

NABS 2016 Conference Lacombe, Alberta, Canada

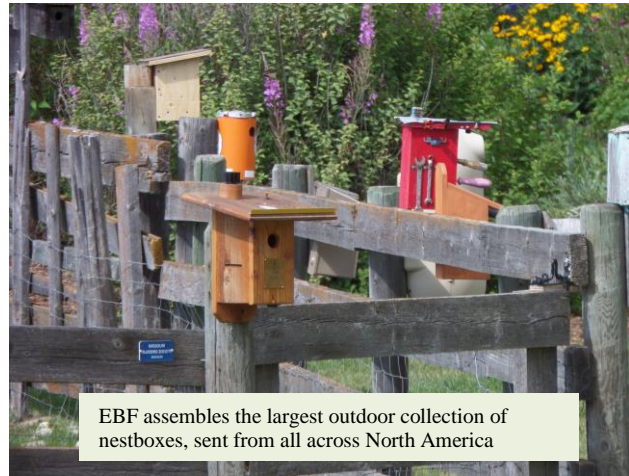
by Kathy Kremnitzer

The North American Bluebird Society (NABS) 2016 Conference was held in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada early this summer and I was fortunate enough to be able to attend. The conference was hosted by the amazing bird-loving folks at the Ellis Bird Farm and featured some fascinating, inspiring speakers and presentations along with some incredibly beautiful scenery.

The Ellis Bird Farm is a non-profit organization and is also a working farm dedicated to the conservation of native cavity-nesting birds. It was established in 1982 to continue the legacy of conservationists, Charlie and Winnie Ellis. The farm was purchased from Charlie and Winnie by Union Carbide. One of my favorite of the conference presentations was given by biologist and Site Services Manager, Myrna Pearman. Myrna told the story of the Ellis siblings and their love for birds and other wildlife and the sanctuary that their farm had provided. Myrna's humorous and engaging presentation explained how, after years of caring for native birds, especially bluebirds, by providing a safe place for them to nest, Charlie and Winnie had agreed to sell their farm, but as a condition of the sale, Union Carbide Canada Ltd., would support and protect a portion of the farm which would always be devoted to conservation.

In addition to the history of the Ellis Bird Farm, the conference offered many other presentations including such topics as Tracking Mountain Bluebirds, Engaging the Next Generation of Bluebirders, Tracking Purple Martins, A Celebration of Alberta Birds and so much more. One especially fascinating talk involved RFID and Geolocator Technology on Purple Martins. This program began in 2012, when scientists captured select birds and equipped them with the Geolocator devices. In May, 2013, a female martin (later named Amelia, after the famous aviator), was recaptured and the data was retrieved from her device. The data showed Amelia had traveled over 13,000 miles from Ellis Bird Farm to Brazil and back again. She left the Alberta farm on August 24th, 2012, crossed the Gulf of Mexico and spent 28 days in Belize, before continuing her journey to spend the rest of the winter in several sites in the Amazon Basin. Incredibly, the data also showed that Amelia left Brazil on April 24, 2013 and made it back to the Ellis Bird Farm only 21 days later! She averaged 375 flight miles per day on her return trip!

If you ever have the opportunity to visit the Ellis Bird Farm, take the time to enjoy the grounds. Nature-scaped gardens and water features abound, with plantings and ponds that encourage native wildlife to make their homes in these wonderful surroundings. Purple martins and swallows dive and swoop after insects while visitors inspect the large collection of nestboxes hanging continuously on fences and outbuildings. One of my favorite memories from the conference was listening to resident goats bleating for mealtime while conference attendees congregated



EBF assembles the largest outdoor collection of nestboxes, sent from all across North America



Martin colony housing at Ellis Bird Farm

in the beautiful gardens to share bluebird strategies and monitoring experiences. Some attended the round-robin tours to various farm sites while others, such as myself, chose to simply enjoy watching the birds while getting to know fellow bluebird lovers.

I found the NABS 2016 Conference to be well-organized and it was obvious that much hard work and planning were given to make certain our experience was all that it turned out to be. The ever-present humor of our Albertan hosts only enhanced the interesting and informative presentations. While even Albertans could not control the weather nor prevent the lengthy and loud thunderstorm that raged outside our banquet tent on the last evening of the conference, their "if you don't like the weather, wait a minute" attitude (a familiar mind-set for those of us living in the mid-Atlantic) allowed us to go with the flow and to enjoy the evening's festivities with others who shared a passion for beautiful birds that just happen to be blue. Special thanks to Myrna and her crew for the wonderful memories.

