



Bluebirds often have two broods; if insect populations allow they many have three in a nesting season.
Photo credit: Karla Rossini

True Blue

*Nearly 1,00 nest boxes welcome
bluebirds back to southern New Jersey*

By Allen Jackson, CU Maurice River

People comment to me about seeing bluebirds in their outdoor activities. This is no fluke; Citizens

United Maurice River, Atlantic Audubon Society, and the NJ Bluebird Society (NJBBS) are coordinating activities in southern NJ to benefit the Eastern bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) by working with organizations and private landowners to locate boxes for the bluebirds to nest in. More than 1,000 boxes have been placed throughout mostly southern NJ in suitable habitat on lands belonging to Federal, State and local governments, utility companies, schools, environmental organizations, farms, commercial nurseries, and on numerous private properties.

When the Holly Farm in Millville was purchased by the State earlier this year, 2 boxes were erected on that property in March. Recent monitoring in April showed both boxes have bluebirds nesting. Another recent activity in our area included locating 2 boxes on property in Port Elizabeth in April - again both boxes have nesting bluebirds. Our most productive bluebird trail, with 10 boxes, is on the Landis Sewerage Authority property in Vineland. It produced 66 birds in one season! The success story continues all over southern NJ. Citizens United and NJBBS provide volunteers to monitor by conducting nest checks during the season. Bluebirds thrive on active oversight; the better your management

the more successful their nesting season.

Four essential practices are necessary for a healthy and productive bluebird management:

- 1) Boxes must meet design standards to be effective.
- 2) Proper placement is important. As with all real estate, location, location, location, is the key to success.
- 3) Birds must be protected from predators and nest competitors and
- 4) Monitoring must be done weekly.



Photo credit: David Lowenstern.

Through conservation efforts and informal partnerships the bluebirds have benefitted, making a significant comeback in NJ. In 2019 the NJBBS reported 4200 bluebirds fledged. More significantly, 14,000 bluebirds have been produced in the past 4

years. Each year more boxes are added, more monitors become involved, and the bluebirds' population increases. According to the USGS's Breeding Bird Survey which has monitored trends of bird species since 1966, NJ ranks #1 in the US for Eastern bluebird with a 7% annual increase trend for the years 2005-2015.

Bluebirds are ground feeders and need open areas with little vegetation. Insects make up as much as 90% of their diet during the nesting season. Having a vegetable or flower garden is a bonus for bluebirds because where there are flowers or vegetables, there are insects. Each young bluebird gets fed 30-50 times a day. Why use insecticides when there are enough bluebirds around to do the job for free? Using pesticides is counter-productive when it also kills insectivores.

Bluebirds are lucky that they are well suited for our conservation efforts. Being cavity nesters they readily accept nest boxes, which makes the proper box very important to the program. A unique partnership has developed to supply the boxes. Ed McCay (McCay Wood Products) mills Atlantic white cedar which is taken to David Moyer, a wood shop teacher at

the Middle Township Middle School, for his students to make into bluebird boxes. The students make ~150 boxes a school year which are easily dispersed throughout NJ.



Photo credit: Pam Higginbotham

There is also a concerted effort to band the young bluebirds before they

fledge. Biological information can be obtained regarding life expectancy, migratory patterns, and nesting activities of the young. Bluebirds usually have 2 broods a season but if they are healthy and an abundant food supply is available, 3 broods are not uncommon. The boxes for bluebirds also benefit other cavity nesters such as tree swallows, tufted titmice, Carolina chickadee, and white-breasted nuthatches.

For additional information about ways to benefit bluebirds visit www.njbluebirdsociety.org or [www .CUMauriceriver.org](http://www.CUMauriceriver.org)

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About the Author

Allen Jackson, who has been our Director of Wildlife Management for a number of years, is a retired US Fish and Wildlife biologist who volunteers countless hours to the recovery of a number of avian species, with a primary focus on bluebirds and purple martins. Allen is currently the president of the NJ Bluebird Society, which he helped establish in 2011. With the assistance of CU members Allen has been a tireless advocate, helping numerous organizations and individuals to provide proper nesting boxes for bluebirds. A series of boxes located along a property is traditionally referred to as a bluebird trail, because a monitor goes from one box to another documenting nesting activity. Monitoring bluebirds correctly is a key to successful production of young.

Allen's ability to provide technical assistance to a wide variety of organizations, national wildlife refuges, state wildlife management areas, state parks, military bases, environmental groups, schools, nurseries, and countless individuals has resulted in a significant increase in population for these species.



Allen Jackson and bluebird set-up

Thank you Allen!

J. Morton Galetto, CU Maurice River