

# The Florida Bluebird Society

**Dedicated to the Protection  
And Conservation of Bluebirds in Florida**



Volume 5, Issue 3

July 2015

## FBS To Hold Annual Meeting at Penney Farms; Agenda To Focus on Bald Eagles and Bluebirds



Ann Releasing 500th Rehabilitated Eagle

Ann L. Harwood-Nuss, a devoted bird lover and conservationist, will be the featured speaker at the 2015 annual meeting of the Florida Bluebird Society in the Penney Retirement Community's Commons Building in Penney Farms, Clay County, on Saturday, August 29, at 10:00 a.m.

The annual meeting will include an election of board members, a short tour of the bluebird trail at the retirement community, and a general discussion of matters of interest to members of the FBS. The tour of the bluebird trail will include questions and answers on topics such as nest box installation, locations, and monitoring guidelines.

A light lunch will be served at noon following the conclusion of the meeting. Seating at the meeting is limited. Individuals planning on attending should RSVP by August 22 to [FloridaBluebirdSociety@gmail.com](mailto:FloridaBluebirdSociety@gmail.com).

Ann is a member of the Audubon Florida Board of Directors and has been active in the Audubon Florida Center for Birds of Prey EagleWatch Program for several years and currently coordinates the Northeast Florida citizen-scientist EagleWatchers. She is a

member of the advisory board for Audubon's Center for Birds of Prey.

In 2014 an effort was made to organize volunteers in Northeast Florida to participate in EagleWatch and monitor bald eagle nests during the nesting season. Season highlights include the collection of data from 27 volunteers and significant interventions for the protection of at least five active nests.

Ann recently had the honor of releasing the 500<sup>th</sup> rehabilitated eagle from the Audubon Florida Center for Birds of Prey.

In addition to her love of "the apex predator, the bald eagle," Ann is an

avid "backyard birder." In her backyard she has 15 feeders and three bluebird houses. If any cat dares to wander through her backyard it most likely will leave with a bell collar around its neck.

She says she "probably spoils" all 25 species she sees throughout the year in her backyard. She provides mealworms year-round for bluebirds, which also "seriously enjoy shelled sunflower seeds."

In her "other life" Ann is Emeritus Professor in the Department of Emergency Medicine at the University of Florida College of Medicine-Jacksonville. She retired after a 35-year career in academic medicine, including the University of Florida, where she served as Associate Dean of Educational Affairs. She was editor of a major medical textbook, the author of more than 30 peer review publications and 30 textbook chapters, and has done more than 60 national and international presentations. She has been awarded the University of Florida College of Medicine Society for Teaching Scholars Lifetime Achievement Award and the University of Iowa College of Medicine Distinguished Alumna Award for Achievement.

She chairs the board of the Jacksonville Public Library Foundation and serves on the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors for the Northeast Florida Community Hospice. Ann and her husband, Robert, live in Jacksonville.

## Poorly designed bluebird boxes could do more harm than good

# Nest Boxes May Make A Difference in Breeding Success; UF Study Calls for More Research on Different Designs



PETERSON NEST BOX

Nest box design has a significant impact on the breeding success of Eastern bluebirds.

A poorly designed nest box could end up being an “ecological trap” for bluebirds.

The Peterson nest box may not be the best type to use in hotter climates.

Those were among conclusions resulting from a research project conducted by the University of Florida Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation which compared Peterson and Gilbertson bluebird nest boxes.

The research project compared 37 pairs of Gilbertson and Peterson nest boxes scattered throughout

the UF campus in Gainesville. The study focused on three main issues:

- Whether bluebirds exhibited any preference for different nest boxes;
- Whether nest box design influenced breeding success;
- Whether temperature influences breeding success and offspring quality.

The study was conducted February through late July 2013 by Julie Perreau, an undergraduate scholar under the advisement of Dr. Kathryn E. Sieving, professor in UF’s Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation.

Paired nest boxes were installed 30 meters apart, with each pair 100 meters apart, at the same height, facing the same direction and care was taken to place both paired boxes in shade or sun to minimize any temperature variation. Boxes were monitored once a week during the first and second clutches.

