

BRAS Bluebird Newsletter- May 2021

There has been an explosion of egg laying by Tree Swallows in our area in the past 10 days! After several weeks of monitoring the gradual nest building by swallows it is exciting to see serious egg laying start! There are eggs in almost all of the TRES nests and nest checks take a little more time to get accurate counts of those beautiful white eggs nestled in soft feathered cupped nests. “Princess nests” is how our youngest granddaughter describes these nests! 😊



The bluebirds had a pretty rough start in the early April nesting. The snowy cold wet weather in late April and early May led to the loss of several dozen bluebird chicks on our trails and even at private homes. It is always hard to witness the loss of these young chicks due to conditions we have no control over like weather. Hypothermia and lack of insects can be deadly.

The “winner” of the earliest bluebird egg laid in our area was 94-year-old Ford Smith of North Ridgeville. His bluebirds laid their first egg on March 28th and had a clutch with a total of 4 eggs. Amazingly they all hatched and fledged in spite of the weather. Two other private homeowners had first eggs in March also- Deborah Nichols (March 29th) and Diane Lehman (March 30). Both of those nestings had losses however. Early nestings are nail-biters for those monitoring them. Supplementing with mealworms and fresh water is helpful but isn’t always enough.



Pictured above: Snow on April 21, 2021

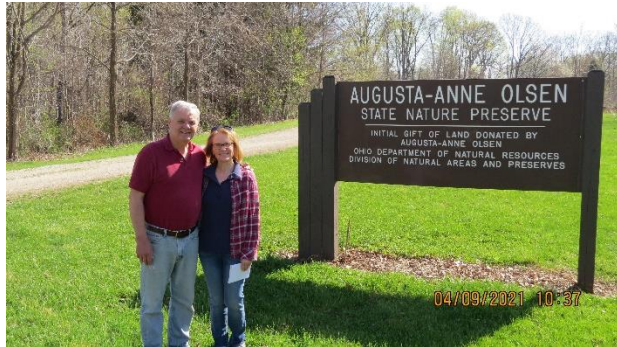
Earliest bluebird eggs in Lorain County

June 1st is an important date! It's the date that I request information about the early season contents of nest boxes on all Black River Audubon Society bluebird trails plus information from those who have bluebird nest boxes at their homes. Please check all of your nest boxes as close to June 1st as possible and report what is actually in each box around that date. I am interested in knowing what species are using the nest boxes (bluebird, tree swallow, black capped chickadee, etc.) and how many eggs or chicks are actually present. Then please let me know if you have already had any fledglings- how many and what species. For example, your report might look like this: "Box 1 has 5 bluebird eggs and has already fledged 4 bluebirds this year, box 2 is empty, box 3 has 6 tree swallow chicks, box 4 has 4 bluebird young chicks." If you found dead bluebird chicks or unhatched, abandoned eggs this year please mention that in your note to me as well as how many were lost. I will compile all this information in an "early season report" and send the information to all of you in the next newsletter. Thank you so much!! I really appreciate it! You can email the information to me at pennybrandau@gmail.com. This is a very important count for our bluebird program. Thank you for sending me your reports!

Fritz Brandau was busy this spring making lots of new bluebird boxes to replace some older nest boxes which need to be retired. Since our program has over 470 nestboxes and we estimate that most boxes have a life of around 10 years we need several dozen new ones each year to keep the trails in decent shape. Pictured below are 48 new boxes, lined up and ready to be put into service. Monitors Diana Steele & Marty Ackermann smile beside a new box on their trail at Westwood Cemetery in Oberlin. Some trails have needed several boxes replaced and some only a few. The lower left photo shows monitors Ron Thomas, Linda Shlapack, Val Deptula and her dog Annie on their trail at Bacon Woods. In the photo (bottom right) a bluebird was spotted perching nearby on the recreated eagle nest at Bacon Woods. Large aspirations? 😊



Now that many people are becoming vaccinated and Covid numbers are gradually decreasing we are thankful for the chance to again meet outdoors with some of our dedicated bluebird trail monitors. These photos are some of the more than fifty monitors in our group. The top left photo shows Jeff and Joy Brown (Olsen trail), top right photo is Barb and Bob Bement (Dalton Park, Wakeman). We are so grateful for all of the monitors in our program!



In the Left middle photo, Mark Pruitt, who monitors Findley State Park with his wife Cheryl, shows the work of a pileated woodpecker on a tree in his back yard! Impressive cavity nester!

On the prior page, the middle right photo shows New Russia Township monitor Sandy Kantelas and new monitors Cortland Hill and Ann Hastings. The happy group in the bottom photo are all new monitors at the South Equestrian Center trail at Carlisle: Courtney Brennan, Anni Pilisy, Sarah Oliver, Katie Brennan and Deb Ackerman.

Black River Audubon Society board member Kate Pilacky reports that there are now nine new Prothonotary Warbler boxes that have been installed in the Oberlin Preserve property. No prothonotaries have been seen yet but she is hopeful for a nesting or two this year and would be happy to have help with monitoring these boxes. If interested please contact Kate at kpilacky@wrlandconservancy.org.



Last year monitor Mike Smith reported finding 2 oddly shaped bluebird eggs and a “normal” egg in one of his bluebird nests at the Carlisle Equestrian Center trail. He noted that the odd shaped eggs did not hatch although the normal one did. Interestingly, this year another pair of strangely shaped eggs have been found in a nest box near the location of last year’s nesting! It is doubtful that these new eggs will hatch either but they are being regularly checked!



Oddly shaped Bluebird eggs in 2020 and in 2021.

An informative and helpful new sheet to determine the ages of bluebird chicks can be found on the North American Bluebird Society website. Check out this link:

[EABL Nesting Growth Chart.pdf \(nabluebirdsociety.org\)](http://nabluebirdsociety.org/EABL_Nesting_Growth_Chart.pdf)

There are several other very informative and helpful Factsheets on the website of the North American Bluebird Society. Here are a few of the ones I have found helpful: “Getting Started with Bluebirds”, “Nestbox Recommendations”, “Monitoring Bluebird Nest boxes”, “Predator Control”, “House Sparrow Control”, and “Mealworms



*“Blue skies Smiling at me
Nothing but blue skies Do I see
Bluebirds Singing a song
Nothing but bluebirds All day long”
-Irving Berlin, Blue Skies, 1927*