

# The Florida Bluebird Society

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



Volume 6, Issue 6

November-December 2016



## STATEWIDE FALL BLUEBIRD BLITZ

November 11 & 12

### 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 Fall Blitz, November 11 & 12, will help us to know where the bluebirds are finding food and shelter during the non-breeding season.

### How do I participate?

Simply choose a location, count the number of bluebirds you see, and send us a report of your sightings. We offer three ways to submit your sightings.

1. Enter your data on a downloadable spreadsheet and email it to us.
2. Record your results on a downloaded form. Immediately after the Blitz mail the form to us.

3. 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).

Downloadable forms are available on our web site [floridabluebirdsociety.com](http://floridabluebirdsociety.com).

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

## Time to Clean and Repair Nest Boxes

Nesting season has ended and now is the time to prepare for next season. We suggest you not only clean out your boxes, but take a good look at them. If you see anything about your box or predator guards that might pose a hazard to birds now is the time to make repairs.

Do leave your boxes in place as birds will take shelter in them during cold weather.

## Bill Pennewill Honored



When Bill and Nell Pennewill moved from Pennsylvania to the Penney Retirement Community (PRC) in Penney Farms, Bill volunteered to work on the bluebird trail that has been started on the campus but was not being properly maintained. Bill began to research Eastern Bluebirds and contact people in Florida who were either working with bluebirds or might have some knowledge about them. What he quickly discovered was the majority of the known information was obtained from the mid-Atlantic and mid-western states.

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# WELCOME

## NEW MEMBERS

T-Square Ranch

Bushnell



## Message From Our President

Cheri Martin-Spray

As another nesting season comes to a close, and fall is here, I recently took some time to reflect on the 2016 nesting activity.

A couple of weekends ago, the early morning temperatures were fairly nice, 73 degrees. So I sat out on our screened back porch, sipping my coffee, watching the birds, and other morning creatures, for a couple of hours.

The cardinals were the first to arrive at the feeders, followed by blue jays, tufted titmice, Carolina chickadees, red-bellied woodpeckers, 2 types of dove, house finches, and finally the squirrels. The birds flew back and forth between the two sets of feeders I have set up on opposite sides of the property. They took turns at the many birdbaths I have set up for them. They had started their day, and in turn, made mine. I thought it couldn't get any better than this, but just about that time, I heard a familiar, though faint, bird calling.

It was "my" bluebirds, off in the distance, near the cattle pasture where they seem to hang out during the off-season. A big smile came to my face. I had not seen, or heard, the bluebirds for several days. Hearing them was reassuring that they had survived the recent hawk attacks in the area. Then, to make my day complete, they flew to the yard, bringing 2 fledglings with them. They showed them the nest box where they had come from, showed them the mealworm feeder, where they can find a free meal when they need it, showed them the bird bath, where they can get a drink or play in the water, and then they just hung around for a few minutes.

Something so simple brought so much joy to me in that moment. I've said it before, and I'll say it again, "There's just something about them".

Hope you had a great 2016 nesting season, and a nice summer.

Happy Fall!!

## 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).

## A Double-decker Bluebird Season

By Ann Harwood-Nuss

I've had the great pleasure of watching bluebirds occupy the same nest box year after year. A pair of bluebirds would, like clockwork, build a nest, lay five eggs, and fledge five young bluebirds. This would be repeated three times each season for the last 7-8 years.

In March of this year, I saw (presumably) competing nesting pairs all wanting to raise their young in this same nest box. One pair would build a nest and lay eggs. Then, another pair would build a NEW nest on top of the first one and lay eggs.

After this double-decker event, yet *another* nest was built and five bluebird eggs were laid. One day, I went to check on this latest effort and was astonished to see that something had carefully removed all five eggs and placed them on the ground together at the base of the nest box! I have seen photographs of birds carrying eggs, so I can only surmise that this event was accomplished by another bluebird. Had it been a predator (snake, raccoon), I would have expected the eggs to be gone. Had it been another small songbird (sparrow) invading the nest box, typically the eggs would have been destroyed and remnants seen in the nest.

Two weeks later, I finally had one successful brood of four eggs. Three fledged successfully and one partially feathered bird was found deceased when I went

to remove the nest.

Of interest, we have two additional nest boxes on our property. The distance among the three is about 100 yards. This year, we had bluebirds lay eggs in one of the additional nest boxes and a tufted titmouse family in the other.

### *Editorial Note:*

*As bluebirds are very territorial, the FBS and the North American Bluebird Society recommend their nest boxes be placed at least 100-125 yards apart.*

## Successful 1st Nesting Season on Bolles School Trail

Thanks in part to grants from the Florida Bluebird Society, a trail of eight nest boxes was established under the direction of Dr. Brett Moyer at the Bolles School this year. Eastern bluebird pairs chose three of the boxes for their nests. Twenty-seven bluebirds fledged from the three boxes during the nesting season.

