

# The Florida Bluebird Society

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



Volume 6, Issue 2

March - April

## Six-year Nest Removal Study

**Bill Pennewill,  
Founding President**

Monitoring bluebird nest boxes on a trail of any size sometimes can be a challenge, causing head-scratching puzzlement and perplexity. That's when boxes are monitored regularly, the same day every week, and nests are removed after each brood of chicks has fledged. The confusion can be intensified when nests remain in the box and are not removed until the end of the season.

Simply put, what goes on inside a nest box sometimes can be a mystery that no amount of speculation can unravel. But that likely is no secret to anyone who monitors a bluebird nest trail regularly.

Let me cite an example. A female bluebird built a nest in May and laid five eggs in June, one of which was pushed against the door of the

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## 2016 Research Grant Awarded

The FBS Grant Committee received and approved a supplemental application requesting additional funds for the Bolles Bluebird Project. Eight cedar FBS nestboxes were constructed and have been installed on the school campuses. A pair of bluebirds showed up almost immediately.

Of the box outside a Pre-K classroom the teacher wrote, *"I can't tell you how much our class is enjoying watching this process. Every child got to come to the window and watch the bluebirds for a few minutes. This is a great learning experience and bringing us just joy."*

We are confident FBS made wise decisions awarding these grants!

## Regional Meeting Jacksonville April 30th

The FBS will have two featured speakers for the 2016 NE Florida Area meeting in the McGehee Auditorium at the San Jose Bolles School, 7400 San Jose Boulevard, Jacksonville on April 30<sup>th</sup> at 10:30 am.

Our first presentation will be by Gary Whiting, **"How To Get A Better Shot"**. Join us for an entertaining and informative seminar on how to improve your bird and wildlife photography skills. Local photographer Gary Whiting will share practical tips and actual examples to help you regardless



Gary Whiting

*Photo provided by Gary Whiting*

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### Message From the President

Can you believe we are already 3 months into the New Year? Time sure flies.

Since the last newsletter issue, we held our regional meeting in Tallahassee on February 6<sup>th</sup>. I saw some familiar faces, and met some new folks, too.

A big “thank you” to everyone who made the meeting possible. And a special “thank you” to the folks at Native Nurseries for their wonderful, informative, and interesting presentation at the meeting, on how to attract wildlife to your yard by planting native plants. I think everyone took home some valuable tips for helping our native wildlife. I know I did. And touring member Glenda Simmons beautifully landscaped yard was such a treat. **Thank you, Glenda!**

I am very pleased with the renewed interest and enthusiasm that the Florida Bluebird Society community is showing. There are a lot of activities planned for this year. The next regional meeting will be held in Jacksonville on April 30<sup>th</sup>. I hope you all will try to attend. The goal is to eventually conduct a meeting in each of the 7 regions. Thanks to our dedicated members, we have been able to hold meetings in 3 of those regions over the years. If you would like to see a FBS event held in your region, and would be willing to help organize it, please let us know by sending an email to [floridabluebirdsociety@yahoo.com](mailto:floridabluebirdsociety@yahoo.com).

I wish you all great success with your nestboxes this season. Send us your stories and photos for an upcoming issue of the newsletter.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Happy Spring!

Cheri Martin Spray

### 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](mailto:floridabluebirdsociety@gmail.com).



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## Ruby-throated Hummingbirds

by Rhonda Ockay

While I consider myself a lover of all birds, only two will stop me in my tracks and make my heart jump for joy: Eastern Bluebirds and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. The Ruby-throated Hummingbird is Florida's only native hummingbird. They typically arrive in Florida late February or early March. Males arrive approximately two weeks before females to establish territories. Ruby-throated hummingbirds travel from Central America and Mexico, nonstop across the Gulf of Mexico, until they reach the United States. Then in October, they make the long trip all over again back to their wintering range. They must gain several ounces of body weight to survive the long difficult journey. Some older or weaker hummingbirds will overwinter in the southern part of Florida. Our FBS President Cheri Martin Spray has observed them at her feeder all winter long.

