

# The Florida Bluebird Society

Dedicated to the Protection  
And Conservation of Bluebirds in Florida



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## FBS Board Approves Code of Ethics, Protocol for Monitoring Nest Boxes

Guidelines recognize  
need for nest boxes;  
seek to maintain  
“wild” status of birds

The Florida Bluebird Society’s Code of Ethics was adopted following months of discussion by the board members. A number of the provisions in the Code of Ethics were garnered from other organizations, such as the North American Bluebird Society and the American Birding

Association, and adhere to existing state and federal guidelines.

One recommendation included in the Nest Boxes Monitoring Protocol prohibits the handling of the bluebird nest, eggs, nestlings or parents during the breeding season.

The FBS recommendation was adopted following extensive conversations with representatives of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) during the granting of a Scientific Collecting Permit to the FBS. The FWC permit specifically states that the “permittee(s) are to inspect nest boxes without disturbing (touching) nests, eggs or young during the breeding season.” This provision adheres to the FWC’s principle that natural conditions be maintained as much as possible when interacting with bluebirds.

This provision is contrary to what many bluebird organizations advocate and contrary to what is practiced by many individuals who monitor bluebird nest boxes. This past season a study

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## Welcome to the Nest

Vanderberg Family - Clermont



## Is There A Perfect Predator Guard?

by Bill Pennewill

Snakes are the second leading cause of predation in bird nests, according to an article in the August 2012 issue of the American Birding Association's "Winging it."

A study conducted on Acadian Flycatcher and Indigo Bunting nests over a five-year period revealed that the biggest threat came from avian predators.

Of course, bluebirds aren't known to build nests at the ends of slender branches on understory trees, as the Acadian Flycatcher usually does, or in shrubs, like the Indigo Bunting. Although the bluebird is a cavity nester, as anyone who has put out a nest box knows, snakes can be A – if not THE – major problem.

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## FBS Adopts Code of Ethics

conducted on a 39-nest box trail determined there was no significant difference between leaving old nests in the boxes or removing the nests as soon as possible after the chicks fledged. Some boxes from which the nests were not removed fledged more birds this season than in 2011, while other nests from which the nests were not removed fledged fewer birds. Results of the first season's study were inclusive.

FBS principles state:

1. Always put the interests of the bird first. Be conscious of their welfare at all times, as they are the highest priority;
2. Consider the impact of all activities on the birds before taking action;
3. Do all possible to ensure that nest boxes and other structures provided for birds are safe;
4. Obey bird protection laws. Do not touch nests, eggs or birds; and
5. Keep disturbances to a minimum. Only open a nest box when necessary to collect data.

The FBS nestbox monitoring protocol includes five major recommendations:

1. Do all possible to ensure the safety and well-being of the birds;
2. Plan ahead to minimize disturbance;
3. Caution is the key;
4. Hands off; and
5. How often and when?

The Code of Ethics is available on the FBS website: [floridabluebirdsociety.com](http://floridabluebirdsociety.com).

## Is There A Perfect Predator Guard?

This was highlighted in recent emails to the Florida Bluebird Society, such as this one from Deb Kuhnly. She said, in part:

Can anyone tell me how to get the stovepipe predator guards? I spent \$60.00 on a 22" cone-type predator guard. It did not stop the 14" rat snake that got 2 nestlings from my 5th nest.

She said the nest box is mounted on a four-inch post.

Which raises the question: is there a perfect snake guard, one guaranteed to keep all snakes out of bluebird nestboxes?

The best I've seen – but don't use – is the Harry Krueger snake trap. Without going into a technical explanation, the Krueger snake trap is intended to do just that – entangle a live snake in the nylon netting. I made one of these and placed it on a box containing a nest cam.

There are several reasons why I decided not to use the Krueger snake trap. First, I found it somewhat difficult to make. Second, living in a retirement community, I was concerned about the aesthetics. The one I made wasn't very attractive to look at. Third, "What I would do if a snake got caught in the netting?"

I saw only two options, neither of which appealed to me. First, I could try to cut the netting and release the live snake. UGH! Or I could let the snake hang in the netting until it was dead, and then cut it out. DOUBLE UGH!

So I removed the Krueger snake trap and instead reluctantly decided to rely on the traditional stovepipe predator guard. Although the box was found.



