

Jersey Blues

The Newsletter of The New Jersey Bluebird Society,
an Affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society

~ Volume 2, Issue 1, 2017



“Bubba Speaks”

~ a Message from Allen Jackson, President, NJBBS

2016 has come and gone, but first let's reflect back a few years and try to understand what led up to 2016 and how we can possibly interpret things. Each year is different and there will always be fluctuations in bluebird numbers. There are many hurdles that bluebirds have to overcome to survive, the list is long and extremely variable. Populations are dynamic and each year is different. However, one thing is certain: how we manage may be a key whether we have bluebirds around for future generations to enjoy. We do not have total control but can have some influence in benefiting bluebirds.

While 2016 can be referred to as a bounce-back year, we need to look to 2015 to get a better understanding of what transpired the past two years. Production in 2015 was down - about 40% from the previous year - due to significant winter kill leading up to 2015. There were three areas in particular that I am familiar with that got hit hard in 2015 and continued to show little improvement in 2016: [Cox Hall Creek Wildlife Management Area](#) in the Villas, Cape May County; open expanses in Deerfield, Cumberland County, and areas adjacent to the Cohansey River, Cumberland County. All three areas were impacted by exposure to heavy snows, cold temperatures, bitter winds and a limited food supply. All three areas did not produce a single bluebird in 2015 or 2016. These were areas with bluebird trails that had been fairly productive in previous years. It has taken two years for bluebirds to repopulate the area. This winter we are finally observing bluebirds making cups in pine needles placed in some bluebird boxes for added warmth. [Bluebirds will use boxes to roost in during the winter](#). This is a positive sign that we may expect bluebird production to return to these three areas in 2017. Gail Fisher made the effort to place pine needles in boxes at Cox Hall Creek. If it wasn't for her interest and follow up observations, we would not have known. Bluebirds have been observed using this area during the fall, *(continued on page 2)*



[New Jersey
Bluebird Society](http://www.njbluebirdsociety.org)

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(continued from page 1) - so there is a certain degree of anticipated excitement for the 2017 nesting season. This is suggesting we take a closer look at using winter roosting boxes to see if their value is worth the cost and effort.

These three areas were the exception and not necessarily indicative of what happened in the rest of New Jersey during 2016. Most monitors reported an increase in bluebird activity. This was reflected at the end of the season with **2,228 bluebirds** reported fledged by NJBBS monitors. **Atlantic County was the biggest producer with 514, followed by Cumberland with 407, Ocean 219, Gloucester County with 208 and Cape May County with 75.** Cape May County has its own issues which make bluebird production difficult, but 75 is a very respectable number under the circumstances. 2017, if we have decent weather, should continue to bring improvement.

Of course, these numbers do not mean all that much because this only represents NJBBS members who reported their production. As we increase our membership and can summarize numbers over many years, we will have a better handle on production trends. This takes time and commitment, but it's something we can strive for.

What I appreciate is how NJBBS members have helped southern NJ by responding to help bluebirds. Last year, Dave Gilcrest (Gloucester), Gail Fisher (Cape May) and Laura Stone (Ocean) Counties be-

came County Coordinators (CC). They supplemented our existing coordinators in Atlantic, Cumberland, Burlington and Salem Counties. Thanks to our existing coordinators who were working hard to benefit bluebirds and ultimately produced good numbers of bluebirds.

2014-2016 Accomplishments: We have accomplished much the past 2 years. Let's highlight some that I am aware of:

Jersey Blues: Our first edition was published the Fall 2016 thanks to the efforts of Lori Jo Jamieson. We hope to produce an issue every six months. The success of *Jersey Blues* is dependent on all of our members submitting article or pictures. This is not the responsibility of a few individuals. If you have a story or photo to share, submit it to Lori Jo at lorijo.jamieson@gmail.com.

NJBBS Logo Shirts: Thanks to Gary Pilling we were able to design a shirt that represents our organization. The shirt is a dark blue and any color version of our logo were reviewed until we found one that made our logo stand out. There are still shirts available for sale if you did not have the opportunity to purchase one previously.

NJBBS Website: Gary Pilling volunteered to be our webmaster. He spent many hours redoing the website, making improvements, and the changes are always ongoing. Comments on the website are appreciated. (continued on page 8)

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

Our mission is to educate, 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 OFFICERS

President: Allen Jackson
 Vice President North: Jim Newquist
 Vice President South: Laura Stone
 Treasurer: John Layton
 Acting Secretary: Gary Pilling

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Past President: Frank Budney
 At Large: Nels Anderson
 Shelly Cucugliello
 Dave Gilcrest
 Lori Jo Jamieson
 Gary Pilling
 Jim Watson
 Ed Zboyan



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 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 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 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 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.

GROWING THE PROGRAM



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

“OUT REACH” (talks, display tables)

March 18, **Allen Jackson** is talking to a group of people at the [Wild Birds Unlimited in Middletown, Monmouth County, NJ](#). We do not have any members from that area so this is a great opportunity to grow our program, add more bluebird boxes and attract new members.

Allen will be speaking to the [Audubon Wildlife Society in Camden County](#), another area we need to make people aware of who we are and what we do. Probable date will be in September.

Allen has scheduled a May 31 on-site and talk with the [Friends of Princeton Nursery Lands](#) in Kingston, an area on the Mercer/Middlesex County line (also close to Somerset County). They own over 200 acres and are requesting technical assistance on the bluebird boxes they have as well as improving their bluebird trail. Again, a great opportunity to expand our program.

Allen, Dave Gilcrest and Jim Watson worked a display table at the [Eagle Festival in Mauricetown](#), Cumberland County on February 4. Many people from Cumberland, Salem, Gloucester, Cape May, Ocean and Atlantic Counties stopped by our table to talk about bluebirds. We anticipate on-sites that will benefit bluebirds.

