



The Bluebirder

Winter 2023

Edition 9

Welcome back to our newsletter. We have had some time off since our last edition and are glad to bring you our newsletter once again. There is 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 725 people following our group, have had 782 "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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Photo Contest

Thank you to everyone who entered our 3rd Annual Photo Contest. The first-place winner is Mindy King. To see all the winners, visit [Photo Contest](#) on our website.

Pictures from the contest will be featured throughout this edition.



First Place - Mindy King

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.

Volunteer Spotlight – Adrian Berghamer

Interviewed by Jacqui Stockman

JS - How long have you lived in Bella Vista?

AB - I have lived in Bella Vista for 5 years but was born in California.

JS - When did you first become interested in bluebirds?

AB - As soon as I moved here in 2018.

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

AB - Last year, lucky me! I can't believe it! We bought a bluebird house from The Bluebird Shed, and I was put on the BVBBS email list. When they asked for volunteers, I jumped at the chance.

JS - What other volunteer positions have you held?

AB - I volunteer for backpacks for underprivileged children



Adrian Berghamer checking a nest box

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

AB - Funny, yes. But it was at a chickadee nest. The mama bird was doing her duties keeping her eggs warm and when I opened the house to check on her nest she was in there and not going anywhere. She proceeded to snort at me repeatedly and she wouldn't leave. So I conceded and left mama alone. Rewarding, most days yes. Seeing those baby chicks and monitoring nest progress has been highly rewarding. And I think baby chicks are the cutest things ever!

JS - Besides the BVBBS, what are your other interests?

AB - I love to feed all kinds of animals in the yard, I read a lot, and my husband and I like to support military functions. I enjoy sewing and seeing others' crafts. My husband and I recently took up fly fishing, so we plan weekend trips.

Adopt-A-Highway

by Becky Pratt



Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup Crew

The Bella Vista Bluebird Society has recently become part of the Arkansas Department of Transportation's Adopt a Highway Program. Our assigned area is the approximately a mile on either side of Highway 71B, Bella Vista Way, from Trafalgar Road to Lancashire Boulevard.

On October 22nd, 17 members gathered for our first pick-up. In a few hours lots of orange bags were filled and piled for takeaway by ARDOT crews.

Our next clean up event will be on Saturday, March 25th at 10am. It will coincide with the Six in Sixty clean up sponsored by Positively Bella Vista. We look forward to having lots of members out helping on that day. If you can volunteer, contact Becky Pratt at (626) 841-0348 or via email at bp Pratt_hmstud@yahoo.com.



2nd Place – Sue Kenny



3rd Place – Marion Ball



4th Place – Mickey Arlow

Home on the Farm for Bluebirds

by Mike White

I live on a 180-acre farm in Center Ridge, Arkansas. It's about 70 miles west and north of Little Rock. We run 80 momma cows, six dogs, two horses, two cats and about 20 chickens. The compound around the house is about 10 acres and we see bluebirds from time to time.

In the Spring of 2022, I purchased eight (8) bluebird houses from The Bluebird Shed in Bella Vista after talking to the BVBBS President who rightfully sang their praises. I paid to have them shipped, and when I received them, I was impressed with the design and construction of the houses. I had also bought two houses each from two different dealers online and found them to be expensive and cheaply built. (Two of those four houses have already fallen apart and had to be removed.)

My goal in having more houses was to increase the bluebird population on the farm. I previously had two houses and couldn't keep the sparrows out of them. I figured more houses would give the bluebirds a fighting chance. I really like the fact that they eat bugs and especially like seeing them around.

I placed the eight houses around the house site approximately every two hundred feet on 4 by 4 posts. The houses were mounted about 5 ½ to 6 feet off the ground.

During the summer of 2022 I watched the houses closely and would remove any sparrow nests after eggs were laid. There was only one nest of sparrows that hatched and got away before being removed.

We had four houses of bluebirds that hatched and flew. I have never had more than one nest of bluebirds hatch previously. I did notice that the houses that the bluebirds liked were the ones farthest away from the other houses and closest to the woods.

