

BRAS Bluebird Newsletter January 2020

January- one of the quietest months of the year for our Black River Audubon Society Bluebird program. There are no nestboxes to monitor, no data to enter into Nestwatch, no bluebird group meetings, and less frequent sightings of bluebirds. New nestboxes for use in 2020 are lined up and ready to be used later this year. But for now, things are quiet after the busy holidays. That will change in a few short weeks!!

It is a pleasure to relax and observe the birds at our backyard feeders. We are not seeing bluebirds regularly this winter at our feeders as we have for the past several years. They occasionally flit in to check out the nestbox in our back yard or quickly grab a few dry mealworms but they haven't been hanging around much this winter. Perhaps they are finding natural food sources still – this winter has been warmer and we have had very little snow compared to recent years. However, other birds don't hesitate to stock up on our offerings of suet, safflower seed, thistle seed, black oil sunflower seed and dry mealworms! Have you also noticed less feeder birds than usual?

Pictured below are two other cavity nesters which have been at our feeders. The pileated woodpecker dwarfs the suet block holder filled with "Zick dough". The dapper little white breasted nuthatch takes a turn at the same feeder. Other frequent visitors to this particular feeder include downy woodpeckers, a female red bellied woodpecker and blue jays.



If you are interested in making your own suet, I would recommend a recipe from Julie Zickafoose which was published by the Bird Watchers Digest. It is easy to make and is loved by many species! She recommends serving it only in cold weather, as it's too rich for summer feeding. The recipe is pictured on the following page.

We love watching a pair of Carolina wrens eat dry mealworms, black-capped chickadees carry away seeds and mealworms and the many other common feeder birds which make back yard viewing interesting! The heated birdbath is very popular with birds and squirrels alike. Definitely worth the investment! Food, water and shelter are the three big attractants for birds.

Pictured below: Recipe for “Zick Dough” and photo of a Carolina Wren.



Plans for spring bluebird programs, classes and meetings are being finalized this month. Here are a few of the upcoming events.

1. If you want to brush up on basic bluebird information before nesting season starts you are invited to attend a presentation by Penny and Fritz Brandau called “Bluebird Basics” on Sunday Feb 23, 2020 at the Amherst Public Library at 2pm. Since class size is limited, registration is requested by calling 440-988-4230. This program is open to the public.
2. A class for persons interested in becoming one of the trail monitors for the the Black River Audubon Society bluebird program will be held on Sunday March 1, 2020. Monitors check bluebird nestboxes on their individual trails at least weekly starting in late March through early August. It is an amazing experience to observe and help bluebirds and other native cavity nesters successfully raise their young. Call Penny Brandau at 440-670-3684 for information about the location of the class if you are interested in volunteering as a trail monitor. The class on March 1st will give you lots of information necessary to monitor a bluebird trail. More monitors are currently needed for 2020, especially in the Oberlin area.
3. Finally, the annual Spring Kick-off Meeting for all current bluebird trail monitors will be held on Sunday March 8th at 2pm at the Amherst Library. This is always a great time to get together with other trail monitors and prepare for the nesting season. There will be time to talk of successes and challenges of the past and to learn best practices and new ideas from each other. Monitoring forms, a slideshow, sparrow spookers, last year’s trail notebooks, food and lots of talk will be part of this meeting. If you are a trail monitor please mark your calendar and plan to come to this important meeting!

Two other larger out -of- county events for bluebird lovers will be coming up in Feb and March. We highly recommend both of them and hope to see many of you at each event. 😊

The first one is the Ohio Bluebird Society annual conference which is open to OBS members and nonmembers alike. This year it will be held on Saturday, February 29th at the Ashland University in Ashland, Ohio. The line up of speakers and conference topics is varied, interesting and well-rounded and the cost to attend includes lunch and is very reasonably priced. Check out this link for more details and also registration information for the Ohio Bluebird Society conference. <https://ohiobluebirdsociety.org/>

A second large event for bluebird conservationists is the North American Bluebird Society's conference which will be held March 11-15, 2020 in Kearney Nebraska. A link for information and registration details for this conference can be found at <http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/>.

My husband and I have been to the last four NABS conferences and are very excited to be able to attend the one this year also in Nebraska. So much to do, see and learn at these conferences! We can't wait!! Please join us if you can! It will be a wonderful experience!



Before all of these programs, conferences and classes are over there will be bluebirds starting to enter nestboxes in our own Lorain County. They will be carrying dry grasses or pine needles to create their neat nests. There will be wing waving, soft songs and calls and flashes of blue as they prepare to raise new families. Life will become VERY busy for them and also for the people who love them and are committed to helping them successfully raise those families. Enjoy your quiet January days. Spring is just around the corner!

How the waiting countryside thrills with joy when Bluebird brings us the first word of returning spring. Reflecting heaven from his back and the ground from his breast, he floats between sky and earth like the winged voice of hope.

- WL Dawson, *Birds of Ohio*, 1903

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