



The Bluebirder

Fall/Winter 2019

Edition 3

And just like that, the year has come to an end! We've had another wonderful year in the Bluebird Society and look forward to some very exciting things to come in the new year. We want to wish everyone a very Happy Holiday Season and Blessed New Year! As a reminder, if you have any ideas, interesting stories or suggestions, or have questions that you'd like us to answer via "Dear Bluebirder" please feel free to e-mail us at JSBlueBirder@gmail.com.



So, You'd Like to Do Some Research About Bluebirds
By Butch Tetzlaff

I'd like to thank everyone in the BVBBS as Dr. Jen Mortensen and I are now conducting bluebird research using some BVBBS boxes that are installed throughout the area. This has been in the making for several months, and we have had to jump through quite a few hoops to get to where we are. Most people do not know what it takes to start a research project on birds, so I thought I'd give you a quick summary of how we got this off the ground.

The first step was writing up a project proposal that outlined the details of the study. This showed that we have the education and training to ensure the safety of the birds and demonstrated that true science is going to be conducted. The project proposal was then sent to the Bird Banding Lab (BBL), which is the arm of the United States Geological Survey (USGS) that regulates bird banding in the United States, so that our permits could be updated. The BBL works in conjunction with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to issue bird bands for all migratory birds governed by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act under which Eastern Bluebirds fall.

Once we had updated our federal permits, we then needed to take it up with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. They wanted to ensure the federal permits were in place and wanted an estimate of how many birds would be captured, banded, and released in the state. Because some of this research will take place at Hobbs State Park, we also needed to get permission to conduct research on state park property by applying for a permit with the Arkansas State Parks. This had to be signed off by the Director of the Parks as well as the Superintendent at Hobbs.

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With these permits in hand, we could then take the project to the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science, which is an organization that oversees animal use for scientific purposes in the U.S. Every institution that receives federal funding must have an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) that regulates animal use at that institution, in this case, the University of Arkansas. Jen added some details to our original proposal to meet their requirements and received notice back from them about a couple of weeks later.

Lastly, we needed to get permission from the landowners to go traipsing around on their properties and potentially catching birds. This included the city of Bella Vista, the POA, a couple of churches, and a few private property owners. Laura Clagget was instrumental in obtaining most of these permissions, so we owe her a very big thank you!

Who would have known that it took so much coordination to legally conduct bird research? But we now have all the permissions required, and amazingly enough, we're ready to go!

Therefore, the research has begun. The first project this winter is studying roosting behavior to determine what proportion of our boxes are used for winter roosting, what time of year that occurs, and if there are habitat differences in the locations selected. Ultimately, Jen would like to learn about the familial relationships that occur as bluebirds roost communally to benefit from the added warmth of more bodies in a box at one time. Oddly enough, this leads to questions about the costs of migration. If only local family groups are found roosting in our boxes, then one must ask where are the bluebirds that have come down from the north, where are they roosting, and what kinds of habitats are they in?

Those are things we plan to find out. Stay tuned as we keep you posted about how this is all taking place. To read more about Butch and Jen's bluebird research go to [Research Project](#).



We Salute the Birdman of Idaho

At 97, Al Larson is reputed to be the biggest bluebird landlord in Idaho. In over 40 decades Al has made, installed and still monitors over 350 nest boxes, he even bands the chicks. To date, he has helped fledge over 40,000 bluebirds. There's an Audubon article about him – [Meet the 96 Year Old Man Who Turned Southern Idaho Into a Bluebird Haven](#), a short video: [Meet the 96 Year Old Bluebird Man](#), and Wild Lens made a beautiful 30 minute documentary about him called [Bluebird Man](#). Thank you, Al, for taking care of our feathered friends.





REMINDER - NABS Conference 2020

The Bella Vista Bluebird Society is an affiliate of The North American Bluebird Society (NABS). Their annual conference will be held March 11-15, 2020 in Kearney, Nebraska. It will be hosted by Bluebirds Across Nebraska (BAN) at the Holiday Inn Convention Center, 110 S. 2nd Ave. Reservations can be made at 308-237-5971. Mention NABS/BAN conference when making reservations to receive a room discount. The conference cost is not yet posted, but from two previous conferences it will likely be reasonable. Visit [NABS](#) for more information and updates.

