

# The Florida Bluebird Society

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



Volume 6, Issue 4

July- August 2016

## What can the FBS do for YOU?

Do you have questions about bluebirds or other cavity-nesting birds? Do you have an idea for a bluebird-related project? Do you have a bluebird observation or story you would like to share?

If so, please join us at the FBS Annual Meeting to be held:

**Saturday August 27**

**10:30 a.m.– 12:30 p.m.**

Cone Park branch of Alachua  
County Library  
2801 E. University Ave.  
**Gainesville, FL 32641**

During this informal meeting we will not only talk about bluebirds in Florida, we hope to set short-term and long-term goals for the organization, and determine ways to accomplish these goals.

We will also discuss our organization's health and things that will keep us viable. There will also be an election of Board members.

If you can't attend but have ideas please share them with Cheri at [floridabluebirdsociety@yahoo.com](mailto:floridabluebirdsociety@yahoo.com).

## From Tragedy to Triumph!!!

*Joanne Q. Heinrich  
FBS Board Member,  
Duval Co. Coordinator*

It was such a lovely day when my neighbor who lives on Bulls Bay off the St. John's River in Jacksonville, invited me over to see her newly hatched bluebird babies. I had been discussing bluebirds with Gloria Murray and her husband, John, for about 2 years now.

Although Gloria and John have lived in their home for over 30 years, they only started seeing bluebirds in 2013. Shortly after they started seeing them, they received a bluebird nest box as a gift from a dear friend. Their first brood was in 2014, but all babies were found dead in the nest for unknown reasons. It might have been because one of the parents crashed one-too-many-times into their large glass windows and died, but we have no proof. Regardless of why the babies died, Gloria wanted to mitigate the window strikes and moved the nest box to



the other side of the yard the following year. There were no new nesting attempts in 2015.

Then, this year, 2016, she had 5 beautiful eggs and all seemed like it was going smoothly. Just a few window strikes, but a lot less with the nest box on the other side of the house. She put up a large bird deflecting decal and it seemed to really do the trick.

I took a picture of the babies and logged it in my "Longview Bluebird Trail" digest, a "semi" bluebird trail I started with the bluebirders in my neighborhood.

*Continued on Page 04*

## 2015-2016 Board of Directors

*FloridaBluebirdSociety.com*

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### ***Message From the President***

Cheri Martin-Spray

#### Summer School

Welcome to Summer 2016!

While many people's thoughts of summer are of cookouts, days at the beach, a relaxing hammock with a tall cold ice tea or lemonade, bluebird enthusiasts think of counting bluebird eggs, making sure our birds are safe, counting bluebirds that hatch and fledge, and starting it over again, (hopefully) one or two more times before the school year starts again.

Summer is still a busy nesting time for many birds, including bluebirds. They do not get their summer holiday like school children.

While busy mother's and father's, wipe the sweat from their brows cooking over a hot stove or grill for their children, mother bluebirds have to sit in a hot nest box waiting for their children to arrive. I think I'd choose cooking rather than sitting in a hot box.

Just like human parents chasing after their little ones during summer break, bluebird parents will be chasing after their little ones once they leave the nest box. That's when their schooling begins.

So, if you are among the lucky ones that truly gets a summer vacation, give a smile to all the parents, human, and not, that are chasing after their kids this summer.

Have a wonderful, safe summer everyone. Try to stay cool.



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

*Ken Custer  
FBS Vice President  
Pasco Co. Coordinator*

I'd like to first thank everyone for joining Leonard Guffey and me at our first FBS West-Central Florida Bluebird Social. Even though I enjoy our larger FBS meetings, I think we all will agree that the smaller more informal get-together "socials" allow for more open discussions.

I would also like to thank Faith Jones for giving us so much valuable information on -Florida native plants and trees to add to our gardens as well as the invasive-exotic ones we need to remove. Much appreciation is also given to our current FBS president, Cheri Martin-Spray, for her great leadership and advice.

