

The Florida Bluebird Society

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



Volume 10, Issue 2

Spring 2020

FBS Program Notes

January 25, 2020

Heritage Pines, Hudson FL

The FBS presentation of “May All Your Blues be Birds” at Heritage Pines was very well attended. The informative program provided attendees with basic information about Eastern Bluebirds, their habits, requirements for survival, and things we can do to help bluebirds. The presentation was provided to educate the community about bluebirds and introduce them to volunteer opportunities to aid with monitoring of the Heritage Pines Bluebird Trail.



Ken Custer, Faith Jones, Hope Botterbusch, and Bob Johnson



A comprehensive Q&A session providing a clearer understanding of aspects of “bluebirding” followed the presentation. FBS provided door prizes, and educational materials created by FBS and North American Bluebird Society (NABS)

We thank Heritage Pines residents Hope Botterbusch for making all the arrangements for the program, Bob Johnson for all his technical assistance, and FBS Board members Faith Jones and Ken Custer for representing FBS.

February 8, 2020

Passionflower Chapter Florida Native Plant Society, Clermont FL

FBS was pleased to provide the program to a filled room of Florida Native Plant Society members. In addition to our standard program information, this presentation stressed the importance of native plants to birds. A list of Florida native plants for Central Florida was also featured. Educational materials created by FBS and North American Bluebird Society (NABS) were available.

We thank Faith Jones for providing the program, and Passionflower Chapter for the invitation and interest in bluebirds .





Message From Our President

Joanne Q. Heinrich



NestWatch App Logo

The time has come! Time to start monitoring your nestboxes and keeping records. Please record your findings in Cornell's NestWatch so you contribute to the scientific world that keeps us informed of the success of our beloved bluebird at <https://nestwatch.org/>. They have created a handy phone app that makes it easy to take a picture, upload and record in less than a minute. Some "early birds" have already gotten a jump on the season. We are hearing of eggs being laid already in January! Remember that even recording "no activity" is helpful. Also, please leave the box in a different direction than you approached it as to not create a trail for predators to follow.

If you haven't put up a box yet this year, it's never too late. You can find the plans for a DIY project on our website here: https://floridabluebirdsociety.org/bluebird_nestbox/. If you decide to buy, please find a box and stovepipe predator guard that is similar to our plans. I can't stress enough about monitoring and effective predator guards. As we state in our protocol:

- Do not put up more boxes than you are willing to monitor on a regular basis. Please take boxes down if you are not going to monitor anymore. They can get filled with invasive, non-native species such as the house sparrows or Cuban tree frogs and cause long-term harm to the environment.
- Do not put boxes up without effective predator guards. If you invite a bluebird in to make a nest in the box, and not protect it, it basically becomes a feeding station for predators.

You can find our Principals and Monitoring Protocol at: <https://floridabluebirdsociety.org/protocol/>

I would love to hear from our members and readers on any and all experiences you have this nesting season. Any other types of boxes you may monitor are always interesting as well, especially those that we don't hear about as much, such as wood ducks. Please feel free to send stories, questions, pictures, comments to our email address: fbs.inquiries1@floridabluebirdsociety.org or send me one directly: joanne.heinrich1@floridabluebirdsociety.org

On a separate note, our board member and past president, Cheri Martin Spray, has decided to step down from the board to focus on other areas of her life. She will still be an involved member and we hope she will continue to contribute to the newsletter and meetings from time to time. We are very grateful to all that Cheri has contributed through the years and thank her for her service to the Florida Bluebird Society! With that said, we have a board position open. Please let me or any other board member know if you are interested and we can set up a call to discuss.



FBS Grant Funding In Use

The Heritage Pine Bluebird Trail (a 55+ Active Community in northwest Hudson, FL) had a recent upgrade thanks to a 2019 grant from the Florida Bluebird Society. Purchased with the funds were a new monitoring camera to provide fast and easy monitoring of 26 nest boxes. Purchased also was a trail camera to spot problems around nest boxes where eggs or hatchlings were lost due to predators (or humans) and materials for stovepipe predator guards for each nest box. These guards were fabricated by a staff member and Robert Johnson, who serves as Co-Monitor, Photographer, and Carpenter.

