and they will visit daily if they know there is a robust food source!

Back to the House Sparrow... I have learned through my involvement with Purple Martin landlords that they take a more proactive approach to the sparrow problem. The idea is to control or eliminate the problem *BEFORE* it becomes a problem. If you can, let's not wait until a House Sparrow takes an interest in your bluebird box.

### How do we do that?

- ◆ Provide only quality bird seed (no millet or milo in the mix) in the winter.
- ◆ If you see a House Sparrow claim a box, set a trap, and eliminate. Box traps are very effective and the most widely used is the Van Ert. Note: when using a box trap, always use under supervision. If you won't be able to observe or check to see if it is triggered every hour, don't set it. Your county coordinator can help/advise you on how to use it.
- ◆ If you have a large population in your yard (flocks) consider getting a "repeater trap". There are many types on the market now in different price ranges.
- ◆ Start checking your boxes early in the season and if you note House Sparrow activity, set your traps!

Van Ert Trap



- ◆ Passive management (removing nests) really doesn't work. You are only pushing your sparrows onto someone else.

We don't like to get these calls from monitors about House Sparrow predation. Most times, once a nest fails due to sparrow issues, bluebirds may not use that box again for the season. We want to nip this trend in the bud if we can, *BEFORE* disaster strikes.

*These two tragic photos were taken on actual NJ trails.*

### Additional Resources:

[North American Bluebird Society \(NABS\) FACT SHEET on House Sparrow Control](#)

[Sialis.org - Managing House Sparrows \(Control\)](#)

See article on page 6, "A New Approach to Using Van Ert Traps".

**A Response from Jim Priest** - I appreciated the award, it was very nice of you to think of me.

Even though I have built around 4 hundred boxes myself, I had help with some through the years. I would like to thank some folks who have helped me with box building. One year, Eric Pedersen from Audubon, this year, Greg Staman from Williamstown - and even Allen Jackson has chipped in. Anytime you can get help, no matter how little or a lot, it is greatly appreciated.

We have a lot of good people in our little group who do a lot to help bluebirds. Especially, Cindy Parise who checks Donio Park, Mike Chezik who checks New Brooklyn Park, Bob Barsotti who checks several parks in Winslow Twp., Bob Boddingham who checks Gloucester County Community Park, Deborah Valcourt who helps check New Brooklyn Park, Keith Clayton who checks Rancocas Conservancy in Burlington County, and of course Greg Staman who checks green Acres Park and Duffy's Park (see Jim's special statement about Greg on the next page).

All these folks check parks every week during the season plus they help put up or move boxes, or whatever is needed. I would like to thank all for their help. - *Jim*

#### Jim Priest Group - Season Report for 2024

County	# Eggs	Chicks	Banded	Fledged
Atlantic	32	32	0	32
Burlington	39	31	0	31
Camden	212	179	0	174
Gloucester *	279	237	0	236
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>562</b>	<b>479</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>473</b>

\*Includes all four of Rich Gess's boxes

#### Four-County Report - by Jim Priest

In the first week of October, Mike Chezik, Greg Staman, Bob Barsotti and myself moved 7 boxes around in New Brooklyn Park, Camden County. All boxes were paired to help the bluebirds, and to slow down the Tree Swallows from taking over the park. Everything went well thanks to all the help we had.

Greg and I also pair a box at the Green Acre Park in Williamstown, Gloucester County for the same reason.

Bob Barsotti and I removed 2 boxes from Spinelli Farm in Waterford Works, Camden County because the field they were in became overgrown and was no longer suitable for bluebirds.



Side hole provides an escape for small birds accidentally trapped



Box with 1-1/4" hole reducer installed

#### A New Approach to Using Van Ert Traps

By Stephen Lang, lang1980@charter.net

Many of you use a Van Ert trap to control House Sparrows. I put a 1-1/4" reducer on a box. A House Sparrow can enter with the reducer but a bluebird cannot.

Then, I drill a 1-1/8" hole on one of the lower sides of the box, so if any chickadees or wrens get caught, they can immediately escape through that hole.

I mount the box on 5' of 1/2"

conduit pipe: a 10-footer cut in half - there's no waste and it's very inexpensive.

Next, I set the pole up against a 3' Light Duty U-post (only \$4) that is pounded into the ground (just 1 foot) and attached the two together with wire.

No need for a baffle if you are just using it to catch House Sparrows. You could even mount it on a fence post or attach it to a tree. Most inexpensive boxes can be used for this. I caught six House Sparrows in one week doing it this way.



Pole installation

\*This article originally appeared in NABS Bluebird Journal, Vol. 46, No. 4, and is reprinted here with permission.

