



## The Bluebirder

Spring/Summer 2020

Edition 4



It's our 40th Anniversary! We have a wonderful story of our beginning to where we are today, and you can read the details below in "History of Bella Vista Bluebird

Society". We hope to have an anniversary celebration sometime later this year at The Beach at Lake Avalon. Watch for further details on our website and Facebook page. 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](mailto:JSBlueBirder@gmail.com).

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#### **History of Bella Vista Bluebird Society**

**By Leon Wehmeyer**

Forty years ago, Charles Nelson, founder of the Bella Vista Bluebird Society (BVBBS), read an article in "Parade" magazine titled, "Where Have All The Bluebirds Gone" and proposed the idea of establishing bluebird trails on the Bella Vista golf courses. With the golf courses wide open areas, nearby trees and bushes, and pristine grass fairways and roughs, the courses are havens for insects, the main food source for bluebirds. Charles approached Charlotte Martin to set up the trails and the BVBBS was thus set in motion. The Society held its first meeting to organize the group on February 1, 1980. It was chaired by Charlotte Martin and attended by 13 other citizens. All work was done by volunteers, including recruiting monitors and electing Charles Nelson as the first president.

The BVBBS then obtained permission from the Property Owners Association (POA) to install nest boxes on the golf courses. Since the golf courses had no yardage markers, the BVBBS offered to place boxes and use them as yardage markers at 100, 150, and 200 yards. The POA accepted this idea, and 75 boxes were installed on the three golf courses and bluebird nest boxes have been a part of the golf courses ever since.

As Bella Vista grew, so did the number of golf courses and the number of bluebird boxes on these courses. By 2019, the BVBBS had 580 boxes on seven golf courses, in local parks, church properties, cemetery and residential locations. At the end of this nesting season, bluebirds will have fledged over 50,000 young bluebirds from the BVBBS nest boxes we monitor!

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Charles Nelson was active with the BVBBS until the early 2000's. He served four years as president, plus many more years as publicity manager and other roles. His dedication to bluebird conservation was the driving force behind the early success of the society, and in 1999 he was honored by the North America Bluebird Society (NABS) with their award for "Outstand Contribution to the Field of Bluebird Conservation".

Other society presidents during the early years included Harlan Arp (1983-84), Gene Sollenbarger (1985-86), Bob Evans (1987), Ginny Weiland (1988-89), Merrill Hatcher (1990-91), and Audrey Hooshagen (1992-93).

Another key person in the early years was Lela Sandfort. Beginning in 1981, Lela oversaw the monitors, including recruiting, training, gathering reports, and whatever else the society needed her to do. She herself monitored during this time and continued doing so until 2013, at the age of 100

Jim Janssen became president in 1994, having already served since 1990 as a monitor, trail boss, and box builder. He continued as president for 21 years. Jim's dedication to bluebird conservation, like that of his mentor Charles Nelson, did much to advance the BVBBS during his total of 25-year service. He had built and installed 500 bluebird nest boxes. He was honored in 2005 by Daughters of the American Revolution in recognition of "Outstanding Achievement for Environmental Awareness".

In 2015 Leon Wehmeyer became president, having serviced since 2003 as a monitor and trail boss. He continued as president for 4 years (2015-18) and in 2019 current president Laura Claggett took over. Laura monitored at Brittany for four years and serviced as vice-president before taking over as president.

The BVBBS has operated since 1980 with only volunteer help. Our main source of income is from donations and the sale of nest boxes, guards, posts and installation in Bella Vista neighborhoods. Our volunteers build the boxes, and since 2017 purchase of a nest box are done through the Bluebird Shed.

All in all, we are a proud group of conservationists, who after 40 years continues to do our part in protecting and increasing the population of these beautiful and delightful little songbirds in Bella Vista, Arkansas.



#### **First Annual Photo Contest**

To help celebrate our 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, we are holding a photo contest to promote the Eastern Bluebird and the BVBBS. The contest runs through 11:59 PM September 14, 2020. Six total winners will be awarded prizes in two categories; amateur and professional. Prizes in each category will include:

1<sup>st</sup> place a \$50 gift card to the Bluebird Shed, 2<sup>nd</sup> place a \$25 gift card to the Bluebird Shed, and 3<sup>rd</sup> place a BVBBS t-shirt or baseball cap. For the contest rules and application, click this link: [BVBBS Photo Contest](#). We can't wait to see all the wonderful photos everyone will submit!