Signs that identify each nest box as a research site were also purchased and installed. In addition, built into the grant is funding for training sessions for staff and residents that includes literature and training materials. There will also be a three-year research project that compares and contrasts the data collected from each nest box from 2019 to 2021 to determine if the Bluebird population in this area has either increased or decreased.

Hope Botterbusch, a retired educator, is the Coordinator of this project. She coordinates the monitoring of the Trail, serves as a co-monitor, records the data from each nest box and reports the findings to the Florida Bluebird Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology each year along with required reports. Hope will conduct training sessions and in the near future, she will also be providing classroom teachers professional development training on the topic of Citizen Science, as part of the Cornell Lab's K-12 Ambassador Program.



Images From Heritage Pines Nest Camera



The camera has captured a pair of Eastern Bluebirds checking out the nestbox shortly after the camera was installed. They have been fondly given the names Ralph and Alice.

You can follow the antics of Ralph and Alice at this link:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0RQYFE_WLcNmpFLU4Xd7xw?view_as=public



EFFECTS OF CONSTRUCTION NOISE ON EASTERN BLUEBIRD NESTING

The FBS 2018 Research Grant was awarded to Yue Liu, a UF Wildlife Biology Masters student. Below are the conclusions drawn from her research?

Conclusions

We discovered an important behavior of females exposed to disturbance – in this case noise. Hyperactivity (head-poking, frequent exits and returns to the nest, and standing off the eggs). This behavior is most likely the cause of lowered mode temperature and hatching success. Basically, *noise makes the females nervous and they can't sit still on the eggs, even though their regular incubation bouts and nest attentiveness are not significantly altered.*

Even though the birds readily choose to nest in urban areas, nest success is indeed dependent on having quieter, less disturbed nest sites in their preferred grassy habitat. While we cannot say for sure based on our analyses to date, it seems that bluebirds are not yet as sensitive to the detrimental effects of noise while making their nest box choices. Our data suggest that there may be a fitness difference between noisy and quiet nests that may lead to adaptive changes in bluebird nesting biology. Birds may become less hyperactive over time, or they may become averse to nesting in noisy areas.

Certainly, however, the construction industry should continue to reduce their noise-print on urban soundscapes. Increasing evidence suggests that human well-being as well as the physical mechanisms underlying our hearing degrade when exposed to such loud noises. Our work suggests that urban wildlife likely suffer similar consequences.



FBS Photo Contest CALLING ALL BLUEBIRD PHOTOGRAPHERS!!!

Florida Bluebird Society is having our third annual photo contest for the 2021 Florida Bluebird Society calendar. The calendar will be given as a gift to all members who join/renew during our August membership drive (while supplies last). Winners will also

receive a calendar featuring the winning photographs!

Deadline for submission is May 15. Please submit up to 3 of your best high resolution bluebird photographs via email to rhonda.ockay1@floridabluebirdsociety.org.

Following are guidelines for photo submission:

- File size for print calendars **MUST** be a **MINIMUM** of 1MB (1000kb) to accommodate enlargement to wall calendar size.
- JPEG, PNG and TIFF formats are preferred.
- Photos should be submitted via email rather than text due to file compression in SMS.
- **LANDSCAPE** orientation photos are used for our print calendars. **PORTRAIT** orientation photos are **DISCOURAGED**.

Predator Guard Construction

Cheri Martin-Spray

As stated in our Principals and Monitoring Protocol, <https://floridabluebirdsociety.org/protocol/>

- Do not put boxes up without effective predator guards. If you invite a bluebird in to make a nest in the box, and not protect it, it basically becomes a feeding station for predators.

Instructions for constructing a stovepipe baffle/predator guard can also be found on our website. They are fairly simple, but if you are like me, a picture or two can sometimes be a big help. The materials for the guard can be picked up at your local hardware store, or at one of the larger big box home improvement stores, and should be fairly inexpensive.

