



## The President's Perch

by Stan Fisher

Winter greetings, fellow Maryland bluebirders. Our winter hasn't been too hard on the bluebirds to date. Hopefully they will soon begin checking out boxes on our trails for spring nesting season. Our Maryland bluebirds are busily feasting on winter berries of holly and red cedar trees and what is left of the crabapple and other berries after the starlings have finished with them. Here on Bluebird Hill, we haven't seen as many bluebirds as usual lately. They tend to flock up in the woods at this time of year for protection and foraging for berries. Beth and I saw a flock of 40 or so during the December 30 Audubon Christmas bird count around Sugarloaf Mountain. We also saw a few during the December 16 count at Seneca, MD. A total of 239 bluebirds were seen in the overall Seneca count.

Winter is a great time to do inventory of our trails and replace or repair damaged boxes. Also, it is a good time to relocate boxes that have underperformed to more promising locations.



Male Eastern Bluebird in an Eastern Redbud tree  
photo courtesy of Richard Pockat, Charlotte, NC

Don't forget: Our bluebirds need us. It was mankind that removed lots of their nest sites and introduced two aggressive species to take over what was left. It's up to us to keep providing nesting boxes and monitoring their trails.

### MBS Upcoming Events

April 6 <sup>th</sup>	Bluebird Garden Spruce Up Day
April 6 <sup>th</sup>	Tortoise and Hare Dare Walk
April 7 <sup>th</sup>	MBS Board of Directors meeting
April 18 <sup>th</sup>	Caroline County Bird Club Meeting, Beautiful Bluebirds Presentation
April 27 <sup>th</sup>	Master Gardener Grow It, Eat It
April 28 <sup>th</sup>	Rockville Science Day
May 4 <sup>th</sup>	Catoctin Creek Park Nature Fest
May 4 <sup>th</sup>	Delmarva Pollinator Festival
May 18 <sup>th</sup>	Bluebirds Forever Festival
May 21 <sup>st</sup>	Bluebird Trail Walk

For more information, please see the Events calendar on the Home page of our website, [www.mdbluebirdsociety.org](http://www.mdbluebirdsociety.org)

### NABS CONFERENCE

March 12<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020

SAVE THE DATE!!!!

Join fellow bluebirders as we migrate to the 2020 NABS Conference in Kearney, Nebraska. Hosted by Bluebirds Across Nebraska (BAN), the conference will coincide with the migration of the Sand Hill Crane and other species of water fowl. Amazing views, outstanding speakers, workshops, fieldtrips and entertainment will be featured. Details will follow in coming months at

[http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/event/nabs-conference/?instance\\_id=15](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/event/nabs-conference/?instance_id=15)

## Spring Is Coming, Are You Ready for Bluebirds?

By Ed Escalante

Bluebirds in the Maryland area begin checking out nesting boxes in March, and start nesting in early April. What can we do to make our nest box attractive to a prospective pair of bluebirds? To begin with, place your box in an open area, such as a lawn, or a flower garden, and away from bird feeders. Place the box at about head height (for ease of monitoring) and mounted on a metal pole that discourages climbing predators. The entrance of the box should be a 1-1/2 inch diameter hole that discourages larger birds. Make sure your box has a means of access (front or side-opening), so that you can inspect the contents of your box to check the progress of your nestings on a weekly basis. This inspection is also important to prevent house sparrows from nesting in your box, which you must remove, if found. Early spring is a good time to clean out old nests and other debris, and do repairs, especially replacement of leaky, rotten roofs.

If possible, place your nestbox where you can see it through a window in your home, and can periodically monitor it for bird activity. Plan to monitor the box once a week by carefully opening it and peeking in. The use of a small mirror is helpful in this inspection, and if you are lucky, you'll find a collection of grass with a depression in the center. And if you are really lucky, you may find small blue eggs indicative of a bluebird. Bluebirds lay from 3-5 eggs before the female begins incubation, which will last for about two weeks. Once the babies hatch, the mother bluebird will brood the young for about six days, keeping them warm and safe. The male bluebird brings food to the mother while she is brooding. Afterwards, the parents tirelessly bring insects to feed the nestlings, until they are ready to leave the nest in 18-20 days after hatching. Thirteen days after hatching, it is recommended that nest box inspection be stopped, to avoid frightening the nestlings into leaving the nest too soon. Once the nestlings leave the nest (fledge), clean out the used nest in preparation for a new nesting cycle.