I am so glad that I finally got to meet FBS members, Fern Kinion and her daughter, Sharon Hall, from the North Tampa area. Equally important, was getting to reunite with FBS members Laurie & Mike Kell, Land O Lakes and hear an update on the bluebird trail Mike manages for West Pasco Audubon Society .

The MOST exciting part of the morning was when the discussion lead to the question of "How can we help to encourage more young people to get involved in the



FBS?" We shared information about our current grant project at the Bolles School in Jacksonville, and talked about working with school teachers to try and create various projects that could be used in schools as well as summer camps and community recreational facilities.

Another valuable idea was to contact local home improvement stores to inquire about the possibility of having a FBS Nesting Box Construction (Saturday) Workshop for families/schools. The idea would be for us to provide our architectural plans and have them (the store) cut the pieces and provide the other materials needed to build a nesting box. We could even include the materials for the posts and predator guards/baffles. This idea certainly warrants further research and discussion.



There were several other great ideas discussed including the possibility of FBS live-streaming video on our website from a nest box camera similar to what was done a few years ago from an active nest box in Penney Farms. This would allow our members and others (schools) to be able to monitor an Eastern bluebird nest box via the FBS website.

Fern and Sharon (her daughter) volunteered to be the "Project Host" as Fern has the ideal environment for such a project. She has an active nest box located just a few feet from an enclosed patio with existing electrical outlets. Mike and Laura have a spare laptop they are willing to donate for this project. So, actually, all we need is the camera and someone to help us connect it to the computer and ultimately to our FBS website. Leonard Guffey volunteered to be our local computer tech to help Fern and Sharon (and Sharon's husband) scope out what we need to make this a reality.





### From Tragedy to Triumph!!!

*Continued from Page 1*



Then a few days later, the unthinkable happened. As Gloria was gazing out of her window at the bluebird box,



a yellow rat snake was peering out. She and John were devastated and so was I. The tall, but narrow baffle apparently is no match for a rat snake. It had taken all 5 babies. That was April 2<sup>nd</sup>.

It took Gloria some time to get over the devastating loss. With some encouragement, a large raccoon baffle and a new box were installed. Not that this added to the



tragedy, but Gloria had a Peterson style box that has been studied by University of Florida and results showed it to have less advantages for the babies than a roomier box like those the FBS promotes. Gloria put up the new baffle and nest box in late April.

Then April 12<sup>th</sup>, Gloria sent me a picture of the “Next Generation”. SIX beautiful blue eggs!!!



On the day I was interviewing Gloria and John for this story, the babies were 16 days old.



Through monitoring up to day 13, all 6 were doing fine and now peering out of the house. We sat in the living room watching them

for a while, but none of them fledged on our watch. A few days later, Gloria told me that they fledged on day 17! She wasn't there to see them, but she sees the parents coming back to the feeder and flying into the large live oaks in their yard as any parent of newly fledged bluebirds will do. I am so grateful to write about this amazing “comeback” story! Thank you Gloria and John, and I am sure the bluebirds have found a great new home to come back to for many generations to come!

If you are interested in more information on avoiding snake predation on other nests around you with no raccoon baffle, please refer to the FBS newsletter, Volume 6, Issue 3 article “**Natural Alternatives**”, by Cheri Martin-Spray for some helpful ideas on avoiding snake predation.



## Birding



By Fern Kinion  
FBS Member

A few weeks ago, several national news articles referred to birdwatchers (the correct term is birding) as *creepy*. These articles were in response to a small, 2013 government study that defined the general population of avid bird watchers: white, 45 and older, and either highly educated or wealthy with the financial resources to pursue this activity.

Following this negative publicity, many rebuttal facts revealed that this hobby is enjoyed by over sixty million people comprised of all age groups. Further, while gardening ranks as the number one hobby, birding follows as a close second. One article estimates that over 88% are known as ‘backyard birders’, as opposed to the much fewer number of those birding along the highways with their binocular. Most importantly, the economic impact of birders, is upwards of \$20 billion dollars spent annually on seed, travel, and birding paraphernalia which surpasses the spending of anglers!

