

# The Florida Bluebird Society

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



Volume 9, Issue 2

2019

## Monitoring Your Nestbox

Nesting season is underway. If you have a nestbox, you should be monitoring it and recording your findings weekly. So that your data is available for researchers world-wide, we recommend you submit your findings weekly to [NestWatch.org](http://NestWatch.org). Keeping records can be a daunting task, and Cornell has developed an App to make submission of your data to NestWatch easier.

### Get the New NestWatch App!

Whether you monitor an extensive nestbox trail or find a single nest in your yard—track nests, eggs, and baby birds with the new NestWatch app. No data sheets necessary! You can now record your observations in real time. Map your nest sites with ease using your phone's built-in GPS, and keep tabs on your nesting statistics from anywhere. Have a remote location with patchy cell service? No worries. The NestWatch app has an offline mode, allowing you to record and save your nest observations without WiFi or cellular service. Download the free app from Google Play or the Apple App Store.



**Look for the  
NestWatch App Icon**

If you already have a NestWatch account, sign into the app with your NestWatch username. Your data will automatically sync to the device. Download the app, explore its features, and let us know your thoughts. We hope you find this new technology improves your experience monitoring nesting birds.

## Region 4 Get Together

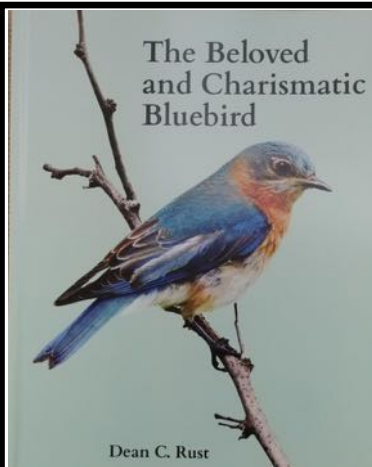
March 23 is a significant day for bluebirds. Ken Custer, FBS President, attributes his love of bluebirds to his mother who was totally enamored and did all she could to help them. She was born on March 23. When Ken moved to Land O Lakes the very first bluebird he saw was on March 23. As March 23, 2019 fell on a Saturday it was the perfect day for a Region 4 Meeting.

FBS Region 4 consists of Levy, Marion, Citrus, Hernando, Sumter, Pasco, Hillsborough, and Pinellas Counties. This was a casual gathering where we discussed nestboxes, predator guards, monitoring, the importance of native plants, and other bluebird-related topics. The activity in Lucy's Tampa nest was live streamed during the meeting.



Thanks to Leonard Guffy, Rose Santore, Janet Day & Ken Custer for organizing the informative meeting.





## Surprise Gift to the FBS Board: The Beloved and Charismatic Bluebird

By Joanne Q. Heinrich  
Vice President, Florida Bluebird Society  
Northeast Florida Coordinator

Honored, we were, when the FBS board members all received a beautifully written and illustrated book by one of our peer group's president, Dean C. Rust. Mr. Rust is not only the president of the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania, but as we found out, a very talented author and storyteller. *The Beloved and Charismatic Bluebird* is a reference book that should be cherished for ages to come just as its subject. Being "into" bluebirds for about 6 years now, I still have a lot to learn and this book added to my education and excitement about our little blue friends who I hold so dear to my heart. It answered some questions I didn't even know I had!

For example, I have two bluebird houses on my property, one in the back yard and one in the front. It's been a very harmonious relationship since the chickadees preferred the back yard and the bluebirds preferred the front. I finally figured out why the bluebirds preferred the front from reading this book. Mr. Rust mentions utility lines as a good source for bluebird perches, especially when they are "standing guard" watching for predators over their own box when there are eggs or chicks in there. That must be the reason they prefer the front! The front yard box is about 36 feet from the cable and power lines going into my neighbor's house. And that is exactly where the parents usually are when I go out to monitor the box.

The range of subjects Mr. Rust covers was captivating: A tribute to the founder of the North American Bluebird Society, Dr. Lawrence Zeleny, a little history lesson dating back to the early 1600's, bluebird basics, surprising ideas on how to deter house sparrows, starting your own mealworm farm, planting for bluebirds, and if that wasn't enough, a glossary that I found to be very informative! Needless to say, I would highly recommend this book to beginner, intermediate and expert bluebirders, there *will* be something you can learn and the photographs are stunning. Thank you for pouring your heart and soul into making this book for our enjoyment Mr. Rust!