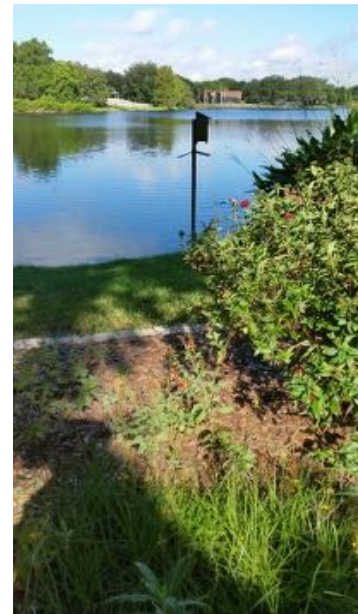
Dr. Moyer's Environmental Science classes are working on a number of other components for the bluebird project including live stream webcam and green roofs.

## FBS Nest Box Webcam Project

By Ken Custer

As we reported in the last newsletter, we have a team of volunteers working diligently behind the scenes to formulate plans to develop and install a "prototype" FBS Nesting Box Webcam at one of our long time FBS member's home in North

Tampa. Fern Kinion has the ideal location for hosting a webcam. We are hoping to have it operational by January of 2017 (before the next nesting season). Fern has enjoyed sitting on her enclosed lanai and watching the bluebird activity.



*"I feel blessed and deeply honored to have the Nesting Box Webcam Project located at my home. I'd seen one elsewhere and was curious how to install*

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## FBS Nest Box Webcam Project

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*one here. Bluebirds initially came to my yard last spring and remained through the winter months. This year I've had four clutches for a total of 12 birds, but I could only monitor the birthing periods by using a calendar. Now, being the prototype host, I can share my joy with school children and many others watching the bluebird nesting activity."* Fern



Thanks to Mike and Laurie Kell for their generous donation of a computer and monitor for use in this project. We also thank Shawn & Cheri Martin Spray for constructing a nest box that is modified to accommodate a camera.

We will be working with our FBS webmaster, Ken Bell, to find the best (affordable) webcam that will accommodate our needs and provide a direct link to our FBS website so that others can enjoy some of the same entertainment that Fern (and others) have witnessed in the past.

## Ideas for Bluebird Research Needed

Is there a question about bluebirds you would like to try to answer? The FBS has Bill Pennewill Grant Funds available. Information and application forms are located in the Resource section of our website, [floridabluebirdsociety.com](http://floridabluebirdsociety.com).

## Fall Outreach Activities



In an effort to spread the word about bluebirds in Florida, we participated in a number of Festivals this Fall.

The Florida Bluebird Society (FBS) participated in ButterflyFest, at the Florida Natural History Museum in Gainesville. Board members Rhonda Ockay and Cheri Martin-Spray, along with member Libby Beese, talked to hundreds of people about bluebirds. In addition to the fabulous rotating photo display created by Rhonda Ockay, the FBS added two children's activities to our display. Bluebird Coloring pages were a big hit with the



little ones, and our Bluebird puzzle game engaged children of all ages.

We hope some of these youngsters will become bluebird trail monitors in the future.

It was a very busy, but rewarding day. We thank Libby for driving two hours to volunteer with us. It is members like Libby that make our outreach programs possible.



On October 22<sup>nd</sup>, thanks again to the commitment of Cheri Martin-Spray and Rhonda Ockay, we participated in the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Florida Bat Festival. Our display was again very active with people attracted to our booth by the photo display and children's activities. Cheri and Rhonda talked to hundreds of people and received donations for few of our nest boxes.



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## BATS IN THE BELFRY

BY: *Cherí Martin-Spray*



Bats. The mere mention of their name can make some people withdraw in horror. Such a shame that they have been turned into creatures associated with horror movies, when in fact; these are some of the MOST beneficial animals on the planet.

In one night, a species called the brown bat can eat as many as 1,000 small insects in an hour. That is according to the Defenders of Wildlife organization. One bat can eat over 3,000 insects (many crop pests) in one night.

There are estimated to be between 900 – 1,200 species of bats. They are the ONLY mammals that can truly fly.

There are so many misconceptions about bats, which has lead the fear against them. Some people see them as disease carrying, blood sucking vampires, when in reality, bats are very helpful in ridding the world of harmful insects. Like MOSQUITOS!!

Most bats eat small insects, fruit, flowers, and nectar, even leaves. It depends on the type of bat. Some bats can squeeze juice from the fruit they put in their mouths. However, there is a type of bat that does drink a different type of fruit. The Vampire Bat. Yes, there is such a thing, but fear not, they are not after humans. They mostly drink blood from cattle and deer. Contrary to popular belief, they do not suck blood like Hollywood legends say. Instead, they make a V-shaped cut and then then lick up the blood. This does not kill the animal. Fear not...there are no

Vampire bats in the United States. They live further south, in southern Mexico, and Central and South America.

