

*Spring 2017 Edition*



Tennessee Bluebird  
Society  
Honor Roll  
(Life Time Members)

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- Chuck & Terry James
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- John Langley
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- Donald Turner
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**Interested in becoming a Tennessee Bluebird Society Life Time Member. For more details see the application on the last page of this newsletter.**

In This Issue

- Presidents Letter
- What's Happening Around The State
- Protecting Your Nest Box By: Duane Rice

**BLUEBIRD QUOTES**

**A bluebird box is perhaps the easiest and most rewarding way to do something**



**good for the environment.**  
- **Michigan Bluebird Society**

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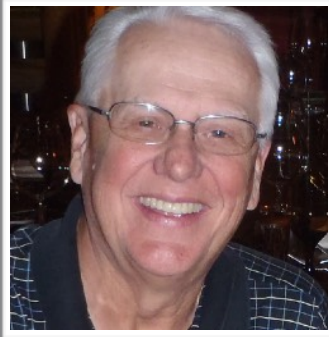
**PRESIDENTS LETTER CHUCK JAMES**


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It looks like we dodged a bullet this winter,



with very mild weather. Our Bluebirds and other native cavity nesters needed a break.

It's now time to think spring, We've already

have seen bluebirds checking out the nest box in our yard. Please make sure you clean out your nest boxes of any old nests. It doesn't hurt to disinfect the nest box with small spray bottle with a 1 to 10 ratio of Clorox and water. Also, you may want to consider rubbing wax on the inside of the roof to prevent wasps from building a nest.

Our spring calendar is starting to fill up with presentations and projects. In the West Fred Robertson and his team have been busy installing nest box trails, in the East we have been busy giving presentations. We are also working with the Indian Mountain State Park and the Jellico High School, building a trail and monitoring. More about that project in our summer issue. We are collaborating with the Knoxville Chapter of the Tennessee Ornithology Society in developing a nest box trail on the property of the University of Tennessee Knoxville.

If you are interesting in nature, conservation we could always use some help. at the end of this letter is our email address. We would enjoy hearing from you.

Thought you might enjoy this 1963 episode of Lassie, where Timmy and Lassie save the bluebirds. Just click on the link in the

highlighted area and take a walk down memory lane. This episode was produced 15 years before the North American Bluebird Society was formed. Whoever wrote this episode was far ahead of his/her time by recognizing the plight of the bluebird

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCTEye-qf5s>

In 1963, Lassie and Timmy were concerned with the struggle of the bluebird. Since then with help by people, like you, building nest boxes and being good bluebird landlords, today the bluebird population has grown from about 2 million to 20 million. Another bad winter could, however, kill 30-40% of the Eastern Bluebird population. Please remember to put out fresh water daily.

Share this episode with your family and friends, it's a great lesson in conservation. Some information has changed, no perch on a bluebird house. House Sparrows like the perch. Today House sparrows are the #1 killer of bluebird babies. Starlings cannot get into a 1 ½ inch opening in a nest box. They do use many of the natural cavities in dead trees.

For more information or to join the Tennessee Bluebird Society, visit our website at: [www.tnbluebirdsociety.org](http://www.tnbluebirdsociety.org) and read our past newsletters.

Happy Birding!!!!

*Chuck James*

*President*

*Tennessee Bluebird Society*

**WHAT'S HAPPENING AROUND THE STATE**

**Wild Birds Unlimited Knoxville**

**Chuck Cruickshank**

was a big hit at Wild Birds Unlimited in Knoxville on Saturday, February 11, 2017. More than 60 people attended his Basic Bluebirding presentation.



Liz Cutrone owner WBU thanked the Tennessee Bluebird Society for the work they do preserving



the Eastern Bluebird in East Tennessee by once again becoming a Corporate Sponsor.



**We Love our Bluebirds**

If you need a Nesting Box, Bluebird Feeder, or Meal Worms, we have everything you need to get started, and take great care of our Bluebirds.



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WHAT'S HAPPENING AROUND THE STATE

**T**ennessee Bluebird Society, Shelby County Chapter has been hard at work this spring installing nest box trails.



The Shelby County Chapter of the Tennessee Bluebird Society was formed in April of 2016. Since that time they have installed 61 boxes on 10 trails. Their plans are to install 20 more nest boxes at Orgill Park in Millington and in Germantown on the Green Way at Wolf River Drive.

At the Aycock Park Nest Box Trail dedication there was a turnout of about 30 people, including: The Boy Scouts, Mayor, Park Manager, Lions Club and Chamber of Commerce.



