

The Florida Bluebird Society

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



Volume 6, Issue 1

January / February 2016



Photo by Glenda Simmons

Regional Meeting Saturday February 6, 2016 Tallahassee

"How to Change Your Landscaping to Benefit Birds, Bees Butterflies and other Wildlife" will be the topic of our special program presented by Jody Walthall and Donna Legare wildlife ecologists and owners of Native Nurseries.



Native Nurseries
THE STORE FOR NATURE LOVERS

Est. 1989

The meeting will be held in the Eastside Branch of the Leon County Public Library located at 1583 Pedrick Road in Tallahassee. Their presentation will commence at 11:00 a.m. It will be preceded by an informal *Meet & Greet* starting at 10:30 a.m.

After the program you are invited to visit the nearby home of Charter FBS member Glenda Simmons who has converted her suburban yard to a well-landscaped refuge for wildlife.

We hope you will attend this special meeting. Bring your bluebird questions and we will do our best to answer them.

To assist with refreshment plans, please RSVP by February 1, 2016 to: FloridaBluebirdSociety@gmail.com.

Lodging: These motels are within two miles of the library.

Country Inn & Suites
3080 Walden Rd.
(850) 942-9955

Best Western Seminole Inn
6737 Mahan Drive
(850) 656-2938

Grant Awarded to Bolles

The Florida Bluebird Society (FBS) is pleased to announce the award of our 2015 Grant Funds to what the Grant Committee determined to be the most deserving bluebird research proposal. The project is the conception of one of our members, Dr. Brett Moyer, Upper School Science Teacher at The



Photo by Rhonda Ockay

Bolles School in Jacksonville. Dr. Moyer, who has a strong research and education background, will coordinate and monitor the project.

The plan involves the placement of bluebird nest boxes on each of the

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2015-2016 Board of Directors

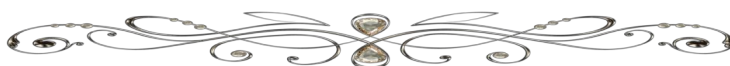
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Message From the President

Cheri Martin-Spray

Time for Home Improvements

As you are aware, bluebirds will begin scouting out a suitable box for nesting in the “off-season”, and will get serious about settling down as early as mid-February, in parts of Florida.

So with that in mind, now is the time for us to check our nesting boxes, and make any necessary repairs before the blues move in.

Check for any loose screws, and tighten down. Check that your predator guard is in place as well.



For ant and mite control, sprinkle a little FOOD GRADE Diatomaceous Earth inside the box on the floor, and rub some into the inside walls too.

Share Your Bluebird Story



Have you had an interesting interaction with bluebirds that you are willing to share? If so, we would like to hear about it. Please send your story with any related photos to floridabluebirdsociety@gmail.com.

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If You Cut It, They Will Come....

*Article and Photos By Joanne Q. Heinrich
Board Member, Duval Co. Coordinator
Florida Bluebird Society*

Yes! Spread the word! If you cut it, Eastern Bluebirds will come! And I'm not talking about trees! I'm talking about grass! Yes, I've come to the realization that it's really cut grass to hunt bugs in that bluebirds need and want, not necessarily open sky. (Thank you to one of FBS's founders, Bill Pennewill, for helping me with this epiphany!)

Try it, you'll like it – I live in a very heavily wooded area. You can barely see the roofs in our neighborhood by an aerial view, that's how wooded we are. If you are anything like me, you have secretly pined over only seeing bluebirds and their houses in open fields, cemeteries, golf courses, and your friend's yard that had a clear cut lot. So when a dear neighbor died about 5 years ago and I bought a bluebird house from his estate sale, I didn't know the change I would go through. I put it up anyway thinking that we are not in bluebird country, but maybe other birds would nest in it. Not wanting to put too much money into what may or may not be something that pans out, I put it up on a shoestring budget. Nailed it to some boards, and strapped it onto the only thing I had in the yard I can spare, a shepherd's



hook, guarded by a trash can lid! Looking back, it sure was ugly, but in the back of my woodsy yard, it fit in alright!

After 2 years, I was utterly shocked when sitting on the back porch with my visiting sister, we see flashes of blue! Oh my! They were building a nest! It was such a lovely site. To me, the Eastern Bluebird is a patriotic bird, red white and blue. And the box was right next to my flying American flag, how appropriate! Just wish I was a better photographer.



Being the Neighborhood Watch Coordinator, and having most of my neighbors' emails, you can bet I took the liberty of the power of my position to get the word out, **WE HAVE BLUEBIRDS!!!** Many responded with the same enthusiasm that I had, but no one said they had already seen bluebirds in our neighborhood before. I truly think mine were the first! So, down came the shoestring budget pole and up went my budget! But I didn't have a good explanation as to why they were nesting in our woodsy area when all I ever heard was that they needed open fields.