In addition, I have kept a sparrow trap out for the last three years. Last year was the first year that the number of sparrows trapped decreased remarkably. In 2021 that number was 78. In 2022 it was only 28.

On a sad note, I took my wife's car, which does not get used much, to have the oil changed during the summer. When I was in the waiting area the tech came out and said "Mr. White, I've just seen something I've never seen before." I went with him out to the car and there tucked up against the engine was a beautiful nest with six baby blue eggs. It's a wonder it didn't catch on fire when I was driving. I guess I only thought I had enough nest boxes!



On a happier note, during this winter I've been keeping sunflower seeds out for birds. I can't tell you how many more cardinals, goldfinch, house finches, doves and bluejays I've had this year, more than normal, AND much fewer house sparrows. I even have one Red Headed Woodpecker that shows up every three or four days.

This year I plan to buy three more BVBBS houses and mount them similarly, except farther from our house and the existing bluebird houses, and right next to two wooded tree lines. I expect these to be houses that the bluebirds will find more to their liking. Time will tell.

I've learned a lot about bluebirds and you guys have been very helpful. Can't hardly wait to order three more houses. I'll let you know how they do. Come on Spring!



Peterson Bluebird Boxes at Buckingham Trailhead

Last spring, Jim Richardson, a BVBBS volunteer monitor, built two Peterson-designed bluebird nest box and mounted them at the Buckingham trailhead at Trafalgar Road & Buckingham Drive. He also monitors these two boxes and had no nests in 2022.

Some of the features of this unique design include:

- slope keeps rain out and keeps the nest dry.
- box is well ventilated, which is critical during the hot period of nesting season.
- sloped design helps monitors remove blowflies and other potential pests.
- access door opens from the top down for easy monitoring and cleaning
- as with other bluebird houses, it also attracts other cavity nesting birds such as prothonotary warblers, chickadees, tree swallows and more.
- Nest entry hole size is perfect for all bluebird species (Eastern, Mountain and Western Bluebirds)



Jim estimates that he has made probably 50 Peterson boxes over the years in Colorado with good success. He likes to paint designs on the roof that are applicable to the usage location.

Plans for making a [Peterson bluebird house](#) can be found at the link. Plans for making the BVBBS traditional hole & slotted boxes are at this link – [Nest Box Plans](#).

BVBBS Bluebird Feeder & Bluebird Pudding Recipe

You can find many recipes for bluebird pudding using your favorite search engine. This is one we have on our brochure and website.

- 1 part peanut butter (1 ¼ cups)
- 2 parts lard (2 ½ cups)
- 5 parts yellow cornmeal (6 ½ cups)

Melt the lard in microwave for about 2 minutes (medium-high setting). Then let the peanut butter melt in the hot lard, using more microwave if necessary. Add cornmeal last. Mix well. These quantities fill a 4 # Armour lard tub, which makes a good storage container. Refrigerate overnight before feeding, then store the leftovers in the refrigerator.

To fill the wooden feeder, smooch the pudding in each section.



Male and female bluebirds with a Hairy Woodpecker waiting its turn



Photo by Ling Ma

Don't have a feeder, use a dish!

BVBBS Grant

Thanks to our members, and sales of our bluebird nest boxes and wooden bluebird pudding feeders through [The Bluebird Shed](#) (see BVBBS Feeder and Bluebird Pudding Recipe on the preceding page), the BVBBS was able to offer a \$1000 grant to fund research on bluebirds again in 2022.