Now the work begins for the Chapter monitoring all these nest boxes.

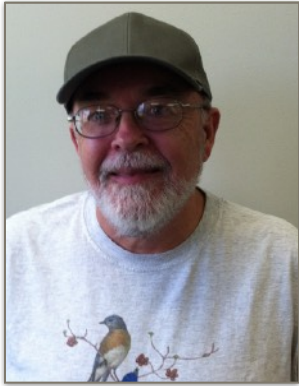
If you live in Shelby County and would like to monitor these nest box trails please contact

A quieter dedication was at the Lions Park in Memory of Sam Miller. Pictured is Sam's family and the couple on the right are Ray and Bonita Dunavant, Shelby County TBS Board Members.



Fred Robertson, President of the Shelby County Chapter of TBS at (901) 612-0233 or email: [nostrebor@bellsouth.net](mailto:nostrebor@bellsouth.net).

**PROTECTING YOUR NEST BOX BY: DUANE RICE**



Duane Rice

**PROTECTION**

The absolute best way to protect your nest boxes, is to be AWARE of what is happening around them.

The natural world is a very dangerous place. Bluebirds need all the help we can give them. Especially birds we have

decided to take responsibility for.

Here are the dangers secondary cavity nesting species encounter.

Predators: Snakes, raccoons, feral cats, House Sparrows, birds of prey, and other species of birds that may prey upon nestlings, like crows, jays, woodpeckers.

Paper Wasps and ants can present problems

for you and the chicks. Blow flies can be a problem for the chicks in some areas. Coat the inside top and sides with Ivory Soap to prevent wasps from attaching their nest to the box. Sevin dust will keep ants and blow flies in check applied under the nest.

Other dangers include humans, and weather.



House Sparrow



Raccoon

Making sure your nest box's contents are protected to the best of your ability, is the best way to insure its success.

**Types of protection;**

Location. First make sure where you've placed your nest box is free of a place where a cat may be able to jump from. An open area will also help insure the nest box is not desired by House

Wrens that will destroy its contents and then fill the nest box with sticks. Flying Squirrels will invade your box, if it is located too near



Flying Squirrel

large trees, from which they can fly.

Locations near livestock are also not recommended because House Sparrows are usually present near livestock.

**POLES**

Selecting the right pole. First, never mount a nest box on a tree. Hanging a nest box in a tree is safer for the birds, provided you have a dome baffle of some sort to protect it from climbing predators.

Many people mount their boxes on wooden posts. I don't recommend this method either, because, once again, they are easy for predators to climb.

**PROTECTING YOUR NEST BOX BY: DUANE RICE**

If you feel you have no other option, then wrap the "trunk" of the post in a slick metal flashing of some sort.

I have found a metal pole, such as 3/4 emt pipe, available at most hardware stores, make excellent poles for mounting nest boxes. These types of poles are also easy to attach different styles of baffles.

**Baffles.**

This is to protect your box from climbing predators, such as snakes and raccoons, among others. A lot of research has been done to try and find a 100% predator proof method of protecting a nest box. So far, none has been found.....yet. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't try to do your best. A good baffle will help you and "your" birds sleep at night.

It has been proven, if a baffle wobbles, it makes a better baffle. Raccoons and snakes do not like a surface that seems insecure for climbing. Also make sure to plug any gaps between the pole and baffles with netting or chicken wire. Snakes can make themselves

very flat to squeeze in between any opening. An inverted plant container, even a large salad bowl, can make a baffle. The point is, to create a barrier between the ground and the nest box, so as to make climbing it as difficult as possible. If it takes more time for a predator to breach the baffle, it may buy the birds the time they may need to escape. Predator Guards:

Should the baffle be breached by a raccoon, or an avian predator is trying to gain access to its contents, a predator guard will help making the contents out of its reach.

Raccoons have very short arms. If the entrance is deep and the nest is low in

predator will not be able to reach the eggs/chicks. The same holds true for an avian predator. The deeper the box, the more difficult it will be for the bird of prey to reach with its talons or beak. If you have a nest box that is made deep, and predator guard may not be



the box, a



necessary at all.

**PROTECTING YOUR NEST BOX BY: DUANE RICE**

Another type of predator guard is call a “Noel Guard”.

Basically it is hardware cloth formed in the shape of a square and attached to the front of the nest box around the opening. The birds are able to come and go easily, but a cat or raccoon can’t reach inside. However, it must be said, this will not stop a snake from entering.