Bernnie Visalli made 2 poster boards for NJBBS use at public outreach programs. The posters included her photos of a winter roosting box and slotted box and the NJBBS logo. The timing was perfect she brought it to the Eagle Festival and we needed more displays on our table. Thank you, Bernnie!

Allen and Laura Stone will represent NJBBS at the [Big Day of Birding at Cloverdale](#), Cloverdale Farm County Park in Barnegat, Ocean County on May 7.

Gail Fisher, Cape May County Coordinator, will be doing a bluebird presentation for the Woodbine Chamber of Commerce and the Dennis Township Middle School Student Government. **See Gail’s report on page 10.**

Allen will be attending a NABS Board of Director’s meeting in Raleigh, N.C. to discuss ways to increase membership, better assist affiliate chapters and plan ways to improve NABS.

“PARTNERSHIPS” (activities with other groups)

Pat Trasferini has opened up many doors for NJBBS thru her environmental advocacy at [Cloverdale Farm County Park](#) and the [Ocean County Park](#) systems.

Lori Jo Jamieson is working on NJBBS partnerships with vineyards. **See article on page 11.** She also planned and help to install a small trail in the [Egg Harbor Township Nature Reserve](#).

Allen and Dave will conduct an on site and coordinate with the [Gloucester County Nature Club](#) to establish a bluebird trail at the [Tall Pines State Park](#).

Allen is representing **NJBBS** and [Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River](#) at [Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center's Eco Fair](#) May 6. Many environmental improvements are being worked on including: 2 vernal pools; wood duck, bluebird, purple martin nesting units; a chimney swift tower; 2 bird feeding stations; invasive plant control; over 200 native shrub plantings for wildlife were added; a nature trail with interpretive signs about habitat and tree/shrub identification.

Allen and Jim Watson are planning to participate in programs at Atlantic County's [Estell Manor](#) and [Lake Lenape Park](#), continuing our long-standing involvement with that County Park.

Laura Stone is working with the Toms River Girl Scout Troop who are making boxes and plan to place and monitor them this season. She is also training a monitor to take over a trail in Howell, Monmouth County and is sponsoring the bluebird recovery project at the Ocean County Vocational School's (Jackson) Horticultural program for the fourth consecutive year with the students selecting the bluebird monitoring program as their 2-year special project.

Additional outreach anticipated (Cumberland County Master Gardeners, Estell Manor Elementary School, Middle Township Middle School's woodshop class)

"REAL ESTATE" (boxes added)

Atlantic and Burlington County: **Allen and Jim Watson** are working to improve the bluebird trail at [Batsto](#) and [Atsion](#). By the time we are done, ~24 new boxes will be in place and ready for the 2017 nesting season. This is being coordinated with the Atlantic Audubon Society.

The Middle Township Middle School Woodshop Class, Cape May County has made 35 NABS style boxes for **Allen**, with another 35 due in about 2 months. Boxes are being made out of Atlantic white cedar. **Dave Moyer**, the woodshop teacher, has instituted making boxes for NJBBS a regular routine each year. They have made over 400 boxes to date. **(photo on page 8)**

Atlantic County: 2 at Mays Landing (**Jim Watson**), 1 at Estell Manor Elementary School (**John Dowling**)

Cape May County: 4 at Avalon Golf Course (**Gail Fisher**), 3 at Dennisville Elementary School (**Gail Fisher**), 1 at Shell Bay Campground in Cape May Court House (**Allen**), 1 at Murdock Farm in Woodbine (**Allen**).

Gloucester County: **Dave** is following up on leads resulting from the Eagle Festival. He has done site visits at 2 properties that included 2 new nest boxes. He also did an on-site at the Friend's School in Mullica Hill with the teacher who wants to incorporate a bluebird trail into the 7th grade program. They will erect 5 boxes on the 20 acres of property. These site visits result in new members and new monitors.

Morris County: **Frank Budney** is working with the [Morris County Parks Department](#) to promote new and existing trails and train trail monitors to participate in NJBBS programs.

Ocean: **Robin Burr** is working in the Tuckerton area, doing maintenance on his 2 trails from 2016 and providing technical assistance for a bluebird trail on Osborne Island.

Christian Olivo is adding 4 boxes to his bluebird trail in New Egypt as part of his Boy Scout Troop 109 project. **Christian** is making this part of his Eagle Scout project. Way to go **Christian!**

Bernie Visalli (article page 9) and **Gail Fisher** are evaluating bluebirds usage of winter roosting boxes.

We are trying to set up an internship for **Peter Nekrasov** of Monmouth County. Peter is interested in the environmental field and has a special interest in bluebirds. We are looking into him taking over 2 bluebird trails ([Hartshorne Woods County Park](#) and Rumson Golf Course), repairing boxes and monitoring thru the nesting season before he goes to college.

"MISCELLANEOUS" (items of interest)

