

The Florida Bluebird Society

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



Volume 10, Issue 1

January/ February 2020

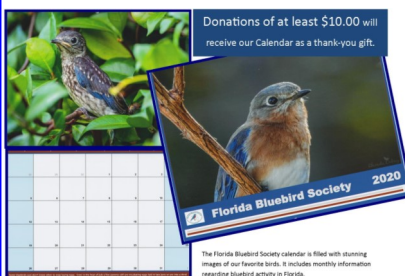
FBS Awards 1st Trail Upgrade Grant

The Heritage Pines Bluebird Trail is located in Pasco County, on the west coast about 50 miles north of Tampa. It was established in 2004 by the first residents of Heritage Pines, Herb & Paula Elliott. The trail is located along the edge of the Heritage Pines Golf Course which has been certified as a “Neighborhood for Nature” and a “Certified Cooperative Sanctuary” by Audubon International.

During the last 15 years the community has grown to over 2000 residents. Some of the nestboxes have fallen into disrepair and there has been an increase in human disturbance. In 2019, monitoring and maintenance was taken over by Hope Botterbusch and Robert Johnson. As an accomplished photographer, Robert introduces the use of an endoscopic borescope camera paired with a cell phone for fast, accurate monitoring of nestboxes. You may recall the article about this in the 2019 Volume 9 Issue 4 of this newsletter.

The FBS Grant Committee determined this Grant Application to be worthy, not only for the upgrading component that will involve replacing and repairing of boxes and predator guards, but for its educational and citizen-science components. Their plan includes the development and presentation of a training program for residents and Heritage Pines staff members with regular progress meetings. Nestbox data will be collected and submitted to Cornell’s NestWatch program and there will be a correlational-regression analysis done to compare and contrast the 2019, 2020, and 2021 data to determine if the residents training monitoring program has had an impact on the Eastern Bluebird population at the Heritage Pines Community. This project should broaden the knowledge of the Eastern Bluebird population, and improve the knowledge of the residents and staff of the Heritage Pines Community about the purpose and importance of the bluebird trail.

We look forward to working with Hope, Robert, and the Heritage Pines Community on this project.



2020 Calendars Available

There are a few 2020 Florida Bluebird Society Calendars available. Calendars are obtainable for a minimum \$10.00 donation. Your donation check can be mailed to FBS, 763 Mallard Drive, Sanford FL 32771 or donations can be made using a credit card and the Donation button on our website floridabluebirdsociety.org. If you have any questions or special requests contact us at FloridaBluebirdSociety@gmail.com. Calendars will be mailed to you.



Message From Our President

Joanne Q. Heinrich

On behalf of the Florida Bluebird Society (FBS), I wish you a Happy New Year!

This is a time when we reflect on the year that is ending. The year 2019 marked the 10th Anniversary of the founding of the FBS. We have had our ups and downs, but we are pleased with our accomplishments. We continue to gather information about bluebirds in Florida. In addition to population data we are learning things that help them and things that do not. We introduce and inform as many people as possible about bluebirds and ways they can help our favorite avian species.



One of the best perks of being on the FBS board is hearing from members and non-members about their trials, tribulations, joy and successes they have with bluebirds. For example, this past year, I coached a woman and her husband through a stressful time. They were both recovering from a very bad car accident when they realized bluebirds were nesting in their 2nd floor dryer vent! Luckily, they had another dryer on the first floor. But they were worried. After a few emails back and forth, they were able to get comfortable that the babies were being well taken care of by the parents and they fledged.

Another woman reached out to us about “a massive number of bluebirds flying into Werner Boyce Salt Springs Park in Port Richey, Florida”. She said there were about a hundred of them. Hopefully, she identified them correctly! I asked her to report it on eBird, Cornell Lab’s bird website and phone app to report bird sightings: <https://ebird.org/home>. She was delighted to find a way to report her finding. I explained it helps scientific studies greatly. You can report it retroactively as well as find where the birds are. We need more citizens involved to help understand the population movements.

As these people did, if you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to send them to our mailbox: fbs.inquiries1@floridabluebirdsociety.org. Remember, we are an organization dedicated to the conservation and protection of bluebirds *and other federally protected cavity nesting bird species* in North America. Please let us know other stories or questions you may have about wood ducks, flycatchers, woodpeckers, chickadees, owls, etc. We love hearing from you!

As I reflect on 2019, I am most appreciative for great members and board who really care. We are grateful for your support, and are looking forward to a successful and productive 2020 nesting season.