Kearney is in south central Nebraska, approximately 325 miles northwest of Kansas City. It is a few miles north of the Platte River, where some 20 million birds belonging to 300 species stop on their migration north for nesting.

The event features speakers, birding field trips, workshops, exhibits, auctions, and dinners on Friday & Saturday with a cash bar. One of the speakers is Bernie Daniel, NABS

President, speaking on distribution and trends for the three bluebird species.

The field trips will give you one of the most impressive sights you have seen in birding. Unfortunately, no bluebirds because March is a little early for them. However, 500,000 sandhill cranes converge on the central Platte River to fuel up on grain from nearby cornfields. They roost overnight on the Platte River, where the water is only ankle deep, and trips are made mornings and evenings to watch thousands of them take off and then land. Another species you will see in abundant numbers is snow geese. About 2 million of them occupy the 80-mile trek along the Platte River. There will be birding trips to view prairie chickens, prairie dogs, pelicans, and numerous waterfowl species.

Contact Jacqui Stockman at jsbluebirder@gmail.com if you are interested in attending and carpooling.

Wings Over Arkansas

If you're looking for something to get your kids or grandkids outside and involved in nature, Wings Over Arkansas is a great place for beginning bird watchers in Arkansas. Participants get a pin and certificate based on how many bird species they identify. The Wings Over Arkansas [website](#) gives an Overview and has everything you need to get started identifying birds in the Program Documents and Links section.

Here's Something You Don't See Everyday

After the bluebird nesting season was over this year, this tree frog took up residency in one of the nesting boxes on the Dogwood golf course. Tree frogs have not been known to bother nesting bluebirds, but it could have been laying eggs, or just getting a different view.



Volunteer Profile: Harrison Ramey

Harrison Ramey moved to Bella Vista from Tennessee in 2014 to be close to family. Originally from Athabasca, Alberta, Canada, Harrison left for a job in the hotel industry in Montreal, Canada. From there he went around the globe, landing in Chicago, IL; Copenhagen, Denmark; Los Angeles, CA; Atlanta, GA; Oslo, Norway; the Philippines; Seattle, WA; Hawaii and finally Nashville, TN, where he was an executive chef at the Opreyland Hotel for the last 17 years of his career.

Roz, Harrison’s wife, was desperately missing her kids and grandkids, who were in Northwest Arkansas, so Harrison and Roz packed up and headed for Bella Vista. It took a while for them to find a house, since it had to have both a shop, for Harrison’s furniture making hobby, and a studio for Roz’s art projects.



Harrison found out about the BVBBS through an ad in the newspaper that Leon Wehmeyer placed asking for box builders. When Harrison contacted Leon the box builder positions had been filled, but monitors were needed, and Harrison decided to start there.

He first started monitoring bluebird boxes at Branchwood in 2014, around the time that Branchwood was converted from a 9-hole golf course to a park. Harrison monitored with the late Micky (Mary) and Ray Weddell, who were long time BVBBS volunteers. He also started building nest boxes with Jim Janssen, our group’s past president and 30-year volunteer, who built hundreds of boxes. Harrison increased the size of bluebird boxes at Branchwood from 15 to 30.

Today, Harrison is a monitor, box builder, trail boss and trail creator. He has built hundreds of boxes in his home woodworking shop while he continues to monitor at Branchwood. He also created the Glasgow & Edinburgh Car Trails, which together now total 30 very productive bluebird boxes, and he’s the trail boss for all three trails. Thank you, Harrison. We’re glad you & Roz made Bella Vista your home.