## Feeding Mealworms to Bluebirds

by Laura Claggett

My husband and I have been feeding dried mealworms to bluebirds for a couple of years in our backyard in Bella Vista. We put out an unlimited supply year-round in the clear plastic dome feeder and fill it up when it gets low. When we first put them out it took a good 2-3 weeks for any birds to find them, and we were about ready to give up, when finally, a bluebird came. And then brought her friends.

The plastic dome serves two purposes. It can keep other birds out that we don't want to attract, like starlings. As the dome can be raised or lowered, we had it raised up all the way when we were trying to get the bluebirds to discover it, and we now keep it lower, so starlings have a hard time getting in. One couple I know must keep their dome positioned two inches below the tray to keep starlings out, but surprisingly the bluebirds can still get in.



The other purpose the dome serves is to prevent raptors from swooping in and grabbing a bird as it perches on the tray. We've never seen that attempted, but we do see hawks occasionally doing a fly-by looking for easy prey. Other birds that we get at our mealworm feeder, are carolina wrens, chickadees, cardinals, phoebes, and titmouses.

But I worried that the chicks weren't getting the nutrition they needed, and I wondered if they might unintentionally get dehydrated, since fat, juicy insects (their usual diet) probably have more water content than dried mealworms.

This year I decided to look into it and came across this article on Sialis.org about [Feeding Mealworms](#). Sialis has long been a trusted source for bluebird information. Another trusted source, The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, mentions [only live mealworms](#), and refers to both the Sialis website and the North American Bluebird Society's (NABS) [Factsheet on Mealworms](#) for more information.

What I learned from Sialis is "offering an unlimited supply of mealworms is probably NOT recommended, as the nestlings need a varied diet." It goes on to say, "mealworms are calcium depleting, and birds a week away from fledgling need to have strong bones for that first flight/crash landing. Calcium deficiency can also cause egg binding in laying birds. [Egg binding is when an egg's shell is too soft to lay. The egg binds up in the female and can cause serious and/or fatal damage.]

The Sialis site goes on to note, "If you are feeding a lot of mealworms (perhaps to help a widow/widower, or during cold rainy weather), the following is recommended (based on nutritional research on poultry and parrots) by veterinarian and bluebirder, Linda Ruth - put mealworms in a plastic bag with calcium carbonate or calcium citrate powder, and shake it gently to coat them. Both are readily available at health food stores or online. Calcium carbonate is less expensive." [Include the word "powder" when searching online to find bulk amounts, instead of capsules/tablets.]

The NABS Factsheet says some of the same: "Because they do not provide complete nutrition, mealworms should be used as a supplemental food only. They are calcium depleting, which can leave young birds with weak bones or cause egg binding in laying birds. To counter this, put the mealworms in a plastic bag with calcium carbonate or calcium citrate powder, and shake it gently to coat them.

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Offer mealworms in limited quantities just once or twice a day unless poor weather conditions dictate more frequent feeding. A hundred or so worms offered morning and evening would be more than adequate for a pair with a box of nestlings."

So, this year, we'll be coating our mealworms with calcium carbonate powder, and only putting out a small amount every day. We love the birds and want to do right by them.

Places to buy dried mealworms locally include [The Bluebird Shed](#), [Walmart](#) and [Orscheln](#). I bought the domed feeder at The Bluebird Shed, and it's also available from a variety of online sellers.

Lastly, after the chicks fledged last year and I removed the nest I almost thought it had been invaded by parasites, but it was only a few mealworms that didn't get eaten.

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### **Bird Banding**

Part of the [research project](#) that Dr. Jennifer Mortensen and Butch Tetzlaff are conducting using BVVBS nest boxes includes banding baby birds.

This portion of the project will investigate juvenile dispersal and survivorship. It is believed that fledglings that are raised in the early half of the year are more likely to disperse away from their natal sites, while fledglings that are raised in the second half of the year tend to remain on site through the winter with their parents. If this is, in fact, the case, the question is why and what are the drivers of the difference in behavior?

They band the nestlings when they are 8-12 days old. If they are banded before this age, the bands do not fit well and can slip off. If they are banded after this age, they may fledge prematurely.

