

# The Florida Bluebird Society

Dedicated to the Protection and Conservation of Bluebirds in Florida



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May—June 2016

## West-Central Regional Gathering & Bluebird Social June 18 Land o' Lakes

The Florida Bluebird Society (FBS) will sponsor an informal gathering for our west-central area members to get better acquainted. The west-central region includes the following counties: Levy, Marion, Citrus, Hernando, Sumter, Pasco, Hillsborough, and Pinellas. All members from around the state are welcome to attend, and the meeting will be open to the public.

The meeting will include a brief overview of bluebirds in Florida and FBS recommendations. This will primarily be a social event where we can share our experiences with bluebirds..

Please join us at 10:00 a.m. in the Sun Coast Lakes Clubhouse, 10742 Burning Bush Dr, Land O Lakes, FL 34638. Light refreshments will be served. There will be a raffle.

For more details and to RSVP please email [custerk@aol.com](mailto:custerk@aol.com).



## Florida Bluebird Society's Newest Junior Bluebirder

Meet Myla, our newest Junior Bluebirder. Myla is 12 years old and a 7<sup>th</sup> grade honor roll student at a popular art school in Jacksonville. She is a dancer (despite currently being on crutches), plays guitar, and takes drama classes at school. Myla heard about bluebirds while watching the recent local news clip featuring the Florida Bluebird

Society's project with The Bolles School in Jacksonville.

When she learned that a shortage of nesting cavities has impacted the bluebird population, she knew she wanted to help. Myla's mom arranged for her to view the on-campus bluebird trial at The Bolles School where she was able to view an active nest and learn about bluebird nesting habits. The very next day, Myla's dad took her to the local Wild Birds Unlimited where she picked out a bluebird house, pole and predator baffle. She enjoyed supervising her dad as he installed the nestbox, and insisted that the nestbox face a certain set of trees so the nestlings would know where they were supposed to go when they fledged.

Myla loves the idea of helping bird families. Her favorite thing about birds is hearing them sing in the morning. Now instead of eating breakfast in the car on the way to school, she wakes up early so she can eat in the kitchen and watch for sightings of backyard birds.

Welcome to the Florida Bluebird Society Myla!

*by Rhonda Ockay*

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# WELCOME

## NEW MEMBERS

Rhonda & Edward Beauchamp	Leesburg
Libby Beese	Palm Coast
Lynellen Bueter	Ormond Beach
Myla Braswell	Jacksonville
Anne Craig	Jacksonville
Phyllis Hendry	Jacksonville
Gloria Murray	Jacksonville
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Shirley Singletary	Jacksonville
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### **Message From the President**

Well, here we are in May already. This year is really flying by. The days are longer and warmer now, and the birds that traveled south in the fall, have begun their journey north. Some have lingered a little longer than usual. I noticed a group of Cedar Waxwings land in my oak tree last week. They only stay a few minutes. Just long enough for me to go inside to get my camera, or binoculars, come back outside, and then they fly off. Oh well. They sure are beautiful.

Most of you are probably enjoying watching your bluebirds bring food to their nestlings, or even watching them build a 2<sup>nd</sup> nest already. The season is in full swing. I hope you are monitoring your boxes regularly, and keeping accurate records to submit at the end of the nesting season. The Florida Bluebird Society relies on volunteers like you, to gather information on bluebirds in Florida.

This past weekend, I had the pleasure of attending the regional meeting in Jacksonville, at the Bolles School. What a beautiful campus.

I heard some beautiful, touching, stories from several people, about how special bluebirds are to them. It's nice to know how many people are interested in conserving Florida's bluebird population. With the dedication that our members continue to show, the Eastern Bluebird in Florida, has a bright future.

I hope you will all continue to show your support, and help keep this beautiful bird in the sunshine state for many years to come.

*Cheri Martin Spray*



## NE Regional Meeting Notes



There were two speakers for our NE Regional meeting on April 30. Our first presentation, *How to Get a Better Shot*, was by Gary Whiting. Gary, a nature and landscape digital artist, teaches photography at the OLLI continuing education program of UNF and is a UF/IFAS Florida Master Naturalist. He divided elements that make the difference between a good and an outstanding image into three components: Artistic, Natural, and Technical.

Gary does not often use a flash. He prefers to “paint” his images with natural light. This is best accomplished by taking images early morning and late evening, the “golden hours”. Side-lighting and reflections can also provide an artistic component to your images.

He explained the natural component is enhanced by knowing the behavior of your subject. Gary showed breathtaking images of birds and told the story of how the shot was captured because of familiarity with the species natural behavior.