Their diet primarily consist of tiny bugs and nectar from flowers. Brightly-colored tubular flowers are the most attractive to hummingbirds. Popular hummingbirds flowers in our region are: bottlebrush, butterfly bush, ardisia, cigar plant, firebush, coral honeysuckle, torenia, and trumpet creeper vine, just to name a few. The preferred method of feeding our jeweled friends would be to offer nectar-producing flowers in your garden. Hummingbirds are capable of surviving without feeders; however, placing feeders in our yard gives us an up close view of these tiny birds. With that comes a responsibility to ensure the feeders and nectar that we offer are safe; otherwise, we could be unintentionally harming or killing unsuspecting hummingbirds. Store-bought nectar and red food coloring should be **avoided** as red dye can be harmful to hummingbirds. Research has shown that hummingbirds do not metabolize red dye and it can damage their kidneys. The red color of your feeder is enough to attract hummingbirds, and the color of the nectar is irrelevant. Experts recommend using a 4:1 ratio (4 parts water to 1 part pure granulated cane sugar). Raw and



organic sugar **should not** be used as they contain too much iron, which can be deadly to hummingbirds. Artificial sweeteners, brown sugar, honey, molasses, and commercial drinks should also be **avoided**.

Sugar water will ferment quickly, especially in the Florida heat; therefore, special attention must be given to changing nectar often and cleaning feeders. Cloudy nectar and feeders with moldy black spots contain bacteria that causes a fatal infection in hummingbirds. The infection causes the hummingbird's tongue to swell, rendering it unable to eat, and it will slowly starve to death. A mother hummingbird can also pass the infection to her babies. The nectar should be changed daily in temperatures over 88 degrees. Please refer to the quick reference guide for a schedule of recommended nectar changes.

To clean your feeder, run it under hot water and scrub with a bottle brush. Miniature brushes are sold that clean feeder ports and crevices difficult to reach with a larger brush (Amazon \$4). If you see black mold, soak the feeder in a solution of ¼ cup of bleach to one gallon of water for an hour. Scrub the feeder and thoroughly rinse, and ensure the feeder is completely dry before re-filling. Do not use soap as it leaves a harmful residue which will be ingested by the hummingbird. To make things easier on yourself and safer for the hummingbirds, consider an easy-to-clean feeder such as the Hummzinger (Amazon \$19).

Ants and bees can be pests at hummingbird feeders. Bees are attracted to yellow, so avoid feeders containing yellow, and especially yellow feeding ports. The easiest way to protect against ants is with an ant moat, a small

### Hummingbird Feeder Quick Reference Guide

#### Change Nectar:

70°-84°...Every 3 days

85°-87°...Every 2 days

88°-99°...Every day

**Homemade Nectar Recipe:** 4 cups water, 1 cup pure granulated cane sugar (such as Domino brand). Bring water to a low boil. Remove from heat and stir in sugar until completely dissolved. Let cool to room temperature. Unused nectar can be stored in the refrigerator for one week.

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## Six-year Nest Removal Study

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house. In July another four eggs were laid in the same nest, bringing the total to nine eggs. Three eggs hatched and the three nestlings eventually fledged. Of the remaining six eggs, four were in the nest, one was pushed against the door, and another was partially buried against the door. When the box was cleaned in August, there was one egg in the nest, four eggs against the door, and one egg missing. This was in a box in which the nest was to be removed after each brood fledged. But the female didn't cooperate.

Notes for the 2015 season for boxes from which nests were removed after the birds fledged include:

- One unhatched egg missing when cleaned out nest; don't know what happened to it;
- Only one unhatched egg when cleaned out nest; don't know what happened to other three;
- Four eggs buried under previous nest.

When checking boxes in which nests were not removed, one often has to make "educated guesses" because nestlings are huddled tightly together and it is against Florida Bluebird protocol to remove nests to count the chicks. So, come the end of the season, it sometimes is necessary to adjust the figures because, "Cleaned out nest with two eggs buried in top nest, one egg buried in middle nest."

All this is just a way of saying that while every effort is made to insure the accuracy of the weekly monitoring reports, birds being birds and nature being what it is, one can never be 100 percent certain of what occurred in a nest box. But every effort has been made to insure the highest degree of accuracy in recording the weekly activities and compiling the seasonal totals.

