

# The Florida Bluebird Society

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




Volume 6, Issue 5

September—October 2016

## Time to Submit 2016 Nest Box Data

We hope you had a successful nesting season and that you feel good about doing your part to help bluebirds in Florida. Maybe you were one of the lucky ones fortunate to have Carolina Chickadees, a species experiencing marked decline in Florida, use one of your boxes.

Important components of your nest box installation is monitoring it on a weekly basis, and keeping a record of what you observe. If you have not already done so, it is time to share your observation data. In previous years, we have requested FBS members send their data to us on our Season Summary Report. After much discussion, we have decided it would be more beneficial to request that you submit your data to The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's NestWatch at [NestWatch.org](http://NestWatch.org).

Although we may not agree with everything on their web site, and much information is not appropriate for peninsular Florida, submitting your data at [NestWatch.org](http://NestWatch.org) will make it available to researchers worldwide. In the future we hope to be able to work with Cornell and be able to obtain their Florida data. 



## A Father's Day to Remember

*By Gary Whiting*

**May 9th:** It started out like many springtime Bluebird episodes. Our annual Chickadee brood had just fledged, and in what seemed like a matter of hours a lovely pair of bluebirds arrived to investigate the box in our backyard. Over the next few days, pine straw quickly piled up. The male was glorious in his azure blue plumage, and the female was striking in her silver hue which unusually stretched around to



underneath her breast. Throughout our years of observing Bluebird pairs, we had not seen a female quite so unique. We enjoyed photographing this couple immensely.



**May 18th:** With our travel schedule picking up, we checked the box when we could, and upon our return from the West Coast we discovered 4 eggs in the nest. Mama was diligent during the incubation process, rarely leaving the box even when we were nearby.

**June 4th-17th:** After another out-of-town trip, we returned to find recently hatched babies in the nest, both parents working hard to keep them fed. During this phase we normally augment their food supply with live mealworms placed in a cup on a nearby fence post. But this pair was uninterested in our offerings, instead preferring to fly across the pond to a golf course for juicier natural options.

*Continued on Page 03*

## 2016-2017 Board of Directors

*FloridaBluebirdSociety.com*

FloridaBluebirdSociety@yahoo.com

Cheri Martin Spray	President, Citrus Co. Coordinator	floridabluebirdsociety@yahoo.com
Ken Custer	Vice President, Pasco Co. Coordinator	custerk@aol.com
Rhonda Ockay	Communication, Clay Co. Coordinator	rhondaockay@yahoo.com
Faith Jones	Treasurer, Membership, Newsletter	floridabluebirdsociety@gmail.com
Joanne Heinrich	Director, Duval Co. Coordinator	joanne.heinrich1@comcast.net
Brett Moyer, PhD	Director	moyerb@bolles.org
Robyn Sieron	Director	rsieron@comcast.net
Bill Pennewill	Founding President, Emeritus	floridabluebirds@yahoo.com



### Membership Renewals

August is the month when all FBS annual memberships come due. Thanks to all of you who have already

renewed your memberships. We would like to give special thanks to our members who have renewed at our higher membership levels.

#### Life

Pam Overmyer

#### Sponsor

Libby Beese  
Candace Bridgewater  
Ann Harwood-Nuss  
Joanne Heinrich  
Shannon Joyce  
Lois Kraemer

#### Patron level

Ulla Benny  
Jean Middleton  
Cheri Martin-Spray

#### Organization

Native Nurseries of Tallahassee  
Wild Birds Unlimited—St. Johns

If you have not yet renewed, please send your annual dues to:

Faith Jones, FBS Treasurer  
763 Mallard Dr.  
Sanford FL 32771

Memberships can also be paid with a credit card on the Membership page of our website [floridabluebirdsociety.com](http://floridabluebirdsociety.com).



### New Board Member

We are pleased to welcome Dr. Brett Moyer to the Board of Directors of the Florida Bluebird Society.

