



The Bluebirder

Spring/Summer 2022

Edition 8

The nesting season has begun. We have reports from our volunteers that check our nest boxes that we have eggs and even some hatchlings! We are happy to report that they all seemed to have survived the severe cold and storms that we have had recently. This edition of the Bluebirder once again showcases our wonderful volunteers with our Volunteer Spotlight, our grant award, squirrels making a nest in a bluebird nest box, and much more!

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.

Also be sure to like us on [Facebook](#)! Since we created our own society FB group page, we now have 525 people following our group, have had 504 "likes" on our event page, and have generated questions, comments, and have had pictures posted about bluebirds and other birds in general. This helps create more interest in the Eastern Bluebird and will help with our growth and mission.

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Get to Know Bluebirds

The North America Bluebird Society (NABS) has just released a great new publication, [Get to Know Bluebirds](#). It is currently only available in digital form and is located on the BVBBS website through the direct link above. And although it's subtitled "A Guide for Young Nature Lovers," we think that there is information for bird lovers of all ages.



Member/Volunteer Discounts at The Bluebird Shed

Did you know that as a volunteer or member of the BVBBS you get a discount on all non-sale and non-BVBBS merchandise at [The Bluebird Shed](#) in Bella Vista? Discounts are 10% for life members, and 5% for annual members and volunteers. If you would like donate, go to [Make a Donation and Become a Member](#), and if you would like to volunteer send us an email at bellavistabluebirds@gmail.com or fill out and send the form at [Volunteer Application](#). Also, see Volunteers Needed article on p. 6 about the two positions we currently would like to fill.

Volunteer Spotlight – Susan and Brian Woodruff

Interviewed by Jacqui Stockman

Susan and Brian became volunteers with the BVBBS in 2015, shortly after they moved to the area. They spent their childhoods in New Jersey and over the years have lived in rural and suburban areas of New Jersey, Maryland, and Missouri before retiring in Arkansas. They got involved with the BVBBS when they saw a notice for needing volunteer monitors in the local paper and applied for a monitor position.



Susan and Brian Woodruff

Since 2016 they have monitored nest boxes at Highlands, the Country Club, and this year they are now monitoring boxes at the Dogwood golf course.

They have always had an interest in birds and have always had feeders and bird baths in their yard. When their grandchildren visit in the summer, they enjoy taking them on their monitoring route to show them the eggs and hatchlings!

When they are not birding, Susan and Brian enjoy walking, gardening, traveling, and spending time with their family. They are also involved in various charities through their church, All Saints Episcopal in Bentonville. They also enjoy volunteering at the Bella Vista Golf Tournaments.

We are happy to have Susan and Brian as part of our volunteer team and appreciate their dedication to bluebirds and the BVBBS!

Grant Program

by Randy Hamm

The Bella Vista Bluebird Society has awarded its first research grant. William Kirkpatrick, a PhD student in the DuRant Lab at the University of Arkansas, will use the \$1,000 grant to support his research into how temperature affects bluebird parenting behavior and subsequent impacts on offspring. He is monitoring numerous nesting boxes in and around Fayetteville.

William said he appreciates the support of BVBBS and his advisor, Dr. Sarah DuRant. "Diving into parental nesting behavior in our age of climatic uncertainty allows for a deeper understanding of what is to come and what we, as a community, can do to help our wild birds. Organizations like Bella Vista Bluebird Society are extremely important due to their dedication to research support and hands-on wildlife management."

The grant was made available to non-professional undergraduate and graduate students conducting research on Eastern Bluebirds. While the BVBBS board will make the decision on whether to award a grant on a year-by-year basis, the intent is to award a grant each year for as long as funds are available.

For more information about Kirkpatrick and his research, visit his website at whkecolgy.com.