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## Chart comparing averages per box for different years

Number of Active Boxes	Eggs Laid	Eggs Hatched	Unhatched Eggs	Birds Fledged
<b>2010</b>				
11 (Not removed)	91	64	27	64
Average per box	8.2	5.8	2.4	5.8
19 (removed)	170	130	40	130
Average per box	8.9	6.8	2.1	6.8
<b>2011</b>				
11 (Not removed)	105	80	25	76
Average per box	9.5	7.2	2.3	6.9
19 (removed)	161	129	32	129
Average per box	8.5	6.8	1.7	6.8
<b>2012</b>				
13 (not removed)	166	117	49	116
Average per box	13	9	3.5	8.2
18 (nests removed)	176	136	40	136
Average per box	9.8	7.5	2.2	7.5
<b>2013</b>				
14 (not removed)	155	109	46	109
Average per box	11	7.8	3.3	7.8
19 (nests removed)	168	106	62	105
Average per box	8.8	5.5	3.2	5.5
<b>2014</b>				
15 (not removed)	121	79	42	79
Average per box	8	5.3	2.8	5.3
15 (Nests removed)	163	122	41	120
Average per box	10.8	8.1	2.7	8
<b>2015</b>				
10 (not removed)	95	78	17	78
Average per box	9.5	7.8	1.7	7.8
17 (removed)	176	131	45	131
Average per box	10.4	7.7	2.6	7.7

## Average for six-year period

Year	# of Active Boxes	Eggs Laid	Eggs Hatched	Un- hatched Eggs	Birds Fledged
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NOT removed					
2010	11	91	64	27	64
2011	11	105	80	25	76
2012	13	166	117	49	116
2013	14	155	109	46	109
<b>2014</b>	<b>15</b>	121	79	42	79
2015	10	95	78	17	78
Totals	74	733	527	206	522
Averages	12	9.9	7.1	2.8	7

Removed					
2010	19	170	130	40	130
2011	19	161	129	32	129
2012	18	176	136	40	136
2013	19	168	106	62	105
<b>2014</b>	<b>15</b>	163	122	41	120
2015	17	176	131	45	131
Totals	107	1014	754	260	751
Averages	17.8	9.4	7	2.4	7

## Six-Year Nest Removal Study

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With that disclaimer, results of a six-year study comparing boxes from which nests were removed during the season with those from which nests were not removed during the season indicates that over an extended period of time there is little significant statistical difference in the average number of eggs laid, which hatch, which don't hatch, or nestlings which fledged.

At the same time, sometimes there was a yearly fluctuation in the comparisons.

*The study was conducted on the bluebird trail at the Penney Retirement Community*



Photo by Jean Skipper

## Ruby-throated Hummingbirds

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water-filled cup that hangs above the feeder. Ants will not cross water, therefore placing this barrier is a guaranteed deterrent. Ant moats are inexpensive, and some feeders such as the Hummzinger come with a built-in ant moat. Do not use petroleum jelly, oil, grease, or double-stick tape. These chemicals are extremely dangerous when they get on a bird's feathers. They act like glue and inhibit flight, leaving birds susceptible to predators and starvation. Also be on the lookout for praying mantis and cats, as both prey on hummingbirds.

Another consideration when attracting hummingbirds, as well as other birds, is providing a fresh and clean water source for drinking and bathing. A shallow bird bath works well, and hummingbirds love to fly through misters to cool off.

Proper care of hummingbird feeders is a significant commitment, but not impossible. Hummingbird feeders provide quick fuel for a hungry hummer and allow us a few moments to dazzle at their magnificence. Remember natural food sources are always better so don't forget to add a few potted plants or a hummingbird garden to your yard.



## Tallahassians Love Bluebirds

Our regional meeting in Tallahassee was well-attended, and we enjoyed making new friends. Jody Walthall and Donna Legare, from Native Nurseries, gave a well-organized presentation entitled, **“How to Change Your Landscaping to Benefit Birds, Bees, Butterflies, and other Wildlife.”** Did you know that in the lower 48 states, 54% of the land is developed and 41% is used for agriculture? That sure does not leave much for wildlife. Jody & Donna stressed the importance of creating wild habitat in our yards.

All wildlife need food, water, shelter, and a place to raise their young. With a bit of thought and planning, we can provide these in our yards. The most important element in creating habitat is replacing non-native plants, especially plants on the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council's Invasive Species List ([www.fleppc.org](http://www.fleppc.org)), with appropriate native plants. You need to choose native plants that are suited for the soil, sun, and moisture conditions in which they will be planted.



Why are native plants so important to wildlife, especially birds? Native plants attract 96% more insects than non-natives. One example given by Donna was the Chinese tallow tree. In its native habitat, which is in China, it supports over 400 insect species. In Florida, it only supports three species of insect. Why are insects important? A Carolina chickadee needs 400 caterpillars per day to feed its nestlings. The number of insects required for bluebirds is similar, and the birds should be getting insects from your native plants.