Roz Ramey’s Bluebird print

Bella Vista Birders

Bella Vista Birders is a bird watching group that was founded in February 2019 by Gail Storm & Butch Tetzlaff. They have seasonal gatherings and meet and greets that include talks about bird watching. The group also goes on field trips to places with good birding opportunities, such as the Craig State Fish Hatchery in Centerton, Compton Gardens in Bentonville, and Swepeco Lake in Siloam Springs, as well as visiting local parks and golf courses. If you’re interested in becoming a BV Birder, contact Gail Storm at bvbirders@gmail.com.



Birds Hitting Windows

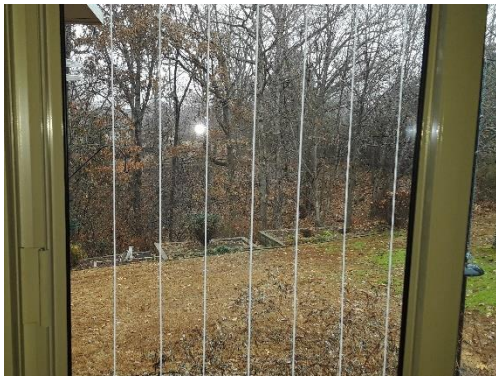
by Laura Claggett

I don't intentionally think of doom and gloom when it comes to birds, but I couldn't help but read about the research that was published earlier this year in *Science* – [Decline of the North American Avifauna](#). All the major news outlets picked it up because of the surprising, no shocking, numbers that were reported – almost 3 billion fewer birds than there was 50 years ago.

Reasons given for the decline were things that we cover in our annual presentation to the public for supporting bluebirds – habitat loss, pesticides and predators. Keeping cats indoors, that I wrote about in our [summer newsletter](#), was given as something individuals can do to help. And birds hitting windows, walls and other structures is estimated to kill one billion birds a year.

An article from Cornell Lab, [Why Birds Hit Windows and How You Can Help Prevent It](#) tells why – because birds see vegetation and sky reflected in windows, or they see plants or lights inside our houses.

Solutions the article includes are paint, soap, decals, tape, netting, mosquito screens, one-way transparent film, and [Acopian Bird Savers](#) (ABS). Obviously, lots of people have tried many solutions. And there are even more solutions on the American Bird Conservancy site – [Stop Birds Hitting Windows](#).



The lines in the photo look a lot more prominent then they do in person

I didn't know what [Acopian Bird Savers](#) were so I Googled it and to my surprise it's almost exactly the same as what Rich, my husband, did at our house last month – put vertical lines spaced about 3" apart on our windows.

On the ABS site they use paracord that hangs down in front of your windows. You can order them or make your own from instructions on the site. But I had watched this short YouTube video – [Incredibly Simple Tip to Prevent Birds Flying Into Windows](#) and we ordered the white "write on glass" pen.

Our sunporch has two walls of windows and we've tried many solutions to prevent birds hitting our windows. Using the white pen shown on the video, and a straight edge, Rich drew vertical lines on the inside of all the windows.

At first, I had hoped to report that it worked like a charm, and it seemed to work for a while. But we've since noticed that on overcast days we've seen birds hit the windows and die. Rich thinks next, he'll apply the UV Liquid that he's used before, which is also not a 100% solution, but maybe combined with the lines it will be more helpful. Our quest continues....

Christmas Bird Count

The Annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count happens this Saturday, December 14th. If you are interested in counting birds by either traveling the local area by vehicle or counting in just your backyard, please contact Butch Tetzlaff at butch@thebluebirdshed.com

Trail Bosses

By Laura Claggett

We're not sure what other bluebird groups/societies call the people who install and maintain their bluebird boxes, but we call them Trail Bosses. Along with our other volunteers, we have both a BVBBS position description and a BVBBS procedure for our trail bosses on our website – bvbluebirds.com..