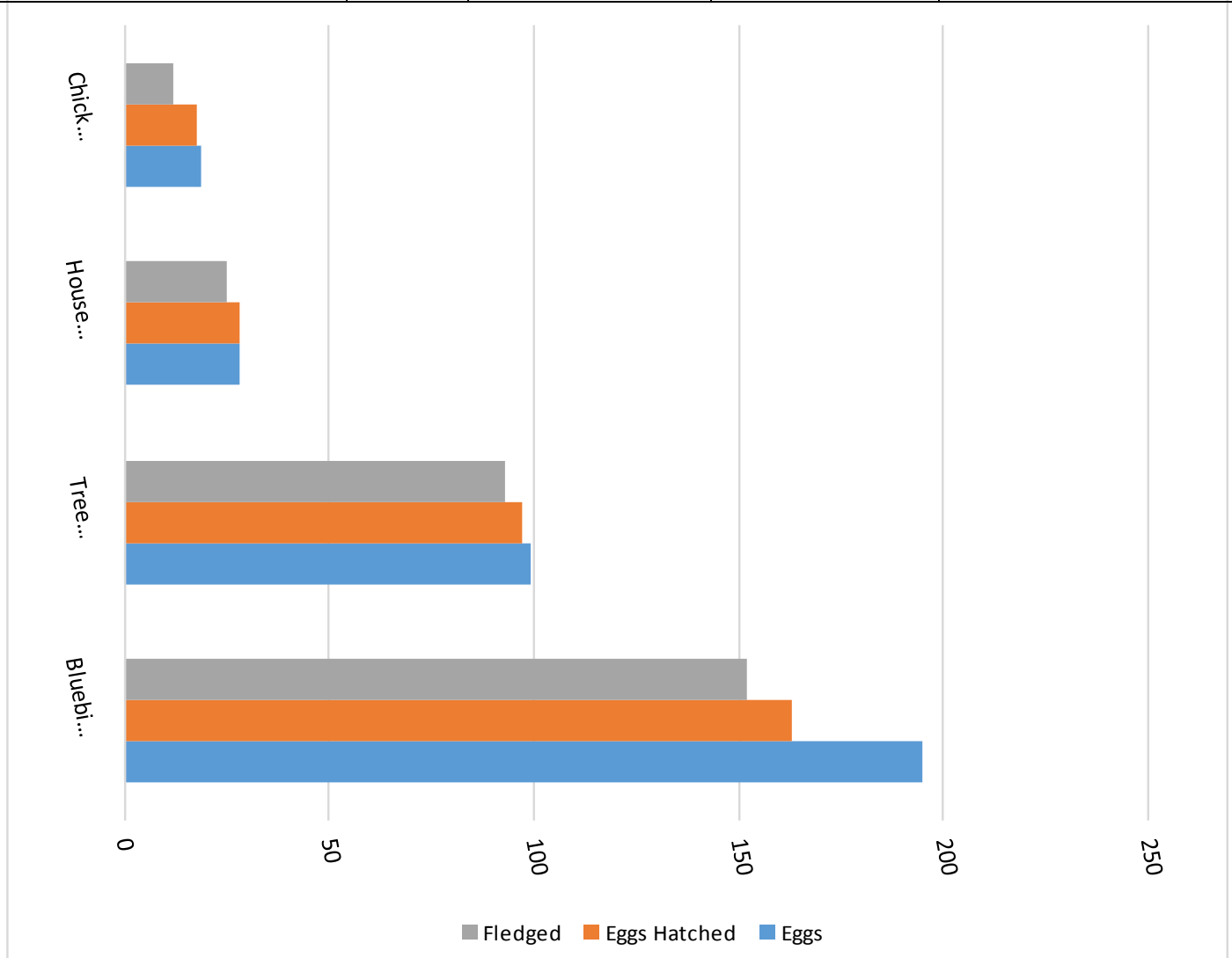
Allen has a pair spending more and more time in the Gilwood style box he put up. This box has a u-shaped opening at the top of the front with a metal rod strategically placed to keep other birds out...an interesting and different box which bluebirds are supposed to like.

Gloucester County News

Dave Gilcrest, as Gloucester County Coordinator, is contacting all of the monitors in his County to verify their involvement in this year's nesting season and to offer technical assistance with repairs and nest box relocations if needed. There is an enthusiastic response for the 2017 season. Monitors are encouraged to discuss setting up new bluebird trails with friends and organization they are involved with. He has also placed NJBBS brochures in the community area of high traffic local market and the GC Library Community Information Board.

Gloucester County 2016

Total Number of Boxes	54			
Total Number of Monitors	12			
Bluebirds Banded	114			
Additional Banded & Fledged	56			
	Eggs	Eggs Hatched	Fledged	Fledge Success
Bluebirds	195	163	152	78%
Tree Swallows	99	97	93	94%
House Wrens	28	28	25	89%
Chickadees	19	18	12	63%



2016 Bluebird Nesting Season Summary

Here is the compiled data from New Jersey Bluebird Summary Forms submitted by participating Bluebird Trail Monitors and County Coordinators for the 2016 bluebird nesting season.

The data is broken down by each County and also shows Statewide totals of each category.

The most accurate data captured in this report is that of the Total Number of Bluebirds Fledged and the Total Number of Bluebirds Banded as all monitors and banders accurately and consistently reported these statistics on the submitted summary forms.

The Number of Bluebird Boxes, the Number of Boxes Used By Bluebirds, the Number of Bluebird Eggs Laid and the Number of Bluebird Eggs Hatched are not accurate totals as these numbers were not included on every summary form submitted for the 2016 nesting season.

New Jersey Bluebird Society Summary Form: Submitted Data 2016 updated 1/31/2017

County	Number of Boxes	Boxes Used by Bluebirds	Bluebird Eggs Laid	Bluebirds Eggs Hatched	Bluebirds Fledged	Bluebirds Banded
Atlantic	159	104	444	532	514	507
Bergen						
Burlington	90	38			142	
Camden						
Cape May	99	13			75	75
Cumberland	6	4	22	8	407	393
Essex						
Gloucester	54		251	219	208	170
Hudson						
Hunterdon						
Mercer						
Middlesex	8	8	62		55	
Monmouth	76	38	296		162	
Morris					291	
Ocean	25	22	247	227	219	92
Passaic						
Salem	3	3	118	112	112	96
Somerset					43	43
Sussex						
Union	11					
Warren						
Totals	531	230	1440	1098	2228	1376

Other Species Reported Nesting in Bluebird Boxes

Tree Swallows - House Wrens - Chickadees
Titmice - Carolina Wrens - Eastern Flycatcher

Most Reported Problems

Cold and wet early Spring weather
Hot and dry weather late in the season
House Sparrow issues
House Wren attacks

A big thank you goes out to Dave Gilcrest for compiling, updating and submitting these important statistics!