The technical or third component of an outstanding image involves camera settings and techniques of

use. Gary shared some tips on camera settings and the use of focus points. He then discussed how to improve composition, sharpness, and exposure of images.

This presentation certainly provided us all with tips we can easily follow to improve the images we take. If you missed the meeting, Gary has posted a summary of his presentation on his website, [GaryWhitingPhotography.com/blog](http://GaryWhitingPhotography.com/blog)



Dr. Brett Moyer, Biologist and Bolles School Upper School Science teacher was our second presenter. Dr. Moyer began with *How Birds Combat External Parasites*, a summary of some of his previous research projects. While in Australia, he was able to prove feather-lice, a common avian parasite, is indirectly killed by heat. A common behavior of certain birds is to spread their feathers across warm sand in direct sunlight. Dr. Moyer’s research concluded the heat causes the lice to move from crevices in their feathers which make the lice vulnerable to preening. When he returned to the states, Dr. Moyer expanded his research to the relationship of bill shape to preening. He was able to determine the small hook at the end of the bills of many bird species is not necessary for feeding, but is vital for preening and removal of feather lice.

Dr. Moyer concluded his presentation with an *Overview of Bolles Bluebird Project* which is partially funded by grants from the Florida Bluebird Society. Eight boxes have been installed on the San Jose campus. Three boxes are already in use by bluebirds. The unexpected use of cypress needles and Spanish moss as the primary nesting material has been documented. Dr. Moyer hopes to expand the research with the use of HD cameras that can be used to observe and then document what the bluebirds are feeding their nestlings.

The presentations were followed by a light lunch on the terrace overlooking the St. Johns River and one of the nestboxes included in the Bolles School Bluebird Project. The nestlings from the first clutch have



already fledged and the parents entertained us during lunch as they appear to be preparing for a second nesting.

After lunch we had a tour of the new bluebird trail on campus and an extensive Q&A session.



Photos by Rhonda Ockay & Ken Custer

## Join the Sparrow Swap Project

*Although House Sparrows are not a problem in most parts of Florida, we thought we would share this appeal from North Carolina Museum of Natural Science.*

Happy Spring to all the bird lovers out there! We need excited volunteers like you to help with the Sparrow Swap citizen science project.

A common sentiment among bluebird monitors is that house sparrows are good for nothing. Make them good-for-something by gathering their eggs and donating them to the egg collection at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences. We'll investigate how to use these eggs for monitoring and mapping environmental contaminants. We'll also help you figure out the best management strategies for minimizing damage by house sparrows.

The Sparrow Swap asks for your help in pursuing two long-term research areas.

1. The first area relates to the use of egg contents for mapping the distribution of a variety of hazardous compounds that bioaccumulate into house sparrow eggs, with this commensal species reflecting potential exposures we may encounter. We will investigate eggshell characteristics and their potential to make bio-monitoring affordable to communities.
2. The second area is to improve public stewardship of native bird species. By having some participants remove and donate eggs and other participants



remove, donate, and swap replicas of eggs into nests, we can compare and test the effectiveness of these two management options.

We ask you to record details of nest visits over two weeks after egg removal or swapping. The shared observations will help to collectively figure out the most effective management regarding house sparrows.

If you'd like to join and make house sparrows good-for-something, visit [bit.do/sparrowswap](http://bit.do/sparrowswap), register to get started with our project, download the datasheets and instructions, and watch the instructional video.

If you have any questions, post to the Sparrow Swap forum or contact us at:

[nc.museum.collection@gmail.com](mailto:nc.museum.collection@gmail.com).

You can also ask questions and share your experiences with us on Facebook at

<http://www.facebook.com/sparrowswap>.



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

# Easter Chick Fledging

By Glenda Simmons

Carolina Wrens have nested in my garage, the past 4-5 years. Most nestings have been successful, but last year they had three failed attempts all due to snake predation. I decided to make some adjustments to reduce the possibility of that happening this year.

