

The Florida Bluebird Society

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



Volume 4, Issue 4

October 2014

FBS Elects Cheri Martin-Spray President During Annual Meeting

Succeeds Bill Pennewill As Founding President

More than 80 bluebird enthusiasts attended the Florida Bluebird Society's (FBS) annual meeting, held in Inverness on Aug 16th, 2014.

Founding President Bill Pennewill opened the meeting with a brief history of the FBS. The attendees then were treated to guest speakers who one by one told their stories of trails, tributes, rescues and studies.

Diane Otten, from Ft. Cooper State Park in Inverness, spoke about the Withlacoochee Trail. A railroad track at the turn of the last century has been transformed into a walking and biking trail that folks come from all over the

world to enjoy. The trail spans three counties, and is dotted with bluebird nesting boxes built by Louis Nipper. This massive bluebird trail is monitored by FBS Board Member Louis Nipper, and FBS members Barney Barnhart, Chet Bennett, Henry Koelblinger and Roger Williams.

Michelle Kline, of HOPE Wildlife Rehabilitation, brought along a few beautiful feathered friends. Each bird had been rescued, but due to their injuries can never be released. They now "work" as animal ambassadors. She shared their stories, and spoke about what to do if a person finds an injured, sick or orphaned animal.

Possibly the saddest story was a screech owl. A well-meaning, but ill-informed person found the bird



NEW PRESIDENT—Faith Jones, left, and Bill Pennewill, founders of the Florida Bluebird Society, congratulate Cheri Martin-Spray on being elected president of the organization.

with an injured wing. Instead of immediately contacting a licensed

Continued on Page 02

Continued from Page 01

Cheri Martin-Spray New President of Florida Bluebird Society



NOT JUST BLUEBIRDS — Michelle Kline, of HOPE Wildlife Rehabilitation, holds a peregrine falcon during her presentation to the Florida Bluebird Society during the annual meeting in Inverness on August 16.

wildlife rehabilitator the individual thought the bird could be cared for and possibly kept as a pet. After a short time the person realized the owl was not doing well and finally contacted HOPE. The bird was badly malnourished, dehydrated, and it was too late to fix the injured wing.

Mike Kell told the story of West Pasco Audubon Society's Bluebird Project, which was started in 2009 by Ken Tracey in Jay B. Starkey Park. Unfortunately there are no

records of the nest boxes being monitored. Mike became involved in 2012. The existing boxes were repaired or replaced, and the trail was expanded to Seven Springs Golf Course, Trinity College and Trinity Presbyterian Church property. The trail now is monitored and records are kept. Mike brought an example of the nest box used on the trail.

Ken Custer shared the story of the genesis of his personal bond

with bluebirds. He explained the process he followed to obtain permission to start a bluebird trail along the Suncoast Trail. The trail was started with nesting boxes donated by Louis Nipper. Ken also showed photos of some of the items he has developed to help bluebirds. We all were very impressed with the garden he designed as a tribute to his mother.

Dr. Katherine Sieving, Professor in the Dept. of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation at the University of Florida, shared the results of a nesting box study conducted this spring. The study compared Petersen style boxes versus Gilbertson style boxes. The study compared temperatures in the boxes. The temperatures were significantly higher in the aluminum wrapped Peterson boxes. Chick development was also monitored and compared. Bone structure was similar between the boxes, but a significant difference in feather development was documented. The flight feathers of the chicks fledging from the Peterson boxes were not as large. Significantly, the Gilbertson nest boxes had 1.5 times the productivity of the Peterson nest boxes.

The FBS thanks all who attended the meeting, and look forward to seeing you at future meetings.

Fall – A Time of Change for Birds and the FBS

By
Cheri Martin-Spray
President
Florida Bluebird Society

There are many changes that occur in the fall. Probably the biggest change that comes to mind is the changing colors of the leaves. They dazzle us with their yellows, reds and oranges as they prepare to drop and make way for new growth in the spring.

Fall also brings changes to the bird world. By now their fresh new feathers have come in and many are ready to migrate south for the winter. And, of course, fall also brings the return of football!! Like changes in nature, humans need to make changes as well.

SINCE THE LAST issue of our newsletter the Florida Bluebird Society has made a few changes of it's own. A renewed Facebook page and a re-vamped web site. We've also had a change in officers and directors. Effective with the August 16th annual meeting, I was voted President of FBS when founding President Bill Pennewill stepped down to take over as newsletter editor.

I am thrilled at the opportunity to serve as President. There are a few tasks I hope to accomplish during my term. I will need your help with fulfilling some of these goals. I hope you

will feel compelled to volunteer when the time comes.

More on that later.

I would like to take this opportunity to tell you a little about myself.