They place two bands on each leg that will be like little bracelets. Once banded, the chicks will be placed back into their nest and business should resume as usual. Over many decades, scientists have been using this technique on millions of birds nationwide, and it poses little to no risk at all to the birds. Butch has banded several hundred baby chicks with no issues at all.



Thank you once again for helping to support research about our bluebirds!



**Birding around Bella Vista Lakes and Parks**

**Article & Photographs By John Huse**

Bella Vista is home to some great birding opportunities, especially around its lakes and parks. I use my vehicle as a blind to watch and photograph birds, however I also get out and move around to areas I can't see from the vehicle. The birds and wildlife are used to vehicles coming and going around the lakes and settle down fast if you stay in your vehicle and are quiet. The downside to the parks on the weekends is there can be too much activity at times to see many birds. I have had good success seeing birds anytime during the day, but it is best early in the morning or towards dusk.

The parks where I have had the best success are Tanyard Creek where you will need to walk the trails. I have had the best success there below the dam and along the falls and creek. Other good places are Tiree Park, Granton Park, the boat Launches at both ends of Lake Windsor, Lake Avalon and Lake Ann on the dam. It is amazing the variety of birds and waterfowl you can see from the various boat launch areas and in most cases, you can do it from the comfort of your own vehicle. You will need to be patient because of the other activity at these locations, but usually within 15 to 20 minutes you will start seeing birds and waterfowl becoming active around you.



Red Shouldered Hawk



Canada Goose

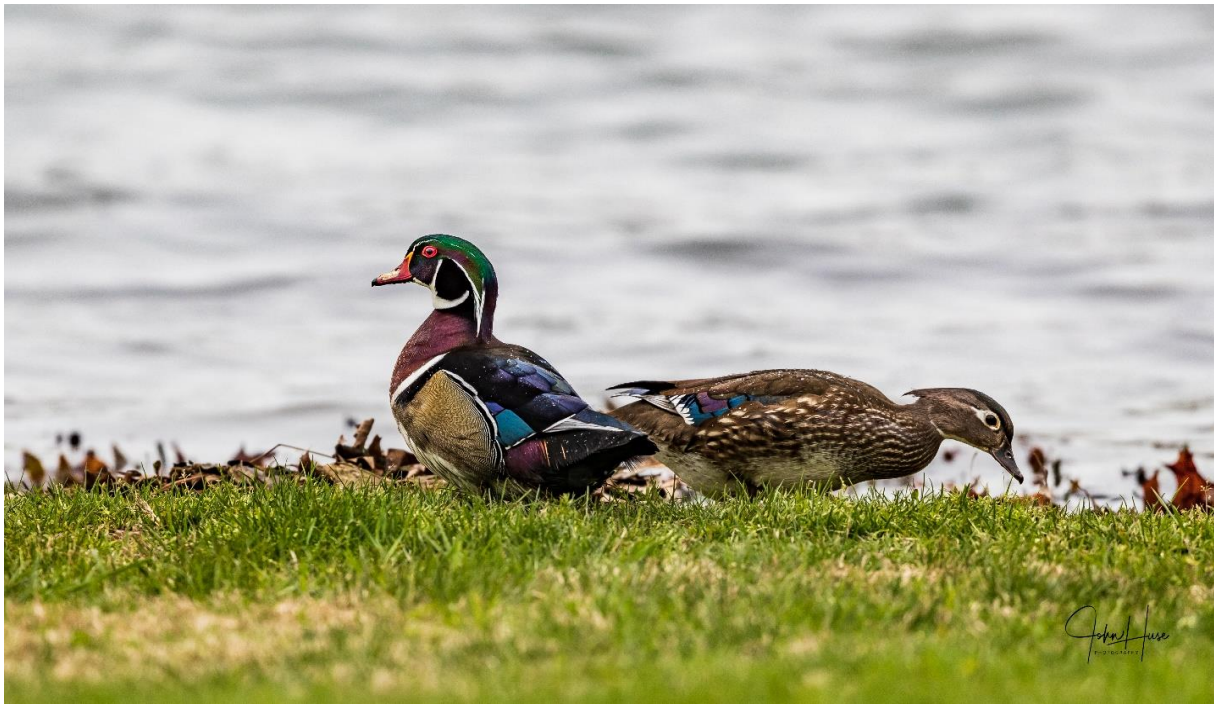


Eastern Bluebird



Yellow-rumped Warbler

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Wood Ducks



Great Blue Heron



Bald Eagle

I always start out just listening. In most cases you will hear the birds first, before you see them moving about in the water, trees or ground. I keep a set of binoculars in my hands to more closely look in the direction of sounds and at movements to determine if I can get in position to photograph the bird from my where I am or if I need to very slowly adjust my position for a better shot.