("Bubba Speaks" continued from page 3)

County Coordinators: Gloucester, Cape May, and Ocean Counties were discussed above. Our goal is to have a County Coordinator for each and every county. Having an active coordinator belies the root of NJBBS' existence. So much can be accomplished taking this direction.

Summary Form: Gary Pilling and I worked on a summary sheet for members to fill out after each nesting season. Dave Gilcrest volunteered to act as coordinate the forms and summarize the season. Notice his 2016 report in this issue, found on **page 7**.

By-laws: Our by-laws were lengthy and difficult to understand. They were rewritten and reduced from nine to four pages.

Vice President North/ Vice President South: In an effort to better organize the NJBBS the State was divided into two sections, North and South of Interstate 195. Electing a VP North and VP South allows for that VP to concentrate on organizing their area. Different approaches can be shared which should ultimately benefit the bluebirds.

Board of Directors: We now have 13 Board of Directors, comprised of 5 Elected Officers and 8 Directors "at large". This group will run the organization and provide guidance and direction for NJBBS members. Thanks to Gary Pilling again, we have a **revised flyer** that can be used as handouts at various events NJBBS may participate in.

NABS: Being an affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society has added responsibilities. We need to work together for the betterment of both organizations. I was appointed to the NABS Board of Direc-

tors and serve primarily on their nestbox committee. A special committee is working on ways that affiliate chapters and NABS can benefit each other.

FREC, Jackson, NJ: We have a centrally located meeting place to hold our annual meeting. The [Forest Resources Education Center](#) has extended an invitation to use their facility for our meetings.

Partnerships: We have more unofficial partnerships than one would imagine. To name a few, [Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River](#) and its [Tributaries](#), [Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center](#), [Atlantic Audubon Society](#), [Middle Township Middle School Wood Shop Class](#), [Gloucester County Nature Club](#) - the list goes on and on. We have so many people who monitor bluebird trails or manage boxes in their back yards. As you can see, a lot has been accomplished the past two years. I am proud of the many NJBBS members (and non-members) who have taken the responsibility to better manage our bluebirds. Being active in NJBBS does require commitment but I think those who have gotten involved can take pride in their and our accomplishments.

If you have not already done so, now is the time to check your boxes to do any maintenance and get them ready for the nesting season. I've seen nests with eggs in March but most activity begins in mid April.

I would like to end with my favorite quote: *"The Nation behaves well if it treats natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired in value."*
~ Teddy Roosevelt

Keep up the good work! ALLEN



Middle Township Middle School 8th Graders Build Over 40 Bluebird Boxes

On Wednesday, February 22, 2016 Allen Jackson, President of the New Jersey Bluebird Society, and Gail Fisher, Cape May County Coordinator for the New Jersey Bluebird Society came to Middle Township Middle School to pick up over 40 Bluebird Boxes created as a service learning project as a part of the 8th Grade Woodshop Project coordinated by teacher Dave Moyer. This project has been taking place for over 5 years and over 400 bluebird boxes have been assembled to be

dispersed throughout the state. The latest boxes created will be hung throughout South Jersey with most of them being hung in Batsto State Forest. Pictured are 8th grade students from Mr. Moyer's Woodshop Class with completed boxes.

My Roosting Box Experiences ~ by *Bernnie Visarelli*

I first got involved with Blue Birds after seeing a presentation at Cumberland County College given by Allen Jackson, way back in 2011. We started off small and have increased to 7 houses over 100 acres, with last year being our best so far with 35 fledged. I am always checking out bird housing when visiting any feed or pet store, and this fall was intrigued by the roosting boxes. Checking with Allen about them, he encouraged me to try it out and he even lent me one. I switched out one of my very successful brooding boxes with the roosting box and got a hit in a few days! The setup is behind my home and I can observe it by looking out our windows, which makes for good observations all times of the day. I placed some pine straw in the bottom of the box since that was in the regular box when I switched it out. We will call this R1.



The normal routine is for the BBs to come up by our home in the early morning after the sun has come up over the trees. They love to sit on the horse pasture fence and wait for the bugs all times of the year, even winter. This activity prompted me to purchase a second roosting box (R2) and put it out in the back of the farm where there is a good wind break provided by the woods, in place of another successful brooding box. I have been checking all of my housing once a week by opening and doing a check in addition to visual checks almost daily when out on the farm doing chores. We do have a normal brooding box with some bird activity, pine straw in the bottom and some bird droppings. Last winter they used that house in particular. There has been a lot of activity in (R1) with as many as 4 males going in and out at a time. This year I have been feeding meal worms daily which has brought as many as 15 bluebirds at one time to feed and "play" in the roosting box.

This experiment has been going on since the beginning of November with no issues until Jan 30th. Much to my surprise, there seemed to be a battle going on around 8 am. I ran to grab my camera, put on warm clothes and see what the heck was going on. A male and female seemed to have taken possession of the box and the male was being very aggressive toward any male that came near the box, and even to the feeder! At one point I was able to walk right up to the fighting pair and snap some troubling photos. This went on for at least 45 minutes until the cold won out and I had to make a retreat back inside. They were fighting in the trees, down to the ground and back up again. It was very alarming to witness and one poor bird stayed on the ground for a length of time before flying up into the trees again. From what I could tell it was the one male taking on all the rest while the female stayed on the roosting box. (Kind of like a bar fight in an old western) I watched the house and feeders the rest of the day and did see birds of both sexes with no further skirmishes.



My conclusions are, if you are going to put up a roosting box, make sure you take the time to do weekly checks and if you see any breeding behavior keep a special eye out to make sure they do not start a nest early in the season. I had to switch out the box mid-February, which was way sooner than I expected to! Special note: no other birds have been observed using the box. A few house finches have landed on the box, but have not seen any go inside. Once a Blue Jay landed on the roof but I think he was just checking out the meal worms!

