



The Bluebirder

Summer 2023

Edition 10

It's really getting hot, and the Bluebirds have already had one or two clutches. We are now in full-swing summer! We have a lot of great information packed inside this edition and the hard-working writers, editors, and publisher appreciate your interest in keeping our newsletter going!

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 850 people following our group, have had 989 "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.

INSIDE THIS EDITION

ARTICLE	PAGE
Nest Box Grant Program	1
Bird Watching Camera	2
Volunteer Spotlight	3
Arkansas eBirds	3
Investigating Impacts of Environment	5
Results of Twinning	6
Sparrows	8

Help Wanted!

Are you good at organizing events, spreading the word, newsletter creation, and a website expert? Perhaps you've now found yourself with extra time on your hands and wondered how you could use that extra time to volunteer for a worthwhile cause. We might have a solution for you! The BVBS is looking for a Public Relations person to handle these tasks and sit on the Board.

For more information see the [job description](#) and once you're ready, simply complete our [volunteer application](#), or contact Laura at bellavistabluebird@gmail.com, text/call 847-951-1743.

Nest Box Grant Program

Do you live outside of Bella Vista, and would like to start your own Bluebird Society? We are now offering the Bella Vista Bluebird Society Nest Box Grant Program. If you, your group of friends, neighbors, church, hiking club, garden club, etc. would like to start your own society and often wondered where to start, well we are here to help!

A group awarded a BVBS nest box grant must include establishing and/or enhancing nest box trails on land within the state of Arkansas (outside of Bella Vista). The BVBS will send 3 nest boxes and educational materials to get a group started.

All details about this grant, and who to contact can be found at [Nest Box Grant](#).

Bird Watching Camera

Last November, we were contacted by a couple who wanted to be able to watch birds up close in real-time inside their house. Over the years they had lost mobility and keen eyesight and were hard-pressed to clearly see the birds who visited their four-station bird feeder that's hung about 30 feet from their deck. They had tried different trail and security cameras, but none were able to provide crisp images.

Luckily one of our volunteers, Jerry Butler, keeps up with the latest in high tech, and he was glad to help. He looked at several outdoor cameras and concluded that above average resolution and optics were required for clarity. Pan and zoom add flexibility for viewing and photographing other areas within their yard.

He chose a 4K, pan, tilt, with 5x optical zoom, and wi-fi camera for their installation. The Amazon listing gives the following details:

Reolink PTZ Cameras for Home Security, 5MP Outdoor Security Camera System, Auto Tracking, 5X Optical Zoom, AI Motion Detection, 2.4/5Ghz WiFi, Color Night Vision, Spotlights, RLC-523WA

Since it was developed for home security, it also has a siren, floodlight, and two-way audio. (Amazon's cost ~\$200.) Viewing is on the resident's iPad.

Here are some photos showing the camera, mounted, the power supply in an added protective enclosure, and a picture from the camera of the target feeders.



Volunteer Spotlight – George Pickell

How long have you lived in Bella Vista and where were you before you moved here?

I moved to Bella Vista from Greeley, Colorado in 2016. However, I lived many years in southeast Kansas



When did you first become interested in bluebirds?

Back in 2000, for Christmas gifts I constructed bluebird boxes for my neighbors. That was when I was able to create my first bluebird trail which was in southeast Kansas.

When did you become involved as a volunteer with the BVBBS?

Upon moving to Bella Vista, I contacted the BVBBS, indicating my interest in bluebirds. Very simple process to become active. After monitoring a trail, I felt the need and want to become a lifetime member.

What other volunteer positions have you held?

Other positions I have helped with are trail monitor,

trail boss, BVBBS board member, and monitor coordinator.

Do you have any funny or rewarding bluebird moments you could share?

Numerous times, as a trail monitor needing to check egg counts, I was able to gently raise the hen to count the eggs/chicks. Most hens flew away, but a few had an unusual trust that allowed me to slowly lower the hen back down. Very special living creatures, indeed!

Besides the BVBBS, what are your other interests?

