

The Florida Bluebird Society

Dedicated to the Protection
and Conservation of Bluebirds in Florida



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House Sparrow Attack

By Joanne Q. Heinrich and Pam Overmyer
Florida Bluebird Society
Northeast Florida Coordinator



It can be pretty easy to feel helpless in sad situations, but as an optimist, I always try to see the lesson in each situation and try to make it better. This is the case when one of our members, Kimberlee in Destin, contacted the Florida Bluebird Society for help. She, like a good caretaker, peeked in her bluebird box for monitoring, and what she saw was very disturbing. She saw baby bluebirds that were about 10 days old with blood on their heads and beaks. I personally never had any experience with this, but immediately thought of a House Sparrow (HOSP) attack. This was very well documented thanks to a very dedicated wildlife protector.



I then contacted our closest board member to her in Panama City, Pam Overmyer. Pam is also active in the Audubon Society, so I knew she could help or find the right people. Pam quickly got in touch with Kimberlee. They messaged back and forth to see if we could help her with her injured babies. Pam got her in contact with their local rehabber, Joan, in Panama City Beach. She was able to give Kimberlee some helpful advice on keeping the babies warm, getting them some fluids, and how to determine if the parents had abandoned them or not. Luckily, Kimberlee has some rehabber experience and was able to warm the babies up, get some fluids in them, and get them back in the box when the parents came back to feed them.

If you find an injured bird or are in need of assistance with wildlife visit our website for basic information and a link to licensed rehabbers in the state. <https://floridabluebirdsociety.org/found-a-baby-bird/>



In case you are uncertain of identification, these are sketches from RSPB of a male and female House Sparrow.



Kimberlee also contacted the website www.Sialis.org. Bet Smith, the owner of the website, responded back to Kimberlee quickly with some tips and instructed her to put up a couple of different "sparrow spookers" to deter the HOSP. <http://www.sialis.org/sparrowspooker.htm>. "Spookers" are simple to construct, or I even found places to purchase on the internet.

The next day, 3 of the 4 babies were confirmed alive and mama had been back tending to them. Unfortunately, by day 3, the HOSP was again in the box with the babies. The babies did not survive despite the best efforts to try to help them and keep them with the parents. Undeterred, Kimberlee was going to take down her box and try a different box that she already had on hand, a Gilbertson's round PVC nest box, that might be less attractive to HOSP'S. Pam also discussed trying a sparrow resistant slotted box or even trying to trap the sparrows to try to prevent a recurrence. House Sparrows are non-native and can (and should) be removed when possible. If HOSP'S continue to be a problem, then the nest box should be taken down all together as we don't want to continue inviting bluebirds in where we know they probably won't be successful at raising their families. The bluebirds will find a more suitable location.

We believe everything Kimberlee did was correct, she monitors her box, she contacts those who could help her, she was very eager in trying to save the babies with their best interest as priority, and she will try again with a different approach now that she knows HOSP's are an issue in her area.



visit http://bugwoodcloud.org/CDN/fleppc/plantlists/2019/2019_Plant_List_ABSOLUTE_FINAL.pdf



PHOTO CONTEST

3rd annual photo contest for 2021
Florida Bluebird Society calendar.

Winners will receive a calendar featuring the winning photographs! **Deadline June 1.**

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 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.



Message From Our President

Joanne Q. Heinrich



As I know you all are, I am “staying-at-home” and trying to make the best of it. Both my husband and I are blessed with jobs that allow us to work from home instead of being furloughed (hopefully I’m not jinxing it, knock on wood!). We just have a much shorter commute from the kitchen to the separate bedroom offices. Our dog thinks we retired and don’t like each other anymore! But he doesn’t mind, as long as one of us takes him on long walks, which I am doing, a lot!