*Disclaimer: In adhering to existing state legal guidelines, the Florida Bluebird Society's General Birding Principles and Code of Ethics for Monitoring nest boxes may differ from practices publicized or advocated by the North American Bluebird Society, other state bluebird organizations, and on Internet web sites. Please refer to our website for more information on FBS principles and Florida regulations:*

<https://floridabluebirdsociety.org/protocol/>

<https://floridabluebirdsociety.org/artificial-nesting-devices/>

## Heritage Pines Country Club HP Bluebird Trail Hudson, Florida

Located on the edge of the Heritage Pines Golf Course, the HP Bluebird Trail is a legacy of the first residents of Heritage Pines, Herb and Paula Elliott. The Elliott's are the founders of Paleo Park-Elliott Site, an ancient sink hole with a surrounding park, and they also founded the HP Bluebird Trail.

Upon moving to Heritage Pines in 1998, the Elliott's realized there were no bluebirds to be seen. In order to attract these beautiful birds, they recruited volunteers to build bluebird houses and installed the houses along the edge of HP golf course. They monitored these houses since their installation.

There are currently about 20 bluebird houses and they are currently being monitored by a group of volunteers who have taken over for the Elliotts to assure that bluebirds fly over Heritage Pines in honor of the Elliotts for years to come.



Photo by Paula Elliott, Hudson, Florida





Project leader Anne Josephs, Gabrielle Wong, and Daniel Skinner sit in a native plant garden at Old Kings Elementary School after installing a nestbox and predator guard. *Photo by Dylan Long*

## Student Bluebird Project Progresses

Flagler Palm Coast High School student's Community Problem Solving Bluebird Project continues to progress with the assistance of FBS Board member, Jim Nichols. Using building materials donated by Lowe's, the students have constructed and installed nestboxes and predator guards. Their project includes the placement of nestboxes at six sites where volunteer monitors are available. Five nestboxes will be placed on school campuses and one at a local Garden Center. Efforts are being made to locate the nestboxes near areas with native plants. According to Ellen Asher, teacher at Old Kings Elementary School in Flagler Beach, use of such locations "will help enrich the students knowledge of how plants and animals work together on our planet".

As part of the Community Problem Solving Bluebird Project the high school students will provide informational bluebird presentations to help educate the students at schools where nestboxes have been located. The boxes will be monitored on a regular basis following FBS Principles and Nestbox Monitoring Protocol.

These same students distributed FBS and NABS literature at the 5th Annual Birds of a Feather Festival in Palm Coast.



## Master Gardeners Learn About Bluebirds

"May all Your Blues be Birds" was offered to Nassau County residents at the Nassau County Extension office in Yulee on March 6, 2019. Approximately forty residents attended and many purchased Florida Bluebird Society designed nest boxes made by Master Gardener Lynn West and a Fernandina Boy Scouts of America pack.

Nassau County Extension, University of Florida, offers twice monthly classes in Lawns, Gardens & Landscapes as well as 4-H Youth Development, Agriculture & Natural Resources and Families & Consumers. Rebecca Jordi, Environmental Horticulture Agent II, leads the office.

The program was conducted by Master Gardener Candace Bridgewater who was inspired to 'grow' bluebirds by Penney Farms Bill Pennewill, Founder of the Florida Bluebird Society. Candace and friend Jean Middleton place and monitor a twenty box trail at Omni Amelia Island Plantation. Bluebirds abound and have many fond admirers.



Thanks to Candace Bridgewater for presenting this program.



Photographs by Elizabeth Wilkes

## Florida's Other Cavity Nesters

By Faith Jones

The Mission of the Florida Bluebird Society is the conservation and protection of bluebirds and **other** federally protected cavity nesting bird species. We do not often discuss the other species. This article will address the Carolina Chickadee and the Tufted Titmouse.



Photo by Ken Schmidt



Photo by Ken Schmidt

### Description

Both Carolina Chickadee and Tufted Titmouse are in the family Paridae. Birds in the same family have similar characteristics.. Chickadees average 4.25"- 5.5" in length while Tufted Titmouses average 6.5". For reference, an Eastern Bluebird averages 7" in length.

Members of Paridae family are sociable, energetic song birds with short conical, pointed bills. In North America, a species without a crest is called chickadees while those with crests are titmouses. Males and females look alike, as do immatures and adult birds. Chickadees all have dark crowns and bibs that contrast sharply with white cheeks. Titmouses are generally uniformly grayish birds with a conspicuous crest. Their wings are relatively short and rounded, and they have longish tails. Although their flight is often rather weak and jerky, their body, wing and tail shape provides the aerodynamic agility they require to move through and feed in heavily wooded areas.