I have many interests, but mostly I love growing things, as well as landscape maintenance, mowing grass and trying to keep it green. My objective is to always do what I can to encourage the fledging of bluebirds. The bluebird box on my garden fence has fledged 10 chicks this year. More to come!

Arkansas eBird

by Randy Zellers, Arkansas Game & Fish Commission, Assistant Chief of Communications

This article first appeared December 2022 on the Arkansas Game & Fish Commission website.

LITTLE ROCK — Birders and other wildlife-watching enthusiasts have a great new way to participate in outdoor recreation, thanks to the creation of a special Natural State-specific online gateway to Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's eBird birdwatching system - [Arkansas eBird](#).



According to Karen Rowe, AGFC nongame bird program coordinator, the eBird tool has been available for years, but the new portal gives birders a more customized way to learn more about and participate in birding.

“eBird was initiated to help the public get more enjoyment out of their bird-watching efforts,” Rowe said. “The online database enables you to keep your list of species safe and be able to store different checklists. People who simply enjoy watching birds around their homes can enter the species and number of birds they see on a daily walk or viewing period in the backyard, and the list will keep count. You’ll have a fascinating list and

be able to see the list grow and notice how it may change by the season or over time.”

Continued on page 4

Arkansas eBird continued

In addition to keeping those lists, users to the Arkansas eBird portal can submit their favorite photos to be displayed for other users of the tool.

“We update the images on the portal regularly, and we’re also planning some fun challenges for users to add even more interest and get our birding enthusiasts more engaged in their hobby and the agency,” Rowe said. “We know most of our birders participate around the house, and especially since COVID, many have stayed within their own backyards and neighborhoods. The portal lets us add stories and links to showcase some great areas of interest around the state, including wildlife-viewing areas, auto tours and important bird areas they will really find worth the trip.”

According to Kirsten Bartlow, AGFC watchable wildlife program coordinator, recent research has shown that bird-watching and other nonconsumptive outdoors pursuits are increasingly popular in Arkansas, and participants are hungry for knowledge.

“We recently contracted with Virginia Tech to conduct a survey of wildlife viewers in Arkansas,” Bartlow said. “Most wildlife viewers surveyed said they identified as beginner, novice or intermediate in their skill level. This portal is an excellent way to connect them with all the resources the AGFC has available. This is a great first step in working more closely with people who may not be as familiar with the agency because they don’t necessarily hunt or fish.”

The real power of the tool, Rowe says, is that all eBird participants have the ability to share their sightings and be part of an international citizen science community.

“The platform also was built to create a citizen science program where every day bird observations could be used in conservation efforts,” Rowe said. “Sightings logged into the system can be used to help obtain figures on bird abundance, species diversity and distribution. This information can be used by federal and state agencies planning habitat improvement projects, administering conservation grants, and purchasing land or easements for conservation.”

Rowe also stresses that the portal is a great tool for hunters and anglers to enjoy. Many deer hunters spend hours immersed in nature, watching a downy woodpecker hopping up and down a tree trunk or listening to the scolding chirps of a tufted titmouse upset at the intruder near their nest tree.

“Most deer and duck hunters enjoy watching nongame birds during long sits or lulls in the action,” Rowe said. “I often say they’re just birders until a deer or duck finally shows up. This new tool may be a great way for them to have some added enjoyment in the woods, too.”

“I encourage everyone to visit the portal and read through the instructions on eBird to see how they can customize their list to fit their wildlife watching needs,” Rowe said. “It’s a great way to get engaged in the outdoors, whether you’re at home or want to strike out and explore new areas.”

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 to 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 about the two positions we currently would like to fill.

Investigating Impacts of the Thermal Environment

by Will Kirkpatrick

I am a 3rd year PhD student in the DuRant Lab in the Department of Biological Sciences. In collaboration with the University of Arkansas' Department for Sustainability, I have established a new field site in my ongoing nest box system around Fayetteville where I am investigating impacts of the thermal environment on two native bird species, Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows.

It is important for the scientific community to understand how species interact with the natural environment so we can better anticipate what will happen when environmental change occurs. Climatic shifts, deforestation, and other sudden changes to the environment may have catastrophic results for wild animals across the globe.