Once Upon a Time, on the Bluebird Trail

Have you ever met one of our Board members or volunteers and wanted to ask them how they started with bluebirds? In our last edition, we heard from MBS's Janice Ward, Jodi Hewitt, Diane Seward and Karen Unruh. Let's see what stories some other folks have to tell.

MBS President, Stan Fisher writes, "My bluebirding started when I bought my "Bluebird Hill" farm in 1974. I was working on the property one day when I came across a dead bird. I had heard two neighbor kids shooting their 22 rifles earlier that day. The bird turned out to be an eastern bluebird. That was the first one that I had ever seen. I confirmed my identification in Petersons Field Guide of Eastern Birds, then, confronted the two boys. I told them what they had done and asked them to confine their bird "hunting" to English sparrows and European starlings. (I already knew that starlings and house sparrows were bad because they used to raid my grandfather's chicken house). They seemed remorseful about the dead bluebird and promised not to shoot any more songbirds. And they haven't to my knowledge.

I was excited about having a bluebird on the property and quickly read up on them and built a Zeleny bluebird box. The immediate success of that box launched my bluebird career. The one box quickly became 10 and my bluebirding interest grew from there. I was a founding member of the North American Bluebird Society (NABS) which, as you know, was originated in Maryland with the help of Lawrence Zeleny, Anne Sturm (a neighbor), Mary Janetatos and a few other enthusiasts. I currently monitor or supervise over 100 bluebird boxes on 8 trails. Bluebirds have brightened my life."

Anne Arundel and Queen Anne's County Coordinator Dave Gillum tells us that he got into bluebirds about seven years ago while volunteering at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in Edgewater, Maryland. They had a trail of about 35 boxes that was not being tended and he offered to maintain the trail. They added an additional 20 boxes but have since lost one to a lightning strike and fire, a couple to mowers, and a couple to fallen trees. Dave maintains the 50 box trail with a group of helpers that cover half of the trail. They have had five separate groups of over the seven years and each brings with them their own expertise and enthusiasm. It was through the Smithsonian and the Anne Arundel Bird Club that Dave became aware of MBS. Dave writes, "I was introduced to MBS by Ed Escalante in his search for county coordinators. He contacted the Anne Arundel Bird Club and I volunteered to act as the Anne Arundel county coordinator. I have had a lifelong fascination with nature and have worked at a wild bird store as well as with many volunteer organizations. I started attending board meetings and was immediately impressed with how professional all the members were and how well MBS is run as an organization. Although the board is rather small, they have been able to accomplish many great things, including the wonderful bluebird festival and tremendous community outreach. Feeding off the energy and enthusiasm of the board I agreed to be county coordinator for two additional counties and eventually to become Vice President of the society. The past presidents and board members have set exceptionally high standards and I hope I can perform up to their level."

"I now work with five different trails to collect nesting data and have helped establish two new trails, one at a school and one a County park. I hope your Bluebird experiences have been as fascinating as mine."

MBS Board member, Bill Roberts, tells us that he first became involved with bluebirds when he and his wife first moved to Gaithersburg in 1998. "I went into the old Hechinger Lumber Yard store and bought a few bluebird houses after reading about the disappearance of the bluebird and how they needed help. It took a year or two, but I remember how excited I was to see that dusky bluebird hopping on the fence near the birdhouse, checking the box for the first time and seeing the eggs! I have had a bluebird trail on my split rail fence ever since. I buy the birdhouses from Lowes and I have had bluebirds every year. " Last spring Bill installed 17 bluebird houses at the Lois-Green Sligo Chapter of the Isaac Walton League of America (IWLA) property on Snouffer School Road in Gaithersburg about a mile and a half from his house.

Stay tuned for the next installment of Once Upon a Time in the Summer edition of Chatter!