Most of the pictures I have included in this article were shot from my vehicle. I probably get 80% of my pictures in these areas from my vehicle. This works in other areas I travel to also. One trick when birding from your vehicle is you need to shut your vehicle and radio off so that you can hear the birds and if you are taking pictures it will give you much sharper pictures without the vibration of the motor running. I will also wear dark colored clothing or camo to hide me and my movements as much as possible.

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The equipment I use most often is a pair of 10x42 binoculars, two Canon cameras setup with different lenses so that I don't have to try and change when something appears closer than expected. These cameras have a 100-400mm lens on one and the other has a 600mm lens with a 1.4x extender on it which makes it about 840mm this is my primary camera setup. I also have two tripods with for when I get out of the vehicle and for use in the vehicle I have two monopods that are quick adjusting for height and a sandbag for the widow to lay my lens on. Some people also use spotting scopes instead of binoculars to spot birds.

Some species of birds that I have photographed around the various lakes and parks are Great Blue Heron, Green Heron, Bald Eagle, Osprey, Red-shouldered Hawk, Eastern Bluebird, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Eastern Phoebe, Northern Cardinal, Cedar Waxwing, Indigo Bunting, Summer Tanager, American Goldfinch, Carolina Chickadee, Red-winged Blackbird, Carolina Wren, Pileated Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Belted Kingfisher, Canada Goose, Mallard, Blue-winged Teal, Green-winged Teal, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, and Wood Duck, and various sparrows, to name a few. You will also likely see various turtles, raccoons, squirrels, chipmunks, rabbits and deer.

Give these areas a try. They can be very productive if you are patient and avoid peak boating times and other activities at these parks. I hope this helps you find some new areas to look for birds.

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### ***Bird Censuses – Why We Do Them***

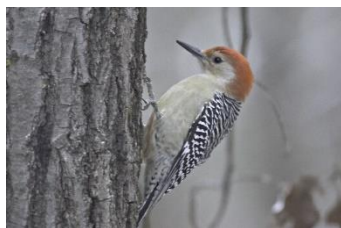
**Article by Butch Tetzlaff, Photographs by Quin Warsaw**

Regular bird counts have been taking place for decades. One of the longest running counts is the Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC), which first took place on Christmas Day of the year 1900. It began as a cry against the "side hunt", a common activity at the time of seeing how many birds a person could shoot in a single day. Frank Chapman, a well-known ornithologist and Audubon member, suggested that people just go out with binoculars and count them instead. Thus, the CBC was born.



*Pileated Woodpecker*

Chandler Robbins of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decided to improve on this informal citizen's science project by launching a nationwide bird census in 1966, now called the Breeding Bird Survey. He set up specific routes that were plotted and mapped all over the country with the intention of being able to be re-run the exact same route at the exact same time of year in the exact same way even if those persons doing the counting retired and turned the routes over to someone else. This put some scientific teeth into what was, until then, a very informal process at the time.



*Red-Bellied Woodpecker*

Both surveys still take place each year and the data collected goes into a national repository for scientists to use. But why do them? Why count birds?

The reason is simple: we have documented evidence of bird population changes, in both numbers and locations, over time. Bird populations are far from static and their ranges both expand and contract.

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Thus, it is a good idea to count everything (rather than just endangered species), because one never knows which species will be affected by what, where, and when. Armed with this data, comparisons can be made year over year, location to location. Without this, we rely on anecdotal information and our poor memories, which is neither science nor convincing to policy makers.



*Pine Warbler*

As an example, I can recall Chickadees, Titmice, and Nuthatches frequenting my mom's bird feeders when I was growing up in Indiana. During my last visit there in February of this year, I didn't see one of these species. The birds in her yard have been replaced by Mourning Doves, House Finches, and House Sparrows. In what used to be a community of horse farms and forest, her land is now surrounded by suburban sprawl in all directions. But when did the change in birds happen? Was it gradual or sudden? Was it this year or a decade ago? With regularly obtained hard data, we can see these micro changes at larger spatial and temporal scales. This enables us to better understand how species are affected by the slow ebb of urbanization and concurrent habitat changes that occur as a result of human land use.