The study found “The Gilbertson-nesting birds produced more, high quality young, suggesting an inappropriate box design could compromise fitness of parents and offspring, therefore box designs should be tested more widely to clarify the best choices for bird conservation.” (In Dr. Sieving’s presentation to the Florida Bluebird Society it was noted that “a small study in



GILBERTSON NEST BOX

Virginia found the bluebirds produced more offspring in [the] traditional square box than [in the] Peterson.”)

The UF study found that the “bluebirds selected both box types equally.”

This would seem to lay to rest the assumption that bluebirds prefer one type of nest box over another. (The study noted further research is needed to compare different box designs side-by-side.)

What happened inside the nest boxes made a difference.

While the total mean clutch size did not differ significantly

*Continued on Page 03*

Continued from Page 02

## UF Study Compares Peterson and Gilbertson Bluebird Nest Boxes

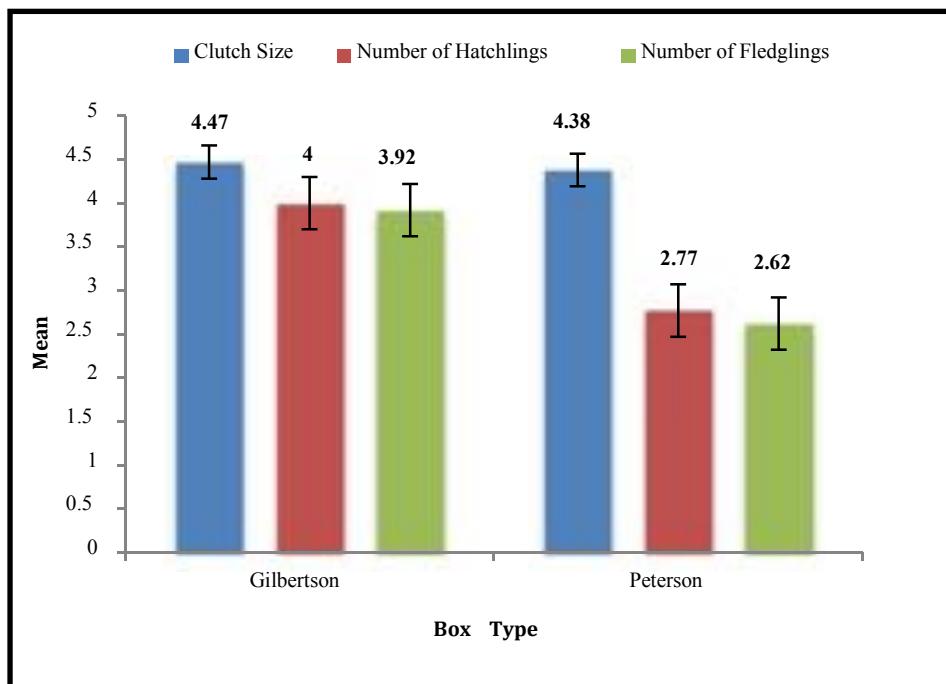


Chart highlights differences between Peterson and Gilbertson Bluebird Nest Boxes.

between the two boxes, there was a significant difference between the mean number of hatchlings and fledglings, according to the report.

“In summary, the Gilbertson box produced significantly more hatchlings than the Peterson box throughout the breeding season, despite starting out with similar clutch sizes. This was primarily due to difference in hatch rate that, in turn, led to a difference in fledgling rate.” the report states.

It was reported that “through the entire breeding season we found that the mean egg mass differed significantly between boxes...In summary, the Gilbertson box produced significantly heavier eggs, hatchlings and fledglings than the Peterson box.”

“This finding has important implications because survival of juveniles in their first year, up to breeding age, is known to be positively correlated with fledgling mass in many avian species.”

Nestlings in the Peterson boxes also had shorter wings at fledging than those in the Gilbertson boxes.

“Hatchlings in Gilbertson nest boxes also had significantly larger average wing cords [editor’s note - distance from the wing joint to the tip of the longest primary feather] than those raised in Peterson boxes, reflecting more advanced wing development at a stage when mobility is critical to survival.”

The report speculated that lack of sufficient food could result in arrested development of chicks in the Peterson boxes.