New Residents – By the next year, we had a few others putting up houses. There was one neighbor whose home I wouldn't have ever thought they would nest in

because of her wooded area, but they have 3-4 broods per year now! I also made the "mistake" of telling my best friend Mary across the street, that her yard is perfect because she has a much more open area. But, that was less than 300 feet away from my box and they went over there the next 3 years!! Oh, I saw them alright because I had the mealworms! I was quite jealous, until this past year when I put up a house in the front yard that a friend made for me. It's a little further away from Mary's than my other one and they nested in late June!

This also may be a part of nature adapting to change. With the non native European Starling and House sparrow invading their habitat, bluebirds need to adapt to different places to raise their young (my personal hypotheses of course).

As a side note, it was nice to read The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Winter Bird Highlights from last year's Project FeederWatch statistics and see that the European Starling and House Sparrow have both had 5-10% *declines* in 2 regions and no change in others, while the **Eastern Bluebird had more than 10% increase in sites visited over the average in the only region that they were top 25 in, which was the Southeast & South-Central Region.**

Training Day – So what really got me writing this article? It was my neighbors Marilyn and Rick Stephenson telling me that they had 4-6 bluebirds building a nest, **in the 3rd week of October!!!** They have lived in their home for 16 years and just about the time I!!!

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If You Cut It, They Will Come....

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put my 1st house up was when they started seeing bluebirds and put up a house. They have been seeing increasing numbers as well. They had 3 broods this year, cleaned out the box at the end of the season, but then voila! A new nest!



A nest being built in October was so unheard of, I just had to share with my fellow FBS board members. Through their responses,

one logical hypothesis came to me: the young bluebirds were being trained by the older ones! Now, many say that bluebirds don't do that, but if you think about how young my area is for having bluebirds, it might make sense that the little ones need training!

I spent some time in the Stephenson's very lovely, shady back yard and it was amazing to see how many bluebirds they had around, at least for our area. But they have cut grass and that's what's most important. Rick was going to mow the lawn later that day and they said the bluebirds will be 'all over it'.

So here's my optimistic moral to the story: Don't worry that you have a lot of trees, try putting up a bluebird nest box! Bluebirds are nesting in seemingly "unconventional" areas because they have to adapt more. So they need more training and if you cut the grass, they will come!!!

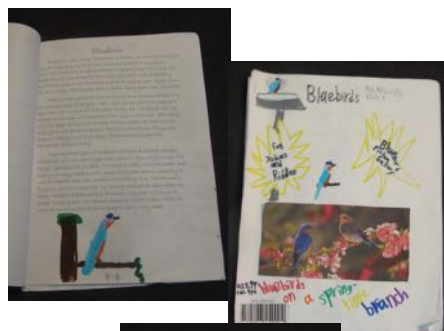


A Blossoming Journalist

By Cheri Martin-Spray

Recently, the Florida Bluebird Society received a request for a little help with a school project, from 4th grader, Eva Barrett. The assignment was to create a magazine, from cover to cover. While most of her classmates chose to create a sports magazine, Eva chose to create a magazine about bluebirds.

Eva worked on her project for about a month, creating an illustrated cover, a book review, a feature story about bluebirds, an advertisement for bluebird houses, (that she had to create herself), a picture gallery, and an interview with me, (as a representative of FBS).



Eva loves nature, and her mom Amy, says that she could not be more proud of her daughter. We are too Eva! You represent our future, and with you on their side, the future of the Eastern Bluebird looks good.

Great job! Eva's project is on display at her school library, alongside her classmates.

Hey Eva...maybe you will be editor of our Florida Bluebird Society newsletter one day. ??

Grant Awarded to Bolles School

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three Bolles campuses, video streaming of activity with access by Bolles School and FBS, student research projects based on nest components, and more.

The project was deemed to be a good fit with the FBS mission as it should help conserve Eastern bluebirds, teach students of all ages to conduct basic science and engage thousands with Eastern bluebirds. We are very optimistic about potential education and outreach this endeavor will provide. Congratulations to Dr. Moyer!



Photo by Rhonda Ockay

Dr. Moyer and Bill Pennell discuss nest box location during a visit at Bolles School



Home Improvements

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For wasp control inside the box, I use a bar of pure and natural soap, like Castile, (nothing with perfumes) . I place it in a shallow bit of water for a few minutes, until the bottom gets mushy. I then use a silicone pastry brush and brush a thin layer onto the inside roof of the box. Not too thick. This will keep the wasps from building a nest. Regular box checks will also help to rid them.

I found this way to be a little easier to get into the corners than just a dry bar of soap. But you can use a dry bar if you want. Just rub it back and forth. Do not put soap on the walls.

Instructions for constructing a stove-pipe baffle/predator guard can be found on our website, www.floridabluebirdsociety.com. They are fairly simple, but if you are like me, a picture or two can sometimes be a big help.

The materials for the guard can be picked up at your local hardware shop, or at one of the larger big box home improvement stores, and should be fairly inexpensive.