Noel Guard

A roof with a large overhang will also help making the contents of the box difficult to reach. It will also help shade the boxes sides on hot summer days.

House Sparrows represent a very real danger to secondary cavity nesting species. Protecting your nest boxes from these pests can be both difficult and challenging, to say the least. Location plays a big part in whether you may have to take on this challenge. If you have reason to believe House Sparrows are present in the vicinity in which you wish to place nest boxes, it may be best if you decide not to place a nest box in the area, or chose another location where they are not present.

Once you’ve decided you are up to the challenge, there will be several methods you can use to get control of your choice of location. Basically, you have a choice to use passive or aggressive methods. Passive methods can be

productive if you are as persistent as the House Sparrows. Patience will also be necessary. Whether you use passive or aggressive methods, you must be sure to do one thing. Protect your nest boxes that have eggs or chicks by adding a sparrow spooker to them as soon as possible. In many cases, House Sparrows will re-act violently to any effort you make to evict them from their nest sight. A spooker will help deter them.

The most common passive method is “nest pulling”. As you find House Sparrow nests in your nest box, simply remove it. If possible, take the contents as far away as possible or place them in a trash bag. It may be necessary to remove them on a daily basis for some time. Unfortunately, if a bluebird shows an interest in a nest box a House Sparrow has claimed, and the House Sparrow catches the bluebird in the box, it will kill the bluebird. If a House Sparrow wants to claim a



Sparrow Spooker



BB Nestlings Killed by House Sparrows

nest box a bluebird is nesting in, it will kill the female if she is on her nest. If there are eggs or chicks in the box, it will destroy

them. To add insult to injury, it will then build its nest on top of the dead birds. So you see, it is imperative you take action to rid the vicinity of House Sparrows.

## PROTECTING YOUR NEST BOX BY: DUANE RICE

Another passive method is removing any House Sparrow eggs while leaving the nest. Some believe this will keep the House Sparrows preoccupied with mating so they won't retaliate.

Trapping is the most common aggressive method. There are many types of House Sparrow traps. Most are very effective, when used properly.



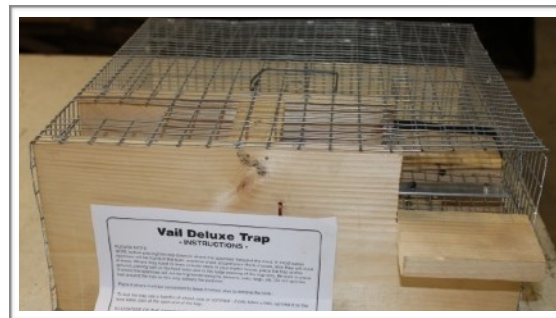
There are basically two types of traps. An in-box trap and a ground trap. The in-box attaches to the inside of the nest box and is spring loaded. When a House Sparrow flies in to the box and trips the spring it closes the entrance to the nest box. Then you carefully open the box and remove the sparrow. The sparrow must then be killed, in order for your trapping to be successful. Otherwise it will return and retaliate against any other birds nesting in any other nearby nest box. Your choice of how to dispose of the sparrow is entirely up to you.

- An in-box trap must be monitored closely at all times. If a species other than a sparrow trips the trap, you must free it as soon as possible.

A ground trap is larger and can trap multiple sparrows. It is usually baited with whatever you wish to use. Bread torn in to pieces, millet seed, corn, or even feathers can be used to lure the sparrow in to the trap. If you trap a female sparrow, it's recommended you use it as bait to attract males.

House Sparrows are very aware of their surroundings and seem to have a sixth sense when you begin trying to trap them. Some even say they can read your body language. When using an in-box trap it may be necessary to be as deceptive as possible. It may be necessary to camouflage or cover with grass the in-box trap so the sparrow doesn't see it when it peers inside.

When using an in-box trap, I recommend you place nesting material the sparrow will find irresistible near the nest box. They are particularly fond of



white feathers or bits of paper. Many people don't bother with traps at all and deal with the sparrows simply by

shooting them with a gun. If you chose this method, make sure you can positively identify a House Sparrow from other sparrows or LBJ's (Little Brown Jobs).

House Wrens are another species of birds that can cause problems for other cavity nesting birds such as bluebirds, chickadees, titmice, and the like. If your nest boxes are located in an open area, away from wooded edges, odds are, you won't have a problem with them. Why? It has been determined they do not prefer to fly across open spaces, especially to nest. The same can be said of chickadees and titmice, with some variance.