“One explanation is that crowding of older nestlings in narrow-bottomed Peterson boxes could hinder nestling access to food during deliveries by the parents, and may exacerbate intra-brood conflict (competition, fighting) leading to arrested wing growth.”

Peterson boxes also were consistently warmer than the Gilbertson boxes, according to the study of the nest temperatures during the first clutch only.

After the first egg was sighted temperature buttons programmed to record the temperature every five minutes for three weeks were

*Continued on Page 04*

	Box Type	Mean Egg Mass	Mean 5 <sup>th</sup> Day Chick Mass	Mean 12 <sup>th</sup> Day Chick Mass
Clutch 1	Gilbertson	2.85	21.25	28.13
	Peterson	2.76	15.45	28.3
Clutch 2	Gilbertson	3.05	13.88	23.54
	Peterson	2.47	19.69	23.27



*Continued from Page 03*

## UF Study Compares Peterson and Gilbertson Bluebird Nest Boxes

placed underneath the nesting material.

“Peterson boxes were consistently warmer during clutch one,” the report notes. This, in turn, led to the conclusion that “observed difference in reproductive success and offspring quality of Eastern Bluebirds may be attributed to a temperature effect, though more data are needed to confirm this link.”

In commenting on breeding success, the report states, “In summary, we found that box design has a significant impact on the breeding success of Eastern bluebirds.”



Julie Perreau, undergraduate scholar at the University of Florida who conducted the study, “Choice of Bluebird Nest Box: A Potential for Ecological Traps?” checks a Gilbertson box and nestlings. Ms. Perreau conducted the study under the advisement of Dr. Kathryn E. Sieving, professor in UF’s Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation.



Nestlings “squished”  
at bottom  
of Peterson Box

As a result, “Given that Eastern bluebirds selected both types equally, this suggests that under certain condition, a poorly designed nest box could create an ‘ecological trap’: a resource that is relatively unsuitable or dangerous to a species but that provides the same cues as one that is adequate or safe to use.”

“Therefore, in cases where only inappropriate or poorly designed nest boxes are available for

Eastern bluebird nesting, well-meaning enthusiasts could potentially create a population sink where highly attractive nest boxes reduce reproductive output so severely that the breeding population cannot replace itself.”

The report concludes, “While we provide evidence that these two boxes are equally attractive but cause different success, further work is needed to test all approved box designs side-by-side.

“In different regions perhaps only those that are proven to maximize reproductive success should be promoted, especially where a large proportion of the breeding population must rely on nest boxes.”

	Mean Daytime High (C°)	Mean Daytime Low (C°)	Mean Nighttime High (C°)	Mean Nighttime Low (C°)
<b>Gilbertson</b>	<b>31.29</b>	<b>17.43</b>	<b>24.62</b>	<b>15.43</b>
<b>Peterson</b>	<b>32.13</b>	<b>22.98</b>	<b>29.51</b>	<b>21.67</b>

# 864 Bluebirds Reported During 2015 Spring Blitz

## Duval Tops in State With 75 Bluebirds Reported; Leon 2nd With 72 Reported

A record 864 bluebirds were reported seen in 52 counties during the Florida Bluebird Society's 2015 Statewide Spring Blitz.

