



The Maryland Bluebird Society's

# BLUEBIRD CHATTER

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## PICNIC! PICNIC! PICNIC!

Come one, come all! The Maryland Bluebird Society will hold its 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Membership Picnic on Saturday, August 8<sup>th</sup> from 2 to 6 p.m. at Black Hills Regional Park in Boyds, MD. Nestboxes, feeders and other equipment will be on display as well as informative resource materials and free literature.

Hotdogs and potluck are the menu of the day, so please bring a dish to share. Soft drinks will be available.

All are welcome to attend this fun-filled afternoon. To RSVP or for more information, please contact Kathy at: [griffin459@myactv.net](mailto:griffin459@myactv.net). Hope to see you there!

## 31<sup>st</sup> Annual NABS Conference

The North American Bluebird Society's (NABS) Annual Conference is being held in Grantville, PA, September 9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>. Deadline for reservations has been extended to September 1<sup>st</sup>. For more information, visit: [www.nabluebirdsociety.org](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org)



Red-shouldered hawk nestlings, about 4 weeks old. Photo courtesy of MBS member Felicia Lovelett

## President's Perch

The 3rd Annual Maryland Bluebird Society picnic is coming up soon, and I look forward to seeing old friends and meeting new ones. To all that read this newsletter, know that we would be thrilled to see fellow bluebird lovers attend this friendly event where information, advice and camaraderie is shared freely.

Come and see the different styles of nestboxes, house sparrow traps, and feeders as well as informative literature, resource materials and NABS recommended nestbox plans.

Have you ever wondered what a sparrow spooker is and how it works? Does feeding mealworms to bluebirds affect their health? What is the safest way to mount a bluebird nestbox? You've put up a nestbox but the bluebirds haven't come—how can you attract them to your nestbox? These are just some of the questions raised by enthusiasts. Our picnic offers the perfect forum to meet and chat with others who share a similar passion for our beloved blues. Bring your own questions, observations and experiences to the group. You may have found the solution to a problem that could help someone else.

In addition to good company, a pot-luck style meal will be available along with soft drinks. Come join us and relax in the beautiful setting of Black Hills Regional Park! I hope to see you there!

Ed Escalante, MBS President

## Eastern Bluebirds at Bancroft

By Tim McCabe

Bancroft of Sandy Spring is a community of 50 estate homes sited within an open, park-like setting in eastern Montgomery County. Lucky for us the Eastern Bluebird has found our area to be a perfect breeding habitat. My home borders a county designated tree reforestation zone on two sides and a several acre agricultural easement that completely fences an open 10 acre grassland pasture. Since moving to this new home in 2005, I have maintained two bluebird houses that I made from white cedar, using NABS specifications. They are located on the back and side of my property. Thus far they've successfully produced multiple bluebird nestings each year.

This past January I proposed an expansion of my bluebird houses to our community board. The idea was to link the houses I have at my home with a new, extended trail throughout the community. To date we now have three new houses along the agricultural reserves fence-line in front of my home. It's a "trial" set that members of the community can get used to. I hope they will be the start of a much longer trail throughout our community. There has been great support and interest from neighbors thus far. It is my hope that the bluebirds' breeding successes will foster even more interest.

Despite the spring's cold, wet weather, bluebirds nested in two of the new houses (5 nestlings each). In fact, male bluebirds were checking them out within hours of erecting them back in early March! One of the nestboxes behind my home was even occupied by a family of Carolina Chickadees (5 nestlings also). Two other houses have been plagued by repeated house sparrow nesting attempts. (I use the Van Ert HOSP trap and it has proven very effective in trapping these predators over the years.) Controlling the house sparrow population seems to be a constant battle, in my area of Montgomery County at least.

All of Bancroft's nestboxes are attached to metal (rebar & electrical conduit) poles. Spacing is about every 120 yards or so. House openings are at about eye level (5 ft.) with front opening doors, which makes monitoring them very easy. It was suggested that I attach predator baffles to protect nesting birds from snakes, raccoons and other climbing predators, so each nestbox is also equipped with a stovepipe baffle. All the poles and baffles are painted a flat black color that mirrors the fencing throughout our community. The nestboxes are natural cedar that will weather to a silvery gray over time.

Nesting data is gathered and reported to Cornell University's Ornithology Lab (via NESTWATCH) for their Eastern Bluebird research efforts. I make the rounds of monitoring the houses about every 4-5 days. The advice and encouragement provided by MBS Board Members Ed Escalante and Kathy Kremnitzer has been most appreciated.

So we are off to a good start with promoting bluebird nesting in Bancroft. I would highly encourage anyone with suitable habitat to try a couple of nestboxes and see if bluebirds are attracted. They provide great enjoyment and the effort involved in monitoring a trail is certainly worth it if it increases the number of bluebirds!



One of the Bancroft trail nestboxes properly mounted and baffled. The trail is monitored and maintained by MBS member Tim McCabe.



Papa bluebird visits the nestbox with a yummy treat!  
Photos courtesy of Tim McCabe

## The Monitor's Corner

**Question:** Is it okay to feed mealworms to bluebirds throughout nesting season?

**Answer:** Offering supplementary foods to bluebirds (or other wild birds) during nesting season should be undertaken with caution.

**Why?** Breeding birds and growing chicks have high requirement for dietary calcium. Both mealworms and most suet mixtures are very low in calcium.

Help your nesting birds stay healthy and raise more young by following these guidelines:

- 1) Offer these items as treats (not more than 10-15 mealworms OR 1-2 teaspoons of suet crumbles/daily per bluebird family).
- 2) Do NOT offer unlimited access to suet/suet crumble mixes to wild birds in the summer.
- 3) Discontinue all feeding of suet/suet mixtures in warm weather (over 80-85 F). Fats can easily spoil at high temperatures
- 4) During periods of unusually cold weather or extended rain, it is OK to offer more generous quantities of mealworms/suet crumbles.

Monitor's Corner Answer submitted by MBS Carroll County Coordinator, Felicia Lovelett.

### County Coordinators Needed

The Maryland Bluebird Society is looking for a few good members willing to serve as coordinators for their respective counties. As this program is developed, duties may include the following : 1) facilitating conservation efforts for bluebirds, 2) attempting to contact, unite and organize bluebirders within your county, 3) compiling a list of known trails and monitors within your county, 4) serving as liaison between your county and MBS. Though this program is in the early stages of development, MBS is optimistic that it will become a valuable tool and resource for bluebirders throughout Maryland.

#### LEARN MORE

To learn more about bluebirds, visit:  
[www.nabluebirdsociety.org](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org) or  
[www.sialis.org](http://www.sialis.org)

To learn more about bluebirds and bluebirders in our area, visit the Maryland Bluebird Society at:  
[www.mdbluebirdsociety.org](http://www.mdbluebirdsociety.org)