**NATIVES FOR BLUEBIRDS - Allen Jackson observes bluebirds eating native berries as fall comes into play.**

It is late September, and I've been watching the bluebirds in my yard scarf up the Pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*) berries. This was the first time I noticed them eating them. I have five bushes around my yard and the bluebirds are visiting all five, which is fitting, since all five bushes are the result of bluebirds or other birds eating and depositing the seeds after digesting the berries. Most people do not know the importance of this berry-producing plant.

This year the birds have to compete for the Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*) berries with the squirrels, as the squirrels have suddenly taken a liking to the three trees in my yard that produce the red berries. This seems to be a favorite food for many of our native species.



Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*)<sup>1</sup>



Overripe infructescence (*Phytolacca americana*)<sup>2</sup>



Winterberry Holly (*Ilex verticillata*)<sup>3</sup>

I am also pleased to have two Winterberry Holly (*Ilex verticillata*) shrubs which also produce red berries that usually get eaten later in the winter. I have had numerous reports in the past of bluebirds eating the berries in February.

Take it from the bluebirds - plant more native, berry-producing trees and shrubs!

<sup>1</sup> Image by [Mike Goad](#) from [Pixabay](#)

<sup>2</sup> By H. Zell - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

<sup>3</sup> Image by [Peaqyouchoucair](#) from [Pixabay](#)

**Greg Staman - Truly A Great Asset to Our Organization - By Jim Priest**



Greg Staman and wife, Stacy.

A few weeks back, I was asked to give a statement on someone who has done an outstanding job in the bluebird season of 2024. Our group has many dedicated people, so it was hard for me to pick just one. I decided to choose Greg because of the outstanding job he did this year. He has solicited his neighbors, and has put a box (or more) in almost every yard. I believe the total is around seven or so. He has been monitoring two parks and all his neighborhood boxes all season, walking many miles to do so. When one of the boxes was attacked by House Sparrows, he spent an entire day setting a box trap to get rid of them, and he did. I just love his dedication to do well.

He also spends a lot of time volunteering for the Citizen United for the Maurice River organization, including holding classes for children at some of the parks. But when it came to us at NJBBS, he has not stopped helping all year. His group has produce 130 Eastern Bluebird fledglings - not bad for a newbie! Next week he will be helping us move seven boxes to new locations.

Greg has truly been a strong asset to our organization, and I wish we had more people like him. In a few days, he will be having surgery on one of his fingers that got infected while flipping (and saving) Horseshoe Crabs. We wish him luck with the operation and thank him for his excellent work. - Jim



*This critter (Flying Squirrel) was camping out in one of Nels' bird boxes. Photos by the author.*

## Flying Squirrels

The Southern Flying Squirrel, scientifically known as *Glaucomys volans*, is a fairly common resident of the Pine Barrens. With their small size and nocturnal habits (sleeps in hollow trees and other cavities during the day) they are seldom seen so many are unaware of their presence. They are brownish above with white under parts and a body length of 5 to 6". Their tail is about 4". Being nocturnal they have large eyes for their size. They eat both vegetable and animal matter - including bird eggs. Wikipedia provides more detail to flight characteristics:

*Flying squirrels glide between trees with flights recorded of up to almost 300 feet. The direction and speed of the animal in midair is varied by changing the position of its two arms and legs. This changes the tautness of the patagium, a furry parachute like membrane that stretches from wrist to ankle. It has a fluffy tail*

*that stabilizes flight and also acts as an air brake as the animal flares up before landing, usually on a tree trunk.*

Since I monitor many bird houses in the pines, I occasionally get to see them up close and in action when they take up residence in one of my boxes. Their nest is a messy collection of forest litter and soft bark scraps. They will almost fill the box and burrow in to sleep and nurture their young, so at first sight the nest looks empty. As I mentioned before, they do eat bird eggs, and my suspicion is their diet also includes young birds. Early on I thought if I could make the entrance hole small enough it might keep them out. Bluebirds need an inch and a half hole. I tried an inch and three eighths hole restrictor but as I positioned it, out came a Flying Squirrel answering that question for me. The best method I have found to keep them at bay is to place the nest box far enough from tall trees so they don't have an easy glide.

One nested in a Peterson box adjacent to the back deck of my home. The front of the Peterson box opens for observation or cleaning. As I opened this one, there was stirring under the nest litter and a Flying Squirrel emerged and exited. The disruption loosened the nest and



without the support of the front door, four naked finger sized young tumbled to the ground. Replacing them and the nest front would require some extra hands. I went for assistance and returned a few minutes later only to see the mom carrying away one of the young in her mouth.. She returned in short order and made off with another. Within five minutes she had her brood safely stashed away in another cavity somewhere nearby. I was impressed.