Patently waiting for spring, *Bernnie Visalli*

Blues News From your NJBBS Cape May County Coordinator, Gail Fisher

Greetings! Here's hoping for abundant bluebirds in 2017. I'd like to celebrate with you the establishment of two new trails and six new monitors since August 2016! Welcome to **Ellen Seward** who will take over the trail for **Tom and Cookie Lippincott** at Cape Island Preserve/[Cox Hall Creek WMA](#) in the Villas. Assisting her, as time allows, is **Pam Hubert** and **Linda Blanchette**. All three women have homes very close to Cox Hall Creek and frequent the trails there. Ellen first fell in love with bluebirds who nested in a backyard box at her former residence in Williamstown, NJ.



Welcome next to **Edd Becica**, the Superintendent of the [Avalon Golf Club](#) in Cape May Court House, and **Brian Wendler**, Avalon Golf Club staff member. Edd and Brian are wildlife enthusiasts who go out of their way to create an animal friendly environment on the course and its surrounding property. Edd has worked 30+ years at the golf club, Brian's been there 21 years, and they are still thrilled each time they spot bald eagles, foxes, ospreys, and all manner of critters out on the course. It is one of the special features, they say, that the golfers really enjoy.

Brian Wendler, staff member at the Avalon Golf Club, helped Allen (I just watched) put up one of their four new nestboxes - a unique (and chilly) way to celebrate the December 21st Winter Solstice.

Welcome to our sixth monitor, **Lisa Salimbene**. Last year she was instrumental in establishing a successful trail at the **Dennis Township Primary School**, Hagan Road campus in South Dennis. This year, working at the **Dennis Township Middle School**, she worked with the Student Government, who raised the money to purchase three nest boxes for the Academy Road campus in Dennisville. Four student government members and Lisa joined **Allen Jackson** and me on December 21st to install three nest boxes there. Clean pine needles were added to the boxes in hopes that local bluebirds might roost there together on cold winter nights.

Welcome to our newest monitors, **Richard Ryder** of [Shellbay Camping Resort](#) in Cape May Court House, and **Hailey Murdock** of [Woodbine Equestrian Center](#). Best wishes for a successful first season! Thanks for the continuing reports of BB sightings throughout the county and beyond. Monitor **Annie Becica** noticed her Woodbine BBs were already checking out her backyard nest box.

This is Annie with one of her two new nest boxes at Big Timber Lake RV Resort in Goshen, where she is the Assistant Manager. Thanks, Annie!



Now is a good time to check your boxes for any winter damage, make repairs and move/remove them as needed. I found two of mine that had significantly tilted over, one that needed the door repaired and one that had lots of poop on the pine needles (see photos) - hopefully from roosting BBs!

Pine needles in November and February. Not the exact same boxes, but you get the idea!

Putting Bluebirds to Work in NJ Vineyards

Last November, while touring several Atlantic County wineries, I had an epiphany: wouldn't wineries and vineyards be excellent places for bluebird nesting boxes? (Whether this was due to the wine tastings or my love for bluebirds has not yet been determined.)

Searching online, I found a [2012 study](#) done in California by Julie Jedlicka, showing how Western Bluebirds eat vineyard pests. Further study of scat determined that they also eat mosquitoes. (see November 2016 [Popular Science article](#) here) I contacted the [Outer Coastal Plain Wine Growers](#) (this region encompasses 2.25 million acres in Southeastern New Jersey) and promptly, the group's President, Larry Coia gave me a call. He would be glad to forward my idea to the members. Larry had spoken to a Rutgers entomologist who thought the bluebirds could be helpful and would not be affected by pest management programs. However, a Rutgers pomologist (botanist that studies and cultivates fruit) cited the need to be careful about the placement of the boxes. They will need to be away from any place which would impede the vine management program.



Julie Jedlicka with a Western Bluebird



Jim Quarella, owner of Bellview Winery in Landisville planning a nestbox trail with Lori Jo



Bellview Winery owner, Jim Quarella, has experience with bluebird nestboxes, but the trails had been neglected. His was the first site I visited. The property has had bluebirds in the past, but also a healthy population of tree swallows. Jim had paired nest boxes due to the tree swallow population with much success. Not only did he want to build his own NABS boxes, he wanted to monitor his own trail once again. He also wanted to place nest boxes where his visitors could watch them and learn about bluebirds. Great thinking!

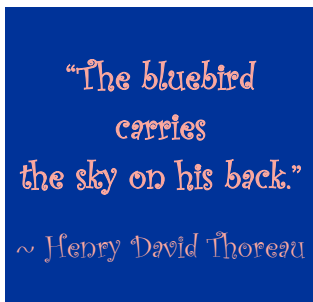
Last week I finally got to meet Larry Coia, his son, Steve and his mother, Lena, at his property in Vineyard. He is in the process of clearing brush and old trees out in a field to make an oasis in which field workers can sit, rest and eat lunch. A nestbox at each end will add so much! Lena will become a NJBBS member and help to monitor.

I still have three or four more vineyards to visit, all in Western Atlantic County. If successful, this program could positively impact the future of NJBBS. That's my hope, anyway. ~ Lori Jo Jamieson



Larry Coia, on right, with son, Steve.

