



# Jersey Blues

The Newsletter of The New Jersey Bluebird Society, an Affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society ~Volume 2, Issue 1 - Fall, 2017

## **BUBBA SPEAKS: "BLUEBIRD SEASON HAS JUST BEGUN . . . AND IT'S ALREADY OVER! WHERE DID THE SEASON GO?"**

It is September and the bluebird season has come and gone. To say it was successful is an understatement. The winter was relatively mild and nesting activity progressed fast and furious. The first brood of young was banded by Gail Fisher (Cape May County Coordinator) on Friday, April 14 at Brett Palmer's property in Petersburg. This is not the first time Brett's bluebirds have been the first reported nesting. Brett has a large and successful purple martin colony along with his bluebird boxes. He is one of the most successful martin and bluebird landlords in New Jersey. One potential advantage is he feeds live meal worms to his birds in addition to being a strong advocate for proper management. Consequently his birds are super spoiled and in prime condition. Last year his bluebirds were the first to lay eggs (6 of them to be exact) and it is not uncommon for them to have 3 broods during the nesting season. Congratulations to Brett and thanks for being such a great landlord.

Final figures for bluebirds banded are in for 2018 and we were able to band 1,234 young before we ran out of bands or missed the opportunity to band them. Banding is a great way to coordinate more closely with the landlords/monitors and really helps to maintain that bond between the County Coordinator and those they work with. Dave Gilcrest is summarizing bluebirds fledged by county so make sure and get your results in to him.

The season started out with a bang. At first we had an abundance of "6-packs" - nest with 6 eggs. I love 6-packs! That in itself is something to get excited about. This season we had 16 nests reported with 6 eggs.

Sadly, the rainy month of May had a negative impact on hatching. Some eggs did not hatch, some young died in the nest, nests and young were abandoned by the parents in other nests and consequently less young fledged. However, weather is one reason bluebirds have more than one nesting. It's a numbers game. There are so many factors that influence survivability of bluebirds that they make up for it with multiple broods when the weather conditions are good. The most successful nestings are the second broods which produce most of our bluebirds. The weather is usually better and there are plenty of insects to feed on if the bluebirds can compete with other nest competitors - house sparrows, tree swallows and house wrens in particular.

*(continued on page 2)*



*Photo taken at Coda  
Rossa Vineyards  
by LJ Jamieson*

*(Bubba Speaks, continued from front page)*

Wren issues seem to increase each and every year and this was one issue many monitors reported. *(see related article on page 4)*

As the summer progressed the weather remained favorable and over 20 boxes had a 3rd brood. Again, a sign of a successful season. We are still summarizing our season so look for more information after things have been totaled. We should have more specific information at our **Annual Meeting in Jackson, November 11th.** *(more info on page 3)*

Incidentally, I got a leg band report of a bluebird banded at Stoddard and Marjory Bixby's just down the road from Brett. A young chick banded July 2, 2015 was recovered the week of April 10, 2017 on Union Road in Vineland, a distance of about 15 miles as the crow flies. Most recoveries average about 1-4 miles from their natal site.

The NJBBS is still looking for a Secretary to replace Shelly Cucugliello. Shelly is available to provide guidance and direction to anyone interested in assuming the position. Many of us take an active role in the NJBBS but we continue to need participation from members to make our organization a success. Please consider stepping forward to help. For instance, Lori Jo Jamieson volunteered to be editor of our newsletter, *Jersey Blues*. What an awesome job she has done producing the past 2 newsletters. She always appreciates receiving articles and photographs from all members.

Believe it or not, we have added approximately 100 bluebird boxes to our trail system in southern NJ. Our mission to benefit bluebirds is evident as bluebirds are becoming more common in NJ. People are beginning to take notice of our accomplishments and the program continues to slowly grow.

#### **COUNTY COORDINATORS MAKING A HUGE IMPACT**

The success of a bluebird season is more and more evident on the activities of the County Coordinator or those of you who step forward with new ideas to promote bluebird management. Lori Jo Jamieson suggested and followed through with contacting vineyards as likely places for bluebird boxes. *(see the article on page 9.)*

I don't know if the wine draws her to the vineyards or the thought of bluebirds supplementing the esthetics of the area but I thank her for her dedication and determination in this area. Interestingly, research shows that the bluebirds eat insects that eat the grapes, so the bluebird is a friend of the vineyard owner.