Nest boxes are monitored weekly and a lot can happen in that time period. In one instance the nest box which had been empty was filled to the brim with Flying Squirrel litter. The box is pole mounted with a horizontal guard substantial enough to prevent access from the ground. That animal had to have made many trips, gliding in with a mouthful of stuff and making perfect landings on a fairly small target. They are persistent and efficient gliders and could very likely be in our neighborhoods, without us ever knowing it.

That makes me wonder what else might be going on in nature around us of which we are totally unaware. - By Nels Anderson



*Photo by The New York Public Library on Unsplash*





Welcome, New NJBBS Members!

**Atlantic County**

David Somers (joined in 2023)  
Patricia Lynn Tyszka

**Bergen County**

Brook Zelcer

**Burlington County**

Leslie Roche

**Cape May County**

Christine Albrecht  
Karen Hammeran  
Steve Hepding  
Shirley McCleary  
Trudy Smith

**Cumberland County**

Becky & James Lewis  
Patricia Westberg

**Gloucester County**

Rick Gallagher  
Mark Shockley  
Cheryl Tartaglione  
Lisa Tiley

**Hunterdon County**

Bruce Michael

**Monmouth County**

Angela Byrnes  
Nano Mardones  
Cynthia Stanley

**Morris County**

Amelia Raybould (joined in 2023)

**Ocean County**

Philip Scala

**Salem County**

Christine Hassler  
Doris Moore

**Somerset County**

Alan Pasternak



Photo by Harry Schneider

# Send Your Bluebird News to Jersey Blues!

published spring & fall

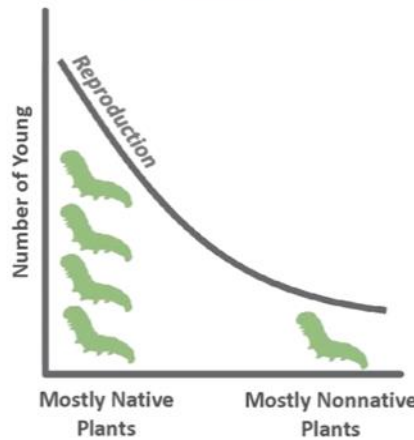
[bluebirdljj@gmail.com](mailto:bluebirdljj@gmail.com)

## Nonnative Plants Reduce Population Growth in Carolina Chickadees

Most songbirds need thousands of insects to reproduce & survive



Carolina chickadee



When yards have nonnative plants, bird prey & reproduction declines

Only yards with more than **70%** native plant biomass sustain chickadee populations



@DLNarango  
@PeterPMarra  
@SMBC

Narango, DL, Tallamy, DW, and Marra PP. Nonnative plants reduce population growth in an insectivorous bird. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences



# Burlington County

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

Year	Bluebirds	Tree Swallows	Chickadees
2007	86	43	17
2008	106	73	139
2009	43	54	20
2010	91	125	41
2011	58	122	20
2012	97	102	29
2013	102	82	0
2014	61	43	5
2015	23	119	8
2016	27	34	7
2017	92	52	7
2018	109	90	8
2019	126	47	0
2020	134	122	5
2021	118	86	7
2022	127	87	0
2023	121	83	8
2024*	114	54	0

\*White Breasted Nut Hatches: 3

## Franklin Parker 2024 Nest Box Trail Report

**First bluebird egg observed - April 15**

**First chick to fledge - week of May 27**

**Last to fledge - week of August 11**

This span of time clearly displays the length of the bluebird nesting season.

In May, box 27 had pine bark scraps and litter - looking like a Flying Squirrel nest - which I emptied. The following week the bark and litter was back but with a grass/moss nest on top. I dropped back and soon a White Breasted Nuthatch flew to and entered the nest box. A week later, three eggs, similar to a Chickadee's, were in place. These eventually hatched and the three fledged. This was a first for me.

Bluebird and Tree Swallow conflicts seem to have subsided somewhat even though both use the same box. Tree Swallows nest in May/June and normally nest just once. Bluebirds nest earlier (the earliest egg ever was March 26) and an established nest with young seems to be relative safe although there are battles and nest takeovers at times. In May /June TS are the dominant tenants with bluebirds taking over again in July.

At the Preserve, the half way point for bluebirds is the first of July, with as many fledged before as after. Overall, it was a good year with 114 bluebirds, 54 Tree Swallows and 3 White Breasted Nuthatches fledged. *Nels Anderson, 10.10.24*



## 2024 Pinelands Bluebird Trail Report

**First bluebird egg observed - April 12**

**First chick to fledge - May 10**

**Last to fledge - August 11**

**Bluebirds Fledged 301 | Chickadees 30 | Tree Swallows 29**

The Pinelands Trail consists of boxes in Wharton, on local farms as well as homes in Shamong, Tabernacle and Southampton. Monitors are Harry Bratty, Clement Green, Bill Andrews and myself. Their help is appreciated; Also, a number of boxes are monitored by

homeowners and all seems to work well. The first egg observed was April 12 and first to fledge May 10. The last to fledge was August 27.