I find it amazing that in 18-20 days these small, helpless young develop into fully-grown bluebirds that can fly out of their nest. Admittedly, they are still young, and must be cared for by the parents, who continue to feed them and teach them the ways of survival. It is your effort and accommodation that can make this happen, and it's delightful to observe bluebirds in your yard. Learn to recognize the sound of their call, signaling their presence, because you'll hear them before you see them.

### MBS Members:

Please check with MBS Membership Chair, Diane Seward, at [trina65@verizon.net](mailto:trina65@verizon.net) to be certain you are current with your membership. You can renew using the form at the end of this newsletter or online at [www.mdbluebirdsociety.org](http://www.mdbluebirdsociety.org) If you know of someone who is interested in bluebirds, please feel free to pass this newsletter on to them.

MBS is a 501 C (3) organization. Dues and donations to MBS are deductible for federal income tax purposes to the extent allowed by law.

Thank you for your continued support!



MBS members from the Lower Shore area gather for a pizza party to kick off bluebird nesting season. Photo courtesy of Janice Ward, MBS County Coordinator.

## Introducing our newest Board Member-Elect, Heather Zindash, CPH

I grew up on a small farm in Northeast Ohio. We had a horse, a pony, a cow, two pigs, ducks, chickens, geese, bunnies, cats & dogs. I was an avid 4-H'er. As a child, one of the first things my mother taught me was how to interact with nature. Whenever we handled our animals, she would explain to me that they could sense our emotions and if we were afraid of them, they would be afraid of us, too. With this in mind, I would always take a few slow deep breaths to steady my nerves before approaching any of our animals. I would move slowly and speak kindly to the animals to let them know that I was not a threat. Inevitably, they would allow me to pet and hold them without incident. This was an especially important skill because I began riding horses at age 3 and in comparison, our horse and pony were much larger than me. So, how I approached them was vital to my safety, and to theirs. This is a skill that I continue to use when interacting with nature. One that can actually be applied in all areas of life, on a farm or in the world.



My favorite childhood memories involve being outside all day and not coming in until dark. Playing in the creek, catching crayfish and getting lost in the woods. All we needed was a hammer, a nail and a canning jar with a lid and we could play for hours capturing and releasing all kinds of insects and small animals. I think that exercise taught me the most about nature. We got up close and personal with many fireflies, worms, toads, frogs, tadpoles, field mice, moles and anything else willing to be caught and observed for a time.

When my husband, Chris and I started our family we knew that we wanted our children to have as much of a connection to nature as we could provide. Our Maryland home provided much less land than the homes we grew up in. So, we planted our property "intensely," adding many perennials and annuals to our already wooded lot. Our initial goal was to attract hummingbirds and butterflies for our daughters to see and experience. Each Mother's Day, my one request was to play in the garden. We would spend all day planting summer annuals, adding a few perennial plants and an occasional bird bath, house or feeder. On one of these days, I found myself watering the new plantings and admiring our work, when I suddenly realized that we had all the elements needed for a Certified Wildlife Habitat. That evening, I went online to register our property with the National Wildlife Federation. And, so our journey began. One thing led to another and pretty soon, our property was a fully functioning habitat complete with visitors of all kinds. Birds, bats, butterflies, bees, beneficial insects, foxes, bunnies, raccoons, groundhogs, chipmunks, squirrels, turtles, toads and the list goes on. We are always outside, enjoying and learning from all the wanders and wonders in our own back yard.