What impresses me the most is how much of a difference one motivated person can make in a County. Dave Gilcrest in Gloucester County, Gail Fisher in Cape May County, Jim Watson and John Layton in Atlantic County, and Laura Stone in Ocean County are a few examples of how important their work is. Their motivation and enthusiasm is directly responsible for the success in their area. Each have their own way of doing things but make no mistake about it, they are known in their County and are getting results. A good coordinator makes the NJBBS look very professional. I thank each and every County Coordinator in our organization. I hope to expand on this at our annual meeting in Jackson. We have some very innovative approaches to bluebird management.

*~ Allen Jackson, NJBBS President*

*"None of us is as smart as all of us." --Ken Blanchard*

### **NJBBS OFFICERS**

**President: Allen Jackson**

**Vice President North: Jim Newquist**

**Vice President South: Laura Stone**

**Treasurer: John Layton**

**Acting Secretary: Gary Pilling**

We are actively seeking someone to serve as Secretary for our organization. If you or someone you know is interested, please email Allen Jackson at [aljxn@aol.com](mailto:aljxn@aol.com).

### **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**Past President: Frank Budney**

**At Large: Nels Anderson, Shelly Cucugliello  
Dave Gilcrest, Lori Jo Jamieson, Gary Pilling**

**Jim Watson, Ed Zboyan**



## New Jersey Bluebird Society: Our Mission Statement, Goals & Methods

Our mission is to provide education and guidance in order to conserve and promote Bluebirds and other cavity nesting birds in New Jersey. Our primary goal is to produce a healthy and productive bluebird population in New Jersey by establishing trails that are located in suitable habitat while utilizing and promoting recommended bluebird management practices (proper housing, protection from predators, and nest monitoring).

We also recognize the importance and necessity to promote management of bluebirds in backyards. We provide expertise and guidance to trail monitors and backyard bluebird enthusiasts, monitor yearly population trends by surveying the number of young fledged from nest boxes, and provide public education about bluebirds to interested people in the state of New Jersey.

### NJBBS ANNUAL MEETING: SAVE THE DATE!

On **Saturday, November 11th from 10 am to 2 pm**, we will hold our annual NJBBS meeting at the **Forest Resources Education Center (FREC)**, 495 Don Connor Blvd, Jackson, NJ. We will have a limited supply of NJBBS laminated logos to place on boxes visible to the general public. These logos acknowledge who we are and what we are doing. Thanks so much to Gail Fisher for the idea, and her work with Stuart Smith of Arc Reprographics, Inc. in Absecon, the company that produced the box logos. I am very impressed with how these came out, the message they convey, and how they will benefit the NJBBS in the future.

### BEST-DRESSED BLUEBIRDERS' NJBBS SHIRTS

We have 11 NJBBS shirts. \$25 each: 2 Medium, 5 Large, 2 Extra Large, 2 in XX Large. Reserve now (aljaxn@aol.com) then pay for them and pick them up at the meeting on November 11th.

### NJBBS TREASURER'S REPORT

LAST MEETING: NOVEMBER 12th, 2016

Balance as of 11/12/16	2170.86
Credits	1843.45
Debits	1312.85
Balance as of 10/06/17	2701.46

NEXT MEETING: NOVEMBER 11TH, 2017

~ John Layton, Treasurer, NJBBS

## Jersey Blues

The newsletter of The New Jersey Bluebird Society

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## Were you there at just the right moment?

If you've captured great images of bluebirds with your digital camera or phone, send them to me attached to an email (in jpeg form) to [lorijo.jamieson@gmail.com](mailto:lorijo.jamieson@gmail.com).

Please include who took them, where they were taken and when. I will try and include them in upcoming issues of "Jersey Blues." Thank you!



## 2017 Burlington County Report: Pinelands Trail

The first observed Bluebird egg was April 7 and last year it was March 27. Early activity was good, however, two nests failed during cold wet weather as the insects hunkered down and the parent birds could not find enough food for themselves and the young. Both clutches were about ten days old when I found them dead in the nest. I do not like getting that shovel out. Things picked up after that and nesting activity remained steady through the nesting season with a total of 186 Bluebirds, 10 Titmice, 69 Chickadees, and 31 Tree Swallows fledged.