Shannon Kitchen, from the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville was awarded our 2022 grant for \$1000. Her work will be conducted in 2023. With Shannon's permission, here is the abstract of her research:

Climate change is expected to increase extreme weather events, necessitating the assessment of species' adaptability to intensifying climatic stress. Eastern Bluebirds (EABL) have a history of population fluctuations, specifically winter mortality events. This study will examine the fitness benefits and cost of Eastern Bluebirds (EABL) winter roosting behaviors, including how thermal constraints, genetic relatedness, and parasite avoidance impact occupancy. I hypothesize that overnight roosting behavior correlates with climatic conditions, including below freezing temperatures. I also predict that genetically related individuals roost together, with unrelated individuals only roosting together under extreme weather events. Finally, I hypothesize that roosting decisions favor insulation, but when thermal properties are equal, parasites are avoided. Importantly, the factors influencing occupancy and site selection are likely to vary between the breeding and non-breeding season. By performing full annual-cycle research in the same location (and over several years), the variables that best predict EABL occupancy, survival, and reproductive success, as well as any carry-over effects between seasons, can be elucidated. This knowledge will better inform seasonal management decisions made by local and national bluebird societies, helping to keep a common bird common, and the ecosystems in which it resides healthy.



5th Place -Jake Greeling



6th Place – Rick Tramposh

Great Friend of Avian Wildlife

Quin Warsaw says “Thank you” to The Bluebird Shed in Bella Vista, The Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society, and all his fans who helped get the word out or purchased one of his Northwest Arkansas Bird Calendars. Quin Warsaw - [Snappy's View](#) donated a total of \$450 from calendar sales to [Northsong Wild Bird Rehabilitation](#).



Quin Warsaw and Northsong Wild Bird Rehabilitation Staff

Northsong Wild Bird Rehabilitation is a Northwest Arkansas based 501c3 organization dedicated to providing medical care to injured avian wildlife while promoting environmental conservation through community involvement and education. Learn more at northsongbird.org.

Found an injured wild bird? Call or text (479) 309-1417 or email northsongbird@outlook.com.

Since early Spring is a good time to plant, and since we share the same [hardiness zone as Virginia](#), and since birds love them to eat, shelter and nest in, we thought we'd share this interesting article that first appeared in *The Bird Box*, the newsletter of the [Virginia Bluebird Society](#), reprinted here with permission from the author.

Attracting (and Feeding) Birds with Native Plants: Viburnum

By Valerie Kenyon Gaffney, VBS President

Why Viburnum you ask? Because they're adaptable to a wide range of soil types and moisture, including drought. Depending on the species, they'll grow in full sun, part sun, part shade or shade. They're hardy to Virginia USDA zones 5-8.

Generally, they are flood, insect, and disease tolerant, although all three can be susceptible to Viburnum Leaf Beetle. Some species are deer resistant and have attractive flowers and foliage, often with especially beautiful fall color. They are useful for borders, screens, mass plantings and even as trees. And attractive to many different types of butterflies and moths, including serving as host plants for spring azures and hummingbird clearwing moths. They also have special value for native bees, and best of all the fruit is a good food source throughout the fall and winter for small mammals and many birds – not least the Eastern Bluebird.

Of the more than 120 species of Viburnum in the world (Family: Adoxaceae), 27 are native and/or introduced to the United States. Of those 27, ten are native to Virginia and of those ten, because they're native to all three regions of Virginia, this article will focus on three species in particular: *viburnum acerifolium*, *V. dentatum*, and *V. prunifolium*.



Mapleleaf (*v. acerifolium*), also commonly known as dockmackie and possum-haw, is our only native Viburnum with maple-shaped (*acer*) leaves. A low, densely branched shrub, it's one of the smallest viburnums, typically 4-6 feet high and 3-4 feet wide. Its low-growing habit provides good nesting and escape cover for birds. Think bluebird fledglings! Small creamy-white, bi-sexual (monoecious) flowers, which appear May through August, are followed in July through October by nearly black drupes. And if among the many songbirds attracted to Mapleleaf fruit, catbirds, cardinals and eastern bluebirds, don't strip the plant, the fruit might even persist through winter. Optimum growth occurs in well-drained moist soils with partial shading, but *v. acerifolium* is tolerant of acid soils, dry sites and deep shade.



Arrowwood (*v. dentatum*) also known as Southern Arrowwood derives its common name from the use of the straight young stems as arrow shafts by Native Americans. Its scientific name (*dentatum*) refers to the coarsely toothed edge of its leaves.