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President's Perch

In our effort to identify bluebird and other bird deaths as a result of tree sleeves, I am requesting your assistance. Tree sleeves are used by the thousands in reforestation plantings across Maryland. The problem comes if the tree does not grow and the tube becomes an attractive cavity for curious bluebirds. The birds can enter these sleeves and, because of depth, narrow diameter and slippery sides, the birds cannot escape. This has happened in numbers too large to count to bluebirds in the west from similar tubes used to mark mining claims. The help I am requesting is, if you see an area of reforestation with multiple tree sleeves, please look at the bottom of the sleeve and determine if there are remains of bluebirds or other birds there. Look only at the empty or near-empty sleeves where the planted tree did not prosper. Please let me know, at sfisher44@verizon.net, how many dead birds were found and how many sleeves were inspected. This information is vital to our passing protective legislation like that which was passed in the west.

We had a wonderful MBS Annual meeting and picnic on September 10th at Black Hill Regional Park. We had a short business meeting, a great potluck lunch, a raffle and a silent auction. Many thanks to those who organized and worked this event, including Ed and Karen Escalante, Bonnie Bell and many others.

Good luck with winterizing your trails, keep monitoring and keep helping our blue friends.

My Cedar Siding Saga

by Anne Sturm

One cold late March morning, I was walking around to the back yard to refill the feeders. I was watching the ground as there can be pockets of ice in my yard and suddenly I noticed a whole bunch of cotton candy strips decorating the ground. I looked up and saw many tiny pieces of the same material – insulation masking as pink cotton candy- poking out of tiny holes in our cedar siding.

Then I saw the BIG holes (in our world we call them cavities) made by our resident red-bellied woodpeckers. I walked around the whole house and inventoried the extensive damage.

We built our house in 1969 and chose cedar siding for its lasting value. So I have no complaints on the siding- forty- seven years is terrific. In all honesty, I knew the woodpeckers were working on various parts of the house but it never had seemed a problem. In fact, I felt they were doing a great job controlling the carpenter bee larvae. Like most people, I had heard the stories and read of the challenges. In Arizona, the acorn woodpeckers do a job on telephone poles and any home made of wood. Obviously, things had reached the stage where I had to redo the house.

Unfortunately, I was not able to get things going before nesting season started. I have been in cavity-nesting conservation since the early 70's and had struggled, like many, with house sparrow control. However, since 2008, I had not had to do any house sparrow control because they just were not around. Starlings had not been a problem for years other than invading to strip the dogwood and holly. This was all to change. The starlings and the house sparrows were the MAIN birds to enjoy the woodpecker cavities. I don't think a single native bird enjoyed my house for nesting purposes this year. I could not reach the nests, as they were all too high up beyond small ladder reach.

Needless to say, I will be doing a lot of active trapping this winter. There are probably many lessons to be learned from my experience. Perhaps the first is to be more proactive in assessing old siding when you know that the woodpeckers are having too much fun. I had just imagined economic damage and insulation challenges—not cavities for invasives. The second, of course, is how bleak our bird world would be, if we were not doing what we do. Our beloved bluebirds would certainly be even more rare, if not extirpated, along with many other joys in the native world. Thank goodness for the hard, persistent work of blue birders all across our continent and in Bermuda. Happy Trails to all of you and deep gratitude for what you do.

The Blessing of the Combines

On Saturday, August 6th, Worcester County held its Blessing of the Combines festival in Snow Hill, MD. Though the weather was hot and humid, over 3,000 people attended the much-anticipated annual event. The festival featured live music, street activities, a Petting Barnyard and Tractor Pull for children, Scales and Tales along with craft vendors and information booths.



Left: MBS members Autumn Fenton, Susan Johnson and Nelda DiLauro greet the public and spread the word about bluebirds.

Right: Helping local children make their own bluebirds!

MBS County Coordinator, Janice Ward, organized an information table for the Maryland Bluebird Society's outreach to attendees. She and MBS members Autumn Fenton, Susan Johnson and Nelda DiLauro answered questions, passed out bluebird information and helped children to make their own bluebird. Janice represents MBS at many such events on behalf of MBS and is a wonderful resource for bluebirders on our state's beautiful Eastern Shore.

MBS Members:

Please check with MBS Treasurer Diane Seward 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

If you know of someone who is interested in bluebirds, please feel free to pass this newsletter on to them.