I placed a box in a cemetery near a friend's grave stone not expecting much but a bluebird family took over and produced two broods with nine fledged. It was a "hmmmm" for me, and since found others have done the same. The usual pests are still around such as sparrows, snakes and such. Winged pests include other birds, wasps, hornets, bees and such so weekly monitoring helps to control them. Thanks to all who support this activity in any way even if it is just providing a spot in their yard. - by Nels Anderson, 10.16.24



*Photos by Nels Anderson*

# Cape May County

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

Co-Coordinator, **Christine Albrecht** | 609-231-8062 | [cdaalbrecht@gmail.com](mailto:cdaalbrecht@gmail.com)

Our 2024 total confirmed fledgling count was 407 individuals, 398 from Cape May County and 9 from Atlantic County.

## SOME INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS THIS YEAR:

- ◆ **Increased cowbird activity observed.** I had more last year in 2023 than I had observed previously and we had even more this year.
- ◆ **Snake activity on the Dennis Township Bike Path** continues to be an issue and we have plans to raise the boxes and their predator guards to combat this problem. Kudos to **Bevin O'Grady** and **Christine Albrecht** for the diligent monitoring of this 13-box trail!
- ◆ From 4 new boxes installed at the **Stockton University Sustainability Farm** in Atlantic County, one box successfully fledged 4 chicks! This is from a project my son, Aidan has been working on at the Farm for his senior Capstone project for a couple of years.
- ◆ **SUCCESSFUL FLEDGING IN LOWER TOWNSHIP!!** Ruth Bergstrom, who monitors boxes at **Cox Hall Creek Wildlife Management Area** and the **Lower Township High School** reported successful fledging from both areas (5 chicks at CHC and 3 from LTHS). Last year, we had our first nesting there in many years, but House Sparrows predated the nests. This year, they were successful. Very exciting! We installed 8 new boxes with 4 of them having successful nesting this season.
- ◆ Welcome to new monitors **Steve Hepding**, **Megan Ritter** and **Trudy Smith**! And of course, a big thank you to Christine Albrecht, my Co-Coordinator. Happy birding!! **Rae**

## Welcome to Our New Cumberland County Coordinator

### A Note of Introduction from Trudy Pomerantz

*My husband and I moved to Millville four years ago. A year after that, we learned about CUMR (Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River and Its Tributaries) and became members. Through them, I heard of the work that Allen Jackson did establishing bluebird trails throughout Cumberland County and I was hoping to be able to place a nesting box on my property.*

*Allen visited our yard but said it was not particularly suitable for bluebirds, plus there were a number of boxes already established near us. During this visit, Allen mentioned that he was going to be going to check the boxes over at Holly Farm the following Friday. Holly Farm is about 10 minutes away from our house. I asked if it was possible to go with him and whether I could be trained as a monitor. Allen gave me the privilege of taking care of the seven boxes over at Holly Farm for the past two years. I've learned a lot during this time, but I know I also have a lot more to learn.*

*When I saw there was a need for a new County Coordinator and that nobody had stepped forward yet, I did - because I so passionately believe in the mission of helping to improve the chances for our native birds and this was one way in which I could help. - Trudy*



Photo: Matteo Iadonisi

Would you like to learn more about hosting bluebirds on your property, or monitoring a nestbox trail?

Please contact the NJBBS County Coordinator listed below who is nearest to you.

<b>Atlantic - Jim Watson</b> 609-204-3358 <a href="mailto:wombat3287@gmail.com">wombat3287@gmail.com</a>	<b>Middlesex - Susan Meaney</b> 732-213-6870 <a href="mailto:meaneysusan@hotmail.com">meaneysusan@hotmail.com</a>
<b>Burlington - Harry Bratty</b> 856-630-6765 <a href="mailto:hbratty@gmail.com">hbratty@gmail.com</a>	<b>Monmouth - Jean Montgomerie</b> 646-808-5158 <a href="mailto:jmontperson@gmail.com">jmontperson@gmail.com</a>
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# Cumberland County

WELCOME NEW COORDINATOR, *Trudy Pomerantz* | 856-816-0076 | [Trudygpom@gmail.com](mailto:Trudygpom@gmail.com)

## 2024 Buckshutem WMA Eastern Bluebird Nest Box Trail Activity and Productivity

By *Kassandra Kopanyi*

The data table **on the next page** represents the presence and productivity of Eastern Bluebirds across 18 nest boxes located in the Buckshutem Wildlife Management Area in Cumberland County, southern New Jersey from April 23, 2024 to August 28, 2024. The portion of Buckshutem WMA in which these nest boxes are located is situated between Ramah and Buckshutem Roads, and consists of open farm fields planted with corn, soy, and pollinator-friendly wildflowers. The nest boxes are located along the edges of these fields, where wild grasses grow exponentially, near dirt paths and the wood line.