Below is a list of our upcoming activities. We hope you will consider attending one of these events.

Upcoming FBS Activities

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Sat. Jan. 25 | Bluebird Program Meeting , Hudson
1:00 p.m. Performing Arts Center, Heritage Pines Golf Clubhouse, 11524 Scenic Hills Blvd.
FBS is pleased to provide an informational program about bluebirds at this gathering. Please tell the Gate Guard you are there for the Florida Bluebird Society meeting.
Questions? Contact Hope Botterbusch at esparanza2@gmail.com or 727-233-2130. |
| Sat. Feb. 8 | Passionflower Chapter Florida Native Plant Society , Clermont
10 a.m. Cooper Memorial Library, 2525 Oakley Seaver Dr.
FBS Board member Faith Jones will present our “May All Your Blues be Birds” program plus information on the importance of Florida native plants to bluebirds, and some of the plants they like. |
| March 12-15 | 2020 North American Bluebird Society Conference , Kearney, Nebraska
This will be a weekend filled with educational programs, field trips, and the opportunity to see the 500,000 Sandhill Cranes that visit the central Platte River Valley each Spring. In addition it will provide an opportunity to meet and talk “bluebird” with rooms full of fellow bluebirders. Details on flyer sent with this newsletter. |
| Sat. March 21 | Region 4 Meeting , Land O Lakes
Details TBA |

Bluebird Meeting Saturday January 25

Please join us as the Florida Bluebird Society provides an informational program about bluebirds on Saturday January 25 in the Performing Arts Center of the Heritage Pines Golf Clubhouse located at 11524 Scenic Hills Blvd. in Hudson Florida. The program will begin at 1:00 p.m. This meeting will provide an opportunity to ask questions and share bluebird stories.

All are welcome. Heritage Pines is a gated community. Inform the gate guard you are there to attend the Florida Bluebird Society program and you will be given directions to the meeting location.



Bluebird Gathering

Lisa Fulton

See page 2 for other upcoming programs and activities.

FBS at Festival of Flight and Flowers

The Festival of Flight and Flowers weekend in Lake County, sponsored by the Oklawaha Valley Audubon Society, was held October 11 - 13. The weekend was comprised of a one-day festival on October 12, in downtown Eustis, surrounded by immersive hiking trips, nature walks, kayaking and bird watching on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday led by biologists and nature experts. On Saturday, FBS President Joanne Heinrich was a featured presenter for a program on bluebirds. Jim and Jan Nichols set up and monitored the FBS booth where they answered questions in addition to distributing



Jim Nichols (VP of FBS), Jan Nichols, Joanne Heinrich (Pres. of FBS), and Stacey Kelley (Co-chair of Festival).

brochures and informational materials to interested festival attendees.

Our thanks and appreciation go out to Jim & Jan Nichols and Joanne Heinrich for volunteering their time and skills so that FBS could have a presence at this festival. We all know how important it is to spread the word about bluebirds in Florida!



About 8.6 million metric tons of plastic enter the world's oceans every year.

Do your part—Reduce YOUR use of single-use plastic.

Earthday.org



FBS Members in Action

Mike Kell, of Pasco County, recently led a small Brownie Girl Scout troop on the Eastern Bluebird Trail in Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Park in New Port Richey. It was time to clean up from the 2019 nesting season and determine which boxes were in need of repair or replacement for the 2020 nesting season.



The girls helped clean out the boxes.

Unfortunately, Cuban Treefrogs had already taken up residence in one of the nestboxes. This did provide the opportunity for a lesson on Florida's problems with invasive exotic species and the recommended humane method of euthanasia for the control of this species that is proving to be detrimental to our native species, including our beloved Eastern Bluebirds. For more information visit http://ufwildlife.ifas.ufl.edu/cuban_treefrog_inFL.shtml



A family of Eastern Bluebirds came to find out what was up!



After the time on the trail, the girls went to Mike's workshop where they helped to build a box that will be located in a local Girl Scout Camp.

Great work, Mike! We are confident your time with these girls made a lasting impression.



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2019 Post-Hurricane Michael Panama City Eastern Bluebird Nesting Season

Pam Overmyer, FBS Director

As with everything in Bay County, Hurricane Michael had a significant impact on my Eastern Bluebird Trails at Majette and Harder's Parks in Bayou George. A bluebird trail is just a series of nest boxes along a designated route that are monitored for breeding activity. Bluebird nesting season generally runs from February to August in Florida.