Dr. Moyer's avian research has resulted in the publication of nearly a dozen scientific articles in peer-reviewed journals. He is currently an Upper School Science Teacher at the Bolles School, teaching classes in Biology and Environmental Science.

In January of 2016, he started the Bolles Bluebird Project, which yielded 27 fledglings in its first year. The project also introduced many hundreds of people to bluebirds, through outreach in his classes, articles on the Bolles School website, postings on social media, presentations to local community groups, and through local newspaper and TV outlets. We know Dr. Moyer will be a great asset to the Florida Bluebird Society.

## A Father's Day to Remember

*Continued from Page 01*

**June 19th, Father's Day.** Tragedy struck. At first we thought our lovely female was in the box for extended periods. But as the day wore on, we became concerned that something had happened to our new silver-breasted friend. She was gone. Our hearts sank. We were helpless to do anything except watch as the male called out plaintively for his mate. Did something happen on the dangerous and possibly toxic golf



course? Did she meet a gruesome end at the hands of a neighbor's cat, or fly into a window looking for nourishment for her offspring? We



did not sleep well that night, worried about the fate of the nestlings.



**June 20th:** He was alone with his babies. A quick peek into the top of the nest box gave us a glimmer of hope. The nestlings were fully feathered, and we estimated a week or less before fledging. But would he abandon everything? Would he be lured away by that sexy new female who was overly interested? I gathered all my local bird rescue phone numbers just in case. Fortunately he became very active, feeding every 15-20 minutes throughout the day and standing guard over the box. Suddenly he WAS feeding from our mealworm cup, dipping down to grab 6 to 8 worms at a time to feed his hungry brood.



**June 20-22nd:** Our spirits were lifted as the male valiantly supplied his offspring with food from both our supply of mealworms and a choice beetle or bug. We monitored the nest daily (my iPhone slips easily into the ventilation slot for a quick peek without opening the door). For the next few days, Daddy was diligent in his care for his motherless children.

We prayed he would keep his energy and enthusiasm for the remainder of the process.

**June 23rd, 7:30 AM.** While the male went across the pond, I quickly went out to the box to check on things and listen for any sound or movement inside. Before I got within 10 feet, baby #1 popped out of the box right in front of me and almost flew into my face. The fledging had begun! We joyfully set out to capture as much of the remaining process we could on video to share with family and friends.



**June 23rd, 10:47AM** We moved our camera gear indoor to avoid interfering with the process. Soon, baby # 2 fledged, and I was ecstatic because I was able to get him on video.

**June 23rd, 10:48 AM:** Baby #3 fledged, and went straight up into a nearby tree for awhile. Daddy quickly shepherded him off to hide in the preserve behind our house. But where was number 4?

**June 23rd, Noon:** It was getting hotter. We waited anxiously for signs of activity. Baby#4 was peeking out, not the least bit interested in the scary outside world. We worried that with three other youngsters already fledged, would Daddy come back for him? Hours passed. At last, Dad returned! He frantically encouraged junior with a bug, hopping from the top of the box to the fence to the tree to goad him out. Finally, at 12:55,

*Continued on Page 04*



## A Father's Day to Remember

*Continued from Page 3*

junior got one leg out, hung on for awhile, then hopped out to the underbrush and safety.

For the next few weeks, we occasionally saw our heroic Dad bringing food to his youngsters, hiding in the preserve behind our home. We could hear them calling out for him nearly every day. Now a month later, we occasionally see some of the youngsters happily looking for worms, completely unaware of their good fortune.

We'll never know her fate, but we'll always cherish the memories of our silver beauty and her heroic mate, who gave us a Father's day to remember.

*About the author: Gary Whiting is a Wildlife Photographer and instructor based in St John's FL. He is a Florida Master Naturalist and works at Wild Birds Unlimited in Julington Creek. Reach him at [garyenwhiting@gmail.com](mailto:garyenwhiting@gmail.com)*



## Ideas for Bluebird Research Needed

Is there a question about bluebirds you would like to try to answer?