Cape May Warbler

The ever-present optimist in me believes this will pass and we will be stronger than ever. This is a good time to enjoy the spring. For example, I am still seeing migrating birds, Palm Warblers, the ever-elusive Black-throated Blue Warblers and a new one to me, the Cape May Warbler! I am also picking up on sounds and sights that are new, I think I saw a pair of Red-eyed Vireos in my backyard trees!

In the current situation, I really don’t have a lot more “spare time”, but I do have some. Recently, I helped a neighbor take down an old and decrepit bluebird box after the babies fledged the day before and replace it with a spare “loaner” I had. I also repositioned my front yard box to the back yard. Since I had a failed nesting there 2 years ago, I hadn’t had any bluebirds nest again. So, maybe it’s time for a change.

I encourage all of you to look to see what can be made new again or just a change. Do you have time to put up (and monitor) a new nestbox at the local golf course (with their permission of course), maybe you haven’t signed up for Cornell’s NestWatch yet, have you been thinking of putting up a camera in a nestbox for streaming, have you a story you’d like to share with us? Just some ideas to help shake things up while “staying-at-home”...

Let’s talk about our annual meeting, or rather, our possible alternative plan for it... Currently, it is slated to be on August 22nd at Penney Retirement Community, in Penney Farms. We will, of course, watch as rules hopefully relax so that we can still keep this date and place, but we are starting to think of the possibility of having a virtual meeting. If that’s the case, we will likely be using a video-audio communication type option. I use this for my job daily and it’s very handy. Of course, we will have the option for audio through the phone for those who may not have video capability. More on that later.

Some reminders:

Watch the Heritage Pines Nestbox webcam: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obbq5Mu_CtM

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/>.

Board Positions: We will have 2 open positions for board members. As mentioned in our last newsletter, Cheri Martin Spray, had decided to step down from the board earlier this year. And Ken Custer, past president, also decided to retire from the board when his term ends in August. Please let me or any other board member know if you are interested and we can set up a call to discuss.

That’s all for now, I pray all of you are safe and sound and we get through the coronavirus crisis soon.



EFFECTS OF CONSTRUCTION NOISE ON EASTERN BLUEBIRD NESTING

This article contains excerpts from the report of a research project funded by a Florida Bluebird Society Research Grants.



PROJECT REPORT TO THE FLORIDA BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

YUE LIU, MASTER'S STUDENT

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Introduction

Bird behaviors are finely tuned to sounds in their environment. Individual behaviors, interspecies communication and interspecies communication all rely on sound to transmit information necessary for survival and reproduction (Luo, Siemers, & Koselj, 2015). Therefore, vocalizing species, especially songbirds, are vulnerable to anthropogenic noises that mask key signals or distract them from appropriate responses (Moseley et al., 2018). For sensitive and stressed adult birds during the breeding season and their vulnerable embryos and chicks, the problems caused by noise may be more serious. In particular, we hypothesized that females incubating eggs in noisy areas may become restless or inattentive such that egg temperatures drop below optimum. In order to understand the impact of noise on the reproductive behavior of eastern bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) and their offspring, we placed Gilbertson-style bluebird boxes around the University of Florida campus to attract breeding pairs. We then conducted experimental research on the effects of construction noise on incubation behavior and hatching success of breeding Eastern bluebirds.

Objectives

Objective 1: Nest box selection by Eastern bluebirds on an urbanizing college campus.

We hypothesized that anthropogenic noise could significantly discourage nest box occupancy even if adequate grass habitat is available.

Objective 2: Effects of construction noise on (a) female incubation behavior and (b) nest success.

We hypothesized that construction noise could (a) change female incubation behaviors and (b) reduce nest success.

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.



Bluebird Egg Color Variations

Pam Overmyer
FBS Northeast Region Coordinator



Everyone knows Eastern Bluebird eggs are a lovely shade of blue, right? Not so fast. While the majority of bluebird eggs are, in fact, bright blue, up to 5% can actually be white. In my own experience with 24 bluebird boxes on a trail, I have had 2 boxes have white eggs at one time. That gives an 8.3% percent rate of white eggs.