Photo by Jay Lacy



Photo by Mary Green

Our Treasurer Retires

Interviewed by Jacqui Stockman

Lorna Sterrett has been a volunteer with BVBBS for eleven years. Due to a recent move out of state, she had to retire from her position as our treasurer. I sat down with Lorna to ask about her volunteer years with us. Here is that interview.

Lorna started as a monitor at Lela Sandfort's and Jim Janssen's encouragement. Lorna had just had knee replacement surgery and Lela and Jim thought it would be the perfect exercise for her. She acquired the Presbyterian Church trail and the Bella Vista Cemetery trail. Lorna later replaced Joe Bowen as Treasurer. "At that time the BVBBS had a pretty simple record keeping system of its small fund", Lorna stated. "With the leadership of our presidents, Leon Wehmeyer and then Laura Claggett, I have seen the organization grow and flourish with the help of all the board members and the monitors."



Lorna holding her cake

Lorna didn't know anything specifically about birds, but with Lela's training it soon took hold for her. She took photos of the nests, the eggs, the new chicks - not only the bluebirds, but the other birds that use the boxes. She said she learned to recognize the different nests, the different eggs, and to spot the different adult birds which were fledged from our boxes. She thoroughly enjoys her newfound knowledge now.

When I asked Lorna what some of her most memorable moments with the BVBBS were, she shared; "I think about all the interesting people from Bella Vista who I have met and who share the same appreciation of the Bluebirds. Some of us are amateurs and some have a greater knowledge."

Lorna has two memorable moments that she shared. "One of my nests contained the more uncommon white Bluebird eggs. I felt privileged to see that. My other memorable moment was not so special. One of my Bluebird nests contained one egg that looked just like a sparrow egg. That didn't look right at all, so I pulled it out and threw it into the brush! I later learned from Butch Telzaff (from the Bluebird Shed) that it was a Cowbird egg, and he and Jennifer (Mortensen) were watching it on the Presbyterian Church route as part of their research and study. They wanted to leave it and watch the development - it wasn't new to them. I felt terrible that I destroyed this study, but Butch graciously told me 'Not to beat myself up about it!' I learned that we amateurs need to ask before we act on something unusual to us!"

Lorna will be living with her daughter and son-in-law for a few months while her house is being built on property next to them. They will each have a 10-acre parcel of land parallel to each other, seven miles south of Seneca, MO. She will be within a mile or two of the Oklahoma state line. Since Missouri's state bird is the Bluebird, she said she intends to set up her two nest boxes and try to attract them. She is also interested in raising a few chickens to have farm fresh eggs!

Lorna attended and transferred the responsibilities of treasurer over to our new Board volunteer, Mark Richardson at our March Board Meeting. We had a small farewell party with cake (made by Harp's bakery) and refreshments. We will truly miss Lorna and all her volunteer work! All the best on your next adventures Lorna!



Mindy Musick King – 2021 – 3rd Pl



Quin Warsaw - 2021 - 4th Pl



Sue Kenny – 2021 – 5th Pl

Photo Contest

It is time for our 3rd Annual Photo Contest. Additional information and the registration form can be found by visiting the [Photo Contest](#) link on our website. Entries are due by September 15th and can include color or black and white images. Prizes are awarded for the top six photos. All judging is conducted, and the winning photographs are selected by our Board Members.



Mickey Arlow – 2021 - 1st Pl

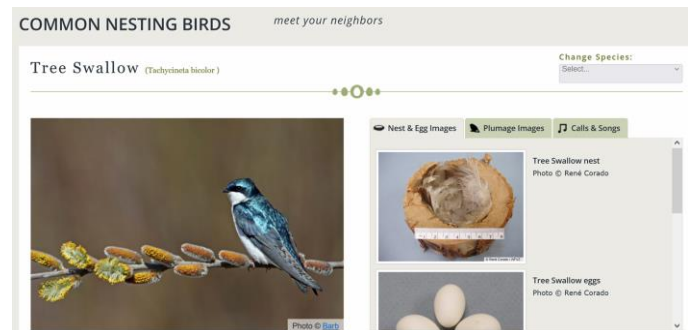
We want to thank everyone who entered our 2nd Annual Photo Contest, and we are showcasing photos from last year's entries throughout this edition of The Bluebirder.