My PhD thesis aims to develop a deeper understanding of how temperature, specifically temperature variation, impacts Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows. Both species nest in cavities in the trunks of trees or man-made bird boxes. They are altricial, meaning that they hatch in a relatively early developmental stage and require time in the nest before they are developed enough to feed themselves or move significantly. Given that these species are confined to the nest for their first 14-20 days of life, it is drastically important that their parents are attentive and keep them from extreme hot or cold temperatures.



I have established five field sites around Fayetteville to conduct my research. In each site, I have arrays of nest boxes set up on poles five feet off the ground. These nest boxes are used by both species for reproduction in the Spring/Summer, which is when I collect my temperature data. I collect my data by inserting a temperature probe that looks like an egg into the nest and one temperature probe outside the nest. By comparing these temperatures, I can track when the mother is incubating her eggs. Incubation time has been linked to

offspring physical development and general nest success. By tracking these parental behaviors, I hope to discover if natural temperature variation has a significant impact on parental behavior and offspring development in each species.

So far, we have discovered in our preliminary analyses that native birds are altering their behavior to combat temperature variability. Unfortunately, there seems to be a limit to how much parental behavior dampens temperature swings in the nest, but further data collection is needed across our relatively young field system to investigate how this impacts the survival of the offspring.



Continued on page 6

Investigating Impacts of the Thermal Environment continued

I was able to start a new field site, Cato Springs, adding 64 boxes to my experiment. Using land owned by the University opens opportunities for mentoring undergraduate researchers without the burden of long field excursions that could lead to exclusion from research. A major goal of my research is to provide opportunities for young researchers to get their feet wet (sometimes literally!) in the field with the potential to collaborate on posters, presentations, and possibly published literature. Nest box systems are the perfect framework for many questions outside of my thermal focus, and my lab group plans to use this system for years to come to investigate avian reproduction and educate undergraduate students about field techniques and data collection/analysis.



My PhD project is supported financially by the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship and the DuRant Lab. Dr. Sarah DuRant and I, in collaboration with the University and other landowners, hope to shine a light on how native birds are impacted by the natural thermal environment. The University land on the agricultural research farm and the Cato Springs field site are crucial to my ongoing research and future projects in our lab that can help us understand critical issues with native species and the ongoing climate crisis.

Will Kirkpatrick is the Bella Vista Bluebird Society's first grant recipient December 2021. This article first appeared in the University of Arkansas Newswire, November 2021.

Results of Twinning at Berksdale Golf Course by Randy Hamm

A couple of years ago, we told you about twinning, the practice of adding a second nest box near one that has been taken over by a species other than Eastern bluebirds. Many times, bluebirds will occupy the second box even though a different variety of bird is nesting just feet away.



On the Berksdale golf course, where I am a co-trail boss and monitor, our problem is tree swallows. These beautiful though aggressive birds often nest in boxes we have intended for bluebirds, and once established, they tend to return to the same box season after season.

In the [Spring/Summer 2021 issue of The Bluebirder](#) I reported that we were having good success by adding twin boxes in those spots favored by tree swallows. In this article, I will quantify that success.

In the six seasons from 2017 to 2022, we saw a marked increase in the number of bluebirds fledged in those boxes where twinning was employed. Over this time period, we added a second box in 16 locations where tree swallows had taken over a single box. As of the 2022 season, we had 77 boxes on the Berksdale course, so, by the end of this study, roughly one of five locations was occupied by twinned boxes.

First, let's establish a baseline for the average number of bluebirds fledged per box in a season. The average ranged from a low of 3.38 fledglings per box in 2021 to a high of 4.46 in 2020. Overall, the average over the six-year period was 3.68 bluebird fledglings per box per season.

Continued on page 7

Results of Twinning at Berksdale Golf Course continued

Against that backdrop of overall average bluebird production on the Berksdale course, let’s look at the twinned boxes as a group. For this analysis, we’ll consider a pair of boxes as a single location. In the two to four years **before** a second box was added, our sixteen soon-to-be-twinned locations yielded an average of 2.35 bluebird fledglings per site. In the two to four years **after** a twin box was added, that average jumped to 6.24.