As the girls got older, I was faced with a question. "What do I really want to do with the rest of my life?" As a creative outlet, I merged my Graphic Design background with my life-long love of gardening and nature to create **The Soulful Gardener**, a blog/website where my mission is to "bring people, plants and nature together for health and well-being." I went on to become a Maryland Master Gardener, Maryland Master Naturalist and Certified Professional Horticulturalist. Along the way, I found that I had a passion and talent for speaking to audiences about a variety of gardening and nature related topics.



I became a Bluebird Trail Monitor at Button Farm while earning volunteer hours as a Maryland Master Naturalist. I had no idea then how fulfilling that work would be nor how quickly my family would want to get involved. (Please also see my husband's article in this issue). Because of our experiences in our own wildlife habitat, we were actually well-suited to be nestbox monitors. And, one of the important skills we use in the field is to breathe deeply, move slowly and speak kindly to the birds as we approach the nestboxes. Who knew I had been trained for this job since I was a very young child? Or, how these skills would be passed down and shared between generations?

I urge everyone to go outside, unplug and open yourselves to the constant surprises Mother Nature has in store. I invite you to follow me at [www.thesoulfulgardener.com](http://www.thesoulfulgardener.com), Facebook, Twitter and/or LinkedIn

# Bluebirds for Generations

By Christopher Zindash

When my wife Heather came home from one of her gardening events a couple of years ago, she announced to the family that she was going to get involved with the Maryland Bluebird Society. At first, the family thought nothing of it, because of Heather's love for everything outdoors! Then, it started to sink in...*what do we know about monitoring bluebirds? Do you need a license to do that?* And, so our adventure began.

It started a couple of years ago with our teenage daughters (now 16 & 18) and me following Heather around at [Button Farm](#) in Germantown, Maryland. It's a living farm right here in the Nation's Capital! I still have the same feeling today as I did my first visit: *how is it possible to have such a wonderful, living farm so close to bustling Washington, DC?*

Since then, we begin our annual ritual of Bluebird monitoring around mid-March. We have 12 Bluebird nesting boxes placed throughout the nearly 100-acre Button Farm. It takes roughly an hour to visit all of the boxes; checking to see if there are any new arrivals, tracking each box's progress, and having a little fun along the way! The inspiration for this story comes from bringing three generations of one family back together and learning to live together in a new way. Last year, my mother, Pat was diagnosed with Cognitive Decline, more famously known today as Early Onset Dementia. We had to sell her house in Florida and move her up North to Maryland, so she could be in a senior community that helps independent seniors that just need a little extra help. Living close to our family, she is able to experience her granddaughters growing up. Adjusting to our new lifestyle has been a process, but this year we had a happy little accident on our way to the farm!

Just about mid-March this year, Heather and I were talking about how we were going to monitor the bluebird boxes, with both of us working full-time and two teenagers with lives busier than ever. The second weekend to monitor was approaching, and we realized I would have Mother Pat with me that morning. I thought to myself, *maybe it's worth asking Pat to join us and see how it goes.* I inquired with Heather, as this was her task, and I did not want to impose. Heather loved the idea, and saw the opportunity for Mother Pat to connect with nature and enjoy birding in Maryland. Some folks probably think that monitoring bluebird boxes is easy. But, for someone approaching 80 years old, walking on uneven terrain for nearly a mile round-trip, this is not an easy task by any means.

"That sounds fun! Let's do it," says Pat while putting on her coat and heading for the door. She did not think twice about it! Partly for the change of scenery, as it was a very cold winter (her first in years, and so much of the winter spent indoors here in Maryland) but, also for the curiosity. I know my mother well and I remember that look of intrigue in her eyes, even with the current Cognitive Decline. I knew I had a dedicated assistant.

Our first day at Button Farm was a chilly, but sunny morning. I grabbed the bucket with our Bluebird tools, charts, and supplies in one hand, and Mother Pat's arm with the other. Off we went.

We slowly hiked to the first nesting box. I explained what we needed to do and gathered our tools. As we got closer, mother Pat was startled when mama Bluebird heard us and scurried from the nesting box. *Could it be already?* Any onlooker would have thought we struck gold! Sure enough, there were 4 little blue eggs! Mother Pat thought that was pretty neat! She made me move the little mirror around so she could count them all...1...2...3...4! "Let's write this down," she said.



