



## Publication

### **Dedicated to Bluebird Enthusiasts**

The Florida Bluebird Society's mission is the conservation and protection of bluebirds and other federally protected cavity nesting bird species in North America. The FBS encourages a collaborative effort from its members and readers to provide information, ideas and articles to help collect and disseminate pertinent and relevant information pertaining to bluebirds in Florida.

The FBS is an affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society.

### **Nest of Contents**

**Page 1- Introduction**

**Page 2-3 - Tales from the Trails**

**Page 4 - Bluebird Trivia**

**Page 4 - Welcome New Members**

**Page 5-6 - Spring Statewide Bluebird Blitz**

**Page 6-7 - Help Wanted**

**Page 7 - 2012 Calendar of Events**

**Page 8 - Annual Membership**

**Page 9-10- **New** Q and A Section**

**Page 10-12 - Article Birds Can't Read**

**Page 13 - Thank you to FBS Contributors**

**Page 13-14 - FBS News and Online Information**



The photo is courtesy of Nancy Price in Stuart.  
The location was at Fox Brown Rd. Martin County, near one of the nest boxes.  
-FBS member Bev Poppke-

## Tales From the Trails



We would love to fly into your backyard and see pictures of your bluebirds or nesting cavity birds with informative and interesting stories you may have about them.

Please keep pictures to a maximum of 5 for each submission and a short story if you have one. We may have to edit your submission to accommodate space or to complement other newsletter content for that issue.

We can use several submissions per monthly issue so we will save multiples received for future issues.

Please email your nature pictures and stories to Barbie Arms, FBS Corresponding Secretary at [Floridabluebirds@aol.com](mailto:Floridabluebirds@aol.com)



Just before 10 am leaving for work, I saw the female exit the nesting box. It had already warmed up, nicely, so knowing it was hatch date, I took a quick peak showing five eggs. When I returned home around 6pm, I waited until I saw her leave the box, and took another look, to find all five had hatched. So these nestlings are less than 8 hours old, in this picture. I then witnessed one of the sweetest interactions, I have ever seen with one of my bluebird pairs. They were almost next to each other in the bare Crape Myrtle tree, with the male on a slightly higher branch than the female. He reached down, and she reached up, with the male, very tenderly nuzzling her. They were beak to beak, and it looked as he was kissing her. He did this several times. He was not feeding her. I've seen that many times. This was different, like the proud husband, thanking his wife for the gift, she had just given him.

And NO camera in my hands, at the time!

-FBS member Glenda Simmons-

**Deadline for submissions for the June issue is June 12, 2012**





Bluebirds have long been romanticized. Nineteenth-century naturalist John Burroughs described a bluebird as a “disembodied voice; a rumor in the air...before it takes visible shape before you,” revealing in its plumage “one of the primary hues, and the divinest of them all”. Blue is traditionally the color of heaven. No wonder a bird so celestially saturated seemed mystical.

**Welcome New Member!**



**Kim Belvin Jacksonville, FL.**  
**We are glad you joined our nest!**



Photo courtesy of Daryl and Berry Kuehnast

## Spring Statewide Bluebird Blitz



I think the most exciting news from this Blitz is that Bev Poppke, from Martin County Audubon, finally had some bluebirds. She started a trial about the same time we were organizing the Florida Bluebird Society. Until this spring, no bluebirds had shown interest in her nest boxes. She finally has some tenants and we were very pleased to hear the news. It was thrilling to finally receive a Blitz report from Martin County with some numbers instead of the “no bluebirds found” we have received on all previous Blitzes. We actually had two reports from Martin County. Congratulations to Bev for persevering with the trial. I guess maybe it is true when placed in the right location, “if you build it they will come.”

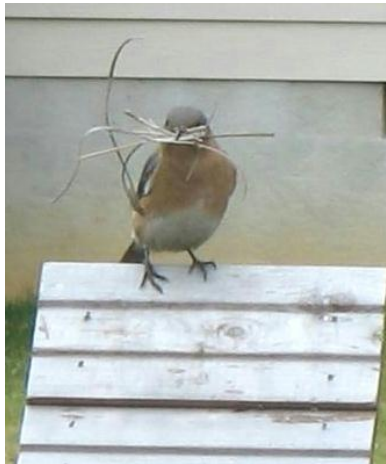
According to the reports sent to me plus those received via ebird.com, there were bluebirds documented in thirty-three (33) counties across Florida on April 13 and April 14. In addition to Martin County, we had our first reports from Okaloosa, Walton, Franklin, Wakulla, Baker, and Citrus Counties. A total of 477 bluebirds were recorded on 91 reports.

We were again fortunate that some newspapers across the State published stories about our Spring Bluebird Blitz. These stories not only help raise awareness of the Blitz, they also increase awareness of the Florida Bluebird Society.