In short, our twinning efforts took these sixteen locations from well below to almost double the course-wide average in fledgling production per box. While we can’t guarantee that twinning will solve your backyard box problems, we’re happy with the results of adding twin boxes on the Berksdale golf course.

Randy Hamm has volunteered with the BVBBS since 2016. He is a monitor and trail boss at Berksdale Golf Course, and a director on the BVBBS Board.

Berksdale Twin Study 2017–2022

Box #s	Pre-twin BB	# of years	Avg. BB/yr.	Post-twin BB	# of years	Avg. BB/yr.
1E/ET	0	4	0.00	7	2	3.50
2A/AT	0	4	0.00	5	2	2.50
2E/ET	10	4	2.50	15	2	7.50
3B/T	28	4	7.00	10	2	5.00
3H/T	4	4	1.00	12	2	6.00
4/4T	10	4	2.50	8	2	4.00
4B/T	23	4	5.75	21	2	10.50
5/T	0	4	0.00	13	2	6.50
5E/T	16	3	5.33	18	3	6.00
6/T	7	4	1.75	14	3	4.67
6A/T	0	2	0.00	25	4	6.25
6B/T	12	2	6.00	41	4	10.25
7E/FT	2	2	1.00	7	4	1.75
7G/H	3	2	1.50	42	4	10.50
7K/L	5	2	2.50	24	4	6.00
7N/T	0	2	0.00	19	3	6.33
TOTALS	120	51	2.35	281	45	6.24

Bluebirds fledged in all Berksdale boxes

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	TOTALS	# of boxes	Avg./box
Zones 1, 2	59	52	80	75	36	50	352	102	3.45
Zones 3, 4	74	85	88	60	63	66	436	108	4.04
Zone 5	30	45	43	33	36	20	207	61	3.39
Zone 6	48	34	38	29	27	45	221	53	4.17
Zone 7	52	41	54	43	38	17	245	73	3.36
TOTALS	263	257	303	240	200	198	1461	397	3.68
# of boxes									
Zones 1, 2	19	19	16	16	16	16	102		
Zones 3, 4	22	21	17	16	16	16	108		
Zone 5	12	12	11	10	8	8	61		
Zone 6	10	10	10	9	7	7	53		
Zone 7	14	14	14	13	10	8	73		
TOTALS	77	76	68	64	57	55	397		
Avg./year	3.42	3.38	4.46	3.75	3.51	3.60	3.68		

Sparrows

by Mike Brown

This article was first published on [Eastern Bluebird Landlords Facebook](#), October 16, 2020.

Learn the native Sparrows on the right from the no good foreign invasive House Sparrow on the left. Once you know the native Sparrows, you will find it easy to never mistake any of them from the Bluebird murdering House Sparrow on the left again.

First, none of the far more beautiful native Sparrows will ever bother your Bluebirds and they will never nest in a tree cavity or a Bluebird box. They are true Sparrows and live, feed, and nest in thickets, grasslands, low trees, fence rows and forests.

Only the House Sparrow will bother your Bluebirds. House Sparrows are not true Sparrows. They are in the Weaver Finch family of birds and their heavy seed cracking beak is far bigger than the beaks of every native Sparrow pictured on the right.

This post is in response to another post I read about being unsure about maybe a native Sparrow in a Bluebird box. It will not happen folks. No native Sparrows will ever be a threat to Bluebirds. So, if you see a Sparrow going in and out of your Bluebird box at any time of the year it is a House Sparrow. It will never ever be any of the beautiful native Sparrows on the right, period. I love all the Sparrows on the right, but I trap and eliminate House Sparrows year-round, and they are now the rare bird here not the Bluebirds. The native Sparrows on the right belong here. House Sparrows do not.

For more information on House Sparrows, see the North American Bluebird Society's Factsheet [House Sparrow Control](#) or [Managing House Sparrows](#) on the Sialis website.



Invasive House Sparrow



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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