

BRAS Bluebird Newsletter July 2020

For the past two months we have been in the thick of nestings by bluebirds and tree swallows and a few other species like house wrens and black capped chickadees. Of course, the battle to prevent nesting or nestbox takeovers by the invasive house sparrow seems unremitting from March through August! Every house sparrow you remove makes the trail a little safer for our native species though so keep up the good work!

Trails are much quieter from mid-July through the end of August since almost all of the tree swallows have fledged, black capped chickadees finished nesting in June and even second nestings by bluebirds are fledging in many cases. There will still be some bluebirds starting new nests through August first, and of course house wrens can nest through mid-August. Monitors often ask how often they should check boxes at this time of the year and my advice is to continue weekly checks as long as you have an active nest with eggs or chicks and then it is probably ok to reduce it to every 10-14 days until mid-August.

The June 1st count spreadsheet is finished and attached to this email. Please review the information it contains and let me know if there are errors or needed edits. "Thank you" to each person who shared their trail or home nestbox nesting information for this summary sheet! I also deeply appreciate Stephanie Bevan's work at creating the attractive, organized, and easy to read spreadsheet from my raw numbers! Thank you so very much Stephanie! 😊

Because of the known loss of at least 133 bluebird chicks in early May due to the cold, snow and rain I expected our June 1st numbers of bluebirds to be much lower than the 2019 numbers. It was totally surprising to see that their numbers had rebounded due to quick re-nesting and egg laying and the number of bluebird eggs, chicks and fledglings on June 1st were actually higher than on June 1st, 2019!! We had 459 total eggs, chicks and fledglings in 2019 and 489 this year. Wow! The Tree swallow numbers were slightly lower but very close to last year's numbers (1398 vs 1424), we had no successful black capped chickadee nestings this year and the house wren numbers were slightly higher than last year (76 vs 64). It will be fascinating to see what our end of year counts will be!! Please send your final numbers to me when your nestings are finished so they can be included in our final year end count. Thank you!



Pictured on the previous page is new monitor Jan Demarinis who demonstrated with Fritz Brandau how we are using masks and Social distancing while doing mentoring at Hale Road Loop trail in Oberlin. Jan and new monitor Eugenia Bobo will be primary monitors at this site.

Covid-19 has changed the way we do so many things! We are so very grateful for the way the monitors for our 33 trails have faithfully continued walking and managing their trails even as the world around us has changed! The opportunity to do outdoor “normal” activity of trail monitoring has been an incredible extra special blessing this year. The fresh air, exercise, wonder of the nesting birds and the sense of doing something helpful and good makes bluebird monitoring rewarding mentally, physically and emotionally. I have been thankful for it!

Naturalist John Burroughs (1837-1921) said it well. “I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in order.” It’s no wonder that our parks are bustling! We all have this need for soothing and healing, right?

The current pandemic has changed the way we look at life and the things around us. Things can seem crazy at times! Pictured below is a turtle at Sandy Ridge that made me laugh. His shaggy looking shell reminds me of the look so many of us sported after weeks of no visits to our beauticians/barbers! Seeing a groundhog in a tree at Sheldon’s Marsh was a crazy surprise! In a tree!! Mom Bluebird is pictured “recharging” on the Solar panel of our Ring nestbox camera (I need to try that I guess) and a house wren at Burrell House artistically “decorated” her nest of eggs with dry snakeskins! Now that is just creepy crazy! I won’t be touching those eggs! Lol!



Tim Jasinski, Wildlife rehab specialist at Lake Erie Nature and Science Center, called me on June 23rd to ask if we could help him find a foster home to place a clutch of young bluebirds who had

lost both parents due to a feral cat attack. The homeowner had tried desperately to find help for the young bluebirds when she realized that both bluebird parents were dead. We knew the chicks could only be placed in another nest that a) had chicks within one day of the same age as the orphans and b) were put in a nest that would not overtax the feeding capabilities of the foster parents. The new total number of chicks had to be 5 or less since that is the typical upper limit clutch size for bluebirds. After driving to the home of the orphaned chicks we saw that they were in serious condition due to lack of food, and estimated their age to be about 10-11 days old. Only two of the original 4 chicks were still alive. Both were chilled and only one was able to gape weakly for food. We knew they would soon die unless a home was found for them.

Marty Ackerman and Diana Steele monitor the trail at Westwood Cemetery in Oberlin and Marty sends me a weekly email update on the trail. Because of those accurate notes, I was able to see that he had a box with bluebird chicks of similar age AND there were only two chicks in the clutch! Perfect!!

I gently held the chicks to try to warm them as my husband drove from Sheffield to Oberlin and was able to feed a few live mealworms to one chick enroute. The other chick warmed up enough to start gaping for food by the time we arrived at Westwood so we were able to feed her a few mealworms also before placing them both in their new home with two attentive foster parents and two foster siblings.

Monitors Diana Steele and EJ met us and took over the care of monitoring this new family! Once a day for the next three days we supplemented the bluebird parents' need for additional food by placing some live mealworms on the box roof. Curbside service at its finest! These mealworms were quickly fed by the parents to the chicks! Happily, all four bluebird young fledged successfully a few days later! It was so rewarding to have a happy ending! It took a lot of different people working together to make it possible. Kudos to the great bluebird parents too! 😊 Pictured below: Monitor EJ and program coordinator Penny Brandau. Also pictured are the awesome bluebird parents who accepted and cared for two little orphans plus their own!





Marty and Glenda Carbaugh and Joey at their new trail at Burrell House. A tree swallow chick peers out the box hole before fledging.



Mill Hollow Bacon Woods monitor Ron Thomas and his daughter Valerie Deptula put a sparrow spooker on a bluebird box which held white bluebird eggs! This was the second nesting of this bluebird couple with white eggs this year.

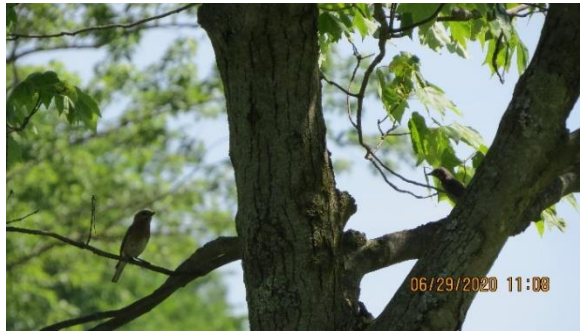


Tree swallows readily accept and benefit from the protection offered by sparrow spookers in areas where house sparrows are prevalent. Second photo shows a family of tree swallows enjoying time together in a tree near their nestbox after the young had fledged.

Sunbathing is used by some birds as part of their feather maintenance. The birds adopt a posture in which the body feathers are fluffed up and one or both wings are held out from the body with feathers spread. Birds from more than 50 families sunbathe, including bluebirds! It also might help them get rid of pesky parasites living on their skin and feathers.



Sunbathing female bluebird



Father- daughter photo (2 weeks post fledge), and mother and new fledgling in silhouette.



Wishing you good health, peace and time in nature to soothe your senses!

Newsletter and photos by Penny Brandau pennybrandau@gmail.com 440-670-3684