February 2019 found me surveying the damage to the boxes, then repairing and replacing what was left. In 2014, I had "adopted" 11 boxes at Majette Park (which at the time was Bay Dunes Golf Course) and two boxes at Harder's Park. I had added 11 more boxes at Majette, and 13 boxes at Harder's, for a total of 37 boxes over the two trails. As expected, many boxes were destroyed or missing. All but two of the old boxes I had adopted were damaged beyond repair or completely missing. Three of the new boxes I had installed were completely gone, either due to the hurricane or the heavy equipment used for debris cleanup. That left the trail with 23 boxes. Category 5 winds had pushed many of them over, but I was able to straighten them back as close to vertical as possible.

During the trail cleanup, on February 17, I was amazed to find some recently hatched bluebird chicks in one of the boxes! This was unheard of for February on these trails and they were the first reported hatchlings for the entire state of Florida! Counting back the days, I determined that the eggs were laid at the end of January. It seems the hurricane had affected the birds as well as the humans! Those early birds did well despite the cold weather and fledged in early March. The parents went on to have 2 more successful broods. The 4th brood had 4 eggs that didn't hatch. It is uncertain if they were infertile or if the heat prevented them from proper development.

Despite the loss of multiple boxes, the remaining boxes continued to be active and contributed to an excellent breeding season. My final check was on August 8. At that time the last broods had fledged, and remaining eggs that didn't hatch were long past when they were scheduled to hatch, so the boxes were cleaned out. We had a total of 268 eggs, 192 hatchlings, and 192 fledglings. This brings my 5-year total to at least 695 fledglings, and probably over 1000 but 2 seasons had limited monitoring.



With the loss of so many trees in this hurricane, there is a significant increase in suitable habitat for bluebirds: open, grassy areas with surrounding shrubs or trees as cover. Bluebirds are cavity nesters and so many natural cavities are gone since the storm. So I encourage everyone to put up bluebird boxes to provide homes for these fascinating little feathered friends. For more information, please visit Sialis.org for everything related to bluebirds. Also, NABluebirdSociety.org and FloridaBluebirdSociety.org are the websites for the national and state bluebird societies.

Do You Have a Bluebird Story?

Have you had a special experience with a bluebird? Could you write a summary of your experiences during the last nesting season? We are always looking for bluebird-related stories to share with our members in this newsletter. Send your story and a picture, if possible, to FloridaBluebirdSociety@gmail.com.

The Best of Intentions Don't Always Turn Out Well

There may not be one perfect bluebird nestbox or one perfect nestbox location, but over time we have learned some basic guidelines that seem to provide appropriate space and a safe place for bluebirds to nest. The last thing anyone wants to do is lure bluebirds into unhealthy or unsafe conditions. Or, provide a nesting location for one of Florida's many invasive exotic species.

Unfortunately, this sometimes does happen. How did this nestbox end up in a tree? Was it ever properly placed on a pole with predator guards? Or did this box fall off its pole and a well-meaning individual place it in this tree? Either way a box in such a location is a prime target for predators and is obviously not being monitored.



Metal wrapped on a nestbox may have seemed like a great idea to make a box last years longer in the Florida climate. We now know such boxes turn into ovens and their less than 3" square box bottom provides very cramped quarters that can negatively impact developing bluebirds. FBS recommends a bluebird nestbox bottom be at least a 5" square.



And then there is the person who decides to help the birds by putting up a nestbox. But that is all they do. There is no predator guard, no monitoring, and no maintenance. The box started out being not as safe as it could be, and then it is left there to become a breeding place for invasive non-native species.

Before you put up a nestbox, or add nestboxes to an existing trail, please read our Principles and Nestbox Monitoring Protocol that can be found at <https://floridabluebirdsociety.org/protocol/>.

Use CAUTION when providing Mealworms



Bluebirds love mealworms, but in Florida, they are not part of their natural diet. Similar to humans and candy, too much of a "good" thing can be harmful. In the case of mealworms, too many can have detrimental effects on the health of birds.

Unlike native crickets and other insects, mealworms are high in phosphorus and very low in calcium. Lack of calcium can negatively affect bone development in nestlings. Bones may not fully develop, or they may not develop correctly. Low calcium levels can affect egg shell integrity.

Mealworms should not be offered in an unlimited supply. Serve mealworms only as a treat. *Birdwatchers Digest* recommends a limit of **10 mealworms per bird per day**.