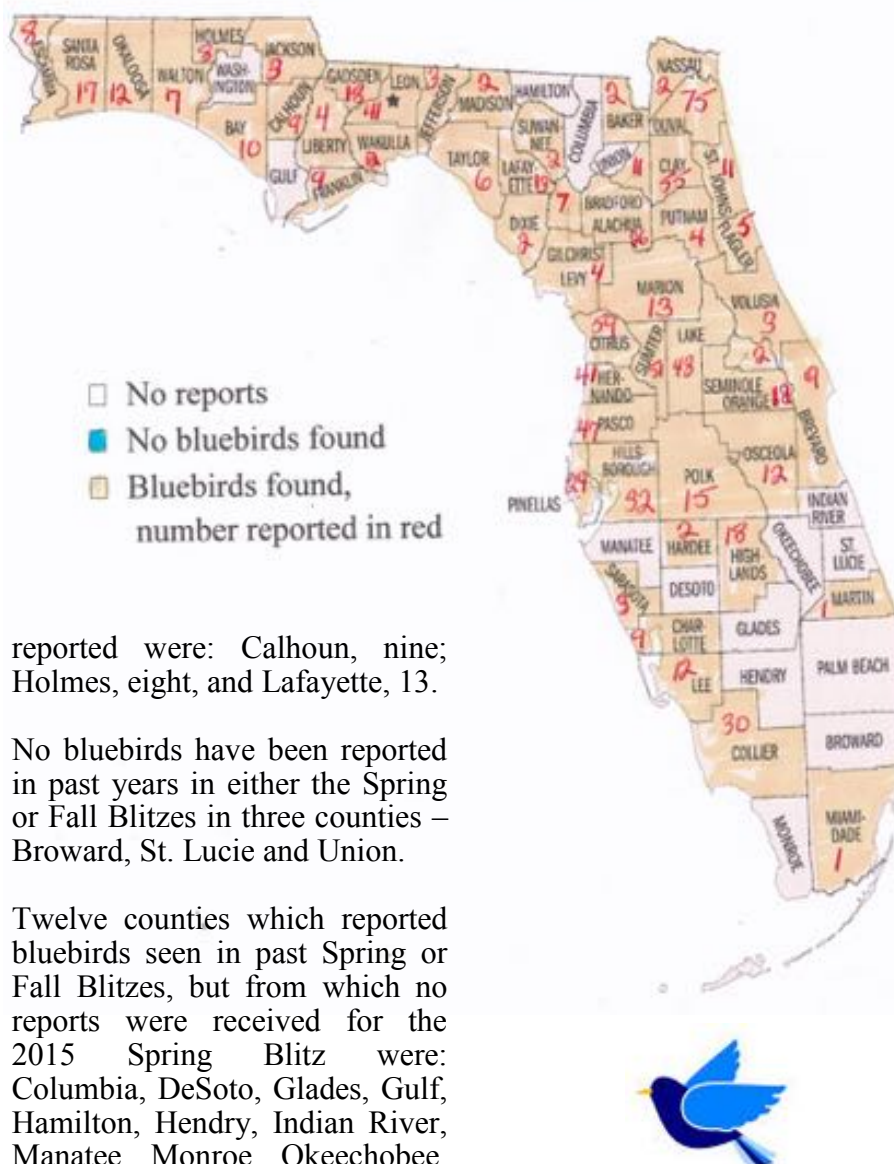
The count, taken from reports submitted to the FBS and from sightings posted on ebird, is 337 more than the previous Spring Blitz high of 527 reported in 2011, the first year for which records are available, and more than double the 411 bluebirds reported during the 2013 Spring Blitz.

The Statewide Spring Blitz is held to help determine where bluebirds are found in Florida during the nesting season. The FBS also sponsors a statewide Fall Blitz in November in an effort to learn what habitat bluebirds use and where they are found during the non-breeding season.

Seventy-five bluebirds were reported seen in Duval, the most for any county. Leon County was second, with 72 bluebirds reported seen, and Citrus County was third, with 59. Duval County also had 26 reports, the most from any county.

Bluebirds were reported seen for the first time during either the spring or Fall Blitzes in three counties. Counties and bluebirds

April 2015  
Statewide Bluebird Blitz Results



reported were: Calhoun, nine; Holmes, eight, and Lafayette, 13.

No bluebirds have been reported in past years in either the Spring or Fall Blitzes in three counties – Broward, St. Lucie and Union.

Twelve counties which reported bluebirds seen in past Spring or Fall Blitzes, but from which no reports were received for the 2015 Spring Blitz were: Columbia, DeSoto, Glades, Gulf, Hamilton, Hendry, Indian River, Manatee, Monroe, Okeechobee, Palm Beach and Washington.

## Why the FBS Conducts Spring and Fall Bluebird Blitzes

Question: I live on a golf course in Port St. Lucie; would I get any bluebirds if I put up a nest box?

Answer: The Spring and Fall Bluebird Blitzes help tell the FBS where bluebirds are seen in

Florida. In the above story and on the map you will note that no bluebirds were reported in St. Lucie County. You might put up a bluebird nest box and see what happens. If you do, please report the results to the FBS.