Above photo shows traditional stovepipe predator guard, which proved to be ineffectual. A corn snake, still bulging from nestlings it had consumed, was inside. Photo below shows netting temporarily placed over stove pipe predator guard on box which had lost nestlings to a snake when traditional predator guard used.



## Is There A Perfect Predator Guard?

protected by a stove-pipe predator guard, snakes got into the box two consecutive years. This past year the box, with the same predator guard, made it through the season without being invaded by a snake.

This year two additional measures were tried. Immediately before the start of the nesting season marine grade (water proof) axle grease was applied to nest box poles, some with, others without, stovepipe predator guards. The stuff was messy to apply and midway through the season fire ants were seen running up and down on top of the axle grease. That will not be used again.

In another experiment, silicone was sprayed on the pole where the predator guard hung. There is no way of determining if this was a deterrent. It will be used next season in an effort to learn if it is effective.

So the question remains unanswered: is there a perfect snake guard?

**QUESTION:** - I was cleaning my nesting boxes for the bluebirds and found that there were wasps inside. I got them out. However they continued to comeback. Is there anything that would keep them from going in? I do not want to use poison.

**ANSWER:** If these are paper wasps attaching a nest to the ceiling of the nest box you don't have to use poison. Because I check all nest boxes at least once a week, I usually discover the start of a paper wasp nest before it become large. When I find paper wasps starting such a nest I remove it. (Be very cautious ! Wasps sting!) I then coat the ceiling with soap. I personally use the least expensive bar of soap I can find, and it will last a lifetime. The soap film prevents the paper wasps from attaching a nest to the ceiling of the box. This should solve your problem.

## FBS Conducts Study On Removing Nests After Birds Fledge

Removing nests as soon as the chicks have fledged is recommended by many organizations and is a practiced by many individuals when monitoring bluebird nest boxes.

Typical of such recommendations is that included in the North American Bluebird Society's Fact Sheet on Monitoring Bluebird Nest Boxes: "After any nesting effort has ended, either due to nest failure or successful fledging of the young, remove the used nest from the box. When a bluebird nest is successful, re-nesting in the same box may be encouraged if the first nest is removed. This can be done as soon as all chicks have left the nest. Females usually build a new nest."

This mantra, repeated endlessly and accepted practically without reservation by most people who monitor bluebird nest boxes, led to strong conversations between the Florida Bluebird Society (FBS) and the Florida Wildlife Commission (FWC).

The FBS applied for and received a Scientific Collecting Permit from the FWC. However, the permit stipulated that "Permittee(s) are to inspect nest boxes without disturbing (touching) nests, eggs, or young during the breeding season. Permittee(s) are to clean out the nest boxes after the nest season has passed in order to allow re-nesting in subsequent years."

Despite FBS protestations that such a provision was contrary to the usual practice when monitoring bluebird nest boxes, the FWC was determined not to modify the provision. The FWC argued that nest box conditions should be kept as "wild" as possible. The FWC

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# FBS Conducts Study On Removing Nests

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maintained that when a bluebird builds a nest in an abandoned tree cavity – such as that made by a red-bellied woodpecker – no one comes along and cleans out the old nest. Nor should anyone do that in a nest box, the FWC said.

The FWC also maintained that there were no credible scientific studies documenting the advantage of in-season removal of old nests after the chick have fledged. An FWC employee who serves on the FBS board then issued this challenge: Initiate a study to see if there is any advantage to removing nests as soon as the chicks have fledged.

After one season of a rather unscientific study the results were not conclusive. The jury is still out.

The study was conducted on 31 previously active nest boxes in the bluebird trail at the Penney Retirement Community in Clay County in northeast Florida. The boxes were selected randomly, with nests removed from every other one. Nests were removed from 16 boxes after the nestlings fledged; nests were not removed from another 15 boxes.

Unexpected complications were encountered in monitoring and recording data in those boxes from which the nests were not removed. Recording the number of birds which fledge usually is simple: count the number of eggs in a clutch and count the number of eggs in the nest after the birds fledge. If there were five eggs in the clutch and one egg remaining in the nest, it is reported that four birds fledged, barring any unusual circumstances.

When the old nest is removed it is torn apart to learn if it contained any buried eggs. When the old nest was not removed it was impossible to discover if there were any “hidden” eggs. Seven eggs were found in one box which had not been cleaned out. Three nests had been built in this particular box. At the end of the season there were three unhatched eggs in the top nest, two

unhatched eggs buried in the second nest, two unhatched eggs buried in the first nest.