### Range

Carolina Chickadee is one of five species in the genus *Poecile* found in North America. It is the only species of chickadee found in Florida. It's range extends about halfway down peninsular Florida. The Carolina Chickadee is smaller and duller than most other chickadee species. It is most similar to the Black-capped Chickadee, but has tan feathers on the sides of its chest.

Tufted Titmouse is one of five species in the genus *Baeolophus* found in North America. Tufted Titmouse is a species found throughout the eastern US with the exception of the extreme southern portion of Florida. They are uniformly gray above and whitish below with a peach colored wash on the sides of the chest. Their crest is gray and they have a black forehead.

Movement of both species is mostly sedentary with some seasonal movement short distances from their nesting territory. Both are considered resident birds within their range.

### Habitat

Both species are found in a wide range of wooded habitats including riparian and swamps. They can also be found in parks and suburban habitats.

### Behavior

Carolina Chickadees and Tufted Titmouses are often found together foraging in mixed flocks that may also include Downy Woodpeckers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and warblers. They are extremely active birds. Their diagnostic feeding behavior results from specialized leg muscles which enable these birds to feed acrobatically. They are adept at feeding while hanging upside down or sideways as they look for bugs on the underside of branches, in hanging leaf clusters, cones, or buds at the end of twigs.

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## Florida's Other Cavity Nesters (Continued from page 4)

Paradae often store food in temporary storage sites called caches. The food may be placed in a cache and retrieved almost immediately, as when a chickadee moves many sunflower seeds from a feeder and stuffs them in a nearby tree bark. In this case the cache has merely helped the bird get most of the food for itself. At other times the cache may be more long-term such as when chickadees store seeds collected in the fall for use later in the winter. This strategy, which involves significant spatial memory, is not as important for Florida birds but is crucial for overwintering in harsh environments.

### Vocalizations

Each bird species has a distinct song and often a number of calls. Songs are used primarily by male birds to attract a mate or to defend his territory. Calls are more flexible in their usage. They are used by males and females often to simply keep tabs on each other's location. Chickadee and titmouse vocalizations are loud and similar, yet specific for each species. They call frequently as they forage for food.

The Carolina Chickadee song is described by David Allen Sibley as three to four notes of different pitches *see bee see bay* and other variations. Their call is described as *chik a dee dee dee dee*. Both song and call are higher pitched and faster than those of the Black-capped Chickadee.

The Tufted Titmouse song is commonly described as *Peter-Peter-Peter*. Their calls are numerous, but all have a quality that is described as hollow, nasal, or mechanical. David Allen Sibley describes a few as a scratchy, chickadee-like *tsee-day-day-day* or *high pitched thin notes ti ti ti sii sii zthree zthree zthree*. Also whistled notes such as *see-toit*.

### Diet

Most of the year 80-90% of their diet consists of caterpillars, spiders, and insects including their eggs and larvae. During winter months their diet is half plant and half animal. They do eat berries and seeds, especially sunflower seeds. They are common visitors to urban and suburban bird feeders.

### Breeding

As is true with most monomorphic species, Carolina Chickadees and Tufted Titmouses are believed to mate for life. The female usually chooses the nest site. The pair either cleans out a pre-existing cavity or finds a nestbox.

Carolina Chickadees and Tufted Titmouse nests and eggs are similar in size and appearance. Nest construction takes 5 to 11 days and is predominantly done by the female. She stuffs the cavity with a foundation of coarse plant materials such as leaves, bits of bark, and most commonly moss. She then lines the egg cup with finer materials such as feathers or animal hair. Tufted Titmouses often place snake skins on their nests.

Eggs are whitish with brownish spots. Eggs incubate for 11-14 days, and the young fledge in 13- 17 days.



**Carolina Chickadee nest**

*Photo by Bill Pennewill*



**Tufted Titmouse nest**

*Photo by Cheri Martin-Spray*



**Eastern Bluebird nest built on top of a Carolina Chickadee nest.**

*Cheri Martin-Spray*

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## Florida's Other Cavity Nesters (Continued from page 5)

Both parents share the work of incubation and feeding. The adults continue to care for their young after fledging. Occasionally adults and young remain together into the winter months. Those pairs that have a second brood have been known to employ fledged young from earlier broods as food providers during the second nesting.



**Carolina Chickadee eggs**

Look closely, starting to hatch

Joanne Heinrich



**Tufted Titmouse eggs**

Photo by Cheri Martin-Spray



**Eastern Bluebird eggs**

Photo by Libby Beese

### Conservation

In recent decades, their populations have declined in the Gulf Coast states including Florida. During this same time period, their ranges have expanded northward.

The scarcity of suitable nesting sites limits the size of their populations. As is true for all cavity-nesting species, as long as the removal of dead and dying trees remains a common practice in areas where people live there will be limited natural nesting cavities. Maintaining nestboxes and bird feeding stations will benefit these species.