## Notes from the Nest Box

### What A Season! Everything from Green Eggs to High Nesting Bluebirds



Bluebird, circled in left pix, apparently was willing to fly to any height to find a suitable nest cavity; bird in right pix appears to have fecal sack in beak.

The chicks in the nest built by this bluebird better have a successful “first-flight.” Otherwise it’s going to be a long drop to the ground below.

Faith Jones, FBS treasurer, was doing volunteer work on the Florida scrub-jay project in the Lake Monroe Conservation Area in Volusia County when she spotted “the highest bluebird nest I have ever seen.”

A professional tree trimmer looked at the picture and estimated the

tree was 90 feet high. The nest cavity is an estimated 75 feet high.

Note that the bluebird sitting on the snag appears to have a fecal sack in its beak, indicating there are chicks in the nest.

“Pretty darn high for a bluebird nest, but also a prime example of using what is available,” Faith quipped.

(Ed question: Has anyone else ever recorded a nest this high or higher?)

#### **Donald Dixon in Tallahassee reports:**

We started a bluebird project four years ago in Los Robles Park by installing one nest box in the small park in the center of our neighborhood. We had three broods. The next year a neighbor put a box in his yard, I put one in mine. All boxes had several broods. The third year another put up a box and we got another one in an empty lot. All these locations provided at least three broods each season. So our neighborhood now has plenty of bluebirds to enjoy. The original clutch of eggs in our park in 2011 was white. Each year since, the eggs were white. This tells me it is the same pair still.





# WELCOME New Members

Richard Gorges.....Naples  
Fern Kinion.....Tampa  
Janie Simpson..Fleming Island  
Ann Weaver.....Jacksonville

## More “Notes from the Nest Box”

Jean Middleton reports that the Omni Amelia Island Bluebird Trail 2015 is off to a wonderful start!

In February we installed four new bluebird boxes and now have a total of fourteen boxes in place around the three golf courses and other community spaces.

This morning’s bluebird box check revealed:

One box that had 5 eggs last week now has very tiny bluebird babies.

Seven boxes have a total of 36 bluebird eggs: one box with 6 eggs and six boxes with 5 eggs each.

Three boxes have chickadees: one with a nest full of babies, and two nests with 6 and 5 lovely speckled eggs.

Three boxes are empty.

We’ve found that often a chickadee nest is followed quickly by a bluebird nest. We like growing chickadees, too.

This project has become very popular at Omni Amelia Island Plantation and has been a draw for nature-minded visitors as well as residents. During 2014 eight boxes were installed (2 more late in the season) and fledged a year's total of fifty-three bluebirds!

---

### NABS Fact Sheet on Monitoring Nest Boxes

A fact sheet, Monitoring Bluebird Nest Boxes, is available from the North American Bluebird Society.

The fact sheet covers “Why Monitor Your Nest Box?” “What to Monitor,” “How to Monitor,” and “How to Identify Nests and Eggs by Species.” Included are a variety of helpful illustrations such as the 20-day daily growth of bluebird nestlings and the nests and eggs of different birds.

# An Ordinary Bluebird with Not-so-Ordinary Green Eggs



Pix submitted by Dr. Byron E. Holly, of Brandon, in the Tampa area.

He wrote: “They have built nests in our two bluebird houses and laid eggs in one. Now have 4 eggs which are 9 days into incubation (1-10-15). Three of the eggs are green, one is blue. For a day or two all four were blue.

Last year we had three clutches which produced 10 fledglings. We put the houses up approximately two years before the first pair showed up. They are awesome birds.”

(Ed Note: Efforts to contact Dr. Holly to clarify the sequence were unsuccessful.



Has anyone else ever experienced this phenomenon?

If so, the FBS would appreciate hearing from you. Pix would be great!)

The Florida Bluebird Society is a registered IRS 501(c)(3) non-profit organization  
A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION  
MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICE BY  
CALLING TOLL-FREE WITHIN FLORIDA 800-435-7325.  
REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT OR  
RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE.  
REGISTRATION NUMBER IS CH292P