I am finding again that nest boxes in the deep woods do not fare as well as those on farms and in people's yards. Predation was not a big problem, yet several nests complete with eggs were abandoned with no signs or wasps or hornets inside the box. Ninety boxes were in place for most of the season. ~ Nels Anderson, Burlington Co. Coordinator

## Discouraging House Wrens from Nesting

House Wren populations appear to be increasing. They have been known to destroy bluebird and other cavity nesters' eggs by piercing them and then often removing them from the nest. There have been occasional reports of House Wrens killing young nestlings (4-5 days old) and throwing them out of the nest. As nesting pressure increases, or as the season progresses, they may move farther and farther away from what is considered "ideal" HOWR habitat. Remember that **it is illegal to remove or destroy wren nests with eggs/fledglings, or adult wrens**. Unlike House Sparrows and Starlings, House Wrens are native, and protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. There are some techniques available, none of which are 100% effective. Some easy, basic ways of discouraging House Wren nesting include removing dummy nests, avoiding marginal habitat, avoiding crowded boxes, opening/plugging the nestbox, and keeping them busy. (See [www.sialis.org](http://www.sialis.org) for more involved methods.)

**Avoid marginal bluebird habitat.** Installing/moving nestboxes at least 50 and preferably 200-300 feet away from brushy, heavily wooded and riparian areas may decrease the likelihood of House Wrens using the box. If it is an option, place boxes near conifers, instead of near deciduous trees.

(continued on page 10)

## Atlantic County Co-coordinators' Report

In 2017 on-site inspections were conducted at numerous locations including parks, farmland, schools and private residences. Five new sites were established with promising results and others are still pending. One inspection at Woods Landing in Mays Landing resulted in a proposal to the Homeowners Association to establish a trail throughout the community, which was approved. A six-box trail has been erected at that site.

~ Jim Watson, Atlantic County Co-coordinator



## 2017: A Year of Firsts for Me

- Lost 31 Bluebird chicks, 7 to 10 days old, due to heavy rain storms in mid-May.
- Banded and fledged 256 Bluebirds despite loss of chicks due to rain.
- 4 boxes with white eggs: 2 had second broods for a total of 24 eggs. 12 were not fertile.
- Had a box shared by 2 female Bluebirds. First brood had 8 eggs; 3 hatched and fledged. Same box was shared again. Second brood had 7 eggs laid but were gone after 6 days.
- Had 1 box with a third brood of 4 eggs. As chicks emerged, they were attacked and killed by ants. There was no sign of ants as I monitored weekly.
- Taught a new monitor, Mary Roche, and she did an excellent job at E.B. Forsythe National Wildlife Reserve. It was a shame she lost 10 chicks due to hypothermia.

My boxes fledged 256 Bluebird chicks, which I banded. The last chick I banded at Stockton on August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017 made 2,000 chicks I have banded: A lifetime high! (p.s. – I have been monitoring and banding for 19 years.)

~ John Layton, Atlantic County Co-coordinator

(continued on page 5)



### 2017 Nestbox Results – John Layton, Atlantic County

Eastern Bluebirds (banded and fledged)	256
Tree Swallows (69 at Forsythe)	80
House Wrens	58
Chickadees (all fledged)	32
Carolina Wrens	5
Titmice	9

#### E.B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge 21 Boxes - Monitor: Mary Roche

Eastern Bluebirds (banded and fledged) 4 nest starts, 3 with 5 eggs (15), 2 with chicks (10). 10 chicks (8-10 days old) lost to hypothermia due to rain in mid-May. 5 eggs destroyed by wrens. 1 nest start abandoned.

Tree Swallows	74	<b>Comments:</b> Best start in 6 years. Have new monitor, Mary Roche. She did an excellent job. Hope she continues despite loss of chicks.
House Wrens	36	
Chickadees	11	
Carolina Wrens	0	
Titmice	0	

#### Stockton University 27 Boxes - Monitors: Diane Kady and Linda Mancuso

Eastern Bluebirds (banded and fledged) 82 chicks banded, 6 lost to hypothermia – 76 total

Tree Swallows 5 eggs abandoned	0	<b>Comments:</b> Most productive trail, thanks to terrific job by monitors Diane and Linda. I banded 4 chicks on August 29 <sup>th</sup> , 2017. Box #10's last chick was the 2,000 <sup>th</sup> chick banded during my time as monitor.
House Wrens	6	
Chickadees	4	
Carolina Wrens	4	
Titmice	0	

#### Personal Trail 39 Boxes Monitor: John Layton

Eastern Bluebirds (banded and fledged) 136 banded and fledged.

