

The Bella Vista group is the sole Arkansas chapter of the North American Bluebird Society.



## For the birds

By Karen Rice  
Bella Vista City Guide

Incoming Bella Vista Bluebird Society (BVBBS) President Laura Claggett thinks bluebirds are good for Bella Vista.

"A healthy environment has lots of bluebirds," she said. "And we want Bella Vista to be healthy."

What started with five hand built birdhouses on the Country Club Golf Course in 1980 has grown to more than 500 homes for Eastern Bluebirds, all built, maintained and monitored by the BVBBS.

The group is the sole Arkansas chapter of the North American Bluebird Society, which was established in 1978 in response to a 90 percent decline in the bluebird population between 1940 and 1980.

That near-extinction of the bluebirds was caused by extreme weather, invasive species and environmental factors like pesticides, and urbanization, which resulted in loss of habitat, said Leon Wehmeyer, outgoing BVBBS president,

who has held the position for four years and been involved in the group for 15.

Thanks to the efforts of volunteer organizations like the BVBBS, the trend has been reversed. As of 2018, the group maintains 522 nesting boxes throughout Bella Vista's golf courses, parks, church properties, cemetery and residential locations. To date, they have helped fledge more than 47,000 Eastern Bluebirds.

Caring for the birds is no easy task. Boxes are monitored weekly, from March through August, by almost 50 volunteers, who keep track of nesting and bird welfare. Trail bosses make sure boxes are in good repair, and try to prevent invasions by predators, insects, humans or other threats.

Then there are the box builders, four of them. Last year they started building a new style of boxes with a slot instead of a hole to deter invasive House Sparrows.

"They are very aggressive, they take over the boxes and kill the bluebirds," Leon said of the House Sparrows.



Bluebird Shed owner Butch Tetzlaff with one of the new bluebird boxes.

Staff photo: Karen Rice





For the first time, materials for the boxes were donated in 2018 after the BVBBS became a 501C3 charitable organization. T.H. Rogers donated all the cedar for a years-worth of boxes, \$2,500 worth. Lowe's donated \$500 in other materials.

The group used to sell the boxes on their website, but beginning last year, The Bluebird Shed, a new business in town, took over selling the handmade cedar nest boxes for the BVBBS.

Store owner Butch Tetzlaff, an avid ornithologist, says the connection with the Bluebird Society was a happy accident.

"It's been great," he said. "I really admire what they do and it's been fantastic for the store. People can come in for

information instead of doing the research online."

That gives Butch the chance to talk about birds, something he loves to do. He'll also arrange with the BVBBS to have bluebird boxes installed for people.

"We used to sell maybe a box a month," said Laura. "Now we're up to 100 boxes in a year's time with The Bluebird Shed. It's a real win-win."

According to Laura, bluebird nesting season begins in March and, if the weather cooperates, they will have up to three nestings.

Most of the houses are located on the golf courses, perfect for the bug-eating bluebirds.

"Bella Vista is ideal," she said pointing to the golf



Volunteers monitor nesting boxes weekly during nesting season. Photo courtesy BVBBS

course. "There's nice open land for them to get bugs and there are trees for shelter. When we decide we don't need golf courses anymore, that we're going to build more houses, we're going to lose the bluebirds. We're going to lose a lot of things."

Meanwhile, Laura says the dedicated volunteers of the BVBBS will continue to "keep house" for our feathered friends.

"It's good for us," she added. "It's good for the bluebirds. It's good for everybody." ●

✓ To get involved with the BVBBS, and learn more about bluebirds, visit their website at [bvbluebirds.com](http://bvbluebirds.com). Laura & Leon's contact information is on their site.

✓ For more information about The Bluebird Shed, visit [thebluebirdshed.com](http://thebluebirdshed.com).

✓ A new birding group is also forming this year in Bella Vista, and will feature monthly birding walks. For more information, contact Gail Storm at [bvbirders@gmail.com](mailto:bvbirders@gmail.com).