We are appreciative of the hours that were spent searching for and observing bluebirds on our Blitz days. We look forward to another successful Blitz in the Fall.

-Faith Jones-

### **HELP WANTED**



The Florida Bluebird Society is looking for a few good people to help expand its efforts to conserve and protect bluebirds and other federally protected cavity nesting bird species in the Sunshine State.

Specifically, the Florida Bluebird Society is looking for a volunteer who has experience publishing a monthly newsletter. Barbie Arms, the current editor, is doing an outstanding job, but would appreciate a volunteer who would help share the monthly opportunity to publicize the activities of the Florida Bluebird Society. This would include assisting in the writing, editing and layout. Specific responsibilities would be worked out between Barbie and the individual volunteering to serve as co-editor.

The Florida Bluebird Society also is looking for avid and knowledgeable bluebird enthusiasts who would be willing to share their experiences and expertise with other interested individuals. These volunteers would have the opportunity to help provide the best available information on creating and maintaining bluebird nest boxes in Florida. Individuals serving as a regional county coordinator also would have the added opportunity of meeting other people from their area who share their interest in bluebirds.

Of course, all volunteers would be expected to comply fully with the mission and policy guidelines of the Florida Bluebird Society.

Contact Barbie at email [floridabluebirds@aol.com](mailto:floridabluebirds@aol.com)



## 2012 Calendar of Events

**Tuesday, May 22, all day**, Middleburg High School, 3750 County Road 220, Middleburg; Power Point presentations, "It Takes More Than A House" to ninth through 12<sup>th</sup> grade pupils of Amy Bridges, by Florida Bluebird Founding President Bill Pennewill.

**Wednesday, May 30, all day**, Oakleaf High School, 4085 Plantain Oaks Blvd., Orange Park; Power Point presentations, "It Takes More Than A House" to ninth through 12<sup>th</sup> grade pupils of Keri Milligan, by Florida Bluebird Founding President Bill Pennewill.



## Annual Membership

It is now time to renew your annual membership. All memberships expired the month of August, 2011. To streamline our procedures, August is the month for all membership renewals. We offer a number of membership categories, and trust you will find one that fits your budget.

A big THANK YOU to all of you who have already renewed your memberships. We truly appreciate your continued backing. We are especially grateful to those of you who decided to renew at an increased level of support.

If you have not already done so, we ask that you **please renew your membership today!**

<input type="checkbox"/> \$15.00 Single	<input type="checkbox"/> \$50.00 Organization	<input type="checkbox"/> \$10.00 Student
<input type="checkbox"/> \$25.00 Family	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100.00 Sponsor	<input type="checkbox"/> \$500.00 Life Member
<input type="checkbox"/> \$50.00 Patron	<input type="checkbox"/> \$10.00 Senior	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

Mail your check to : Faith Jones, Treasurer  
Florida Bluebird Society  
763 Mallard Drive  
Sanford FL 32771

A membership form is also available on the website  
<http://floridabluebirdsociety.com/> If you have any questions regarding your  
membership please contact Faith Jones at [puffin\\_fj@yahoo.com](mailto:puffin_fj@yahoo.com)



Here is a **new** Q and A section to help get your questions answered. Let us connect as members and help each other with our bluebirds!

Send your question so we can get the answer. Please let us know about any experiences you have regarding our questions. We will post your answers in the next newsletter.



**Question** from Faith Jones

Have you ever heard of a successful nest box on the side of a house? Linda Neale sent in this picture.



**Question**    **From Jim Anderson**

We live in a golfing community and have 20 bluebird houses scattered throughout the course. Many of the houses that we checked yesterday are empty, but there seems to be a family of small frogs taking up residency in some of them and removing them does not seem to help they tend to return. Can you tell me if frogs in the bluebird house will dissuade the birds from using that house? We do have one house that has 4 eggs but also had 5 small frogs (tree frogs?) in it. Will the birds continue with their activities or is there a way to keep the frogs out. Thanks in advance for your help. We are proud bluebird watchers.

Please send your Questions and Answers to Barbie at [Floridabluebirds@aol.com](mailto:Floridabluebirds@aol.com)



Photo courtesy of FBS member Phil Berry

## ARTICLE

### **BIRDS CAN'T READ:** Facts and Fallacies of Bird Boxes

*by Richard Poole and Christine Brown*

We have examined bird boxes for over 30 years and as the years progressed, we learned that birds can't read. Many birds disregard completely some instructions written in "How to build bird boxes."

Take the term "bird boxes." Residents in our boxes include: squirrels, flying and gray, various species of snakes, mice, bats, anoles, bees, wasps, raccoons and opossums. We call our boxes "nest boxes."