This year, I had a nest with eggs that weren't white, but they weren't the normal shade of blue either. At first, I was a little unsure that they were even bluebird eggs. I kept an eye on the box and saw the female on one of my nest checks. It was definitely a female Eastern Bluebird.



So, when you check your bluebird boxes, if you see one with white eggs, it still might be a different bird species, but don't rule out bluebird either. And if you see a paler shade of blue, well, that's just another normal variation for our special bluebird friends.



Easter Bluebird Happenings

Mid-April brought a number of reports from around Florida.

Ann in Jacksonville shared: *We have two separate nests on our property and for the first time ever, **BOTH nests have SIX eggs.** Traditionally, it has always been 5 eggs, and three clutches per year.*



Candace in Ponte Verde sent a picture of her newly hatched hatchlings that entered the world on Easter.

James from St. Augustine reported: *We have 5 babies in our Bluebird house that just hatched this week. Momma and Daddy are very busy guarding the house and feeding them.*

Mike from Hernando: *My three Bluebird babies fledged today. The parents are talking to them and feeding live mealworms*

Libby from Palm Coast reported the addition of a few boxes in her neighborhood has resulted her seeing an increased number of young bluebirds this Spring. She sent this picture of a group at her birdbath.



A Bluebird Tale

My wife was a teacher and I know how much she values gratitude from her students. So, I am sending this note with gratitude. I very much enjoyed the seminar you conducted at the Cooper Memorial library in Clermont earlier this spring. I applied what you taught the class by constructing a stovepipe baffle and modifying a bluebird box that I purchased at Walmart. The happenings inspired me to write this story for my great-grandchildren.

*John Frank
Clermont*

I put up the bluebird nestbox early in March. It is visible from our living room. A pair of bluebirds found it in about two days and signed a lease. They moved in their furniture over the course of a few days and decided to start a family.

Over five days, Mrs. Bluebird proceeded to produce five eggs. Quintuplets! Wow! Mr. Bluebird kept a close eye on the proceedings and was relieved when the last egg was laid. The incubation started on the fifth day and soon there were five open mouths to feed on a regular basis.

Both Mrs. & Mr. Bluebird carry in groceries and carry out the trash (fecal sacs). Mr. Bluebird keeps away any meanies that might be around but, both he and the Missus tolerate having their



picture taken. They have even struck some impressive poses. Sometimes though, they are too busy to pay any attention to the photographer while hurrying back and forth with bugs and stuff.

We did peek in a couple of times when Mrs. & Mr. Bluebird were away from home. We visited when there were five eggs and shortly after the kids were hatched. We have since kept our distance as we do not want to frighten the little ones or upset Mrs. or Mr. Bluebird.

We haven't seen any sign of the youngsters yet but, we expect that they will be peeking out at their new world pretty soon. When they do they will be able to see a tree about twenty feet away from the nursery. They will be able to fly to the tree when they depart their home. This is important because there may be some meanies in the neighborhood that would like a bluebird snack for lunch. The tree will give them a first flight destination that will provide some protection and from which they can watch mom & pop come and go.

Soon after they will be able to follow mom and pop to good restaurants where they will learn to select from varied menus that will enable them to grow up big and strong so that they, in their turn, can bring joy to all the human beings that will delight in their beauty.

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.

WELCOME

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Lutz

Heritage Pines Nestbox Live Stream

The nestlings in the box at Heritage Pines in Hudson are growing fast. Watching the live stream on YouTube has provided a great distraction during these days of stay-at-home orders and social isolation. But, take care as it is hard to stop watching for fear of missing something. It's addicting!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obbq5Mu_CtM



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2019-2020

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Visit ***FloridaBluebirdSociety.org/membership***

OR

Select your desired Membership type:

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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

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 fbs.inquiries1@floridabluebirdsociety.org

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*2017—2020

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*** 2019—2022

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