That's the serious, nerdy reason. But as Frank Chapman and friends found out back in 1900, counting birds is just plain fun!

If you are interested in helping monitor our local birds, you can participate in the monthly Bella Vista Backyard Bird Survey that has been taking place since April 2019.



*Pine Warbler*

I started this survey for two reasons. First, it would enable us to see changes in our local bird populations as urbanization takes place here in our own city. Second, even though these surveys are very easy to conduct, there are very few year-round community-wide bird surveys taking place in the United States. Even Cornell's Project Feeder Watch only takes place during one half of the year, so it completely misses local breeding birds. I wanted to create a model and set an example that could be used by other communities especially here in Arkansas.

I plan to continue to collect the data and add it to national data repositories if there are people like yourselves willing to regularly count the birds in their yards.

Hopefully, over time, we'll see very few changes to our local bird populations as Bella Vista becomes a larger metropolis in the ever-growing NWA community. However, if we do see large scale changes, we'll be able to know it quickly. Armed with this information, we may be able to suggest useful modifications in how our community is managed for human growth. This will allow us to continue to gracefully cohabitate with our native wildlife, which is one of the key reasons many of us choose to live here in the first place.

Thus, by counting birds we can help our birds, help our community thrive, and have fun at the same time! What's not to love about that?

Want to learn more about the Bird Count Census or get involved? Reach out to [The Bluebird Shed Bird Count](#).

All photographs in this article were captured by Quin Warsaw in his backyard. You can learn more about local birds and view his amazing photographs at [Snappy's View](#) on Facebook.



**Volunteer Profile: Gracie Turley**



When she’s not building, monitoring or maintaining a bluebird nest box, you might find Gracie Turley singing with the Bella Vista Women’s Chorus, filming a city council meeting with Bella Vista Community Television, working on an outside project as a member of the Northwest Arkansas Master Naturalists, at a POA Lakes Committee meeting, walking her dogs, or kayaking on one of the local lakes. Anything to be doing what she loves - being on the go, and mostly outside.

Gracie, and her husband Russ, moved to Bella Vista from the Pacific Northwest six years ago. They were finding that part of the country too rainy and too chilly to be comfortable. Russ had lived in Tulsa and was familiar with this area.

Gracie got her deep appreciation for nature and spending time outdoors from her mother, who was a well-educated nature lover, and her father, who was a botanist. Attending Northwest Arkansas Master Naturalist’s training was something she really wanted to do. The training classes are held every other weekend for three to four months and cover local geology, weather, plants, insects and animals. Volunteers then take on local projects. Projects she’s helped with include planting native plants at the Buckingham Trailhead, and rehabbing a Blowing Springs wetland area, clearing invasive plants so native plants can thrive.

She first got interested in the BVBBS four years ago when she read a notice in *The Weekly Vista* that volunteers were needed. She was assigned to the Scotsdale Golf Course as a monitor. The following year, Joe Bowen, the trail boss at Scotsdale, retired his position and Gracie took on that roll too. Since being a trail boss meant doing basic woodworking to make repairs to the boxes, she just naturally started building nest boxes from scratch. She now provides BVBBS nest boxes that are sold at The Bluebird Shed. And since she wanted a golf course closer to where she lives, she switched from Scotsdale to Kingswood in 2018.

In all the activities Gracie has chosen to enrich her life, she gets to meet many kindred souls and gets to share what she loves with others. We are so happy that she moved to Bella Vista and became a dedicated BVBBS volunteer. Her seemingly endless energy and her consistently sunny disposition make her a delight to work with.

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**BVBBS Merchandise**



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](http://TheBluebirdShed.com) in Bella Vista.



**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](mailto:bvbirders@gmail.com).



**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](mailto: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](http://BVBBS) website for up-to-date information.

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](http://bvbluebirds.com) or email us at [bellavistabluebird@gmail.com](mailto:bellavistabluebird@gmail.com).

Dedicated to increasing and protecting the Eastern Bluebird population of Bella Vista, Arkansas

**BVBBS Board**

Laura Claggett	President	Leon Wehmeyer	Past President	Lorna Sterrett	Treasurer	Buzz Schoenhard	Secretary
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