The FBS has Bill Pennewill Research Grant Funds available. Information and application forms are located in the Resource section of our website, [floridabluebirdsociety.com](http://floridabluebirdsociety.com).



*Photo by Glenda Simmons*

## Monitoring is Vital

When you install a nest box you invite cavity-nesting species to move in. When extending that invitation you must accept the responsibility to make certain your guests are safe. As a Florida Bluebird Society member, we assume you follow our Principles and Nest box Monitoring Protocol that can be found in the Resources section of our website at <http://www.floridabluebirdsociety.com/protocol/>

We thank Glenda Simmons for sharing her observations, impressions, and photos from this nesting season. She is responsible for nestboxes in her yard, neighborhood, and family member's yards.

The above picture was taken with a wildlife motion-activated camera in her backyard. This is one of the nest boxes many of us admired on our yard tour after the Regional Meeting last February. In the nest box attached to this pole were three 2-week-old bluebird nestlings. Had their box not been protected by the appropriate sized stove pipe baffle on the free standing pole, they would have been goners! Glenda got a clip of two raccoons at the pole the night before. We can only imagine the fear these birds go through when their sleep is disturbed by these encounters!

This was the experience at a different location, where a neighbor's cat had been seen hanging around the base of the pole. Evidently a cat managed to jump over the 5 foot pole and baffle to get on top of a nest box. The cat was able to reach in and get the adult female who was brooding three 5-days old nestlings. Glenda found a few feathers at the base of the pole and more inside the nest box. In the box she found 1 dead nestling, and two live, very hungry nestlings. She immediately contacted a licensed wildlife rehabilitation facility which accepted the nestlings. Another good reason for monitoring! Had her timing been one day later, she would have found 3 dead nestlings.

At a third location in a neighbor's yard when Glenda did her nest box check, she found the baffle was split.

In the box where four eggs had been the previous week, she found an empty, undisturbed nest. This was perplexing. The condition of the nest box, seemed consistent with snake predation.

Eventually Glenda was able to catch the elderly homeowner, who informed her that while mowing,



*Continued on Page 5*

## Monitoring is Vital

*Continued on Page 04*

he had hit the pole, causing the baffle to come apart. Apparently, the small opening in the baffle gave a snake enough advantage, to get to the box. Had the homeowner secured the baffle the day it was damaged she would have found a female incubating her eggs. Another good reason for monitoring. No way to know if the female survived, but this ended the 3rd nesting attempt, and the nesting season.

We know that no predator guard affords nest boxes 100% protection but most of our members have had the best luck with large stove pipe type baffles. But even the best protection will not work properly if damaged.

## Annual Meeting Gainesville

A productive meeting was held on August 27. We worked on setting goals for the coming season. One of our goals is to stream nest box activity on our web site next year during breeding season. This project is being coordinated by Ken Custer. We agreed on three outreach activities at festivals around Florida. We will make enhancements to our nest box plans. In an effort to increase our social media presence Rhonda Ockay will take charge of our Facebook page and get us on Twitter and Instagram.



## Message From

### Our President

Cheri Martin-Spray

## Year End Nest Box Clean Out

As nesting season draws to a close, we have had questions about when it is safe to clean out nest boxes. So I thought I would take this opportunity to discuss our recommendations for cleaning.

The time to clean out boxes is at the end of the season, between September and November.

For your protection consider wearing rubber gloves and a face shield. Carefully lift out the used nest. I use an old kitchen spatula for this task. Place the soiled nest in a plastic grocery bag, but do not tie up just yet. Next, inspect the nest for any unhatched eggs that may be buried in the flattened nest, and document any you find. Also, check for anything that looks unusual for a bluebird nest. For instance, if you see some feathers buried in the nest, (other species use these to line the nest cup) or if you see bits of trash, like plastic wrappers, twigs, anything that bluebirds generally would not have in their nests. Document these things, and share the information with us.