This summer the area faced extremely high temperatures and ample rainfall, which aided in the abundant growth of the wild grasses and other vegetation that surround and infiltrate the planted fields. Trimming of this overgrown vegetation was not performed as it was in previous years, which possibly resulted in a comparatively lower number of eggs and fledglings produced than years prior. For example, last season in 2023, the same nest box trail was more frequently trimmed and maintained and yielded 158 eggs with 108 chicks fledged, compared to this year with 139 eggs and 103 chicks fledged. Trimming the tall grasses and other overgrown vegetation gives the bluebirds better opportunity for foraging, as they mainly score insects close to the ground and rarely catch them while in flight. Tree Swallows, which are avian aerial insectivores, had an advantage this season and frequently took up residence in the bluebird boxes, in some cases for the entire season.

In a handful of boxes the bluebirds had another challenge to face - ant infestations. If bluebirds were already occupying the box before the ants arrived, it appears they were not greatly affected. Once the box had an infestation, however, it became less likely that a pair of bluebirds would nest in it again. For example, box T3 has a persistent ant presence and only one successful clutch fledged for the season. There would be a nest throughout the season but no more production in this box. Ant infestations were more common in boxes that are situated closer to trees and receive more shade than others. ***Allen Jackson adds these notes:*** *The ants are there to get moisture in the nest from bird droppings. Recommended practices are to clear vegetation on the ground around the box, and use salt or diatomaceous earth under the nest.*

Despite this, our Eastern Bluebirds remained present and active, often seen watching on from a nearby tree branch or flying overhead. Two boxes, R5 and T1, are tied for having the most chicks fledged with 12 fledglings each. Both boxes are in locations that receive very little shade and are near paths or patches of shorter vegetation making for easier foraging. Only two of the 18 nest boxes did not have any bluebird activity or productivity all season, and over 100 chicks fledged from their nests on the Buckshutem WMA box trail.



Eastern Bluebird chicks, 1-2 days old.  
First clutch of box G4 on 4/23/24.



Overgrown grasses on the perimeter of the planted agricultural fields at Ramah Road Field.



Ant presence in box R7.

All Photos by *Kassandra Kopanyi*

## 2024 Buckshutem WMA Eastern Bluebird Nest Box Trail Data Summary

Cumberland County - continued

Tr	Box Location Number	# Eggs	# Young	# Fledged
	R1	13	8	8
	R2	0	0	0
	R3	4	4	4
	R4	10	2	2
	R5	13	12	12
	R6	4	4	4
	R7	8	8	8
	T1	12	12	12
	T2	11	10	10
	T3	4	4	4
	T4	5	4	4
	T5	13	9	7
	T6	18	6	6
	T7	8	6	6
	G1	5	5	5
	G2	6	6	6
	G3	0	0	0
	G4	5	5	5
	Totals=	139	105	103

## Gloucester County

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### 2024 Gloucester County Update - By *Bernie Visalli*

A warm April got us off to a great start, with nests and eggs reported a bit earlier than normal in a few locations. We always hold our breath for that dreaded late snow or chilly rain that can spell disaster for those early nesters but that thankfully did not happen this year.

Most of my monitors were great about keeping me up to date on what was happening throughout the year, including ongoing fledge counts, for which I am grateful. A big **THANK YOU** to those who kept up the energy even though our banding program was not available this year.

Holtzhauser Farms had the biggest surge when their trail was expanded to seven boxes. Fledgings totalled 36, despite having a House Sparrow problem throughout the year. This particular box was removed after the 3<sup>rd</sup> trapped sparrow. It will be relocated for 2025. *Please take the time to read my article about House Sparrow Control on page 3!*

We had a new monitor come to the game late in the season but was still successful with a nest and fledging! **Welcome Jan Summers** to the team! It still stands true: if you put up a house in the right location, they will find it, and every successful box makes a difference! REMINDER: if you have questions about your trail or need assistance with repairs/ resetting, let me know and I will have you on the list for next season. Splendid work everyone! I'm looking forward to 2025! *Bernie*

# Monmouth/Ocean Counties

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## Defending the Bluebird Nest

By Andrew Major

In our early years as birders (50 years ago), my wife and I were thrilled to see a bluebird; they were so rare. 10 years ago we attended a bluebird festival organized by the New Jersey Bluebird Society. There we heard a presentation by one of the founders, Allen Jackson. That talk motivated me to do something for bluebirds.