We continued along the trail that day and learned a lot about Bluebird nesting, Button Farm, and a little more about each other. Each week, it was the same...about 1-2 days before our trip to Button Farm, I get a phone call that says, "Are we going to see our Bluebirds this weekend?" Of course, the answer is Yes!



We went from seeing Mother Pat from 1-2 times each year to 1-2 times each week. Life has definitely taken on a new dimension. We now have three generations living very close together, and like many other families who have had to make this transition, it takes a little getting used to the new family dynamic. Pat often tells us that she no longer has a “job,” now that she has entered assisted living. The tasks she once enjoyed as part of her life, she now has to rely on others to complete. It has been fun to have Mother Pat assisting with the monitoring, but now it’s become part of her new, self-proclaimed “job.”

Rain or shine, hot or cold, Mother Pat was dedicated to joining me on our weekly trip to Button Farm. She delighted in checking the boxes and monitoring their progress. At the end of the season, she surprised us all by announcing that we had 52 fledglings. She was right! Little did we know, she had been keeping each weekly count in her mind through the season. This was an impressive accomplishment, considering her memory loss condition. As we have learned more about Dementia, we have also learned that Bluebird monitoring is the BEST job or chore for people with this illness. Dementia requires regiment, familiarity and regularity. Quick changes in the environment can be exciting, but too many are confusing. Bluebird monitoring is the perfect fit: we took the same route every week, we performed the same activities, and we capped off each visit with a family meal. Though her mental decline progressed from week to week, she always looked forward to seeing the surprises each nest box held. It created a great balance for Mother Pat, and helped our family get used to our new “normal.”

The joy this activity has brought to my mother is well worth it. Mother Pat loves to tell stories anyway, but now every time I go to visit her, many of her friends stop and ask me about the Bluebirds! It is a story I surely do not mind retelling to whomever wants to listen!

**Update:** *The first version of this story was written in June. It was never sent for submission until now, because Mother Pat suffered a medical emergency in August that took her to the hospital, then to a rehabilitation facility. Though she recovered well physically, her mental capacity took a steep decline and we have seen little improvement. She can no longer distinguish between reality and memory (or fantasy). But, the remaining intact memories still include her experiences of Bluebird Monitoring. When we visit Mother Pat now, she greets us with a running list of commentary, peppered with fleeting moments of lucidity. One lucid memory that persists, is her memory of monitoring the Bluebirds. She asks us how the birds are doing now and when we need to go back out to count? Not quite understanding that it’s November. She still reminds us that there were 52 fledglings.*

*Bluebirds are known as the bird of happiness. Sharing the pleasure of Bluebird Monitoring not only brought three generations together, it also provided us all with long-lasting happiness in the form of elusive memories that Mother Pat still holds on to. This warms our hearts on our own, otherwise difficult trail. ~Heather Zindash*

## Birding and Wildlife Adventures Down Under

*By; Douglas Smith*

My wife and I checked off one of our ‘bucket list’ items this year and flew ‘down under’ to Australia for a month. Another ‘bucket list’ item checked off was when I got a chance to see what it was like to sit in the pilot’s seat of our Boeing 787 just before our departure on Sept. 11, 2018.

Our itinerary encompassed wildlife sanctuaries, nature preserves, an ‘outback’ safari experience, city life, surrounding parks and side trips to major points of interest. You might want to Google those items you want more information on.

The Australian Government, its six states, and numerous territories have set aside millions of square miles of land for conservation, parks with nature trails, biking, hiking, camping and wildlife preserves than any other county in the world, as far as I can ascertain.

On our visit we encountered more unusual wildlife than we imagined and were able to do some birding and wildlife tours in every area we visited. Most of the pictures in this article are mine but a few were copied from other sources (credit given), because they were simply better than mine, and to give the reader a sense of what these species look like and places visited.

It should be noted that in Australia today, there are 828 existing species of birds ranging from the smallest Weebill (3” long and a few ounces) to the flightless but dangerous Cassowary (approx. six feet tall and 125 lbs).



