

BRAS Bluebird Newsletter January 2024

The month of January is probably the least busy month of the year in our Black River Audubon Bluebird program. Nest building by bluebirds will not start until March or April and any needed maintenance work on nest boxes is usually done either in late fall or early March. However, there are several preparatory things we can learn, do, or attend to help make the upcoming nesting season as successful as possible!

Educational programs within our local group and in the broader bluebirding circles are being planned, materials for upcoming monitoring season are being printed/obtained and participation in birding activities like back yard bird feeding, nature walks or citizen science studies are very rewarding especially during these gray winter days of January, February, and March.

Here are some classes or meetings you might consider attending in the next few weeks:

The Spring Kick-off meeting for all current and new bluebird trail monitors of the Black River Audubon Society will be held on Saturday March 9th from 2-4 pm at the Amherst public Library. If you have helped by monitoring the bluebird trails for our group in the past, please plan to attend this important yearly meeting to obtain materials and supplies for your individual trails, catch up on news and to meet with other trail monitors. It is always a fun time to get together and talk about bluebirds and our program! I'm hoping for great attendance from our trail monitors again this year! Please RSVP me so I can plan refreshments too. 😊

There will also be a class for persons who want to become new bluebird trail monitors for Black River Audubon Society which will be held on Sunday February 25th. Each year we are happy to welcome new volunteers to our group of monitors! If you are interested in becoming part of our trail monitor group, please contact me at pennybrandau@gmail.com to register for this important orientation class. New monitors will be mentored by other experienced monitors as they start to actually monitor nest boxes during nesting season.



The Ohio Bluebird Society will hold its annual day long conference this year on Saturday March 2, 2024 at Ashland University and registration is open until Feb 16th Information about the many speakers and their topics as well as registration details can be found on their website.

My husband and I attend the OBS conference every year and always leave with new knowledge, new friends, and a renewed commitment to bluebird conservation. Please join us!

<https://ohiobluebirdsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/OBS-2024-conf-registration-Final-V2-1.pdf>

A familiar activity called the Great Backyard Bird Count will be held this year February 16-19, 2024. It is hosted by Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society and Birds of Canada. See this link for information about the count. <https://www.birdcount.org/>

“Each February, for four days, the world comes together for the love of birds. Over these four days we invite people to spend time in their favorite places watching and counting as many birds as they can find and reporting them to us. These observations help scientists better understand global bird populations before one of their annual migrations.”

Whether you count one bird or hundreds of birds, participation is easy and fun for all ages.



The days of January, February and March are also good times to brush up on bluebird information by reading some well known books about bluebird conservation. Four of my favorite ones are listed below:

1. “The Bluebird Monitor’s Guide to Bluebirds and Other Common Cavity-Nesters” by Cynthia Berger, Keith Kridler, and Jack Griggs.
2. “The Beloved and Charismatic Bluebird” by Dean C. Rust
3. “Enjoying Bluebirds More: A Special Publication from Bird Watcher’s Digest” by Julie Zickafoose
4. “Bring Back the Bluebirds Even on Your Hand” (Paperback) by Andrew M. Troyer

Becoming a member of the state Ohio Bluebird Society <https://ohiobluebirdsociety.org/> or the national North American Bluebird Society <https://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/> is another wonderful way to support bluebird conservation at both the state and national levels. It is also another great way to receive regular bluebird information through their quarterly newsletters and other sponsored programs. My husband and I have been members of both OBS and NABS for many years and highly recommend them both!

Before all these programs, conferences and classes are over, bluebirds and other native cavity nesters will be visiting and claiming nestboxes. Spring officially begins this year on Tuesday March 19th- only 51 days away! The bulbs of the first snowdrop flowers and crocuses are already beginning to poke through the soil in our flowerbeds! It won't be long!!

I always look forward to hearing about the earliest bluebird eggs in our county and cannot wait to receive texts, calls or emails from many of you as those beautiful pale blue eggs start to arrive in your nestboxes! I always enjoy publishing information about the earliest bluebird eggs so please keep me informed! Last year's private homeowner's first egg was laid on March 19th and the first trail bluebird egg was laid on April 2. Amazingly these eggs did hatch and fledge! It will be interesting to see the dates for this year's earliest eggs! 😊



Many questions about bluebirds this time of year focus on how to help them survive the long and sometimes brutally cold Ohio winters. Like us, their basic needs are food, water, and shelter. A heated birdbath will be a real help in the winter when most water sources are frozen over. It is entertaining to watch the varied birds and even mammals that are drawn to the warmed water of a heated birdbath!

During winter a bluebird's diet changes from predominantly insects to mostly seeds, berries and small fruits. Bluebirds are not typically considered feeder birds but they will come for dried mealworms, peanut butter suet nuggets, sunflower hearts and even small currents or chopped raisins. Bluebirds prefer a platform feeder or will also use specially designed feeders. Many of

these are made with a 1 1/2inch hole in each end to give bluebirds access while excluding larger birds. Photo examples of a bluebird feeder and heated birdbath are seen below.



Lastly, do not block off the entrance to your nesting box during the winter unless you notice house sparrows using it. Bluebirds often roost together in natural cavities like abandoned woodpecker holes or empty nest boxes during severe weather. Stories of six, eight or even more bluebirds roosting in a nest box at night are not uncommon! Native Downy woodpeckers also are well known for their occasional use of bluebird boxes for wintertime roosting although they sometimes peck the entrance hole to enlarge it during their visits. A new hole guard in the spring easily fixes that!

Enjoy these quieter January days. Spring is just around the corner! Tuesday March 19th will soon be here to herald the start of the 2024 nesting season. I hope you make time to attend a class or program about bluebirds, join a bluebird organization, read, or learn more about bluebirds, and enjoy leisurely nature walks to observe these beautiful, beloved birds.

"Look deep into nature and then you will understand everything better"

Quote from Albert Einstein

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