One of the first questions Richard is asked when discussing boxes is, "How high should I place my box." His reply, "Just high enough so that when I climb my ladder I can easily open the top and take a picture if I desire." Usually the height is 9-10 feet to box entrance. The impetus for this article occurred when he read, "screech owl boxes should be 30-40 feet high." A friend had a screech owl nest in a box 7 feet high. We have had many screech owls nest in our boxes.

Other fallacies include:

- "Everyone knows, a purple martin box should be 10 feet plus high." We have seen two martin nests in one wood duck box with the entrance 6 feet above ground.
- "A great crested flycatcher box should be over 8 feet high." We've seen a great crested flycatcher nesting in a 'bluebird box' with a hole 4 feet above the ground.
- "If you want a certain bird, you have to build a box for that bird's specifications." See purple martins above. We have raccoons and opossums in the neighborhood. Richard decided they should have a box. The floor was 10" x 10", the height 18 inches. A great crested flycatcher nested in it (Fig. 1). Some commercial boxes for red-bellied woodpeckers are 9 1/2 x 7 3/4 inches. Question: what is the diameter of a hole made by a red-bellied woodpecker? Maybe four inches at the most and we have had red-bellied woodpeckers nest in boxes as small as 3.5" x 5.5" x 10" (Fig 2).
- "If ventilation holes aren't drilled at the top, the birds will roast." Knowing heat rises Richard had trouble thinking anyone would write this. But we decided to have a test. Yes, our test showed the ventilated boxes were cooler, by 0.9 degrees C. We published the experimental procedure in Florida Field Naturalist 36:3, p.64. While checking eastern bluebird boxes in central Florida we found 4 young. They were in a 'bluebird' box but one was larger than the others (Fig. 3) A cowbird? We waited and as they grew feathers we learned that all were bluebirds. We inquired about the cause of the large one. The best answer we received was, "it was the first egg laid and the temperature was hot enough to start incubation." Usually the female waits until the last egg is laid to start incubating them, so this one got an early start!

The size of the hole will exclude larger birds, if squirrels don't enlarge it. But the size of the hole will not exclude smaller birds or other animals. We put metal flashing around our holes. Someone in the past decided screech owls need a 3 inch hole. Our screech owls have nested in boxes with 2 1/4" holes (Fig. 4). The recommended standard size hole for wood ducks is 4 x 3 inches. Richard made that size at first, but using a drill is a lot easier than a jig saw. His holes are now 3.5 inches which is OK by the wood ducks. As he was measuring the width of the box to put the hole in the middle he asked himself, "Why the middle?" so he drilled the hole to one side. The result was that birds laid their eggs on the side furthest away from the hole.

We have enjoyed our experiences with nest boxes. We hope you will place some in your area. Someone once asked Richard, "If I buy your box, will you guarantee I'll get a screech owl." "No," he replied, "but if you don't get the box, I'll guarantee you won't get a screech owl. And don't be surprised if some other critter takes up residence." Birds can't read!

Fig. 1 Great crested flycatcher eggs in box 10 x 10"



Fig. 2 Red Bellied Woodpeckers in box 3.5" x 5.5" x 10



These are hands of a licensed bird bander



Fig.3. Eastern bluebird nestlings from same brood showing size difference.



Fig.4. Eastern screech owl in box with 2 1/4" hole



## Thank You

In 2011, the Florida Bluebird Society was fortunate to have Organizational Members, Sponsors, and a few generous contributors that we would like recognize. We acknowledge and thank the following special members for their support:

BASCA, Inc., Orange Park FL ([bascainc.org](http://bascainc.org))  
Jeff & Marj Bryant  
Bruce Darnell  
David Foster (in honor of)  
Fred Vroom  
Gainesville Garden Club  
Col. Burton Walrath  
Wild Birds Unlimited, St. Johns ([jacksonville.wbu.com](http://jacksonville.wbu.com))  
Wild Birds Unlimited, Tallahassee ([wbutallahassee@centurylink.net](mailto:wbutallahassee@centurylink.net))

### **\*\*Reminder\*\***

If **you** are planning to change **your** email address please inform us and send updates to Barbie. Also if you would like to receive any back issues of our newsletters please contact Barbie at email address [floridabluebirds@aol.com](mailto:floridabluebirds@aol.com)

**Want to communicate with the Florida Bluebird Society, or simply have a bluebird question? Please visit our website**

**Website** <http://floridabluebirdsociety.com/>

**Or**

**Email:** [floridabluebirdsociety@yahoo.com](mailto:floridabluebirdsociety@yahoo.com)

**Facebook:** <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Florida-Bluebird-Society/146994685328275>

The Florida Bluebird Society is a registered IRS 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

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REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE.

REGISTRATION NUMBER IS CH292P

Goodbye and see you next month!



Photo Courtesy of Debra Kuhnly