Donna also showed pictures of suggested native plants for attracting wildlife. They included: sweet gum trees, poke-weed, American beauty berry, sparkle berry, red buckeye, and purple coneflower. We were all encouraged to reduce the amount of lawn in our yards. If you are trying to attract wildlife to your yard, it is important that you do not use toxic pesticides.



A lot of questions were answered during a useful Q&A session. After a light lunch we traveled the short distance to the yard of Glenda Simmons. Glenda has been working for several years to enhance her yard to attract birds. We



had seen “before” pictures of her yard during the presentation and were amazed at the difference

in its current appearance. Glenda has reduced her lawn by adding attractive mulched areas with native plants around the perimeter and near the house. In less than 15 minutes, fourteen species of birds were documented in her yard. The highlights for most were the two male Baltimore Orioles.

Congratulations to our two door prize winners and to those with winning bids on our silent auction items. If you missed the meeting in Tallahassee, you might be interested in our April 30<sup>th</sup> Regional Meeting in Jacksonville or, we will be holding our Annual Meeting in August at a location yet to be determined.

### Recommended reading:

Cerulean, Susan; Celeste Botha and Donna Legare. Planting a Refuge for Wildlife: How to Create a Backyard Habitat for Florida Birds and Beasts. FWC. <http://myfwc.com/viewing/habitat/refuge/>



Heugal, Craig. Native Plant Landscaping for Florida Wildlife. University Press of Florida, 2010.

Tallam, Douglas. Bringing Nature Home: How You can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants. Timber Press, Inc. Portland OR, 2009.

## NE Regional Meeting April 30th

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*McGehee Auditorium at Bolles School*

share practical tips and actual examples to help you regardless of your skill level or the type of gear you use. His programs are a result of 30+ years of photography experience combined with naturalist training and years of wildlife behavior observation. Not a photographer? You'll still enjoy the beautiful images and an entertaining presentation.

Gary Whiting is a freelance photographer, instructor, and naturalist specializing in wildlife, landscapes, and adventure images. His work has been featured in *Bird Watcher's Digest*, *St Johns Magazine*, Wild Birds Unlimited retail video and social media, and various local businesses and publications. He teaches photography in private sessions and in groups at the OLLI continuing education program at University of North Florida. He is also a Florida Master Naturalist and a sales consultant at Wild Birds Unlimited in Fruit Cove, Florida.

Our 2<sup>nd</sup> presentation will be by

Brett R. Moyer, Ph.D. He will discuss highlights of his previous research on the ways birds defend themselves against external parasites. Dr. Moyer also will lay out his goals for the Bolles Bluebird Project, which was recently started with grants from the Florida Bluebird Society. Dr. Moyer has conducted avian research that has resulted in the publication of nearly a dozen scientific articles in peer-reviewed journals. Dr. Moyer is currently an Upper School Science Teacher at the Bolles School, teaching classes ranging from Biology to Environmental Science to Bioethics.

After the meeting, attendees are invited to tour the bluebird trail at the Bolles School and enjoy a light lunch and camaraderie with a lovely view of the St. Johns River.



Dr. Brett Moyer

The tour of the bluebird trail will include questions and answers on topics such as nest box installation, locations, and monitoring guidelines.

To help us plan for the seating availability and lunch, individuals planning to attend should RSVP by April 23<sup>rd</sup> to [FloridaBluebirdSociety@gmail.com](mailto:FloridaBluebirdSociety@gmail.com) or call Joanne Heinrich at 904-400-1459 and leave a message with the number of expected attendees.



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

### What is a Bluebird Blitz?

A Blitz is a concentrated effort on a specific target date to locate as many Eastern Bluebirds in your locale as possible.

### Why a Bluebird Blitz?

The Spring Blitz, April 1 & 2, 2016 will help us to know where the Bluebirds are in Florida during the breeding season.

### How do you participate?

Simply choose a location, count the number of bluebirds you see, and send us a report of your sightings. Here are 2 easy ways to submit your sightings.

- Enter your data on a spreadsheet or form available on request from [FloridaBluebirdSociety@gmail.com](mailto:FloridaBluebirdSociety@gmail.com) or our website.
- Enter your sightings at [ebird.org](http://ebird.org). If you are a Cornell NestWatch participant, you will use the same login and password to access [ebird.org](http://ebird.org).

**THAT'S IT!** Together we can make a difference in the conservation and protection of Florida's bluebirds!

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