Support BVBBS through Amazon Smile

You may already be familiar with Amazon Smile. When you use [AmazonSmile](#), every time you order something, Amazon will donate 0.5% of your eligible purchases *at no extra cost to you*. You can make the Bella Vista Bluebird Society your charity at smile.amazon.com, or by visiting our website under [Support Us](#) and click on the AmazonSmile box. Be sure to add Bella Vista Bluebird Society as your Supporting charity.

Common Nesting Birds

If you enjoy learning about birds and looking at their nests and eggs, visit [NestWatch's Common Nesting Birds](#). This online resource includes information on 44 species of birds seen in North America. It has photographs of both male and female birds, if their plumage is different, and each species' nests and eggs. It also includes the timing on incubation and nesting periods, the habitats they nest in, and each bird's calls and songs. An amazing amount of time and energy must have been spent on this wonderful reference source.



Logos and Bluebird Embroidery Designs

If you're crazy about bluebirds, and who isn't, you can get a bluebird embroidered on a shirt, jacket, or hat. At [BVBBS Apparel and Logo](#) you can see the variety that's available locally, including BVBBS hats that we sell through our very favorite store [The Bluebird Shed](#).



Alana Harp - 2021 - 6th Pl

Nestbox Sharing – Bluebirds and Squirrels

by Amber Kimmich

Unbelievably, Amber Kimmich of Powhatan, Virginia, documented a squirrel that used a nest box last year for newly born kits while bluebird nestlings were also in the box. Amber's article originally appeared in *The Bird Box*, the newsletter of the Virginia Bluebird Society, Fall 2021, and is reprinted here with her permission and photographs.

We have had a successful bluebird box on our property for over ten years. The bluebirds chase off every other bird that even thinks about trying to nest in it. A few weeks ago, I noticed that the bluebirds, who were on their third brood of babies, were very agitated at the nesting box. I also noticed that the box was missing the snake guard and had some chewing around the entrance. When I went out, I knocked on the nesting box, and of course, a squirrel poked her head out and ran away. I didn't think anything of it at the time and went about my day.



Later that evening, I noticed the same agitation and went back to the box. The same squirrel came running out. So, I put up a new guard and did my best to keep an eye out. It wasn't an hour before I saw the squirrel come back to the box. I am a former rehabber with AWARE for Virginia and have held a federal bird license, so I knew there was a problem in the nest. We got the ladder, unscrewed the hinges, and we were shocked to find three baby squirrels nestled in with three almost ready to fledge baby bluebirds! I also knew this was not going to work.



We figured the best plan of action was to move the birds. I had an extra box with a guard already on it. We have fencing with a post every few feet around the garden, so we moved it about five feet away. My husband and I pulled out part of the nesting material with the birds and left the squirrels. We relocated the birds to the new box. The parent bluebirds kept a close eye on the new box the entire time and chattered away at us. At first, they were not happy, but it only took about ten minutes before they started checking out the new box and were back to feeding and caring for the babies.

As for the squirrels, the only thing we can figure as to why the squirrel decided to do this, is that she was using a nesting box (put up a while back for rehabbed squirrels) on a tree about ten feet away, and it fell during a storm the previous night. Maybe she felt this was the easiest and fastest way to care for her babies, or perhaps they had an agreement. Not sure, but she wasn't taking no for an answer, and her babies were moved right up in there with baby birds. She has since continued care with a few tail swipes from the birds when she returns to the nest. The young bluebirds fledged the nest about five days after we moved them. We have seen them with mom and dad, learning to feed, and seem to be doing well. Nature always reminds us that we need them, and sometimes they need us.