The trickiest part, I feel, is cutting the hardware cloth, and the top part of the metal stovepipe. Be careful not to cut yourself on the metal or wire. I enlisted my hubby for this job. 😊



One way to mount the completed baffle onto the pole, is to use hanger iron, cut into 7 inch strips, and a couple of machine screws with nuts. This is a fairly easy way to hang, or mount, your predator baffle.



Once you decide where your bluebird house is to be mounted

on your pole, (height wise), place a double strip of duct tape around the pole a few inches below where the bottom of the box will sit. Bolt the two strips of the hanger iron around the duct tape on either side of the pole, and bend them as shown in the pictures.



Then slip your assembled baffle over the pole, coming to rest on the hanger iron bracket. It should wobble on the pole a little. Then mount your nesting box.



It's that simple, and your birds will be a whole lot safer then not using any predator guard.

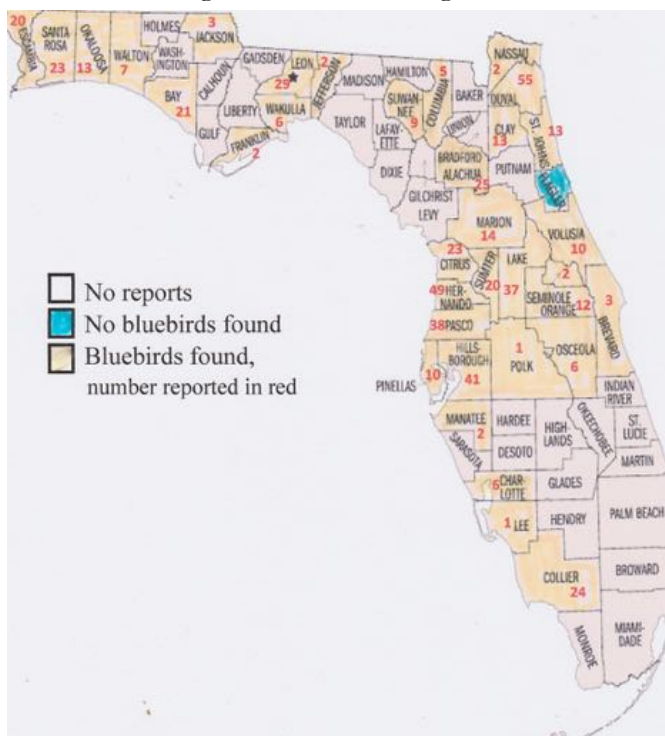


2015 Fall Statewide Bluebird Blitz Results

Our ninth Statewide Bluebird Blitz was held November 6 & 7. We conduct the Fall Blitz in a effort to determine where bluebirds are finding food and residing across the State during non-breeding season. We now have data from five Fall and four Spring Blitzes.

For this Blitz we received 154 reports, three of which reported no bluebirds found. Reports were received from 36 of Florida's 67 Counties. with a total of 547 bluebirds reported.

Our data indicates there are more bluebirds found in Florida during the non-breeding season (November) than in early April which is breeding season. Another interesting fact emerging from our data is that bluebirds are more concentrated during their non-breeding season. We consistently have more bluebirds



**FLORIDA BLUEBIRD SOCIETY's
Statewide Spring BLUEBIRD BLITZ
April 1 & 2**

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

County	# of reports	# of bluebirds reported
Alachua	11	25
Baker		
Bay	2	21
Bradford		
Brevard	1	3
Broward		
Calhoun		
Charlotte	1	6
Citrus	6	23
Clay	5	13
Collier	7	24
Columbia	2	5
DeSoto		
Dixie		
Duval	20	55
Escambia	2	20
Flagler	1	0
Franklin	1	2
Gadsden		
Gilchrist		
Glades		
Gulf		
Hamilton		
Hardee		
Hendry		
Hernando	12	49
Highlands		
Hillsborough	9	41
Holmes		
Indian River		
Jackson	3	3
Jefferson	2	2
Lafayette		
Lake	8	37
Lee	1	1
Leon	8	29
Levy		
Liberty		
Madison		
Manatee	1	2
Marion	5	14
Martin		
Miami-Dade		
Monroe		
Nassau	1	2
Okaloosa	2	13
Okeechobee		
Orange	3	12
Osceola	3	6
Palm Beach		
Pasco	8	38
Pinellas	3	10
Polk	1	1
Putnam		
Santa Rosa	4	23
Sarasota		
Seminole	1	2
St. Johns	5	13
St. Lucie		
Sumter	5	20
Suwannee	3	9
Taylor		
Union		
Volusia	3	10
Wakulla	2	6
Walton	2	7
Washington		

reported during the Fall Blitz from fewer Counties. In 2014, there were 411 bluebirds reported in 43 Counties during the Spring Blitz, and 598 bluebirds found in 37 Counties during the Fall Blitz. In 2015, 440 bluebirds were found in 45 Counties during the Spring Blitz with 547 bluebirds reported in 36 Counties during the Fall Blitz.

We thank all who sent us reports for the Blitz. With your continued participation we will continue to collect data that we hope will provide some meaningful information about bluebirds in Florida.