The first paragraph of the [trail boss procedure](#) tells how important they are - *Being a trail boss for the Bella Vista Bluebird Society is a commitment that should be taken seriously by all trail bosses. Maintaining the boxes, poles and guards is necessary for us to have success in fledging bluebirds. Trail bosses also give the monitors someone to rely on not only for caring for the trails, but also for advice on what is happening in their nest boxes.*

And #3 on our [trail boss position description](#) further describes what's expected - *Become acquainted with and keep in contact with all monitors for your trail area. Assist them in training and in solving any problems associated with the trail.*

Steve Skaggs, one of our trail bosses, has said overall, he'd like his monitors to know that he's there to do the heavy lifting, and he'd like his monitors to contact him with any issues. Since a monitor is typically out there more often, they'll see things - like wasp nests, broken guards, broken boxes, etc. - that he can take care of if he knows about them. "I'd also like the monitors to know that we are their "big brothers" - you call, and we come running, lickety-split!" Thanks, Steve!

Steve said he intends to schedule at least one round with each of his monitors ever year and encourages other trail bosses to do the same. When we communicate and get to know each other, we'll have more success doing what we set out to do "increasing and protecting the bluebird population in Bella Vista."

From my perspective as a monitor, I've seen good trail boss responses make a difference. This year at Dogwood and Brittany, before the start of the nesting season, our trail bosses were asked, and complied, to moving some of the boxes off the course to make it easier for maintenance crews to mow. Some of the boxes were moved too close to

the woods, an environment, I was told in the past, that house wrens prefer.

In March I had a bluebird nest in one of my boxes. Five eggs had hatched and in April I found five dead chicks. Coincidentally, just weeks before I had viewed a video on the Facebook site, [Eastern Bluebird Landlords](#), that showed a house wren in a nest box using its beak to aggressively knock bluebird chicks on their heads and killing them. (Sorry if I've written about this in a past newsletter, but it helped me understand nature and made an impression.)

The next week, a house wren had started a fascinating stick nest in the box and it progressed to laying eggs (which were ultimately destroyed by an ant invasion.) I let Jim Sours, my trail boss, know what had happened and asked him if he would treat the box with diatomaceous earth for the ants, and could he move the box away from the woods about 10 feet into a gravelly area that I figured wouldn't be mowed.

Steve would have been proud, because Jim acted right away. I guess you could say he came running, lickety-split. He checked with the maintenance crew who approved moving the box 8 feet away from the woods, and I kept my fingers crossed that 8 feet would be enough to discourage the wren.

Two weeks past, and on the third week we had a bluebird nest with one egg. I was cautiously hopeful and surprised the next week when there were four eggs, and ultimately, I breathed a sigh of relief when the bluebirds successfully fledged four new bluebirds into the world (and the house wren never returned.)

I didn't mean that to sound like a bedtime story where everything turns out for the best in the end, but it was no fable. It was timely communication on my part, and good trail bossing on Jim's part that made a difference. Thank you, Jim! And thank you to all the trail bosses who so efficiently and effectively do what they do. We couldn't fulfill our mission without you. (Incidentally, one of our monitors on Dogwood this year had 0 birds fledge of any species. We hope changes can be made before the next nesting season to revive the results.)

BVBBS Merchandise – The Perfect Christmas Gift!



Still looking for that perfect last-minute Christmas gift? Don't forget, the Bella Vista Bluebird Society t-shirts and baseball caps are still available for purchase. The t-shirts are \$18 per shirt and are available in a variety of sizes and colors, and dark blue are now available. The baseball caps are \$15 per cap and have an adjustable band w/metal clip in the back for perfect sizing! All our merchandise is available at [The Bluebird Shed](#) in Bella Vista.



Dear Bluebirder....

Have questions about bluebirds, nest boxes, problems or concerns? Any comments or suggestions for an article or an event we should attend? Write to us at JSBlueBirder@gmail.com and in the Subject Line add "Dear Bluebirder". We will answer your questions in our next edition!

As always, you can visit the [BVBBS](#) website for up-to-date information.

To Our Entire BVBBS Family – We Wish You A Very Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year!



The Bella Vista Bluebird Society (BVBBS) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organized for wildlife protection & preservation. For more information go to our website bvbluebirds.com or email us at bellavistabluebird@gmail.com.

BVBBS Board

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