Tree Swallows	16	<b>Comments:</b> none
House Wrens	12	
Chickadees	19	
Carolina Wrens	0	
Titmice	4	

#### Ballenger Woods 7 Boxes Monitor: Lori Jo Jamieson

Eastern Bluebirds (banded and fledged) 34

Tree Swallows	5	<b>Comments:</b> Great job, Lori. This is a very productive trail year after year.
House Wrens	0	
Chickadees	0	
Carolina Wrens	0	
Titmice	0	

## Cape May County Bluebird News -2017

It would seem that the bluebirds here in Cape May County had a successful rebound year, after two very harsh winters recently. Here's a brief comparison of the two most recent nesting seasons:

	2016	2017
# boxes	99	107
boxes used by BBs	13	25
BBs fledged	60	125
# active monitors	10	17

One of the most interesting events of the season for me was the prolonged cold rainy spell we had in mid-May. Because of the best practices of one of our veteran monitors, Brett Palmer (who is also an amazing purple martin landlord), I have observed the positive impact that winter feeding (and emergency feeding) of mealworms has had on the bluebirds. Because of Brett's example, I've kept live mealworms on hand during the nesting season. Last year it saved a box of chicks when the female went missing 6 days before the fledge date.

This year, when the cold weather was predicted, my monitors who had chicks at the time were given mealworms, and began training the parents to take them two days before the cold and driving rain set in. Twice a day a few larvae were placed on the roof, and then a heaping tablespoonful was put in a tuna fish can screwed to a 3' PVC pipe pushed into the ground about 15' away. Feeding continued till a day after the weather cleared. All of the chicks survived. I know this may not be practical for those who have large trails, but it sure worked well here.

Second, one nest box located at The Nature Conservancy's newly improved Garrett Family Preserve at Cape Island Creek in Cape May, may have had a nesting attempt by a king bird. Photos were blurry, but nest and eggs matched. Several attempts were made at ID, but then the bird abandoned the nest. Has anyone else documented king bird use?

Finally, it has been a real pleasure to assist one of my newest and youngest monitors this summer... Kendall Creamer. Read about her summer adventures and check out her awesome photo on the next page. Great job, Kendall!

~ Gail Fisher, Cape May Co. Coordinator



### Pot Luck in Cape May County

On Thursday, August 31st, some of my awesome, dedicated volunteers gathered on my arbor deck for the 1st Annual CMC BB Monitors' Potluck Lunch. It was an opportunity to tell the stories of our season, share information and exchange ideas.

In attendance were (L to R, back row) Jan Dwyer, Gail Fisher, Mike Ralidak, Jen Creamer, Chris Clemenson (*Atlantic County monitor & owner of Clemenson Farms Native Nursery*), Allen Jackson. (middle row) Ann Ralidak, Kendall Creamer (*see her article and photo on page 7*); (front row) Katie Creamer (*Kendall's sister and assistant monitor*).

We all wore name tags that included our monitor number (assigned by me). Each number matched one on a county map showing the location of each monitor's trail(s). I can't help it - I'm a retired primary teacher!

For lunch there was chicken salad, tuna salad, homemade gazpacho, salsa, guacamole & chips, iced tea and lemonade.

The most interesting information I gathered from my monitors, however, is that we all seem to have a sweet tooth. Desserts included lemon squares, key lime pie, fudge brownies, individual cherry cheesecakes, peach pie, apple caramel walnut pie and vanilla ice cream! Yes! Life's short. Eat dessert!

Heading into Labor Day weekend was perhaps not the best choice of a lunch event for my monitors who work in tourist-related venues, so I'll rethink the date for next year. Thanks to all who were able to attend. Here's looking forward to an even larger gathering next year!

~ Gail Fisher



## My First Year of Bluebird Monitoring

My first year of bluebird monitoring began with losing my second brood of baby bluebirds, so I was so excited to see the mom and dad bluebirds creating a new nest in a new box. For several days they continued making the nest. Then, one day I opened the box, and saw one egg. For the next four days one egg was laid each day, leaving the parents with five blue eggs. After thirteen days three of the eggs were hatched! The next day one more egg was hatched. Two days later the last egg was hatched! I was so happy that all of the eggs hatched.

All of the babies were very healthy and growing nicely, but something went wrong on the 7th day when I checked the nest. There were only four babies left in the box. I'm guessing that the baby died, and one of the parents removed it from their nest.

A few days later, the baby bluebirds got banded! It was very exciting to hold them and see how much they'd grown when they were getting their bands *on*. The day after the babies got banded they got spooked out of their nest by some type of animal. My family and I think that it was a screech owl, because my mom heard a screech owl the night before all of this crazy stuff happened. I was so upset because I thought something got them.