MY HUSBAND and I moved to Citrus County from Hillsborough County, where I grew up, about five years ago. Before moving here I had not seen an Eastern Bluebird since I was a little girl, when we would go to my grandparents' weekend cabin on the backwaters of the Withlacoochee River, not far from where I live now. In those days bluebird numbers were on the decline. My older brother pointed one out to me one weekend at the river place and explained why it was a real treat to see an EABL.

Of course, returning home to the city, I did not see any bluebirds in our backyard. So I would ask why. My mom would say, "Those are country birds." So, I did not see another bluebird until moving to the country. But I never forgot about that pretty little blue bird that I saw so many years ago. I actually thought they had become extinct.

IMAGINE HOW delighted I was to see a male bluebird at our birdbath one April evening. I was so excited! I had to call my husband right away to

tell him the good news. But he didn't understand why I was so thrilled to see a blue jay. NO, not a blue jay, I explained, an Eastern Bluebird. Like from my childhood!

The next evening, to my surprise, Mr. Bluebird was back, and he brought the Mrs. with him. Oh joy! A pair!! I watched for those two birds every evening after that. A few weeks later they brought a couple of little ones with them to play in the birdbath.

THAT'S ALL it took. I was hooked. I got on the Internet and read as much as I could and even checked out books from the library. I put up a couple of nesting boxes and within a week I had a pair of takers. Five baby blues successfully fledged from that first nesting.

I've been blessed with many successful nestings since that time, and thanks to the Florida Bluebird Society I have learned many important factors about providing them with an environment suitable to, hopefully, ensure many more successful nestings.

So, in closing, I want to wish you all a Happy Fall. May your yards be filled with more than just falling leaves. May it be dotted with many happy, healthy, feathered friends.





THANK YOU — The Florida Bluebird Society could not exist without the support of those individuals who year-after-year renew their memberships. Your continued support is vital to the continued success of the FBS.

There are too many who have renewed to list by name, but that does not diminish the appreciation of knowing that you join with the FBS in the conservation and protection of bluebirds in Florida.

Welcome to the Nest New Members

Marcie Clutter	Inverness
Brenda Dillingham	Weeki Wachi
Mary Gates	Inverness
Ken & Carolyn Godwin	Jacksonville
Lois Kraemer	Inverness
Albert & Lynn Morneault	Citrus
John Pollock	Land O Lakes
John Prescott	Hernando
Jeffery Smith	Inverness

WE ARE THANKFUL FOR OUR SPECIAL MEMBERS

The Florida Bluebird Society thanks those special individuals and organizations for their generous financial support

Patrons

Candace Bridgewater - Fleming Island
 Carl & Sylvia Dunham - McAlpin
 Cheri Martin Spray - Inverness
 Thomas Sippnell - Orlando
 Burton Walrath - Jacksonville

Organizations

Audubon of the Western Everglades
 BASCA - Orange Park
 Wild Birds Unlimited - St. Johns
 Wild Birds Unlimited - Tallahassee

Life Members

Madison E. Alderson - Williston
 Louis Nipper - Hernando

2014-2015 Sponsors

David Foster - Jacksonville
 Lois Kraemer - Inverness
 Katie Sieving - Gainesville
 Dick Yeager - Penney Farms

Third Year of Study on Removing Nests Reverses Findings from Past Two Seasons

If anyone pretends to know everything there is to know about bluebirds, turn around and walk away.

That's what I frequently tell people.

Then, after a two-year study and concluding that it's better not to remove nests immediately after the chicks have fledged, I discover that may not be totally accurate. So now I don't know as much as I thought I knew.

That's what I've learned from the third year of the Florida Bluebird Society's (FBS) study to determine if there is any significant variation in the success rate of bluebirds from boxes where nests are removed immediately after the chicks fledge as opposed to not removing used nests until the end of the season.

Because the Federal Migratory Bird Act prohibits the in-season removal of nests, the FBS applied to the Florida Wildlife Commission (FWC) for a Scientific Collecting Permit. This was done to allow FBS members to legally remove used nests during the season.

Much to the chagrin of the FBS, the FWC permit specifically states, "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 renesting in subsequent years."



The FWC gave two major reasons for its stance:

First, nests are not removed in the wild, and

Second, there is no known or credible data to support the necessity of removing nests during the breeding season.

In order to gain some data the FBS initiated a very "unscientific" study of the 39 nest boxes on the bluebird trail at the Penney Retirement Community in Clay County. During weekly monitoring the nests were not removed from every other box. Only those nest boxes which were active during the season are included in the studies. This results in a varying number of boxes being included in the study.