It can grow 6-10 feet both tall and wide and is a good candidate for hedges. Preferring moist loam, it can tolerate clay soil and grows in both full and partial sun. White flowers appear in May and June, followed by blue-black drupes in August through November.

Its attractive fall foliage (ranging from yellow to orange to red) makes it an attractive landscape plant. Besides being a food source for 50 some birds, *v. dentatum* is also the larval host to the Blue Azure butterfly. Think food for bluebird nestlings!

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Photo by Jean Berg



Photo by Sharon Robinson

Attracting (and Feeding) Birds with Native Plants: Viburnum - continued



Smooth Blackhaw (*v. prunifolium*) The common name Blackhaw refers to the purported similarity of this plant to hawthorns (sometimes called red haws) although hawthorns are in a different family. Its scientific name, *prunus* means resembling prune leaves.

The leaves are finely serrated, the branches are more crooked. Depending upon your source, the fragrance of its flowers is either non-existent, or sweet and pleasant. But like all viburnum, its fruit is consumed by songbirds (bluebirds), game birds and small mammals, and in the case of *v. prunifolium* may also be used by humans in jams and preserves.

An extract of its astringent bark was formerly used medicinally. Easily grown in average, dry-to-medium, well-drained soil it can tolerate drought and does best with at least half day sunlight. Unique to the Smooth Blackhaw, the flowers occur above its leaves, while the flowers of many viburnums are nestled. And while usually grown as a large, upright, multi-stemmed shrub reaching a height of 12-15', it can also be grown as a single trunk tree reaching a height of 30'.

But what's the catch? It's what your nursery may not tell you: most native viburnums are pretty self-incompatible and typically require cross-pollination for good fruit production. You can get lots of flowers, but for most viburnum you need a male and a female plant to yield fruit. All of which is to say, two genetically different plants of the same species should be planted in reasonably close proximity. And those genetically different plants must be in bloom at the same time so that visiting insect pollinators can do their job. To learn more about getting your viburnum to bear fruit, check out Kim Eireman's EcoBlog at the link below.



References:

[Classic Viburnums](#)

Eierman, Kim. [EcoBlog](#).

Elpel, Thomas J. [Botany in a Day](#). Pony, MT, HOPS Press, 2013.

[Flora of Virginia](#). Fort Worth, Botanical Research Inst of Texas, 2012.

[Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center](#)

[Missouri Botanical Garden](#)

[Missouri Department of Conservation](#)

[Piedmont Native Plants](#)

[USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services](#)

Photo credits:

Top right: *Viburnum acerfolium* fall fruit. Photo from Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Sally and Andy Wasowski.

Middle left: *Viburnum dentatum* with fruit. Photo from Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Stephanie Brundage

Above right: *Viburnum prunifolium* foliage. Photo from Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, J. W. Smith.

Above left: *Viburnum dentatum* with fruit. Photo from Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Stephanie Brundage.



Photo by Mary Christian



Photo by Quin Warsaw



Photo by Debbie Rasberry

Stovepipe Guards

by Laura Claggett & Steve Skaggs

Contact us at bellavistabluebird@gmail.com with any questions.

We seem to always be battling some sort of predator trying to keep them out of our nest boxes. Raccoons and snakes are maddeningly persistent, and we have been wanting to try stovepipe baffles as a last resort for some heavily predated boxes.

We haven't used stovepipe baffles in the past because the retail cost can be \$35-\$50, which is way beyond our means. Early last spring Steve built 11 stovepipe baffles from scratch using the plans linked below. He also wrote up what he did to make it easier, also below.

At the beginning of the season, Steve installed five of the baffles on heavily predated nest boxes on the Oakford neighborhood trail. And Jim Sours installed six similarly at the Brittany Golf Course trail.

At the end of the season, Brittany had a 46% increase of bluebirds fledged from the previous year, and the Oakford neighborhood had an 86% increase!