Suddenly, I saw a baby hopping around in my backyard. I was so happy! I couldn't believe what I was seeing! I went out to the baby, picked it up, and put it back in its nest. While we were looking for any others that had survived, my parents nearly stepped on another baby bluebird in our yard. I did the same thing to the baby as I did the other one. I was so happy to find two birds alive and I decided that I would give the parents some room because I didn't want to spook them. Later that day, my dad saw the parents swooping down and he found baby number three in our blackberry bush. He did the same thing to that baby bluebird.

As soon as I got home from the beach, I got my jeans and my boots on, and went in the woods in search of the fourth bluebird. Earlier, I had seen the parents land in the woods. I looked around in the area the parents were, but no baby bluebird was seen. I was starting to think that I would not find the fourth bird, but I didn't want to give up. Suddenly, SWOOP! Daddy bluebird swooped down at my head. I knew that meant that I was very close to the baby. I searched and searched for that baby bird. I was so worried that I may have stepped on it. I know I was close! I had to find that baby! Then my sister and my dad came in the woods to help me look for the baby bluebird. Finally, my dad spotted it. I was so excited that we found all four of the babies! I did the same thing with that baby as I had done to all of the others, putting it safely in the box with the others.

That evening, we decided to put a trail camera on the bluebird box along with an owl guard to protect the babies. We watched as the parents fed the babies and went into the box past the owl guard. The next morning, I peeked through the hole in the box and all the birds were safe and sound.

Unfortunately, when I came home later that day, the babies were gone. The trail camera did not show any predator getting them or spooking them out. I looked everywhere and I couldn't find the baby bluebirds. This time, the parents weren't hanging around and acting nervous as they had the day before. They were 13 days old, so they may have fledged very early. My first year as a bluebird monitor was very, very eventful. It was happy and sad. I have learned a lot about what to do to help the bluebirds. I can't wait until next year when I can monitor the bluebirds again.



*Kendall says, "Mama Bluebird caught a small blue tailed (Five Lined) Skink to feed her babies." Kendall lives in Belleplaine, NJ, and used her mom's Canon Rebel to take the photo.*

# GROWING THE PROGRAM



*“Growing the Program” is intended to keep members informed of the things the NJBBS are involved in. Please feel free to submit short blurbs of your activities that ultimately benefit bluebirds and sell our program.*

## **OUT REACH (talks, display tables)**

**Allen Jackson** spoke to the **Atlantic Audubon Society** regarding bluebird activities in Atlantic County. He also lead a walk in September for an AAS field trip to view the **Nature Trail at Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center, Millville** which included bluebird, purple martin nesting units and a chimney swift tower.

## **PARTNERSHIPS (activities with other groups)**

NJBBS is working with the **Gloucester County Nature Club (GCNC)** to promote bluebird management in that County. This program is paying big dividends thanks to the efforts of **Dave Gilcrest’s** coordination with GCNC.

After an on-site visit and speaking engagement at **The Friends of Princeton Nursery Lands**, Allen will be setting up a new and improved bluebird trail. New boxes will be placed along a dirt path, replacing boxes that are located in tall grass, unmaintained, and not monitored. A section along the path will be mowed to provide better feeding opportunities. FPNL will monitor the trail.

**Atlantic Audubon Society:** we have been and continue working with the AAS to promote bluebird management in Atlantic County. This is a very active and ongoing program.

The partnership between the NJBBS and **Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River and its Tributaries** continues to aggressively promote bluebird management in southern NJ.

**Allen Jackson** is discussing partnering opportunities with the **NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife** to promote bluebird and purple martin management in northern NJ. This ongoing program will continue efforts made in mostly southern NJ: **Buckshutem, (Mike Golla); Buckley Tract, Holly Hills.** Besides this, **Laura Stone, Ocean County Coordinator** and **Gail Fisher, Cape May County Coordinator** are managing or

working with monitors on bluebird trails at NJDFW lands in their counties.

**Dave Gilcrest’s** investigation into whether the environmental improvements along the **Atlantic City Expressway** could include partnering with the NJBBS resulted in a September 27th meeting between **Allen Jackson** and **Jim Leslie, Safety Specialist for South Jersey Transportation Authority.** They conducted an onsite investigation along sections of the Atlantic City Expressway in Camden and Atlantic Counties, from exit 41 east to Atlantic City. Jim drove about 40 miles of the AC Expressway, stopping at locations that may be suitable for boxes.