**Day 1** – Thursday Sept 13<sup>th</sup> we arrived in Sydney, New South Wales, on the South East Coast of Australia and began our travels with a boat tour of Sydney Harbor passing the world-famous Opera House and under the Harbor Bridge, and around many inlets of historical interest.

**Day 2** - Sept 14<sup>th</sup> had us on a land-based tour of the city including Bondi Beach, Sydney Tower, the Queen Victoria Building, convict quarters and working areas and later a tour in and around the Opera House.

**Day 3** – Sept 15<sup>th</sup> our tour guide drove us ‘out of town’ to an area called The Blue Mountains, whose name was derived from the blue haze that hangs over the valley. The cliff walls and deep 3,000-foot valleys reminded us of our Grand Canyon but with vegetation. There we viewed the Three Sisters rock formation, rode the steepest railway in the world (used to haul coal up from the valley floor) and visited Featherdale Wildlife Park where we posed for a picture with a real live Koala Bear – they sleep 18 hours a day and eat for the other six, with an occasional amorous adventure.

**Day 4** - Sunday the 16<sup>th</sup> was a free day and we toured Sydney and a street fair in the old convict section of town. We found the historical background surrounding Britain’s shipping convicts to Australia interesting. The short version is on January 20, 1788 eleven convict ships landed in Botany Bay, later named Sydney, to establish a colony to keep the French from claiming the territory. (It’s said that people were being arrested in England and shipped to Australia for stealing an apple, or loaf of bread).

**Day 5-6** - Sept. 17-18 we flew to Adelaide, Southern Australia and spent time with friends we met on a previous trip. The following day our friends took us up to Hahndorf, the oldest German settlement in Australia, for some shopping, good food, and sightseeing.

**Day 7** - Sept. 19<sup>th</sup> had us taking a short flight over to Kangaroo Island (KI) where we stayed a couple of days exploring one of the most pristine, natural, uncommercialized islands in Australia. Morning tea at a eucalyptus grove filled with sleeping Koala’s and curious kangaroos was followed by a walk through Latham Conservation Park where we found Echidnas, Goannas, Wallabies and of course Kangaroos complete with Joeys. KI is also the only place the endangered Glossy Black Cockatoos may be found.



Interesting Fact: You had to scrub the soles of your shoes before entering and exiting the park to remove any infected soil – this is required to help stop the spread of Phytophthora Root Fungus. The Australians are very serious about conservation and preserving their hundreds of thousands of acres of parks.

**Day 8** – the 20<sup>th</sup> our KI guide drove us to Flinders Chase National Park, stopping for morning tea on the beach of Seal Bay (yes lots of fur seals), a visit to Admirals Arch, a huge ocean carved grotto, lunch on the cliffs overlooking a jetty and ‘flying fox’. This was a pulley and cart device used to haul materials to build a light house and supplies from a boat dock ninety meters up to the cliffs above. Our final stop in Flinders Chase NP was Remarkable Rocks, formed 50 million years ago as molten rock pushed up, cooled, and was worn away by the wind and sea. Then it was back to Adelaide, a night’s rest and up for our next adventure.

**Day 9** – Friday the 21<sup>st</sup> had us flying from Adelaide, near the Southern tip of Australia to Darwin Northern Territory, at the Northern tip. We rested up for the next day’s trip to the ‘out back’.



**Days 10- 13** – Sept. 22-25 we wound up the rubber bands on our single engine, six seat plane and flew off for a three-day adventure in Bamurru Plains, a real bush camp 30 minutes by plane from anywhere. There was no cell service, no internet, no TV/radio/ newspapers or as we called it, almost heaven (sorry John Denver). We landed after the pilot circled the dirt run-way to make sure there were no animals in our way, climbed aboard an eight seat, open lorry and drove to the lodge. There are 10 ‘Safari Bungalows’ equipped with all the modern conveniences.