Another very common misconception that people have is that all bats have rabies. This is simply not true. Studies have shown that less than one percent contract rabies.

Florida is home to approximately 13 different species of bats. The majority of them are insectivorous. There are about four species found in the southern areas of Florida that feed on nectar, pollen, and fruit.

Another benefit from bats is that their excrement, called Guano, is among the best natural fertilizer in the world! Just think of all the beautiful flowers and vegetables you could grow using this natural fertilizer.

Bats are threatened, and are disappearing at alarming rates. Loss of habitat is the biggest reason. Which leads me to the main reason I wanted to write this article.

I was gifted with a beautiful bat house for Christmas, built by my brother-in-law Jeff. I had been chattering about how much I wanted to put up a house after attending Bat Fest in Gainesville last year. Well, it didn't fall on deaf ears.

He did a wonderful job of building the house, and I couldn't have been happier Christmas morning. When I hadn't gotten it up by my birthday, 5 months later, he brought the (very) tall poles needed to erect it, and at a family get together in mid-May, 4 grown men erected my bat house! It was a job.

The houses need to be mounted at least 10 feet from the ground, but the

higher the house, the better your success rate. I believe my bat house is 15 ft. high. They also need warmth, so placing the box facing the morning sun is a good location, and away from tree branches, to avoid snakes or other predators from dropping on the house.

They say I have to be patient while waiting for bats to move into the house. It could take months, or even years. However long it takes, I know that I am (trying) to help a very important creature in the eco-cycle. And with the latest mosquito threats, I'm anxious for them to move in.

There is so much more information I would love to talk about when it comes to bats, but the best thing you could do would be to look them up on the internet. Florida has some great bat conservation groups that can offer help.

In fact, one such group is the Lube Bat Conservancy, in Gainesville. I invite you to come "Hang With Giants" at this years' Bat Festival, on October 22<sup>nd</sup>. The Florida Bluebird Society will be there, along with some excellent wildlife conservation groups from Florida. Be sure to stop by our table at the festival and say hello. We will be at table #15 in the Barn.

I encourage everyone to learn about this important, threatened, misunderstood species. Yes, I'm BATTY!

## Fall Festivals

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We know that our participation in these festivals helps us to enlighten people about bluebirds in Florida. We greatly appreciate our volunteers who have donated so very many hours to these outreach activities.





## Natural Alternatives

By Faith Jones

### Environmentally-friendly Household Cleaner

If you have not already given up expensive and chemically-laden household cleaners here is a suggestion for a general cleaner that will clean just about everything. You can vary the ratio of ingredients based on what you need to clean. It is amazing at removing soap scum from bathroom tile and sinks.

#### Ingredients:

- 1 part white vinegar
- 1 part dish detergent (I use blue Dawn)

For carpet stains and toilets you can double the amount of vinegar.

#### Directions:

1. Heat vinegar in the microwave for two minutes.
2. Pour Dawn and warm vinegar into spray bottle.
3. Shake gently to mix.
4. Let sit until mixture cools before use.

You may notice a vinegar smell at first, but once you rinse, the clean smell of the detergent persists.

Try it. I think you will be surprised how well it works.

## Pennewill Honored

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Much of that information does not hold true in Florida.

Bill decided to try and bring together people in Florida interested in bluebirds. He took on all that was involved to establish a non-profit corporation and comply with all State and Federal requirements, and thus the Florida Bluebird Society was formed. At our organizational meeting in August 2009, Bill was elected our first President. His term on the Board ended this year, and he declined the nomination for an additional term.

There would be no Florida Bluebird Society were it not for our Founding President. Bill has researched nest box design for Florida conditions and came up with the design FBS recommends and obtained NABS approval. He wrote the FBS Bluebird information booklet, and created our Powerpoint presentation. He has conducted a number of bluebird studies on nest box temperatures and productivity, effects of nest removal vs non-removal between nesting, etc.

At our Annual Meeting in August, the current Board agreed to give Bill a hat embroidered with the FBS logo as a token of our appreciation. To permanently honor him, our research grants will forever be



known as the Bill Pennewill Research Grants.

Bill had this lovely message in response to the news:

*Please pass along to the other board members my thanks for the FBS hat. Every time I wear the hat -- as I did yesterday -- it will be a reminder of the thoughtfulness and appreciation of all those people who enjoy bluebirds as much as I do. While out and about the campus yesterday I saw many bluebirds, and -- as always -- it was such a delight to see them flitting through the trees or dropping down to the ground to pounce on some insect.*

*Because of folks like you and the members of the FBS, other folks will continue to learn more about bluebirds in Florida and have the opportunity to experience the pleasure of seeing those birds "which carry the sky on their backs."*

*Again, thanks so much to all you folks who will carry on the work of the FBS.*

*— Bill P.*



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