**PROTECTING YOUR NEST BOX BY: DUANE RICE**

It must be stated, House Wrens are a native species and therefore protected by law. The same means used to rid nest boxes of House Sparrows can't be used for this reason. What can be done? Preventative methods must be used instead. Nest removal is allowed as long as no eggs are present in the nest. House Wrens will fill each nest box in their territory with small sticks, until the female chooses which nest box she will lay her eggs in. The problem is, if another species is using a nest box a wren wants, it will peck holes in the eggs of the other bird's eggs or remove any nestlings.

The best way to prevent this from occurring is to place a "wren guard" over the box so the entrance is not visible to the wren. A quick way to make a wren guard is to use a sturdy piece of cardboard or foam board, fold a piece so that it extends out and over the entry, making it still possible for the resident species to gain entry. Also do the same (without folding) to the sides of the nest box. Attach with a staple gun, and it should keep the wren at bay. This will "steer" the wren to another nest box not being used by another species and cause much less heartache.

**Weather:**

Here's why ventilation and drainage are absolutely necessary in a good nest box. Hypothermia is the number

one killer of nestlings in the early and late months of the nesting season.

While it's true, there isn't much you can do about the weather, there are some minor things you can do to protect the contents of your nest boxes during extreme weather conditions.

If the weather turns cold and cloudy while there are chicks in your nest boxes, supplement the bluebirds diet with meal worms, or a suet recipe that is best suited to them.

Once the weather turns sunny and warm, it's best for them and their young to resume their normal diet.

No one likes a damp bed. Make sure your nest box has good drainage so



Bottom Vents



Side Vent

that the nest is dry during the rainy month of April. Newborn chicks will not survive a wet nest, not matter how much Mother sits on them.

When temperatures reach the mid-90's and higher, and your nest box is exposed to direct sunlight for extended periods, some sort of make-shift shade will help the chicks get relief from the heat. I have seen umbrellas, hats, and other ingenious devices used to this end. I have found a "sun-shade" made for the dashboard of vehicles, cut to size, and attached with a staple gun to the top and sides of the nest box, will do the trick. Leave space between the top and sides by "bowing" it out, like a bonnet. Of course, if conditions are

**PROTECTING YOUR NEST BOX BY: DUANE RICE**

windy, adjustments might need to be made.

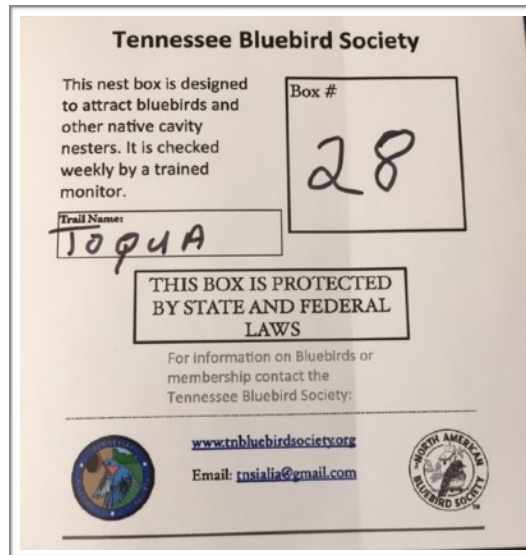
Good ventilation will help more than anything you make or add.

**Human Beings:**

Where do I begin? Of all the other dangers the birds will encounter, there is none as unpredictable as humans. While the other dangers, such as predators, are simply trying to survive, humans seem to have no rhyme or reason for their behavior. Most of the time vandalism doesn't occur on private property. So I'd say the nest boxes on your property are safe. Unless you use chemicals on your lawn, or you let your cat roam freely. Then, we have a problem. You. Make a choice. You can't have it both ways and say you're doing your best to protect "your bluebirds".

Please avoid using poisons of any kind on your yard during nesting season. If a parent bird brings an insect to the chicks that has been poisoned, it will poison the chicks.

If you have nest boxes on public lands, you will experience vandalism at some point in time. First, don't



waste time trying to reason why. Just deal with it in the best way you know how. Eyes are watching your nest boxes, even when you can't. By having a card or placard with contact information attached to your nest box, you will increase the odds that if a good Samaritan sees bad behavior, they will contact you. A warning label of some sort may give some a second thought to someone tempted to behave poorly. After all, it

is absolutely true, all native species are protected by Federal Law.