Why not **plant a native tree** or shrub? That will attract food for your bluebirds and finding it will improve the bluebird's survival skills.

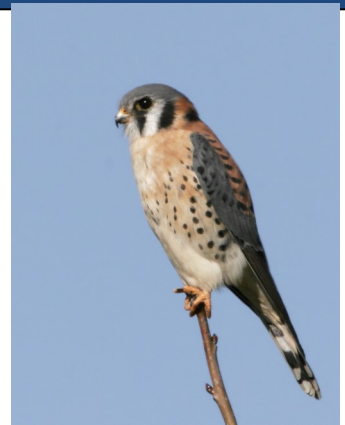
What's Happening Outside?

January is the best time of year for watching waterfowl on wetlands, lakes, and prairies. It is also a good time to observe hawks and American Kestrels along highways. Over large marsh systems, clouds of tree swallows spiral down at sunset to roost. Cedar Waxwings and American Robins are eating fruits such as holly berries.

Nesting season begins for Roseate Spoonbills, Florida Sandhill Cranes, hawks and owls. In mid to late January male cardinals begin territorial singing, Snail Kites begin courtship in Central Florida, and early returning Purple Martins can be seen in South to Central Florida.

During cold spells, West Indian Manatees congregate at natural springs and industrial warm water sites.

Carolina yellow jessamine blooms in north and central Florida woods. Gray Foxes, Bobcats and Raccoons are at peak of courtship and breeding this month. It is deer mating season in the Panhandle. Florida Black Bear in north Florida are sleeping in dens.



American Kestrel
Photo by Ken Schmidt



Purple Martins
Photo by Ken Schmidt

During February, Purple Martin scouts look over North Florida nesting sites. Make sure your houses are up! Clean and repair Eastern Bluebird nest boxes as they also will be choosing their nest sites.

Greater Sandhill Cranes migrate from Florida northward to Michigan and Wisconsin. Purple Finches and Pine Siskins will leave North Florida feeders and begin their migration back to northern nesting areas. At various locations around the state, nesting season begins for Ospreys, Woodstorks, Snowy Plovers, and Burrowing Owls. In the Dry Tortugas, Sooty Terns, and Magnificent Frigatebirds begin their nesting season.

In South Florida, it is mating season for Wild Turkeys and Northern Bobwhites while in North Florida Woodcocks begin exhibiting their courtship displays.

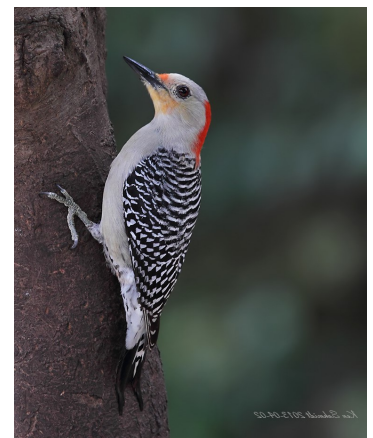
Woodpeckers begin their mating season and announce territories by drumming on trees, houses, and other

objects.

Bald cypress trees leaf out. Trilliums and dogtooth violets bloom in Florida Panhandle ravines. Watch for West Indian Manatees swimming in spring runs.

Eastern moles are breeding this month in tunnels under our lawns. Pocket gophers begin their spring breeding season. The first litters of gray squirrels are born. Bear cubs are born in dens this month, and deer fawns start to arrive.

You can see January and February are great wildlife-watching months, so get outside and enjoy!



Red-bellied Woodpecker
Photo by Ken Schmidt

Information from Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission



Put your old Christmas tree to good use – start a brush pile near your bird feeder. Not only will it provide good year-round cover for birds, but it will also take up a lot less space in your local land fill.





JOIN the Florida Bluebird Society

Visit FloridaBluebirdSociety.org/membership

OR

Select your desired Membership type:

- ☐ \$15.00 Membership (single)
☐ \$25.00 Family Membership
☐ \$50.00 Patron/ Organization
☐ \$100.00 Sponsor
☐ \$500.00 Life Membership
☐ \$10.00 Senior (62 and older)
☐ \$10.00 Student

Mail this Membership Application and your check made out to **Florida Bluebird Society** to:

Faith Jones, Treasurer
 Florida Bluebird Society, Inc.
 763 Mallard Drive
 Sanford FL 32771

Name: _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip Code _____

Telephone _____

Email Address _____

Do you currently monitor a bluebird nest box trail?

☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, # of boxes _____

Location of trail _____

☐ Willing to actively participate in FBS

☐ Willing to serve as County or area coordinator



WELCOME

NEW MEMBERS

Beverly Dusseault
 Nancy Fishinger
 Sandy Smith

Lynn Haven
 Montverde
 Montverde



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

Life Members

Madison E. Alderson - Williston
 Ann Harwood- Nuss - Jacksonville
 Joanne Heinrich - Jacksonville
 Louis Nipper – Hernando (dec.2017)
 Pam Overmyer - Panama City
 Billi Wagner - Vero Beach
 Richard Yeager -Penney Farms

2018-2019

Sponsors

Libby Beese—Palm Coast
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 Candace Bridgewater—Ponte Vedra
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 Shannon Joyce - Clermont
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 Jane Simpson—Fleming Island
 Nancy Stokes - Fleming Island
 Barbara Walker—Venice

Organizations

Bluebird Pharmacy—Ponte Vedra Beach
 Cypress Business Communications—Jacksonville
 Native Nurseries of Tallahassee, Inc.

Ann Harwood-Nuss New Life Member

Ann L. Harwood-Nuss is an Emeritus Professor in the Department of Emergency Medicine at the University of Florida College of Medicine-Jacksonville. She retired after a 30-year career in academic medicine at the University of Florida. She was editor of a major medical textbook, the author of more than 30 peer review publications and 30 textbook chapters, and has done more than 60 national and international presentations. She has been awarded the University of Florida College of Medicine Society for Teaching Scholars Lifetime Achievement Award and the University of Iowa College of Medicine Distinguished Alumna Award for Achievement.

Ann is very interested in the environment and the birds and animals that grace us with their presence. She's on the Board of Directors for the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens and serves as Vice Chair of the Animal Care, Conservation and Wellness Committee.

Ann is also very active with Audubon Florida Board of Directors and is chair of Audubon's Science Committee. A number of years ago she organized the five-county Northeast Florida EagleWatcher's volunteer group, committed to monitoring bald eagle nests during the nesting season and collecting data on nest productivity. The volunteers also serve as advocates for the eagles against threats (typically human). She is also a member of the advisory board for Audubon's Center for Birds of Prey.



She is the former chair of the Jacksonville Public Library Foundation. Ann remains actively involved in Community Hospice and Palliative Care, serving on the Board of Directors and chairing the Quality and Compliance Committee.

Ann and her husband, Robert, live in Jacksonville.

Birds Vanishing from North America

Two-thirds of North American birds are at increasing risk of extinction according to a new National Audubon Society report, "Survival by Degrees: 389 Bird Species on the Brink." The fate of birds and humans is deeply connected. Because birds are present in every landscape (unlike other animals), birds tell us about the health of places in which we all live. If a landscape or ecosystem is broken for birds, it is, or will soon be, for people. If we protect birds, we protect the earth.

We can decide what the future holds for the birds we all love.

What you can do:

Increase yard habitat by planting trees and native plants. Add a bird bath. Benefits: plants attract insects that provide food for birds plus lovely butterflies for you to enjoy and provide shelter and nesting areas for birds. The nectar, seeds, berries, and insects will sustain birds and diverse wildlife.

What YOU can do to Help Birds

Continued from Page 09

Leave dead trees (snags) which provide nesting and food for cavity nesters like bluebirds, woodpeckers & owls.

Avoid or reduce pesticides around your home and garden.

Use less plastic. Avoid single-use plastics including bags, bottles, wraps, and disposable utensils. It's far better to choose reusable items, but if you do have disposable plastic, be sure to recycle it.

Make windows safe. On the outside of the window, install screens or break up reflections—using film, paint, Acopian BirdSavers, or other string spaced no more than two inches high or four inches wide.

Keep cats indoors. Indoor cats are healthier and live nearly three times longer than outdoor cats. Keeping your cat indoors will save birds and keep your cats healthier. You can also train your cat to be on a leash.

Read National Audubon Society's report, *Survival by Degrees: 389 Bird Species on the Brink* on this link: <https://www.audubon.org/survival-degrees-about-study>



The great Pacific Garbage Patch is one of the five garbage filled gyres in the world's oceans. The Pacific garbage patch is three times the size of France!

NOAA.gov



2019-2020 Board of Directors

FloridaBluebirdSociety.org
fbs.inquiries1@floridabluebirdsociety.org

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Bill Pennewill	Founding President	floridabluebirds@yahoo.com

Terms:

*2017—2020

**2018—2021

*** 2019—2022

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