Off to A Good Start

by Douglas Smith

The 2016 Seneca Creek State Park Bluebird (BB) monitoring season is off to a good start with activity in all 14 boxes, with BBs having already fledged from two of them.

In March I began cleaning all the existing boxes, repositioning some and installing a couple of new ones. Our first arrivals began their nests during the first week of April. By April 15th BBs and Tree Swallows (TS) had laid their eggs and begun nesting. May saw the arrival of some Carolina Chickadees (CH) and House Wrens (HW) which didn't occur last year.

A very unusual situation, totally new to me at least, was a nest that was started by a BB and then taken over by a CH. One week there were a couple of BB eggs and then there were CH eggs and a couple of babies. (See photo below) We'll see how this plays out but I'm hoping the CH babies get big enough so WHEN/IF the BB egg hatches everyone can compete for food and the parents will raise both. Let us know if you've heard/seen this occurrence before or do we just have cool and unique birds in SCSP!



nest activity in a TS nest. I saw one TS sitting on top of the box and the other one was clinging to the front looking into the entrance hole. That in itself was a little strange but hey, I'm not a TS so what do I know. They both flew up into a nearby tree as I approached. I opened the box and using my periscope mirror peeked in. Not being able to see the bottom of the nest I put my finger in to move the feathers apart and felt down into the nest to see if eggs were present. I jerked back my finger from what felt like a shock of electricity and yelled a few expletives. Looking at my finger I could see a small red mark similar to a bee sting but it felt different. Then I heard the sound of an angry bee, spread back the nesting material and saw a large carpenter bumble bee curled up under the nest and buzzing loudly. Fortunately, for me, males don't sting and females must be provoked before they do.....guess I poked a male or a tolerant female.

With my finger still throbbing a bit I pulled the nest out, brushed the bee out and replaced the nest. Later, with my finger and pride feeling a bit better, I checked back on the nest and found the TSs back at work fixing it up for egg laying activity. The following week found several tiny, white TS eggs and the birds and nest in good shape after this unusual episode. Next time I will use another method to check on activity and leave my fingers out of it!

Since things seem to come in three's, the third bird event I found was a HW nest in the cigarette ash tray to the right of the door of the Visitors Center/Admin Building. Wrens are notorious for building big, ugly nests with deep nesting pockets, in just about anything that strikes their fancy. Evidently this Wren, realizing no one uses the big silver ashtray any more, took the opportunity to utilize it and the roof cover above to build a nest, lay 5 eggs and fledge them all even with a lot of human traffic to and from the building. (Photo below) Birds are so cool.



Totals	BB	TS	HW	CH
nests	16	5	5	2
eggs	61	33	28	7
young	46	30	21	4
fledge	38	22	16	1
% eggs to young	91%	91%	75%	57%
% young to fledge	83%	73%	76%	25%
% eggs to fledge	62%	67%	57%	50%

(This article is reprinted with permission of the Friends of Seneca Creek State Park from their Summer 2016 newsletter. www.FOSCSP.com)

Bluebirds at Needwood Golf Course

by Tony Laing

In the fall of 2002, nearly 14 years ago, Eric Laing, Boy Scout Troop 264 in Brookeville MD, chose for his Eagle Scout project a task of leading a team that built, painted, and installed 26 bluebird houses on a trail around Needwood Golf course. This was done under the auspices of Meadowside Nature Center as part of a national effort to restore the Eastern Bluebird population that had been decimated due to habitat loss and competition from invasive bird species such as the House Sparrow. As part of an experiment, Meadowside requested Eric to build half of the birdhouses using the somewhat triangle shaped Peterson Model and half using the more common rectangle shape named the Duncan Model. The naturalists at Meadowside wanted to determine if the bluebirds preferred one type of box over the other. Eric's dad, Tony Laing, joined up with a volunteer from Meadowside in the spring of 2003 and helped monitor the boxes on a weekly basis, counting eggs, young, and fledglings. Since 2006, he has been the lead monitor and keeping the tally. This information is shared with Maryland Park and Planning as well as the Needwood Golf Course and the Maryland Bluebird Society. The Table below shows the number of fledglings:



Photo by Bob Irvin

Needwood Trail monitor Tony Laing checks for activity in one of the trail's Peterson nestboxes.