I prepared for it by poring over the website [sialis.org](http://sialis.org), and setting up bluebird trails in the nearby state and county parks. At first I was perplexed and dismayed when the joyful bluebird eggs (or small chicks) disappeared from the boxes—sometimes one at a time or all at once. At times the nest would be covered with twigs. So, I started experimenting with all kinds of baffles: trash can lids, stovepipes, cones, PVC drain pipes, Noel guards.

Now I know who the culprit was in most cases: the House Wren. House Wrens are ubiquitous (about 160 million in North America -10x the number of Carolina wrens). They are protected native birds who evolved with a survival advantage: to eliminate competitors. To my knowledge none of the other North American wrens do this. I started placing Noel guards on boxes wherever suspected wren vandalism occurred--even once.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

In my experience, they are about 80% effective. In some areas the house wrens were bold enough to leave cover and fly quite a distance to invade the boxes in spite of the Noel guard (Fig 1).

Wally Edsall's article, in the NABS journal (Summer issue 2023) convinced me that a visual barrier is the way to go. I am not sure what deters the wrens; maybe when they don't see the hole they don't get the urge to explore. Anyway, I was thinking of making wren guards on Wally's model—that were inexpensive and durable.

The material I came up with is vinyl siding. When I showed the prototype to a fellow bluebirder, Jim Priest, he told me that he has been using them for years with 100% success. He is making them from wood, with a bevel cut to compensate for the slope of the roof. My woodworking skills are no match for Jim's, so I will stick with the siding material for the time being. *(continued on next page)*

# Monmouth/Ocean Counties

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*("Defending the Bluebird Nest", continued from previous page)*

A 3" clearance between the box and the guard (Fig. 2) seemed reasonable; so that adult birds can fly in and out of the box without having to maneuver a lot. The 4" siding hides the entrance hole (Fig. 3). In my experience, adding the side panel made no difference in effectiveness and may even hinder opening the side door. To open a front door box may necessitate opening the wren guard also. The closed and open positions (Fig. 3-4), shown without the side panels in these illustrations, are maintained by the same screw (Fig. 5).

The box and mounting technique shown here are recommended by Allen Jackson (Fig. 1). Having built and bought several types of boxes, I found this prototype to be the best (for easy inspection and cleaning).

The siding material for the wren guard can be tailored to different size boxes; storing the guard in different positions (Fig. 6-7). The bluebirds have no trouble finding the entrance. Although the birds are very tolerant of our interference, I don't deploy the guard until there is at least one egg, and open it before fledging, in order not to make the dangerous first flight even more precarious. After the first clutch fledged I turn the wren guard down again.

The bluebirds raise the second clutch as they did the first. Now all my boxes have 4" PVC drain pipe baffles and wren guards, which are kept on the boxes all the time (turned up or down).

This method was nearly 100% effective this year. In cases where I can't determine the identity of the predator (avian, reptilian or mammal) I use all defenses: 8" stovepipe (or 4" PVC pipe) + cone + Noel guard. This combination is seldom needed—at least in our area (Central NJ). I place blueberry trays (Fig. 8) in all boxes for easier management and cleaning. The bluebirds accept them.

Ants can be predators, too. I found hatchlings skinned alive; tiny ants swarming all over them. Now I apply a sticky material (TangleFoot or similar) on all my posts. Feather mites were a problem mainly in swallows and the treatment was elaborate. Then I read about using vanilla scented air fresheners (NABS journal Spring 2022) against gnats. I had two opportunities to test it on mites this year and both in both cases the mites disappeared. Ants ignored them. Occasionally bumblebees took refuge behind the nest trays and coexisted with the bluebirds.

A few of my boxes are near buildings. I had 5 tragic outcomes due to house sparrows. I trap them, then move the boxes or replace them with ones that have 2 holes (to give the bluebirds a chance to escape).



Fig. 9

I wish this were the end of the story.

I monitor a bluebird trail at an industrial site. The entrance to the plant is ideal for bluebirds: a paved road with a 30' mowed lawn on one side, then a chain link fence, beyond which the forest begins with the understory. The boxes face the forest—good escape route for the fledglings. Unfortunately, many house wrens reside in the woods.

I tried to distract them by hanging plastic gourds (a cheap solution) on the fence at periodic intervals. Most of the gourds became occupied (Fig. 9) but that did not stop the wrens from destroying the bluebird nests. The gourds probably made the situation worse.

Bluebirds and tree swallows made several nesting attempts. Last year only 2 of the 8 boxes were successful; this year none. All the boxes had Noel guards or vinyl wren guards.