Another interesting observation is that in one box in which all the eggs hatched and all the chicks fledged, the birds used the same nest to raise two additional broods. In those nests containing unhatched eggs, new nests were build on top of the old nests.

A few figures which may or may or may not have any meaning after only one year:

## Total renestings:

In 16 boxes from which nests were removed there were 14 renestings in 2012; 12 in 2011; 9 in 2010.

In 15 boxes from which nests were **NOT** removed, there were 23 renestings in 2012; 15 in 2011 (includes six chickadees); 11 in 2010.

## Total birds reported fledged:

In 16 box from which nests were removed 112 birds fledged in 2012; 99 in 2011; 80 in 2011.

In 15 boxes from were nests **NOT** removed 134 birds fledged in 2012; 101 in 2011; 92 in 2010.

## Total unhatched eggs:

In 16 boxes from which nests removed there were 31 unhatched eggs in 2012; 24 in 2011; 15 in 2010.

In 15 boxes from which nest were **NOT** removed there were 50 unhatched eggs in 2012; 20 in 2011; and 21 in 2010.

Obviously much more research must be done to come to any objective conclusion on the subject of removing nests during the season. Therefore the FBS seeks the assistance of all individuals monitoring bluebird nest boxes. The FBS email address is: [floridabluebirdsociety@yahoo.com](mailto:floridabluebirdsociety@yahoo.com).

## Great Photos With New Camera

A new camera and an early arrival for a field trip at Moss Bluff South, a Marion County Park, resulted in two outstanding photos by **Carolyn Retey**, of Sparr. Retey arrived at the park early to practice using her new camera. As she signed in at the gate a bald eagle called from a big pine tree by the parking lot. The bald eagle is the first photo taken with the new camera. As Retey drove into the parking lot a male bluebird landed on top of a fence post in front of the car. Because she had just taken a picture of the bald eagle, the camera was beside her on the front seat. Retey picked up the camera and took a picture of the bluebird through the front windshield. The results speak for themselves.



## PLEASE NOTE

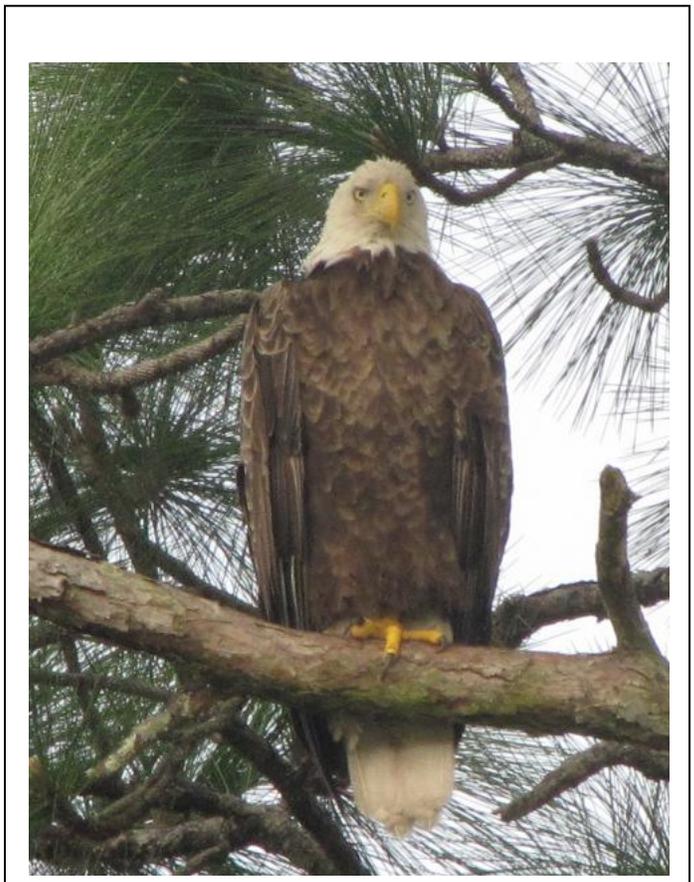
The Florida Bluebird Society Newsletter will not be published in December.

The next issue will be January 2013

The FBS wishes you all the very best during the Holiday Season.

Looking forward to a “very blue” New Year.

Keep those stories and photos coming!



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