Approximately 15 locations were found in open areas mostly associated with exits, but suitable habitat was also found at the service area. SJTA will have about 20 boxes built. Locations would not pose a safety issue for monitors and most could be accessed by local roads rather than having to travel the expressway's toll road.

Allen was very supportive of SJTA’s interest in promoting these projects and looks forward to setting the boxes for the 2018 season. If anyone is interested in helping monitor some of this trail, please contact Allen Jackson at [aljaxn@aol.com](mailto:aljaxn@aol.com). More exact locations will be identified in the future. Thanks to **Rick Martin and Dave Gilcrest** for providing the initial information on this project.

## **REAL ESTATE (boxes added)**

Generally we added over 100 boxes for the 2017 nesting season. County Coordinators were especially active in this area.

New boxes were added in **Mercer and Somerset Counties** at local residences.

A new box was added to the residence of **D. Thompson in Alloway**, which was almost immediately utilized by a pair of bluebirds.

A box was erected at the **SurgiCenter** in Vineland and 2 broods were fledged out of this box.

A box was located on **Garrison Avenue in Vineland** and 2 broods were fledged. *(continued next page)*



**Allen** erected boxes in **Mercer and Somerset Counties**. A trail consisting of approximately 6 boxes will also be added in **Middlesex County** as a result of speaking to the **Friends of Princeton Nursery Lands**.

Allen relocated 2 boxes and added 3 more boxes at the **Landis Sewerage Authority in Vineland**. In 2017, the first season, 23 eggs were laid, 22 hatched and fledged out of 6 boxes.

**Lori Jo Jamieson** installed a **vineyard trail** in **Atlantic and Cumberland Counties** (*see article this page*) and continues to develop and improve a 6-box trail at **Egg Harbor Nature Reserve**. She also gained approval for two new nest boxes in **Asbury Methodist Cemetery** in the spring.

**Allen** delivered another load of Atlantic white cedar to the **Middle Township Middle School's** wood shop class organized and taught by **David Moyer** who has built approximately 600 boxes for the NJBBS. This program has allowed significant benefits to bluebirds with over 100 boxes added to mostly southern NJ in 2017. The boxes are built specifically to meet strict design standards. This program is recognized nationally for its benefit to bluebirds.

~ Allen Jackson

## Putting Bluebirds to Work in NJ Vineyards



Back in November 2016, I got an idea that wineries and vineyards could be excellent places for bluebird nesting boxes, and that the birds would help eat the bugs that harm the grapes. According to a [2012 study](#) done in California by Julie Jedlicka, Western

Bluebirds eat vineyard pests. Further study of scat determined that they also eat mosquitoes as this [Popular Science article](#) reports.

Allen Jackson, whether my interest was due to the wine tastings or my love for bluebirds has not yet been determined, but the partnership



**Coda Rossa Vineyards** in **Franklin Township** wins the "prize" for the most fledged: **10 bluebirds**, including a "six-pack" first brood, all from one box. There was a HOSP presence in between broods. Blocking the hole after removing the nest and eggs discouraged a second attempt. During both broods, the male bluebird often perched at the box hole, peering in and blocking access for the female, who was thankfully very patient. Our "cover bird" is none other than Mr. Nosey!



**Jim Quarella** of **Bellview Winery in Landisville** erected two nest boxes of his own, resurrected from a previous trail. Between two broods, **8 bluebirds** were fledged from box 1! Jim's photo of 5 chicks in box 2 prompted me to bring John Layton out to band these beautiful babies. Sadly, when we arrived on May 15th, we found cold, wet, dead chicks, five more victims of the cold and rainy period. A subsequent tree swallow nest yielded 6 fledglings. Jim also has purple martin houses on his property.

Although **Dr. Lawrence Coia's** two nest boxes got a late start on his expansive **Vineland** vineyard due to a big earth-moving project, there were **4 bluebird chicks** fledged! It appears that tree swallows also suffered losses in May: I discovered 4 dead chicks in a nest box infested with mites - and was startled to see 2 surviving chicks fly out and away from this box. Hope springs eternal.