Quotes for Bluebird Lovers - from Sialis.org



A bird does not sing because he has an answer. He sings because he has a song.
- Joan Walsh Anglund, *A Cup of Sun*, 1967

Bluebird flying high, Tell me what you sing. If you could talk to me, What news would you bring Of voices in the sky? - *The Moody Blues, In Search of the Lost Chord*, lyrics from *Voices in the Sky*, Justin Hayward, 1968

But no blue, not even the brightest summer sky, seems as blue as the bluebirds of spring. - Ron Hirschi

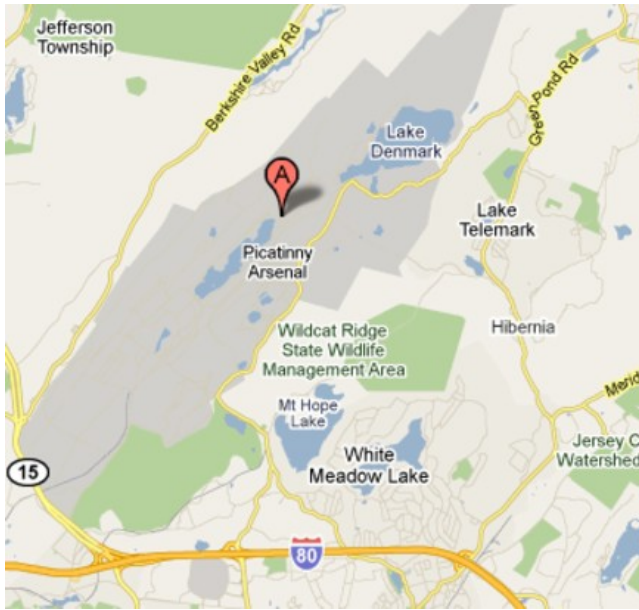
A bluebird box is perhaps the easiest and most rewarding way to do something good for the environment.
- Michigan Bluebird Society

As might be expected of creatures so heavenly in color, the disposition of bluebirds is particularly angelic. Gentleness and amiability are expressed in their soft musical voice. Tru-al-ly, tru-al-ly, they sweetly assert when we can scarcely believe that spring is here; tru-wee, tur-wee they softly call in autumn when they go roaming through the countryside in flocks of azure. - Neltje Blanchan, *Birds Worth Knowing*, 1917

Conservation Conversation from Picatinny, Morris County

Lots of information was passed back and forth between Allen Jackson and Jim Grundy in just two emails. NJBBS hopes to work more closely with the Picatinny. A summary of the season is below.

"Allen, we had the usual Bluebird Nesting Box activity as in recent years. The slight drop-off in numbers is most likely due to the difficulty in getting reliable monitors. Note that 6 of the boxes lost monitoring during the nesting season with eggs or nestlings present in the boxes. Has a root cause been determined for the reduction of Bluebirds in some areas of the state? I hope that the Bluebird Trail at [Picatinny Arsenal](#) can be monitored next year with the loss of monitors. John Reed retired last year and he and his wife Susan Simovich had to visit the facility to maintain the boxes and assist in monitoring. They are hoping to move to John's home state of NY in the future." - Jim



"Jim, thanks for the email. 2016 was basically a bounce back year after the winter kill that impacted nesting in 2015. Most places did fairly well although some areas that got hit hard did not produce any BBs in 2015 or 2016. There are so many hurdles for BBs to deal with to survive it is hard to determine just what the problem is.

Most areas did well. We did have some cold rainy weather which may have been worse in your section of the State so it is hard to tell. So far the winter has been fairly good in our area, little to no snow and I see and hear BBs all the time. Most of our BBs in southern NJ do not migrate. Do you see BBs overwintering at Picatinny? We changed NJBBS around some and now have a VP North and VP South. Jim Newquist is our VP North and hopefully he will work/coordinate with you for Picatinny." - Allen

Picatinny Arsenal Bluebird Boxes: Reported 2 August 2016

	Nests or Broods	Birds Fledged	Nestlings Remaining	Eggs Remaining
Bluebirds	31	102	8	10
Tree Swallows	7	20	4	0
House Wrens	1	0	0	0
House Sparrows	0	0	0	0
Chickadees	0	0	0	0
Tufted Titmouse	0	0	0	0
Total	39	122	12	10



What's for Dinner?

Allen Jackson has bluebirds coming to his feeder using **Royal Wing Premium No Melt, "Peanut Delight Suet Dough"** sold at Tractor Supply. **Jim Watson** gets lots of bluebirds eating a **"Mealworm Snack"** brick bought at Walmart. Peanut butter and dried mealworms seem to be the attractants.

Lori Jo Jamieson has noticed a dramatic increase of bluebirds since she put out **Royal Wing Suet Balls**. She bought a feeder that came with four suet balls at Tractor Supply..

A BLUEBIRD TRAIL IN A NEW JERSEY SWAMP?

The [Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge](#) in Morris County comprises about 8,000 acres in Northern New Jersey. It is a 12-square-mile natural oasis situated in a mostly suburban environment 26 miles west of New York City's Times Square. Bird watchers have reported over 240 bird species in the Refuge and over 100 species of birds are known nesters. There are 39 resident mammals including black bears, coyotes, river otters, beavers and red foxes. The Refuge has a large variety of fish, reptiles and amphibians and is home to endangered or threatened bog turtles, wood turtles, Indiana bats and blue spotted salamanders.

The Refuge is an example of land restoration rather than preservation, coming into existence in 1960 as a result of a creative NIMBY campaign. To thwart the planned creation of a fourth airport for the New York metropolitan area, local citizenry donated about 3,000 acres of land to the federal government for the creation of a National Wildlife Refuge. The Refuge has subsequently grown through acquisition of adjacent farms, dairies and homesteads. Restoration is ongoing as properties continue to be recycled back to a more native condition. The refuge has a variety of habitats including grasslands, brush lands, mature forest, forested wetlands, marsh, ponds and streams. The refuge also contains five impoundments that total 570 acres of surface water.

NEST BOX TRAIL STARTED IN 1971

The first bluebird boxes were installed in the Refuge in 1971 in response to the precipitous decline in bluebird population in the earlier parts of the twentieth century due to habitat loss and the introduction of competing nonnative cavity nesting species. The refuge staff maintained the boxes and documented nesting results in the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, the introduction of nest box trails across the country successfully reversed the downward trend in bluebird populations. The staff was then assigned to other priorities. As a result the nest box trail suffered from neglect due to infrequent maintenance and monitoring.