I asked Amber how a squirrel could fit in a nest box. This was her answer:

The box was used for other birds in the past. I've had great crested-flycatchers use the box. It was a purchased nestings box with a larger entrance. The funny part is that it had a snake guard on it. The squirrels chewed that off, chewed the hole larger and all the while the bluebirds used the box two times. The squirrels were originally in a homemade squirrel box on a tree not 10 feet from the bluebird's box. During a storm, that box fell, and they moved their babies to the box which was occupied by the bluebirds. Crazy! This year, the bluebirds have reclaimed it... even with a bluebird box next to it. We never took the new box down when we moved the babies. Hope that answers your question. I used to do wildlife rehab, so I have all kinds of boxes on the property. I'm amazed every year at how the bluebirds ignore their houses but use bigger ones. I think they prefer it.

Volunteers Needed



Volunteer Trail Boss Gracie Turley

We currently have two openings for volunteers. We would like to find a Trail Boss, someone to maintain nest boxes on some small trails on the west side of Bella Vista. It can also include installing nest boxes for customers who buy our boxes at The Bluebird Shed. You would be fully training by our Trail Boss Coordinator, [Steve Skaggs](#).

Our other position, Website Editor, would work closely with our President, [Laura Claggett](#), to create and publish content on our website bvbluebirds.com.

Descriptions of each position can be found at [BVBBS Position Descriptions](#).

Meet Our New Treasurer



Mark joined us as our Treasurer in February. He came to us from the Bella Vista Fly Tyers, where he was Treasurer for three years. He is still a member, however no longer an officer.

He became a member and volunteer of the BVBBS when Ray Matkowski drafted him to build nest boxes at one of the Fly Tyers meetings. He started building nest boxes in 2019 and now also works on the new front metal logos, in addition to building our wooden pudding feeders.

Mark and his wife Ruth moved here from St. Charles Illinois 6 years ago. They are continuing a family tradition. His parents lived here for 10 years in the late 80's and early 90's. They enjoyed the area then and did not consider retiring elsewhere.

Mark and Ruth enjoy watching and feeding birds and have three nest boxes on their property. They like to encourage and assist in the installation of additional nest boxes in their neighborhood. Mark enjoys fishing and continues to chase fish around Loch Lomond primarily. Mark and Ruth also have six grandchildren in Gravette, and that keeps them very busy!

Welcome Mark to the BVBBS Board - we are happy to have your volunteer service!

Wooden Bluebird Pudding Feeders

The BVBBS is now offering volunteer-made wooden bluebird pudding feeders for sale at [The Bluebird Shed](#) to use in the winter.

Our feeders are made of 4x4 Douglas Fir, with holes for suet or bluebird pudding. They also have a small chain at the top so they can be easily hung.

Need a recipe for bluebird pudding? Go to our [FAQs](#) and click on Feeding bluebirds, or Google bluebird pudding recipe and you'll see a big variety of recipes that you can make. It's also possible to buy suet and fit it into the holes.



Does Supplemental Feeding Help Nesting Birds

by Robyn Bailey, NestWatch Project Leader

Wild bird feeding is one of North America's largest undirected ornithological "experiments," one in which many of us willingly participate because it is a simple way to nurture our backyard birds. In the United States, more than 59 million people feed birds around the home (U.S. Department of the Interior et al. 2018).

Beginning in 2014, NestWatch organized one of the largest studies of supplemental feeding of breeding birds, simply by asking participants to report whether they offered supplemental food to nesting bluebirds and chickadees (all species). After delving into the data

collected from 2014 through 2019, we were able to analyze 24,528 nest records of Eastern Bluebirds, Black-capped Chickadees, and Carolina Chickadees submitted by citizen scientists from Alaska to Florida. We sought to answer the question of how feeding wild birds impacts their reproductive success on this grand scale.