The lone nest box at **Dante Romanini's Panther Branch Vineyard in Vineland** had promising beginnings with a bluebird nest started April 10th. On May 1st, I found the female on the nest but no eggs were

produced. Later In June, tree swallows successfully nested, fledging 5 birds. Let's not forget that these are insect-eating birds, too. (*continued on page 11*)

## Gloucester County Coordinator's Report

After a cool and rainy start to the season with losses of some clutches, the remainder of the 2017 season was very productive with many monitors reporting 2-3 clutches fledging successfully. We banded over 200 bluebirds this year in Gloucester County. Our monitoring sites ranged from single boxes in backyards to multiple boxes in municipal, county, and state parks. All of the 2016 monitors were active again this season. Working with the Friends of Tall Pines State Preserve, we added a bluebird trail at this former golf course which has recently become the county's first state park. At Washington Township Lake Park (Gloucester County) we re-introduced a bluebird trail with active monitors from the Gloucester County Nature Club working with the Parks and Recreation Department. Partnering with the Gloucester County Nature Club, we hope to expand bluebird trails into other municipal and county parks in the upcoming season. Several residential backyard bluebird boxes with active monitors were added this year. Assistance was provided at two local golf courses and the county 4-H fairgrounds.

Bernie Visalli, one of our most active monitors in Gloucester County, has a farm in South Harrison Township. She is a very successful monitor and is looking to expand trails on other farms in the area. One note of interest - she found dead bluebirds in uncapped PVC pipes used to mark irrigation locations. Using social media and spreading the word in the farm community, she shed light on the issue and asked the landowners to cap similar pipes on their properties.

While attending Eagle Fest in Mauricetown (Cumberland County), I was approached by Peter Manzelmann, a teacher from the Friends School in Mullica Hill about establishing a bluebird trail on their campus. The teacher then incorporated the bluebird monitoring into his 7th and 8th grade classes. After an on-site visit with Peter and his students, bluebird boxes were placed in five promising locations on the school campus. The students monitored the boxes and kept careful records of the bluebirds and the other nest box species that they encountered. In the first season, a number of the boxes were very productive and the young bluebirds were banded. The students enjoyed watching, banding and holding the bluebirds.

Overall, I have found that bluebird banding engages our monitors and provides an opportunity for continuing discussion of proper bluebird nest box management. The most common topics raised by our monitors this season were tree swallow nest box competition, house wren issues, and the most effective way to deal with house sparrows.

~ Dave Gilcrest - Gloucester County Coordinator

**(Wrens continued from page 4)** Removing brush near a box may also help. Shrubbery appears to be a bigger attractant than trees. Facing the entrance hole away from shrubbery may help a bit.

**Avoid crowded single boxes:** House Wren populations may have grown in some areas due to the proliferation of tiny ornamental boxes in backyards. The Bluebird Recovery Association of Wisconsin found that crowded single boxes (multiple boxes 100 feet to 100 yards apart) seemed to attract both House Wrens and House Sparrows. There were fewer HOWR in boxes 100 yards apart (and more bluebirds.)

**Remove extra boxes:** An alternative approach is to have fewer boxes, so House Wren populations don't explode, and the HOWR don't attack neighbors' nests. For example, just have one box in a yard, and use a wren guard on it once an egg is laid.

**Keep them busy:** Put up a number of wren houses without predator guards in a very small area in prime wren habitat, away from bluebird boxes. Then continually remove the dummy nests. This may keep the males occupied so they don't have time to attack. Boxes should have 15/16" holes.

**Clean out old nests:** In some populations, cavities with HOWR nests are preferred over empty cavities, perhaps because they may indicate prior successful use. Therefore, at the end of nesting season, clean out used nests.

*(Used with permission from <http://www.sialis.org>)*

## GREAT SWAMP NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE 2017 BLUEBIRD NEST BOX REPORT

It was a long nesting season that started with weekly nest box checks in early April. The first bluebird egg of the season was laid on April 17. The last nest to fledge was reported on August 20. The notable events during the nesting season were: An unusual cool, rainy May resulting in reduced egg hatching and increased hatchling mortality; House wrens were the major nest box predator; A controlled burn and house removal improved bluebird habitat for 2017.

NESTING STATISTICS	2017	2016	10 yr avg
Bluebird Nesting Pairs	42	36	40
Bluebird Eggs	282	255	282
Bluebird Fledglings	199	189	213
Nest Failure, % (no fledglings)	27	21	21

In 2017 there were 1.32 nesting per box. Over 88% of the nest boxes had at least one nesting during the season. Every nest box pair had at least one nesting and as usual, some boxes had multiple nestings. Boxes are paired to allow bluebirds and tree swallows to nest in the same area. Tree swallows nested in 91% of the nest box pairs while bluebirds nested in 66% of the pairs. House wrens nested in 29% of the box pairs. Both tree swallows and bluebirds nested in 56% of the box pairs. Bluebird nesting pairs and fledglings increased for the second consecutive year.