Our bed faced out to the porch and see-through mesh screen that allowed you to watch buffalo wander by on their daily walk to and from grazing areas along with wallabies searching for food just feet from our bungalow. We took an airboat ride through the swampy back waters and saw hundreds of Magpie Geese, climbed a birding platform to watch the Whistling Kites, Egrets, and herons out in the floodplains, and traveled by lorry to other locations to watch wildlife on the plains and in the forests. We also saw Wedge-tailed eagles, Jabiru, and our favorite, the Laughing Kookaburra

(go to this URL to see and hear this amazing bird that looks like our local King Fisher - <https://youtu.be/H2wyBU2GzhQ>).

We wound up the rubber bands on our little plane again for our flight back to Darwin. After a good night’s sleep, we were driven to the airport for the second half of our Australian adventure. I’ve broken this article up into two parts because of the length of our trip, amount of information, sights, and adventures we experienced. Segment two will begin with us going to Uluru, also known as Ayers Rock, Port Douglas and the Great Barrier Reef, Cape Tribulation and Daintree, Kuranda Scenic Rail and Skyrail, Brisbane, and Melbourne.

(Note: Part 2 of the Smith’s adventure will appear in our summer newsletter.)

## **BIRDS OF A FEATHER MENTOR TOGETHER!**

By Dr. William Hadyn Roberts, Jr., Eagle Scout, Class of 1972

The newly renamed Scouts BSA (formerly Boy Scouts of America) offers MBS members an exciting opportunity to mentor boys and girls aged 12 through 18 in the Bird Study Merit badge. This is a wonderful opportunity to spread YOUR knowledge about bird life in general and bluebirds in particular. It also fulfills one of the core Missions of our organization: “...assist in monitoring and increasing the population of the Eastern Bluebird and other native cavity-nesting birds through education...”. By imparting YOUR love of birds to young Scouts you can leave a life-long legacy of birding.

To get started, order the Bird Life Merit Badge booklet (\$5.) go to [www.scoutstuff.org](http://www.scoutstuff.org) or call customer service at 800-323-0736. To be a Merit Badge Counselor in your local District and Council, you will need to fill out an ADULT APPLICATION along with a small application fee. You will also have to complete an approximate one-hour class on Youth Protection Training. After approval, your name and contact information goes into the Scouts BSA merit badge counselor data base. I would like to tell you that you just sit back and wait for the requests to come rolling in, but I can’t! You will have to proactively call the Troops in your local commuting area and offer your services as a Merit Badge counselor.

As an Eagle Scout I can tell you that the merit badge experience can be a powerful influence on a young child and adult. Although my Mother, a life-long birder, was a great influence on me, the Bird Study merit badge was a powerful experience that I still remember to this day! I also remember my Mother telling me that she was jealous of the field trips that I took with the merit badge class. You will find this a very rewarding experience for yourself as well as the children and adults you share your birding passion with. Good luck, and *Be Prepared!*

## Maryland Bluebird Society's County Coordinators

MBS's County Coordinator Program is an important aspect of what our society is all about, helping bluebirders throughout the state when troubles arise. These volunteers accept phone calls and e-mails and are ready to assist with information and resources on the spur of the moment. Do you need help figuring out how to set up your nestbox? Maybe you have an abandoned nesting and don't know why. Perhaps house sparrows are plaguing your neighborhood and you don't know what to do. Well, an MBS County Coordinator is always willing to listen and share whatever knowledge and experience they can with you.

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If you do not see your county in the above listing, it is because we do not have a volunteer from your county. Please contact us if you would like to serve as County Coordinator from your area of our beautiful state.



**THE MARYLAND BLUEBIRD SOCIETY, INC.  
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

Mail to: Maryland Bluebird Society  
20809 Bell Bluff Road  
Gaithersburg, MD 20879

Instructions: Print and complete this application and mail to the above address. Please remember to enclose your check payable to the Maryland Bluebird Society.

Memberships and donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Note: Membership is effective for the calendar year (s) in which the dues are paid, except that new member dues paid in the fourth calendar quarter cover the following year.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please check the appropriate boxes below:

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