As an avid, backyard enthusiast, I have feeders in my yard that attract a colorful variety of birds including wrens, doves, and cardinals. Living on a lake, many wading birds, birds of prey, and waterfowl frequently visit my yard. My avian visitors often rest on an arbor near the shore line. My days begin by sitting on my enclosed lanai and watching the birds through wall to wall windows as

they make their way to the nearby feeders.

Last spring, I received one of the most blessed gifts of my life! As I sat eating breakfast, an unfamiliar bird landed on a planter near one of the windows. Seeing his reflection, he pecked repeatedly and later was joined by a female. I then learned these were Eastern bluebirds.

Shortly after their arrival, we erected a nest box in an open area near the lake. That very first season two clutches were fledged from the box.. Although I had read that these birds would leave the area during the winter months, those who had nested in my yard did not. To help protect them, we placed a feeder box a distance away from the nesting box, with a sturdy baffle that keeps predators away.

Feeding the “blues” dried or live meal worms brings them from nearby trees to their claimed area of the arbor. The feeder box is mounted on a tall wooden posts. The male maintains a vigil as he flies from the feeder or arbor to the nesting box, taking food to the female and protecting her as she sets on the incubating eggs and the baby chicks after they have hatched.

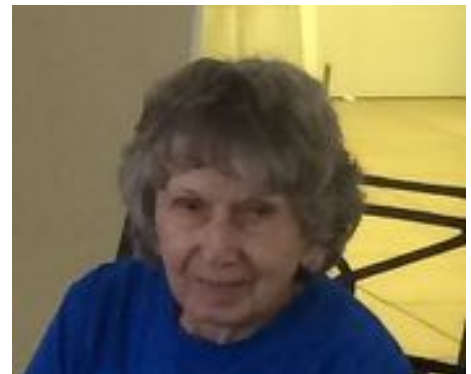
Although their songs may be faint, it is a joy when they welcome you with their distinctive “chur-lee chur chur-lee” sounds. This spring we have had two clutches born—one of three babies and the second of five. Perhaps there will still be more

before the end of the season!

Watching from my kitchen as I cook or wash dishes, I look out through the dining room and lanai windows to the arbor area to see if the sleek body of this beautiful bird is visiting. Subsequently, in the mornings, I often feel the necessity of providing the birds with food before eating my breakfast.

Being blessed by all of the birds—and especially the bluebirds, makes one’s days and life endearing. Added to this, however, is the responsibility to protect what nature gives us and to supply water for their bathing and thirst. Monitoring the nest boxes regularly is important and that it is done in a manner so that no observation should jeopardize the safety and well-being of the birds.

***Creepy? Perhaps a few people might think birders fall into this category, but life’s rewards are greatly enhanced by such gifts as birds for our pleasure.***



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## Build It and They Do Come!



In addition to the nest boxes installed at The Bolles School in Jacksonville, we have a number of members who also erected nest boxes early this year and had bluebirds take up residence almost immediately.



Brenda Beauchamp's box produced the above four "blues" in Leesburg.

Libby Beese's new box in Palm Coast fledged the two beauties pictured below.



## Natural Alternatives

By Cheri Martin-Spray

### Insect Control

Many insects do not like peppermint. Among them are: Ants, Aphids, Beetles, Caterpillars, Fleas, Flies, Moths, Plant Lice, and Spiders.

Here is a "recipe" you could try for repelling these pests:

1 drop Peppermint Essential Oil to 1 oz. WHITE vinegar. Place in a spray bottle, (glass is best) shake well before each use.

You can spray this around your windowsills, and doors, or around the outside patio. DO NOT spray directly on plants, as vinegar kills them. Be sure to use white vinegar and not apple cider vinegar, as the latter will attract fruit flies.

You can purchase Essential Oils from a natural health food store, or online from various sources.

One note: If you are *trying* to attract caterpillars, i.e.: butterfly caterpillars, then I would avoid spray this near areas where the caterpillars reside.

## 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).

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