Any suggestions would be welcome. ~ Andrew Major

Don't miss The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's "Trouble-shooting guide for nest box landlords" found on page 16 of this issue!

The **Cornell** Lab  of Ornithology  
**NestWatch**

## Trouble-shooting guide for nest box landlords

<i>What you might find:</i>	<i>What may be the cause:</i>	<i>What you could do:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Eggs or nestlings missing, nest intact</li> </ul>	Snake, rodent, House Sparrow, House Wren	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Install predator guards or baffles on the box pole</li> <li>◆ Move boxes away from areas where House Sparrows are prevalent</li> <li>◆ Place House Sparrow deterrents or excluders on the nest box.</li> <li>◆ Move boxes away from prime House Wren habitat</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Eggs or nestlings missing or on ground under box.</li> <li>◆ Nest disturbed, partially pulled out of hole, or on ground under box.</li> <li>◆ Adult feathers scattered on ground below box.</li> </ul>	Raccoon, cat, squirrel, human vandalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Install predator guards or baffles on the box pole</li> <li>◆ Install boxes high enough so cats can't leap from the ground to the box roof</li> <li>◆ Place box away from trees or fences to prevent raccoons and cats from climbing or jumping to the box</li> <li>◆ Securely close box with screws or nails</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Eggs on ground under nest, nest intact and tiny holes pecked in eggs.</li> <li>◆ Nestlings dead in box and with signs of trauma, especially around the head.</li> <li>◆ Adult dead in nest, signs of trauma, especially around the head.</li> </ul>	House Wren, House Sparrow  Note: Dead adults and nestlings more likely due to House Sparrows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Move boxes away from areas where House Sparrows are prevalent</li> <li>◆ Place House Sparrow deterrent or excluders on the nest box.</li> <li>◆ Move boxes away from prime House Wren habitat</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Eggs fail to hatch.</li> <li>◆ Nestlings or adults dead in box, no signs of foul play</li> </ul>	Infertile eggs, runt eggs, female disappeared, bad weather, chemical poisoning, nestlings or adults could not climb out of box	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Don't use lawn, garden, and insect chemical products</li> <li>◆ Discuss possible chemical application problems with neighbors, golf courses, etc.</li> <li>◆ Install fledgling ladder or roughen up the inside of the nest box directly under the entrance hole</li> <li>◆ Some things are beyond our control</li> </ul>





# Monmouth/Ocean Counties

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**Meet A Member: Jim Estelle** - As I drive down the “NO OUTLET” street bearing his name, Estelle Drive in Howell, I note the open space on either side of the road and the scattered houses along the road. Jim shows me the two boxes on the 10+- acres he lives on in his grandparent’s house. Then we walk down the road to their prior “south field” and visit another two boxes next to a horse pasture and shed. Across the street was his uncle, at the end of the cul-de-sac is his mom’s house. Other family members’ houses are along the road; some now sold to other people or occupied by relatives. Jim’s family has been here in southern Howell since the 1600’s. Hard to imagine this time-warp of the past just off Route 9.



Jim is a bird lover and animal lover; showing me all the animal inhabitants of the area, from the bluebirds to the rabbits to the deer. He asks me if I want to go to the other 3 sites in Howell where there are bluebird nestboxes which he monitors; all using Cornell

Laboratories’ NestWatch app. We didn’t have time to visit Country Girl Acres or Immanuel Bible Church or the Open Space parcel that Howell bought on Fort Plains Road. I think it totals 10 nestboxes in all.

We discover that we are both proteges of Laura Stone, Jim having met her a few years before I did. I tell him about the High School Students who Laura trained in 2021, along with myself, at FREC in Jackson. We discuss adding a cone baffle to a nestbox on a 4”x 4” post.

“All the nextboxes are different,” Jim says. Materials are whatever he can get for free or at low cost. He knows how to construct nestboxes himself. We will be in touch again; Jim’s another new friend I have made through bluebirding.



## Tree Tube Nets Can Prevent Tragedy at Riparian Buffer Installations

**(Asbury, Warren County/Hunterdon County)** - A riparian zone is the area of land alongside a river or body of water. Allowing for a buffer of native plants along our streams and tributaries keeps the river cool, filters unwanted particles from increasing stormwater, and protects stream banks. Native buffers can also serve as a corridor for wildlife such as birds and pollinators.

This summer, folks at the Musconetcong Watershed Association partnered with the AmeriCorps Watershed Ambassador, Liv Stettler, to create riparian buffers along the Musconetcong River by planting hundreds of native trees. These young trees are protected from animal grazing by plastic tubes. Since I monitor several bluebird nestboxes near by, I was concerned that the tubes had no netting at the top to keep out nosy bluebirds that could get trapped inside and die. I sent an email to Linda Cerceau, Education and Outreach Manager at MWA addressing my concern.