Nest boxes located on public land should always be secured by a screw, not a nail. Would you leave your house unlocked? Of course not. Humans have and will remove the contents of your nest box if they so desire. A screw or better yet, a lock, will prevent theft, in most cases.

If someone is curious and wants to see what you are doing while you're monitoring the nest box, by all means, share your love of these beautiful birds with them. Many bluebirders got started this way, and the more, the merrier, I say.

Once again, PROTECTION is about being AWARE of your nest box(es) and their surroundings. Weekly monitoring is the best way to increase your awareness.

For the best information regarding all native secondary cavity nesting species, visit: [www.sialis.org](http://www.sialis.org) ###

## **We need help in the following areas**

*\* **County coordinators** - Give presentations to local civic groups and organize one community project per year.*

*\* **Data Collection** - Must have strong spreadsheet skills. Collect trail data and collate for research.*

*\* **Woodworkers** - Willing to build nest boxes.*

*\* **TBS Board Members** - We need people interested in taking a leadership role in TBS.*

*\* **Newsletter Publisher** - Must have past experience putting together newsletters.*

*Email us if your interested in the above opportunities to:*

[tnsialia@gmail.com](mailto:tnsialia@gmail.com)

### **Tennessee Bluebird Society Board of Directors**

#### **Eastern Region:**

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Chuck Cruickshank - Loudon

Kathy Dooley - Loudon

Chuck James - Loudon

Jerry Rysticken - Farragut

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Rosemary Chamberlain - Dickson

Rosalind Kurita - Clarksville

Duane Rice - Chapmansboro

#### **Western Region:**

Fred Robertson - Collierville

Farrell Roe - Jackson

Stacey Roe - Jackson

Joanne Watson - Collierville

Scientific Advisor: Dawn Wilkins,  
PhD, UT Martin

Email: [tnsialia@gmail.com](mailto:tnsialia@gmail.com)

Website: [www.tnbluebirdsociety.org](http://www.tnbluebirdsociety.org)

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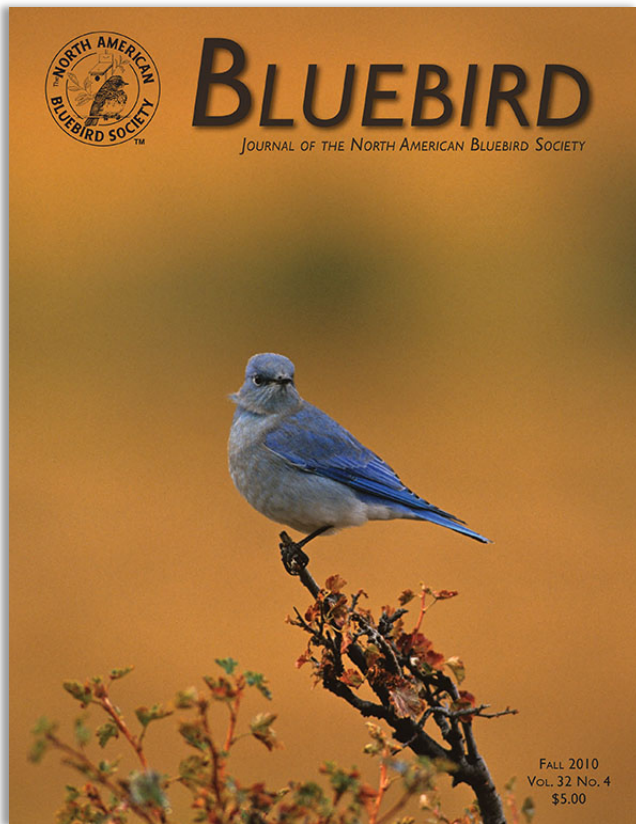
**TENNESSEE BLUEBIRD SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS**

Did you know when you become a member of the Tennessee Bluebird Society there is an additional benefit? Once you become a TBS member for an additional \$15 you qualify for your first membership into the North American Bluebird Society at a 50% savings. Only \$15 instead of \$30. Fill out the Tennessee Bluebird Society application on the last page of this newsletter. Indicate that you want a TBS Household Membership for \$15. Then by

the NABS circle (Y) and add \$15 for a total of \$30 and send in your application. We will submit your membership to NABS.

In addition to receiving our 4 TBS newsletters you will receive four issues of Bluebird from the North American Bluebird Society.

Don't miss this great savings.



**Websites**  
Tennessee Bluebird Society  
[www.tnbluebirdsociety.org](http://www.tnbluebirdsociety.org)  
North American Bluebird Society  
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