### ORPHAN BLUEBIRD

In early August the Raptor Trust had a very weak 5-6 day old bluebird hatchling. Its sibling had died. The prospects for this orphan were not promising. Fortunately the Refuge had a nest of hatchlings all about the same age. The orphan was placed in the nest with the 4 existing hatchlings. One week later the nest had 5 healthy hatchlings. All eventually fledged.

### CONTROLLED BURN & TEARDOWNS

A controlled burn was held on April 13. Bluebird boxes (8 boxes in total) in the burn area were taken down prior to the burn and reinstalled on April 16. Four sets of bluebird boxes on the edge of these properties were moved to the center of the lots, surrounded by short grass. The other two tear downs were converted to RV sites.

These changes shortened vegetation around the nest boxes and increased bluebird nesting from 3 to 10 in these boxes. Bluebirds prefer to forage on the ground and to nest in open areas. As the vegetation grows during the season and from year to year, the advantage of these modifications will disappear unless the areas are mowed. The Refuge's plan to mow more acres annually should improve bluebird habitat. Neither tree swallows nor house wrens prefer open areas for nesting.

~ Leo Hollein

Many thanks to Jim Mulvey, Nancy Felicito and Joe Balwierczak who monitored nest boxes and reported their findings on a weekly basis during the 2017 nesting season. Paul Ford, who for many years built new boxes and repaired others for the trail passed away in October 2016. Below is a photo of the 2017 bluebird nest box volunteers.



BLUEBIRD NESTBOX MONITORS L-R Leo Hollein, Nancy Felicito, Joe Balwierczak and Jim Mulvey (photo by Carl Woodward)

(*Vineyards*, continued from page 9)

Last but not least, **Michael Spadea** generously opened his vineyards in **Mullica Hill** to two new boxes, which he and his son, Mario, monitored. They had some run-ins with house sparrows, and some interest from tree swallows.



Michael also has two nice martin houses that he wants to get back in circulation with the help of Dave and Allen. This should cut down on house sparrows moving in and increase the odds of bluebirds next season.

Many thanks to these wonderful vineyard owners who were willing to try something new. If you know of a vineyard owner who would be interested, or if you are willing to monitor, please send me an email at [Lorijo.jamieson@gmail.com](mailto:Lorijo.jamieson@gmail.com).





# NJ Bluebird Society

Caring for the Bluebirds of New Jersey

## Membership Has Its Rewards!

Sometimes we just need nature to get us motivated. In this case, we hope your concern for the well being of our native Eastern Bluebird has motivated you to join the New Jersey Bluebird Society. Bluebirds are one of our most desirable species. If you are reading this newsletter and still aren't a member, here's why you should be:

Many factors impact bluebird survival, including weather, food/cover, predators, nest competition, pests, and disease. Proper management can be the key to maintaining a healthy and productive bluebird population. By joining the NJBBS we can provide you with that up to date information. As members we can:

- ~ **Provide education about bluebirds to interested people like yourself.**
- ~ **Provide expertise and guidance to trail monitors and backyard bluebird enthusiasts.**
- ~ **Provide data forms to help document the bluebird activities in your boxes. We encourage you to submit the number of young bluebirds fledged from your boxes at the end of each season. This precious data is used to monitor early population trends in New Jersey.**

Now that you're thinking about it, why not go to [www.njbluebirdsociety.org](http://www.njbluebirdsociety.org) and become a member?

## North American Bluebird Society

There are lots of advantages to being a member of both **NJBBS** and **NABS**. Joining NABS entitles you to receive "Bluebird", their colorful quarterly publication. This is a quality periodical of interest to anyone who appreciates bluebirds and other secondary cavity nesters. The North American Bluebird Society organization supports and helps unify the work of state chapters across America. For a small membership fee (\$15 special price the first year, then \$20 per year), everyone in NJBBS is encouraged to also join NABS and get a better understanding of what our bluebird friends are doing in North America.



You can go to our website, [www.njbluebirdsociety.org](http://www.njbluebirdsociety.org) and look for NABS's membership form that accompanies the NJBBS membership form. If you are new to the world of bluebirds, NABS's website, [www.nabluebirdsociety.org](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org) is a goldmine of information, including printable (PDF) **fact sheets** on getting started, nestbox plans, predator control, monitoring guides and feeding recommendations. Even those of us who consider ourselves "experienced" find these resources to be very useful for our own use and as information for new monitors.