Photo by Susan Huges

In a recently published study (*Bailey and Bonter 2021*), Eastern Bluebirds were considered supplemented if they were offered insect larvae (e.g., mealworms or waxworms), whereas the chickadees were considered supplemented if they were provided seeds, suet, insect larvae, or fruit. NestWatchers also reported when they made food available (i.e., before eggs were laid, when eggs were present, and/or when nestlings were present) so that we could determine if a nest was supplemented during the relevant time period.

Timing of egg-laying

Our analysis revealed that Eastern Bluebirds, with access to additional food, laid eggs nearly 6 days earlier than those without; however, chickadees did not lay eggs any earlier when they were offered food. Laying eggs earlier could be an advantage for bluebirds if it allows them to produce an additional clutch later in the season. However, there is a risk that they could nest too early and encounter lethally cold weather in the early spring (*Pinkowski 1977*). We are not sure why chickadees didn't nest any earlier when food was available, but it's possible that they rely on other cues to decide when to lay eggs.



Debbie Rasberry - 2021 - 2nd Pl

Clutch size

Eastern Bluebirds and both species of chickadees held steady in their clutch size, even with additional food on offer. Other factors were more strongly correlated with clutch size, such as latitude, longitude, and how late in the breeding season the eggs were laid. For example, Black-capped Chickadee clutch sizes increased from south to north, whereas Eastern Bluebird clutch sizes decreased. Both Carolina Chickadees and Eastern Bluebirds increased their clutch sizes from east to west. Our three focal species tended to lay smaller clutches later in the season. For Eastern Bluebirds with access to extra food, there was a small increase in clutch size for those late clutches, suggesting that supplementation can reduce this downward trend in clutch size as the season progresses. However, because both chickadee species rarely lay a second clutch, they essentially put all their eggs in one basket.

Nest survival

This analysis took into account the presence or absence of predator guards, which are correlated with increased nest survival (*Bailey and Bonter 2017*). For an average Eastern Bluebird nest with a predator guard, nest survival was improved by about 5% overall when food was available. Our results suggested that for nests which make it to the nestling period, feeding bluebirds may be particularly helpful in the earlier part of the breeding season, when nestlings may be vulnerable to early spring cool weather. Nevertheless, unsupplemented Eastern Bluebirds still had very high nest success, suggesting that they survive quite well in nest boxes with predator guards even without human-provided food. Black-capped and Carolina Chickadees, on the other hand, did not have higher nest survival when supplemental food was available. This suggests that other factors (e.g., predators, competitors) may impact chickadee nest survival more than food availability.

Lessons learned

Bluebirds and chickadees are among the most likely species to be supplemented with both food and nesting cavities in North America, so it makes sense that we would examine these species using our citizen-science platform. We did not expect the results to differ so much between the chickadees and the bluebirds, but we can speculate as to why they did. Eastern Bluebirds have a more limited diet, eating primarily insects and fruit.



Photo by Sharon Robinson

Chickadees of both species exploit a wider variety of foods, and therefore may not be as sensitive to food shortages during the breeding season. However, our results do not imply that you should stop feeding chickadees. Indeed, surplus food may help them in the nonbreeding season (*Brittingham and Temple 1988*).

In our continent-wide sample, we found that 10% of Eastern Bluebird nests were supplemented, as compared to 29% of Carolina Chickadee nests and 37% of Black-capped Chickadee nests. While offering insect larvae may not be as mainstream as seeds, it is certainly gaining popularity among bluebird enthusiasts. We are happy to be able to offer some insight into this growing hobby, and we thank every NestWatcher who contributed data to this study.

Robyn Bailey is the project leader for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's NestWatch project. This article originally appeared as a blog post on the Cornell Lab's NestWatch website; it is reprinted here with permission of the author.

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To become a member or donate to the BVBBS, go to [Make a Donation or Become a Member](#). If you are interested in becoming a BVBBS volunteer, you can email us at bellavistabluebird@gmail.com, or fill out and send our [Volunteer Application](#).

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.

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

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