The trickiest part, I feel, is cutting the hardware cloth, and the top part of the metal stovepipe. Be careful not to cut yourself on the metal or wire. *Gloves should be worn for this job.*



One way to mount the completed baffle onto the pole, is to use hanger iron, cut into 7 inch strips, and a couple of machine screws with nuts. This is a fairly easy way to hang, or mount, your predator baffle.



Once you decide where your bluebird house is to be mounted on your pole, (height wise), place a double strip of duct tape around the pole a few inches below where the bottom of the box will sit. Bolt the two strips of the hanger iron around the duct tape on either side of the pole, and bend them as shown in the pictures.

Then slip your assembled baffle over the pole, coming to rest on the hanger iron bracket. It should wobble on the pole a little. Then mount your nesting box.

It's that simple, and your birds will be a whole lot safer. If you want to add an extra layer of protection, a cone baffle can be placed on the pole above the stove pipe baffle.





SO, YOU WANT TO RAISE MEALWORMS

By: Cheri Martin-Spray

Mealworms, those little things that we think the birds need to endure breeding and winter seasons. They are not even a natural food source for Florida birds. The truth is, birds do not need them to survive. Another truth is, the mealworm is not a worm at all. It is the larval stage of a Darkling Beetle, a species native to Africa. But of course we do like to provide our feathered friends with a little treat once in a while. This is my mealworm story.

I accidentally started raising mealworms the year I had my first pair of bluebirds. I was new to birding, did not know the Florida Bluebird Society existed, and even though I read books, did not know it was harmful to feed birds so many mealworms. I ordered mealworms from a vendor in another state who shipped some to me.

This was in late July or early August and it was my bluebird's last brood of the season. I was able to "teach" my birds where to find the mealworms - that's another story. They readily gobbled them up and took them to their babies. After the babies fledged the parents came around for a short time, even bringing the fledglings with them occasionally.

Our birds probably do not migrate far, but they do "disappear" for a while. So, what was I going to do with all these worms? Some had already morphed into beetles, which grossed me out as they reminded me of roaches.



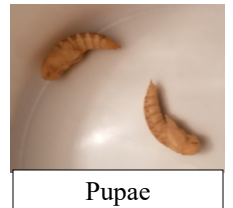
Luckily, my sister-in-law is a retired teacher who has raised mealworms (Mealies) in her classroom for reptiles and amphibians. She suggested I find a large clear container (larger than a shoebox), put in oatmeal or bran oats and then the worms. I used a box about the size and depth of a sweater box, so I used 2 large containers of oatmeal. I also placed sections of paper egg cartons in the box. This provided a good place for the beetles to lay eggs. They also eat the paper, and hide underneath it. She instructed me to feed them **clean** vegetable scraps, starting with potatoes.



After adding my mealies and beetles to the box, I made a cover out of screen. I had read not to cover with a solid lid as the worms get too hot. It also said to keep them in a cool, dark place while raising them. Some articles say to keep them warm. But I think in Florida, it's best to keep them cool, but not cold. I then placed slices of potato in the box. Apples, carrots, and things that are moist, but not too watery, can be added a little later. If the food is too watery it could cause the oatmeal to mold. The worms and beetles will flock to the food.

Similar to butterflies, they have a 4-stage life cycle. The egg stage lasts 1-2 weeks. The larval stage (mealworm) lasts 8-10 weeks. The pupal stage lasts another 1-2 weeks before they turn into Darkling Beetles. When you have several beetles,

they are very amorous. That seems to be all they do. After a while, they lay their eggs, and the cycle starts all over again. The beetles live only a short while after laying eggs.



Pupae

Mealies are teeny tiny when they hatch. My delicate babies like to sit on top of the egg cartons, or hang under them. The mealies grow to about an inch in approximately 3 weeks.