In 2001 the newly formed [Friends of the Great Swamp NWR](#) assumed responsibility for funding, maintaining and monitoring the trail that had grown to over 160 boxes. A number of items required remedial action. Boxes were removed from overgrown areas. Wooden support posts were replaced by metal posts with predator guards. White-footed mice that were found nesting in one third of the boxes in 2001 could no longer gain entry to the boxes.

PAIRED NEST BOXES INCREASE BLUEBIRD NESTINGS

The main issue in 2001 was that the nest box trail had nearly 3 tree swallow nestings for every bluebird nesting. The Refuge has lots of quiescent water and subsequently a robust flying insect population in warmer weather, an ideal environment for tree swallows. In 2001 single boxes were on posts about 100 yards from the next post. In this setup tree swallows were able to out-compete most bluebirds for a nest box as there were usually 4-6 tree swallows contesting a pair of bluebirds.

Both bluebirds and tree swallows are territorial nesters that defend their nests against others of their species. However, they will permit another species to nest nearby. Pairing boxes on separate posts about 20 feet apart provides nesting opportunities for both bluebirds and tree swallows. Bluebirds will never nest in both box pairs. After tree swallows have begun brooding their clutch, they will permit another pair of swallows to nest in the paired box if it is not occupied. This happens in less than 10% of the box pairs. The primary modification to the trail was to pair boxes. There were, however, several other steps taken to reduce nest box density. The number of boxes was reduced from over 160 to about 140. The box pairs were placed over 200 yards apart. Most box pairs are not in sight of another box pair. This helps the bluebirds as they need more territory in the less than ideal bluebird habitat in the Refuge. These changes were carried out in the 2002 to 2005 period. Tree swallow nestings declined and bluebird nestings increased. Parity was essentially achieved between bluebird and tree swallow nestings in the 2008 to 2012 period. Bluebirds are partial and short distant migrants in the Refuge. The severe winters of 2013/14 and 2014/15 had well below average temperatures and extended periods of snow cover. The resulting bluebird mortality was the likely reason for bluebird nesting declines in 2014 through 2016. (- continued on page 14)

(Picatinny, continued from page 13)

WRENS AND BLUEBIRDS DO NOT USE BOX PAIRS AT SAME TIME

The third most common nester in the boxes is the house wren. Infrequent nesters include house sparrows, tufted titmice and once great crested flycatchers. House wrens interact differently with bluebirds and tree swallows. In the last few years house wrens and tree swallows have nested in the box pairs at the same time. On 15 occasions tree swallows and house wrens have both successfully fledged clutches while simultaneously nesting in both paired boxes. House wrens do predate tree swallow nests by destroying their eggs. This occurs when wrens need a box for nesting. In the same period bluebirds and house wrens have never nested at the same time in a box pair. Four times house wrens predated bluebird eggs and then nested in the box. I did observe once a bluebird catching a wren destroying its eggs. It drove off the wren before the predation was completed. There were 3 eggs remaining in the clutch. The bluebirds did successfully fledge the remaining clutch. On several occasions bluebirds fledged young and house wrens subsequently nested in the box. Tree swallows capture prey only while flying; both house wrens and bluebirds hunt on the ground or in vegetation. They compete for the same food resources and evidently want to limit competition for food in their nesting territory. Boxes used multiple times by wrens are relocated to more open locations.

REMEDIATED SITES PROVIDE WILDLIFE HABITAT

The Refuge also inherited a number of municipal and industrial toxic waste sites. Three of these sites have been remediated. These sites have been capped with layers of clay and a plastic liner to prevent water intrusion that could potentially leach toxic metals into the water table and adjacent streams. These sites are maintained as grasslands to eliminate trees whose roots could penetrate the protective cap and provide a path for water entry. Since it is also not permissible to penetrate the cap with support posts, a surface mounted system has been used to support song bird nest boxes placed atop the remediation sites. All three sites are among the most productive for Bluebirds.

BLUEBIRDS ARE EXCELLENT FOSTER PARENTS

In 2013 the Raptor Trust, an avian rehabilitation center, received several clutches of very young bluebird hatchlings. Their parents were killed by predators. One clutch was a day or so old. The other was about 3 days old. These hatchlings required brooding as they were too small and naked to control their body temperature. The Raptor Trust did not believe they could raise them. They suggested the young be placed in Refuge bluebird nest boxes. Five hatchlings were put into 4 Refuge nest boxes that had young hatchlings or eggs about to hatch. All 5 orphan hatchlings survived and fledged. The adult bluebirds either did not know they were orphans or are willing to raise any hatchlings in their nest. Three orphans that remained with Raptor Trust did not survive. The nests with orphans were visited weekly. There were several interesting observations. 2-day-old hatchlings were placed in a nest with 5 eggs about to hatch. The parents not only fed the orphans but continued to brood their eggs until they all hatched. Although the 2 orphans were noticeably bigger at the first post introduction visit, all the young appeared the same size on the second visit. The parents successfully fledged a clutch of 7 young.

PUBLIC INVOLVED IN BLUEBIRD BOX TRAIL

The current objective of the bluebird nest box trail is to provide nesting habitat for eastern bluebirds to ensure a healthy population of this attractive song bird exists for the enjoyment of the Refuge visitors. Bi annual presentations on bluebirds are part of the Friends public education program. The trail provides volunteer opportunities for those who wish to work with wildlife. 5 volunteers participated in the nest box program in 2016. 15 other individuals tagged along with nest box monitors on weekly field checks. They had the opportunity to see the nests, eggs and chicks of the various species. 2 Refuge high school interns and 4 college interns participated in one or more box monitoring visits.

The two visitor center nest boxes with cameras were used by nesting birds in 2016. Bluebirds fledged a clutch from one box while tree swallows fledged a clutch from the other box. Visitors were able to view the activity inside the nest boxes on a monitor and through a large window with a view of the nest boxes. This is a very popular real time exhibit that has been in service since 2011. Every season abandoned (eggs do not hatch) bluebird and tree swallow nests are found. These are turned into the Visitor Center where they were put on display. At the annual Friends Fall Festival visitors have the opportunity to work with volunteers to assemble bluebird nest boxes from precut pieces. They are encouraged to take the boxes home and mount them.