Our cherished Eastern Bluebirds nest at about the same time as Carolina Chickadees and Tufted Titmouses. These three species compete for nesting cavities. The Eastern Bluebird, being the largest of these species, generally dominates in any nestbox competition. Bluebirds have been known to remove nesting material placed in a box by another species, and to build on top of other bird's nests. There have also been cases where a bluebird removed eggs and even recent hatchlings of other species from a nestbox they wanted to use.

If a chickadee or titmouse chooses your nestbox we hope you will be pleased that your box is being used. These birds are also native cavity nesting birds, and our mission includes their protection.

### References

Alderfer, J. (ed.) *National Geographic Complete Birds of North America*. Washington DC. National Geographic Society. 2014  
Ehrlich, Paul R., Dobkin, David S., Wheye, Darryl. *The Birder's Handbook*. New York, Simon & Schuster. 1988  
Sibley, David Allen *Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America*. Knopf New York 2016  
Sibley, David Allen *The Sibley Guide to Bird Life & Behavior*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. New York 2001

**Titmice or Titmouses?**

Answer in next issue.







# WELCOME

## NEW MEMBERS

E. Joye Boardman	Palm Coast
Hope Botterbusch	Hudson
Walter & Vicki Cox	Fernandina Beach
Debbie Hobin	Brooksville
Mark Hubbard	Green Cove Springs
Gayle Larsen	Fleming Island
Keith Laverty	Ormond Beach
Nancy Laverty	Ormond Beach
Alice Lee	Jacksonville
Luann Moore	Jacksonville
Lorraine Weiss	Ft. Myers

## FBS Awards Research Grant

Yue Liu, a master student in Wildlife ecology and conservation at the University of Florida, is studying the processes and mechanisms Eastern bluebirds use to adapt to human caused changes in their environment. The overall objective of the research is to evaluate the impact of construction noise on reproductive behavior of the eastern bluebird and their offspring.

The study will investigate changes in reproductive behavior during the incubation stage. The hypothesis being that exposure to noise will result in changes to characteristics of the male's song.

Previous studies have demonstrated noise has a negative effect on hatching success. This study hopes to provide a greater understanding of the behavior changes that alter hatching success. The impact of construction noise on embryo development, and the affect on fledgling personality will also be studied.

FBS is pleased to be able to help fund this research.

The Florida Bluebird Society thanks the following individuals and organizations for their generous financial support.

### Life Members

Madison E. Alderson - Williston  
 Joanne Heinrich - Jacksonville  
 Louis Nipper - Hernando (dec.2017)  
 Pam Overmyer - Panama City  
 Richard Yeager—Penney Farms

### 2018-2019

#### Sponsors

Susan Beittel - Sanibel  
 Libby Beese—Palm Coast  
 Candace Bridgewater - Fernandina Beach  
 David Foster - Jacksonville  
 Ann Harwood Nuss—Jacksonville  
 Shannon Joyce - Clermont  
 Jean Middleton— Amelia Island  
 Teri Pollard—Jacksonville  
 Michael Singer - Hernando

#### Patrons

Ulla Benny - Gainesville  
 Delilah Gwaltney—Wildwood  
 Ed Kawecki—Jupiter  
 Allison Marsak - Ponte Verde  
 Cheri Martin-Spray - Inverness  
 Nancy Stokes - Fleming Island

#### Organizations

Native Nurseries of Tallahassee, Inc.



## Wild Birds Unlimited—Palm Coast Hosts FBS


There was a full house in the store as Joanne Heinrich, FBS Vice President, gave a fact-filled presentation that included information about nestboxes and predator guards.



FBS and North American Bluebird Society information was distributed.

Thanks to Joanne and Jim Nichols for their work on this presentation.







### Save the Date: March 12-15, 2020!

Join bluebird friends for the migration to the 2020 North American Bluebird Society Conference in Kearney, Nebraska. This exciting and educational event is being hosted by Bluebirds Across Nebraska.

**Speakers:**  
Al Batt, Bernie Daniel, Myrna Pearman, Stan Tekiela, Julie Zickefoose

**Activities (More to come):**  
Sandhill Crane Viewing Blinds, Prairie Chicken Leks Viewing & Rainwater Basin Waterfowl Viewing Areas, Workshops, Exhibits, Silent Auction, Raffle, and time to socialize with birding friends.





## 2018-2019 Board of Directors

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Jim Nichols	Director	jnicholspc@bellsouth.net
Bill Pennewill	Founding President	floridabluebirds@yahoo.com

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