Linda explained that every year, an AmeriCorps Watershed Ambassador completes one major project for them. It had just been decided that this year they’d be taking inventory and doing maintenance of the newly/recently planted trees along the trail near the bluebird boxes. When she saw my email, Linda inquired about the nets/coverings to go over tree tubes and a co-worker mentioned that MWA had some on site. So, part of Liv’s work was to determine if she should either remove or cover the tubes with those nets where the trees have not pushed through yet in that one section of recently planted trees. This summer, I’ve been delighted to see the white nets installed over the tree tubes in which growth hasn’t yet reached the top. Thanks for caring about the bluebirds! - *Lori Jo Jamieson*



*Tree tube with protective netting sleeve installed*



**Minutes: NJBBS General Membership Meeting on 10/19/24** - The General meeting followed a BOD meeting. The 13 BOD were joined by 6 general members for a total of 19 members in attendance. Bernie Visalli, VP South, greeted the following general members: Cheryl Tartaglione, Nels Anderson, Valerie Armstead, Amelia Raybould, Patricia Tyszka, and Beverly Burbano.

1. The Policies and Procedures developed and approved in 2024 were summarized. With Bernie showing the website on attendees screens, Gary described how to navigate the website for these Policies and Procedures. Gary also briefly commented on a few specific topics.
2. With a summary of his many contributions, Bernie present a Certificate of Recognition to Jim Priest (see story on page 3).
3. We briefly reviewed County Coordinator responsibilities and NJBBS membership benefits. From this, we discussed how we can better support members.
4. Bernie opened a discussion for issues anyone had during the year. This led to an in-depth conversation on House Sparrow control. Several of the general members, a few also being new members, displayed strong concern on this topic and great enthusiasm on other bluebird care topics. - by *Bernie Visalli and Gary Pilling*

## Salem County

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



### 2024 Salem County Update - By *Bernie Visalli*

Salem County is always full of surprises, and this year didn't disappoint. My biggest observation is the uptick of House Sparrow issues, even in remote areas. Trapping started in March and continued all the way through September, which leads me to believe their nesting season is longer than any of our native birds'. I broke my record this year, and in one extremely successful day caught three House Sparrow males at three different boxes, all at one site!

Now onto the good news across the County, with an interesting story from Tony Petrongolo in Pilesgrove, NJ. Tony texted me about a situation that happened after he cleaned out the box after a nest fledged, like we normally do. The next week during his nest checks, there were five eggs in the same box - with no nest! I advised him to find the

old nest or create a new one with some pine needles. We were both on the edge of our seats for a couple weeks waiting to see what would happen. . . Guess what! They all hatched and fledged. Goes to show the resilience of our bluebirds. Great job Tony, for being a great landlord and reaching out to see if I had a solution. Note: If I find a nest that was abandoned and in decent shape, I keep that nest in a zip bag for just this kind of situation. You never know if you have a wet nest that needs changing out, or for this rare type of situation.

The star performer award in Salem County this year goes to Copper Knoll Farms. **They increased their fledge count by 500% from 2023!** The trail expanded from three boxes in 2023 (their 1st year) to seven boxes for 2024. **Copper Knoll Farms** is a family farm located in Pittsgrove, NJ, growing specialty mushrooms on logs, elderberries, and lavender. Kimberly and Chester harvest, process, and package all the products on their farm. They offer elderberry syrup kits, dehydrated mushrooms, mushroom powders, lavender essential oil, lavender hydrosol, handmade soaps, lotions, room sprays and more. The farm's mission is to produce the highest quality products from their specialty crops that can help reduce stress while promoting self-care. They strive to manage their fields and forest in an environmentally friendly, sustainable manner to conserve natural resources and wildlife. Kimberly and Chester actively manage and monitor their bluebird trial as well as a purple martin colony. The farm is also home to a wide variety of wildlife such as Green Heron, Great Blue Heron, hawks, turtles and frequent visits from the area's Bald Eagles. They also have a managed food plot for deer and turkeys. You can learn more about the farm, watch videos and shop their products on their website: [copperknollfarms.com](http://copperknollfarms.com).

### Monitor Spotlight: Copper Knoll Farms



**2024 Copper Knoll Farms season totals:**

**Bluebirds (5 boxes) fledged 54;**

**Chickadees (2 boxes) fledged 11**

***A note from County Coordinator:*** *This farm's enormous success is the result of GREAT monitoring and an understanding of how habitat is the key to success. I take pride in working with farms since they apply their immense understanding of their land and are interested in helping wildlife in our ever-shrinking open space problems facing New Jersey. - Bernie*