We have to include this disclaimer. Since this was not a scientific study, we really don't know for certain how much of that success was due to the stovepipe baffles. Some of it might have been from relocating some of the boxes, adding PVC and/or conical baffles to boxes, and some boxes have Noel-type wire guards (see photo with all four guards on the next page). And some of the success could have been due to Mother Nature - who knows? We tried many solutions, and we saw very positive results, so overall our efforts weren't in vain. Let's hope they continue to fend off predators.

This NABS Factsheet, [Predator Control](#), has diagrams & simple instructions for stovepipe, cone and PVC baffles, and hole/noel guards. Steve notes follow.

Duct pipe guards are relatively easy to make. You'll need:

- 8" diameter duct pipe sheet (24" length, or 60" length cut into three 20" sections)
- 8" square of 1/2" wire mesh (might need to be doubled to add strength)
- zip ties
- flat black paint (optional)

Make the sheet into a pipe by snapping the two long edges together, top it with a section of wire mesh that is then secured to the top of the pipe with zip ties (drill a few holes around the circumference of the top of the pipe through which zip ties can be threaded to capture the wire mesh, then trim the mesh to roughly match the pipe).

Spray-paint flat black (optional, but highly recommended, particularly for use on a golf course). Snip a few squares out of the center of the mesh so that the tube can be slid over a t-post, letting the wire mesh rest on the existing section of PVC baffle in the case of most BVBBs installed boxes.

Ideally, the duct pipe section would be 24" long, mounted a minimum of 24" above ground level, which would put the top of the guard 48" above ground level. Then add another 6" or so for a conical guard, and add about 15" for a box, and now the top of the box is maybe about 69" above ground level - too high for a lot of our monitors (and for our standard 6-foot T-post), even considering that the box floor is lower than the hypothetical 69" overall height.



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Stovepipe Guards - continued

We ended up mounting everything lower, which kind of forgives using a 20" duct pipe, cut from a 60" sheet. A 60" sheet is about \$18 from Lowe's. so, each 20" section is about \$6, while a 24" section is \$9 - big difference! It's a bit tedious, but not difficult, to cut the 60" sheet into three 20" sections using tin snips, but it's worth it, particularly when there's no 24" available.



As excited as we are about the newly installed stove pipe baffles, we would be remiss if we didn't mention the article NOAC Notes by Butch Tetzlaff that appeared in the Fall/Winter 2020 issue of *The Bluebird*. That article has information presented at the North American Ornithological Conference held online the week of August 10, 2020.

The abstract of the study mentioned is about research conducted in 2019, three researchers monitored 72 nest boxes every 1-3 days to determine the effectiveness of two common predator guards (Noel and stovepipe), compared to [nest boxes without guards on Peterson-style boxes. Their conclusion was that predator guards may not be effective in preventing access to all predators. Results indicated that predator guards were not effective at improving nest success in artificial nest boxes. However, there was a slight trend toward higher success with stovepipe guards at the site with highest predation. Additional years of monitoring and a larger sample size may yield clearer trends.

Summer Art Camp By Ray Matkowski

Twenty children ages 6 through 12, partook in building bluebird nest boxes at Summer Art Camp. The class was led by Gary Henderson, chief kit builder.



When children have the chance to express themselves in a safe environment, they gain confidence, build social skills, and expand their horizons. We were excited to help them on their journey to discover themselves through the joy of the fine arts and to share the love that God has for each of his young creations.

A huge thank you to the BVBS volunteer Troy Shaffer who assembled all the kits and donated the materials.



Valentine's Day Gift



If your sweetheart loves to watch and feed the birds there is no better way to show your love, than with a bluebird nest box or bluebird pudding feeder. Both items are available for purchase at [The Bluebird Shed](#) and all proceeds benefit the Bella Vista Bluebird Society. See p. 4 for a bluebird pudding recipe.

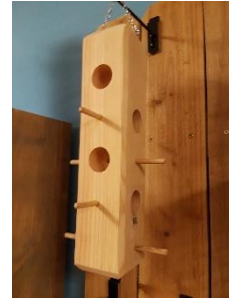


Photo by Joseph Brown



Photo by Heaven Williamson

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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