The success rate is measured in the average number of birds fledged per box. This year, for the first

time since the study was initiated during the 2012 season, the average number of birds fledged and the average number of renestings was higher for those boxes where the nests were removed, as opposed to those boxes where the nests were not removed (5.3 vs. 8; 2 vs. 2.5) See attached chart.

As in past years, more eggs were laid in those boxes where the nests were removed. This year, however, with a same number of active boxes in both categories, there was a significant difference (163 vs. 121).

It compiling the report there was a question about including some boxes because of extenuating circumstances. But since there always are extenuating circumstances in nature, only in one instance was an exception taken. Three eggs and one nestling disappeared in a box from which the nests were to be removed. This was believed to be the work of a snake.

Another box where nests were not removed was included despite outside human influence. The nest box is located in a community garden near a grape arbor. This year reflectors were hung from the grape vines to scare away birds. It worked. Prior to the installation of the reflectors four birds fledged from the box; after the installation of the reflectors there was no more activity at that box nor were any bluebirds observed in the area where previously seen.

Continued from Page 05

Third Year Study of Nests From Boxes Reveals Different Findings

Not removing nests during the season makes it more difficult for Lynn Overstake, my monitoring partner, and myself to determine what is happening on a week-to-week basis. This is illustrated by one box in which the nests were not removed during the season. Using eggs laid and unhatched eggs as the key for determining the number of birds which fledge, we thought

this was a very productive box. When cleaning out the box at the end of the season we were surprised to find six eggs buried in the first two nests, in addition to three unhatched eggs in the top nest. As a result we had to readjust our figures.

As previously noted, this is an on-going study and any attempt to draw a firm conclusion based on removing or not

removing nests during the season would be premature.

In order to help learn more about this activity, the FBS invites other participants who monitor their nest boxes regularly (at least once a week) and maintain reliable and accurate records to participate in the study. If interested, contact me at floridabluebirds@yahoo.com prior to the upcoming nesting season.

Chart comparing averages per box for different years

Number of Active Boxes	Eggs Laid	Eggs Hatched	Unhatched Eggs	Birds Fledged	Renestings
2012					
13 (NOT removed)	166	117	49	116	36
Average per box	13	9	3.5	8.2	2.5
18 (nests removed)	176	136	40	136	38
Average per box	9.7	7.5	2.2	7.5	2.1
2013					
14 (NOT removed)	155	109	46	109	35
Average per box	11	7.8	3.3	7.8	2.5
19 (nests removed)	168	106	62	105	39
Average per box	8.8	5.5	3.2	5.5	2
2014					
15 NOT removed)	121	79	42	79	30
Average per box	8	5.3	2.8	5.3	2
15 (nests removed)	163	122	41	120*	38
Average per box	10.8	8.1	2.7	8	2.5
*Two birds hatched; one fully developed chick found lodged between nest and door, another chick found lodged in entrance opening with half of head and skull missing					

Along the Bluebird Trail — Some Interesting Observations from the 2014 Nesting Season

By
Bill Pennewill,
Newsletter Editor
Florida Bluebird Society

This past nesting season on the bluebird trail at the Penney Retirement Community (PRC) has been a bit unusual in a number of ways, with some oddities observed for the first time since detailed record-keeping was initiated in 2009.

In May four bluebird eggs were laid on the bare floor of a nest box. In a previous nesting four eggs had been laid, four birds had fledged, and the nest had been cleaned out in preparation for a new nesting. This box is part of a study the Florida Bluebird Society is conducting in an effort to determine if there is any significant variation in the success rate between cleaning out and not cleaning out nests during the season immediately after the chicks have fledged.

A few weeks later a new nest was built on top of the eggs, laid on the bare floor, one of which was pushed against the door and removed so it wouldn't fall out and break on the ground and possibly attract any "critters." Four eggs were laid in the new nest built on top of the four eggs. The eggs in the nest eventually hatched and four chicks fledged.

When the new nest was removed there was no evidence of the three remaining eggs which had been laid on the bare floor.



Four Eggs Laid On Bare Floor of Nest Box!

The questions remains: What happened to the three remaining eggs? Were they removed by the female bluebird before she built the new nest?

Can anyone confirm that "missing" bluebird eggs are, in fact, sometimes removed by an adult? A few years ago, when watching a nest cam in one of the boxes at PRC, a bluebird removed the eggs from a chickadee nest. The bluebird later "set up housekeeping" in the box and fledged a number of chicks.

Then there was the case of the "headless" bird. When checking a box with Lynn Overstake, my monitoring partner, there seemed to be some trash or something jammed in the entrance hole. Even with my binoculars,

which I carry while monitoring the next boxes, we couldn't determine what it was. There had been five chicks in the box and we expected to find them gone. When we opened the door of the box we discovered a fully developed bluebird with its wings outstretched but minus half of its head and skull lodged in the opening.