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Needwood Bluebird Fledglings				
	Year	Duncan	Peterson	Total
1	2006	27	52	79
2	2007	22	55	77
3	2008	34	58	92
4	2009	24	71	95
5	2010	17	51	68
6	2011	33	51	84
7	2012	18	78	96
8	2013	18	81	99
9	2014	26	31	57
10	2015	19	41	60
11	2016	<u>32</u>	<u>54</u>	<u>86</u>
		270	623	893
		30.24%	69.76%	100.00%

As reflected by the numbers of fledglings, the bluebirds prefer the Peterson Model 69% as compared to 30% for the Duncan Model. The assumption is that the inside of the Peterson Model resembles a tree better than the Duncan Model. Mr. Laing has painted the boxes twice over 10 seasons and plans to replace the Duncan Model with the Peterson Model as the boxes age and need to be replaced. Eagle Scout projects are meant to last and Eric Laing's project has lasted for over a decade and has resulted in an increase in the Eastern Bluebird population in Montgomery County. Some of the neighbors around Needwood have commented on the increased number of bluebird sightings in their yards.



A tree swallow peeks out from the entrance hole of the Duncan style box. Photo by Bob Irvin

Maryland Bluebird Society Celebrates 12th Nesting Season with Annual Meeting and Picnic

by Kathy Kremnitzer

On Saturday, September 10th, MBS celebrated the end of another bluebird nesting season by gathering at Black Hill Regional Park for our 12th annual membership meeting and picnic. The weather was hot and humid compared to previous years, but when in the company of fellow bluebirders, weather is a minor issue!

Twenty-three Eastern Bluebird fans enjoyed the bounty of hot dogs, hamburgers, pasta, salads and more desserts than could be consumed! Attendees came from far and wide, including Karen Unruh, Janice Ward and Nelda DeLauro from Maryland's Eastern Shore and New Jersey Bluebird Society's president and NABS board member Allen Jackson, who made the trek from the Millville area of New Jersey to spend the afternoon talking about bluebirds.

On the business side of things, the membership voted several board members into new terms, a recap was given of this year's events, as well as a reminder that there are still a few events yet to take place. The next edition of the newsletter will be out by mid-September and Kathy is now collecting nesting data for the fall issue. MBS Treasurer and Membership Chair, Diane Seward, reported the following:

Cash-in-hand as of 8/31/16: \$14,928.27

Membership: 121 memberships paid through 2015
12 Lifetime memberships

Facebook administrator Jodi Hewitt reported our MBS page has 478 "likes" and has been a busy place for the last few months. Members should continue to post experiences, ask questions and share photos.

For those members who were not able to attend the picnic or any of our other events during the year, we hope you will try to do so next year. The more active we are in our efforts at conservation, the better the world will be for our beloved bluebirds.

MBS will be collecting nesting data over the next several weeks for publication in our Fall newsletter. Please send nesting data to Kathy at griffin459@myactv.net



New Jersey Bluebird Society president and NABS board member Allen Jackson addresses the MBS membership during the MBS Annual meeting. Photo by Bonnie Bell



MBS Secretary Bonnie Bell and board member Jenny Hendershot put the final touches on the Silent Auction. Photo by Ed Escalante



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. An MBS County Coordinator is always willing to listen and share whatever knowledge and experience they can with you.

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THE MARYLAND BLUEBIRD SOCIETY, INC.
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Mail to: Maryland Bluebird Society
10809 Rock Run Drive
Potomac, MD 20854

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.

New Application Renewal Application

Note: Membership is effective for the calendar year (s) in which the dues are paid, except that dues paid in the fourth calendar quarter are also effective for the year after which they are paid. Please check the appropriate membership category:

Date: _____

Individual: One year - \$10.00 Three years - \$25.00

Household: One year - \$15.00 Three years - \$40.00

Lifetime: Individual - \$250.00 Household - \$300.00

Student – age 23 or under One year - \$7.00 Three years - \$20.00

Corporate/non-profit One year - \$30.00 Three years - \$85.00

Corporate sponsor (non-voting) One year - \$100.00

Make a tax deductible donation, amount \$ _____

Please print:

Name: _____

Address: _____

County: _____

E-Mail Address: _____

Telephone No.: home cell work _____

How did you hear about MBS? _____