Keep an eye on the amount of oats or bran in your container, and add new if needed. They call this "substrate". Their boxes do need cleaning out occasionally. One thing I discovered is that their excrement is excellent fertilizer. We had to clean out their boxes, and add clean substrate, and were only using screen to filter the poop. The grass where we had the boxes became really green afterwards. Now we use a piece of heavy plastic under the screen and carefully pick out the mealies, beetles and pupae before placing them in their clean box. We still have to separate the excrement, so we leave the plastic, and use the screen to carefully go from side to side, so the poop falls through. Occasionally the tiny newborn mealies fall through as well. We try to carefully pick them out and place them in the clean box that we've prepared ahead of time. When we are finished cleaning the box, I take the excrement and whatever else has fallen through the screen and pour it into a bucket with a lid to be used as fertilizer. Bonus!

When you get ready to feed some worms to your birds, place them into a small cup, and sprinkle them with some powdered calcium from the pet store. It's usually located with fish and reptile items. Simply "dust" the worms with this calcium powder. I've learned that these little delicacies are deficient in calcium and can be detrimental to the long-term health of birds. So the calcium powder should help. Only feed your birds about 5 or 6 worms a day. I know it is hard to only give this small amount when your birds seem like they're begging. Think of them as bird candy, and realize a large amount in a diet has negative consequences.

I hope I haven't bored you with my long story about worms, and excrement.

It is so much more economical to raise your own mealworms. And, not just the bluebirds love these worms. Carolina Chickadees, Carolina Wrens, and Tufted Titmouses go crazy for them too. They are funny, I feel.

Good luck to everyone. Happy farming!

WELCOME

NEW MEMBERS



Connie Allen	Middleburg
Marcia Andre	Hudson
Donna Bingaman	Clermont
Catherine Dean	Hudson
Karen DeVue	Hudson
Jan Finkelstein	Hudson
John & Brenda Frank	Clermont
Joe Fuller	Hudson
Robert Helgesen	Hudson
Alice Hicks	Rockledge
Steven Johnson	The Villages
Susan & Dean Kitchin	Hudson
Karen Kunde	Hudson
F. Hope Millar	Hudson
Lynette Phillips	Monteverde
Laurie Rhodes	Hudson
Trish Steen	Clermont

David Foster New Life Member



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

Life Members

Madison E. Alderson - Williston
David Foster—Jacksonville
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
Susan Beittel—Sanibel
Candace Bridgewater—Ponte Vedra
Shannon Joyce - Clermont
Jean Middleton—Amelia Island
Teri Pollard—Callahan
Joanne Weinman—Gainesville

Patrons

Ulla Benny—Gainesville
Keith Laverty—Ormond Beach
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.

As a Charter member of FBS, David was one of the original supporters who helped us organize.

David and his wife Bonnie, are long-time bird lovers. When he retired, he decided to build a bluebird nestbox. The old adage "if you build it they will come" rang true. Bluebirds immediately started nesting and laying eggs. David wanted to share the joy and started building nestboxes for his neighbors. Then those neighbors spread the word and the next thing you know bluebird nestboxes started popping up all around his Jacksonville neighborhood. Thanks to David's influence the bluebird population in his area has increased tremendously. And, the number of bluebird fans just keeps growing every year.

We are pleased to have David as a Life Member.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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

2019-2020 Board of Directors

FloridaBluebirdSociety.org
 fbs.inquiries1@floridabluebirdsociety.org

Joanne Heinrich**	President, Duval Co. Coordinator	joanne.heinrich1@floridabluebirdsociety.org
Ken Custer*	Immediate Past President, Pasco Co.	ken.custer1@floridabluebirdsociety.org
Jim Nichols**	Vice Pres., Flagler Co. Coordinator	jim.nichols1@floridabluebirdsociety.org
Rhonda Ockay **	Secretary, Clay Co. Coordinator	rhonda.ockay1@floridabluebirdsociety.org
Faith Jones*	Treasurer, Membership, Newsletter	floridabluebirdsociety@gmail.com
Cheri Martin Spray ***	Director, Citrus Co. Coordinator	cheri.martinspray1@floridabluebirdsociety.org
Pam Overmyer***	Director, Bay Co. Coordinator	pam.overmyer1@floridabluebirdsociety.org
Bill Pennewill	Founding President	floridabluebirds@yahoo.com

Terms:

*2017—2020

**2018—2021

*** 2019—2022

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