After you have finished looking through the nest, go ahead and tie up the bag and place it in the garbage can for trash day. The used nest could also be composted.

Next, clean out the box. Start by scrapping off any dried droppings, using a scraper of your choice. Then, mix up a 10% bleach solution, and scrub the box with it, using a brush. Rinse well. Prop open the door for a day or two so that the box dries

thoroughly.

During the off-season, inspect the box for any necessary repairs that need to be made, and then also again before the start of the next season starts.

It's also a good time to inspect the predator baffle, making sure there are no gaps between the pole and the hardware cloth. (If applicable). Tighten any nuts & bolts that secure the hangar tape to the pole. This sort of thing, if it applies to the type of predator guard that you have.

You should leave your box up through the off-season. In the event that we have some really cold nights, some creatures have been known to roost in them for shelter and warmth. You can clean out if necessary before the next season starts.

The birds thank you for your hospitality!



**FLORIDA  
BLUEBIRD SOCIETY'S  
STATEWIDE  
BLUEBIRD  
BLITZ**

**November 11 & 12**



**Find us on:  
facebook®**



## Natural Alternatives

By Cheri Martin-Spray

### Mosquito Control

With so much talk about the Zika virus on the news lately, it gets people wondering about ways they can fight mosquitos without using harmful pesticides on themselves, and in their yard.

Of course the **first** thing we need to do is to go around our yards, and make sure we do not have any standing water for mosquitos to breed in. So be certain to dump out any standing water. If you have birdbaths, change out the water daily, if you do not already do so. The birds appreciate cool, clean water anyway.

One product that I have used for a few years that seems to help control mosquitoes, also ants, fleas, chiggers and other insect pests, is a **granular form of cedar**. It's safe for use around children and pets. It also smells great. The product I use comes in a 10 lb. bag. I use a small hand-held spreader to scatter the cedar granules around the outside of my house, especially around the doors and in the grass.

I purchase cedar granules at a local "do it yourself" pest control supply store, but I have also seen it at big box home improvement stores. You might have to search on-line for a supplier near you.

It is recommended to reapply more often after periods of heavy rains.

This product **REPELS** unwanted insect pests. It will **NOT** harm beneficial insects such as ladybugs, or bees, and our beautiful butterflies.



Another thing you can do in your flowerbeds, (which Ken Custer and I have done) is to use **cedar pet bedding as mulch**

When it comes to products for use on your skin, there are numerous "recipes" available. This is one I have used.

In a small spray bottle add the following ingredients, in the order listed:

2 TBSP	Vodka (no this isn't a cocktail)
2 TBSP	Grapeseed or olive oil
1/2 TSP	Lemon Eucalyptus oil
1/6 TSP	Cedarwood essential oil
1/6 TSP	Rosemary essential oil
1/6 TSP	Lavandula Angustifolia essential oil (Lavender essential oil)

Spray on arms, legs, and neck.

#### \*\*\*Safety Warnings\*\*\*

*As with all essential oils, you do not want to get it in the eyes. Pregnant women should consult with their doctors before using essential oils. Do not use essential oil mixtures on children younger than 3 yrs. old. When using an essential oil for the first time, you should test a small drop on your skin before you apply all over, for an allergic reaction. And last but not least, this is for external use only. Do not ingest this recipe.*

If you do not have all of the ingredients listed above, I have read that Lavender repels mosquitos. Try mixing several drops of Lavender essential oil with a little water and either witch hazel, or vodka, in a spray bottle, and spray on before you head out. The vodka and witch hazel helps the liquid dissipate.

I hope that these suggestions will work for you, and allow you to enjoy the great outdoors, and all that they have to offer.

The Florida Bluebird Society, Inc. is a recognized by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt charitable organization  
Donations to the Florida Bluebird Society, Inc. are considered tax deductible

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