I bought a pole system, from Wild Birds Unlimited, with a base that allows you to set up the pole on a deck or patio instead of mounting into the ground. I attached a snake/

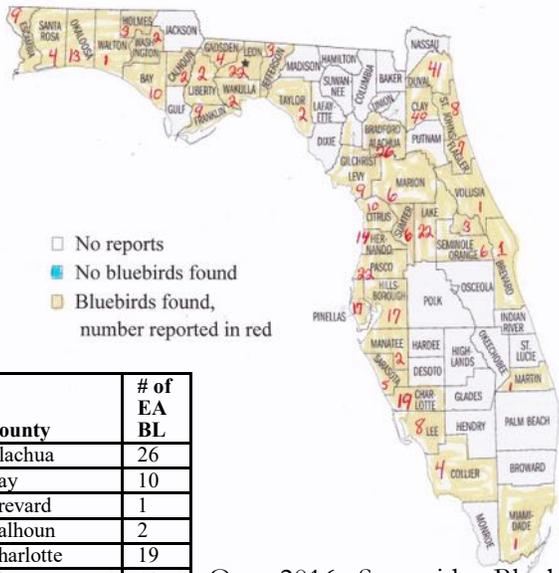
raccoon baffle to the pole. I strategically located the rig in my garage to provide the greatest distance around it in hopes of preventing a snake from reaching it from another source. I mounted and secured a tomato box on top, then placed an old bluebird box, laying on its side, and a roosting basket on top. Both are items the wrens have used in previous years for their nest. I then cluttered the rest of the space, as wrens seem to like. I also tried to make other places in the garage that I thought the wrens might use less accessible. Hopefully this would make my rig the most desirable option in the garage.

It worked! Although three of the four eggs did not hatch, which was unusual, starting in the garage allowed them an early, February, start and plenty of time for additional nesting attempt this season.

I was able to view the nest opening, by standing on a tall step ladder, 7-8 feet away. I never flushed the female while she was incubating. If I saw that she was not on the nest, I would move the ladder closer to count eggs or nestlings. I'm hoping they will choose this baffled platform nesting site again and have more successful nesting.



## Two New Counties in Spring Blitz Results



No reports  
 No bluebirds found  
 Bluebirds found, number reported in red

County	# of EA BL
Alachua	26
Bay	10
Brevard	1
Calhoun	2
Charlotte	19
Citrus	10
Clay	40
Collier	4
Duval	41
Escambia	9
Flagler	7
Franklin	9
Gadsden	4
Hernando	14
Hillsborough	17
Holmes	3
Jefferson	3
Lake	22
Lee	8
Leon	22
Levy	9
Liberty	2
Manatee	2
Marion	6
Martin	1
Miami-Dade	1
Okaloosa	13
Orange	6
Pasco	22
Pinellas	17
Santa Rosa	4
Sarasota	5
Seminole	3
St. Johns	8
Sumter	6
Taylor	2
Volusia	1
Wakulla	2
Walton	1
Washington	2

Our 2016 Statewide Bluebird Blitz was consistent with previous years. Less bluebirds were observed but in more counties than our Fall Blitzes. 157 reports came in from 40 counties with only 384 birds observed. Our lowest number of bluebirds was possibly due to bad weather. We had first-time reports from Holmes and Calhoun Counties, in the Panhandle.

### CONGRATULATION!

Rhonda Beauchamp of Leesburg put up her first nestbox early this year, and look what she had by early April! Once again proving, "built it and they will come!"



## Missouri Bluebird Conference June 12-14

A very special event is planned for the 10 year Anniversary of their Society. The speaker line up is spectacular:

- Keith Kridler from Texas,
- David Pitts from Tennessee,
- Jerry Bahls from Minnesota (topic-Red-headed Woodpecker recovery).

The location of the Conference Field Trip is an outstanding example of what can be accomplished by conservation-minded private landowners. (There will be a guided tour on a "hunt for hummingbird nests!", plus see lots of other wildlife)

Conference Brochure and registration form: [missouribluebird.files.wordpress.com/2016/04/mobs-2016conferencebrochure040116.pdf](http://missouribluebird.files.wordpress.com/2016/04/mobs-2016conferencebrochure040116.pdf)



## Natural Alternatives

By Cheri Martin-Spray

At each meeting the Florida Bluebird Society hosts, one of the biggest topics to come up, is how to prevent predation of the young, and eggs, by snakes, raccoons, and cats. In addition to installing a proper predator baffle, i.e.: raccoon baffle not a squirrel baffle, there are some natural animal repellents that you could try.

These are made up of natural ingredients that will not harm, or kill the predator. Instead, these agents trigger an avoidance reaction, due to the smell of the products. You can find these repellents at most big box home repair stores.

Ingredients in the snake repellent are cloves and cinnamon oil. Please do not use the snake repellents that contain naphthalene., the component in mothballs, as it is poisonous and should not be used near nesting birds or any other wildlife. The animal repellents usually contain black pepper, or putrid eggs, garlic, or rosemary. All are natural ingredients.

These are some suggestions to help your birds co-exist with other creatures. There are many natural alternatives to chemical pesticides and fertilizer as well. Look for our "helpful hints" for natural, chemical free, alternatives for everyday living, in future issues.

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