We have no idea what could have gotten the bird, but there has been some speculation that one of the on-campus shrikes could be the culprit. I don't know.

Another box presented a puzzle because of the number of eggs laid and what happened to them. The box had been very productive in past seasons, but it was somewhat disappointing to see no eggs being laid in his box until June, when we found a nest with four eggs in it. This is one of the nests which was not being cleaned out, so the eggs were not removed even though they did not hatch. A month later three more eggs were laid in the same nest. They also did not hatch. In August we discovered three unbroken eggs, two broken eggs, and two eggs missing. The nest did not appear to be disturbed, so there is no way of determining precisely what happened.

There is some speculation that mockingbirds, who had a nest nearby, may have driven the female away after she laid the eggs. There are times when mockingbirds will drive

Sampling of Photos from Florida Bluebird Society's Annual Meeting in Inverness on August 16, 2014

FBS BOARD MEMBERS —

Cheri Martin-Spray, second from left in photo at right, the newly elected president of the Florida Bluebird Society, is shown with FBS board members attending the annual meeting in Inverness on August 16, 2014. With Cheri are Louis Nipper, left, Faith Jones, Treasurer and one of the founders of the FBS with Bill Pennewill, outgoing president, and Ken Custer

Cheri Martin-Spray, newly elected president of the Florida Bluebird Society, speaks to the more than 80 bluebird enthusiasts who attended the annual meeting of the FBS in Inverness, on Aug 16th, 2014.



Sampling of Photos from Florida Bluebird Society's Annual Meeting in Inverness on August 16, 2014



A BIRD ON HER SHOULDER—A rehabilitated barred owl sits on the shoulder of Michelle Kline, of HOPE Wildlife Rehabilitation, as she speaks to the folks attending the Florida Bluebird Society's annual meeting in Inverness on August 16, 2014. Michelle described HOPE's efforts to rehabilitate injured wildlife and explained what to do if a person finds a sick or injured bird.



WHICH NESTBOX IS BESTER? - Dr. Katherine Sieving, Professor in the Dept. of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation at the University of Florida, shares results of a study comparing Petersen style nest boxes versus Gilbertson style nest boxes during the annual meeting of the Florida Bluebird Society. Her study showed that the Gilbertson boxes produced more offspring, having 1.5 times the productivity of the Peterson nest boxes.



Find us on
Facebook

Do you have a bluebird photo or story you would like to share with others? Or maybe you have a question about bluebirds.

Robyn Sieron is the Florida Bluebird Society's Facebook Coordinator, and she looks forward to more folks taking advantage of the Facebook page to help stimulate interest in bluebirds and the Florida Bluebird Society.

Items can be sent to Robyn at rsieron@comcast.net or Faith Jones, Treasurer, at floridabluebirdsociety@gmail.com.

Check out Our New Web Page

Ken Bell, the Florida Bluebird Society's Webmaster, and Faith Jones, the FBS Treasurer, have completely made over the FBS Home Page, and it's a beauty.

The site has been redesigned to facilitate navigation, allow more photos to be posted, viewers can interact through blog postings, and provides more information.

FBS 2014 Fall Bluebird Blitz Scheduled Nov. 7-9; Extended to Three Days

The Florida Bluebird Society's 2014 Statewide Fall Blitz will be held Nov. 7-9. The Blitz has been extended to three days this year to allow more people to participate.

The FBS holds a Blitz in the Spring and Fall to help determine the status of the Eastern Bluebird population in Florida. The Spring Blitz will help show where Bluebirds are breeding and nesting in Florida. The Fall Blitz will help show what habitat Bluebirds use

and what they eat during the non-breeding season.

Participation is easy! Choose a spot, count the bluebirds, send the FBS a report.

There are 3 ways to submit your sightings to the FBS.

Enter your data on a spreadsheet or on a paper report form. The spreadsheet or report form can be downloaded from the web at: floridabluebirdsociety.com.

Immediately after the Blitz either email the completed form to floridabluebirdsociety@gmail.com, or mail it to: Faith Jones, FBS Statewide Bluebird Blitz Chair, 763 Mallard Drive, Sanford FL 32771.

Or enter you sightings at ebird.org. If you participate in Cornell NestWatch you will use the same login and password to access ebird.



Continued from Page 07

On the Bluebird Trail; Finding the Unexpected

bluebirds away when the two are competing for the same foraging territory. But twice? Could a mockingbird stick its head inside the opening of a next box and destroy or steal bluebird eggs?

Keeping accurate and detailed monitoring records is a great way to discover some of the unusual events which occur along a bluebird trail. If you have any stories you would like to share with other members of the Florida Bluebird Society send them to me at floridabluebirds@yahoo.com.

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