~ by Leo Hollein, December 22, 2016

NEW JERSEY'S NATIVE TREES, SHRUBS & VINES THAT ARE BENEFICIAL TO BIRDS ~ by Pat Sutton

Editor's note: The information below that is specific to Bluebirds is part of a larger list available online [here](#), and on website, www.patandclaysutton.com. Pat Sutton has been an educator and has keenly studied the natural world for over 30 years. She and her husband, Clay, live near Cape May, New Jersey, the world renowned migratory crossroads that is famous for its hawk, owl, songbird, shorebird, dragonfly, and Monarch butterfly migration. Pat is a passionate advocate and wildlife gardener for butterflies, moths, bees (all pollinators), birds, dragonflies, frogs, toads, and other critters. Pat has taught gardening for wildlife workshops and led tours of private wildlife gardens for over 30 years. Sutton's own wildlife garden is a "teaching garden" featured in many programs, workshops, and garden tours.

Native trees, shrubs, and vines are the key to successful backyard habitats, offering critical food and cover to our wildlife. Native vegetation will thrive with the least amount of care. Non-native ornamentals require a great deal of care (excessive water and fertilizer just to stay alive) and tend not to thrive as readily as native vegetation. This should be a prime consideration with successive drought years and water shortage problems. Many nonnative ornamentals have no food value to our wildlife. Be sure to include native evergreens, key in providing cover year-round (safe refuge from predators and bad weather, safe nesting sites, and a safe place to roost through the night). Many of our native plants are key caterpillar plants for our butterflies and moths. This being the case, native plants are also providing caterpillars to hungry insect-eating birds, including Eastern Bluebirds, caterpillars that these insect-eating birds are NOT finding on non-native plants.

Eastern Bluebird's preferred foods are in bold.

Trees

Red Cedar, *Juniperus virginiana* (c)
American Hackberry, *Celtis occidentalis* (w)
Dwarf Hackberry, *Celtis tenuifolia* (not reliably hardy in North Jersey)
Red Mulberry, *Morus rubra* (c)
Sassafras, *Sassafras albidum* (c)
 SERVICEBERRIES, *Amelanchier* spp
 Juneberry, Shadbush, Shadblow, Serviceberry, *Amelanchier canadensis* (c)
Black Cherry, *Prunus serotina* (c)
Pin or Fire Cherry, *P. pensylvanica*
Chokecherry, *P. virginiana*
American Holly, *Ilex opaca* (c)
Sour Gum or Black Tupelo, *Nyssa sylvatica* (c)
Flowering Dogwood, *Cornus florida* (c)
 Persimmon, *Diospyros virginiana* (c) not reliably hardy in North Jersey

Shrubs

Common Waxmyrtle, *Morella cerifera* (c) not reliably hardy in North Jersey
Northern Bayberry, *M. pensylvanica* (c)
 Red Chokeberry, *Aronia arbutifolia* (c, w)
 SUMACS, *Rhus* spp.
Winged or Dwarf Sumac, *Rhus copallina* (c)
Smooth Sumac, *R. glabra*
Staghorn Sumac, *R. typhina*
 HOLLIES, *Ilex* spp.
 Smooth Winterberry, *Ilex laevigata* (c, w)
 Inkberry, *I. glabra* (c)

DOGWOODS, *Cornus* spp.

Gray Dogwood, *Cornus racemosa*
Alternate-leaved Dogwood, *C. alternifolia*
Silky Dogwood, *C. amomum* (w)
Red-osier Dogwood, *C. stolonifera*
 HUCKLEBERRIES, *Gaylussacia* spp.
 Black Huckleberry, *Gaylussacia baccata*
 BLUEBERRIES, *Vaccinium* spp.
Highbush Blueberry, *Vaccinium corymbosum* (c)
Lowbush Blueberry, *V. angustifolium*
 ELDERS, *Sambucus* spp.
Common Elder or Elderberry, *Sambucus canadensis* (c, w)
 VIBURNUMS, *Viburnum* spp.
 Arrowwood, *Viburnum dentatum* (c)
 Mapleleaf Viburnum, *V. acerifolium*
 Naked Withe-rod, *V. nudum* (n, w)
 Nannyberry, *V. lentago* (c)
 Cranberry Viburnum, *V. trilobum*

Vines and Weed

Poison Ivy, *Rhus radicans* (c)
 American Bittersweet, *Celastrus scandens* (c)
Virginia Creeper, *Parthenocissus quinquefolia* (c)
 GRAPES, *Vitis* spp.
 Fox Grape, *Vitis labrusca* (c)
 Summer Grape, *V. aestivalis* (c)
 Riverbank Grape, *V. riparia*
 Frost Grape, *V. vulpina*

(c) statewide (unless otherwise noted) AND adaptable to coastal areas. (n) northern species -- may not thrive where summers are hot. (w) wetland species -- will do best in wet situations. Key Resource: Trees, Shrubs, and Vines for Attracting Birds, by Richard DeGraaf. 2002 (2nd Edition), as well as the author's own observations at the world famous migration concentration area, Cape May.



Photos by Lynn Wood of Egg Harbor Township. - a new member of NJBBS



Photos by Bernie Visalli

Photos by Michael Pomatto of Egg Harbor Township, Science Teacher at Ocean City High School



Photos by Michael Pomatto of Egg Harbor Township, Science Teacher at Ocean City High School

Were you there at just the right moment? If you've captured great images of bluebirds with your digital camera, please send them in jpeg form to lorijo.jamieson@gmail.com. Please include who took them, where, and when. I will try to include them in future issues of "Jersey Blues." Thank you!