



NCBS Logo with Carolina Blue by Dempsey Essick

Bluebird Notes

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North Carolina Bluebird Society Mission Statement

Our goal is to support activities that foster the resurgence of bluebirds and other cavity nesting birds in our home areas.

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Educational Bluebird Material

Bluebirds Forever is a twelve page booklet that was written by some of the original organizers of the North Carolina Bluebird Society. It was reviewed, edited, rearranged and reprinted in 2005. The basic information has stood the test of time and 1000 copies have been reprinted. We are making them available to the members of NCBS (see page 12) for \$3 which includes shipping. If you would like to order an extra copy to share, the cost would be \$5 for these two copies. Discounts are available for multiple copies by contacting either Christine Ammons (towhee@blueridge.net or 828-287-3502) or Helen Munro (hsmunro@ac.net or 910-673-6936).



Bluebird Tips (copy enclosed), a smaller brochure with basic bluebird information, can be printed off the website (www.ncbluebird.org). Multiple copies of this are available for County Coordinators and members giving talks. They can be obtained from Hank Moss (hmjr@nc.rr.com or 910-692-2328).

The DVD, *Inside the Nest Box*, continues to captivate children and adults alike. Twenty-five VHS copies have

been ordered for anyone interested in that format. However, once these have been sold, all copies will be in the DVD format.

Bluebirds, a poster by Roberta Lee, is a new offering from the NCBS Poster. This depicts basic bluebird information including the three species and the life cycle. It fits the poster frame that is 24" by 18".



Bluebird books are reviewed on page 15. As you look for holiday gifts, any of these and a membership in NCBS are appropriate for all age groups. *Bluebirds Forever* (both the booklet and the one by Connie Toops, (see page 15) have plans for bluebird houses. Winter is such a great time to be inside in a work room making boxes for next year's bluebird families.

NCBS Treasurer Diane Scales, a avid reader, recommends *Wesley the Owl* by Stacey O'Brien and *In Hovering Flight* by Joyce Hinnefeld. The first one is non-fiction and the 19 year relationship of the author and a barn owl. The second is fiction and the story of a bird artist, her ornithological husband and their daughter. They are next on my "to read" list.

Helen Munro, Editor

Bluebird Notes

Issue 23 Vol. 4

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Bluebird Tales



Apologies

Christine Ammons has been active in the North Carolina Bluebird Society since its beginning. She has served as vice-president and has been the store manager since I became a member. I know that she lives in Union Mills in Rutherford County and I apologize for putting her in Union County in the last newsletter! I could blame it on a senior moment and I keep looking for the piece of paper with the mistake on it. At any rate, the article should read “*Greetings from Rutherford County.*”

I have a great-niece who currently says, “My bad” when she makes a mistake. Christine, My bad. I apologize.

Sincerely,
Helen Munro, Editor

Mark Your Calendars

The NCBS February newsletter will have the registration form for the annual meeting which is not until May, 2009. However, the May newsletter would be too late to allow people to sign up. In the meantime, please mark your calendar for:

Date: May 9, 2009

Hawthorne Inn & Conference Center in Winston-Salem, NC

Speaker: Dr. T. David Pitts, University of Tennessee at Martin

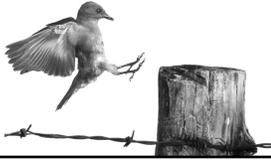
Talk: “Winter Survival: Flight, Food, Feathers, Fat, and Flocks.”

The winter NCBS Board Meeting will be at the home of

Helen Munro
22 Bobolink Rd.
Foxfire Village, NC 27281
Saturday, January 24, 2009

The Board Meetings are when decisions are made about grants for conservation and education, reprinting *Bluebird Tips* and *Bluebirds Forever* as well as the annual meetings, newsletter approval, web-site items, etc. As Board Members get older, replacements are needed. Visiting a Board Meeting might help you see that this is something you would like to do. Thanks.
Helen Munro, Acting President

ATTENTION: Deadline for 2008 NCBS Bluebird Surveys has been extended to December 1, 2008. Right now ten fewer people have reported in 2008 than reported in 2007. Please get your surveys in!!



Bluebird Tales



Hope for Bluebirds

From: Diane Betsworth
Sent: Wednesday, April 09, 2008 8:51 AM
To: president@ncbluebird.org
Subject: Questions

Hello,
 I am assuming you are an expert on Bluebirds. We had a couple use our box last year for three broods. This year a couple came and checked it out but hasn't built a nest. However, they come regularly to eat the worms we put out. This morning another couple seemed very interested in the box but the other couple chased them away. We would love to have more babies this year. Is there anything we can do? Is it even too late to have a nest? Any information you can provide will be greatly appreciated. Diane

On 4/9/08, [hsmunro <hsmunro@ac.net>](mailto:hsmunro@ac.net) wrote:
 Dear Diane,

The bluebirds are just now beginning to build their nests. There is competition for boxes and they will fight until one is declared a winner. The birds will sort it out and it sounds like one of them will nest there.

As soon as I say something like that, the birds will change their minds! However, if you had three broods last year, you should have them this year. Feeding them makes that nest box more attractive. Sometimes the bushes and trees grow up and a nest box that has been used is no longer used.

Keep me posted and let me know what happens.
 Sincerely, Helen

From: Diane Betsworth
Sent: Wednesday, April 09, 2008 10:51 AM
To: hsmunro
Subject: Re: Questions

Helen,
 Thank you so much for your quick response! You have given us hope - we really love having them (and all the birds - we have nuthatches nesting in another one of our boxes). There have been no major changes around the box from last year. I'll keep you posted on how it goes. Also, I was very glad to find your web site. I wish I had looked sooner. I would have loved to have gone to the meeting in Southern Pines last weekend. Thanks again, Diane

On 4/9/08, [hsmunro <hsmunro@ac.net>](mailto:hsmunro@ac.net) wrote:
 Your Welcome!!
 Helen

From: Diane Betsworth
Sent: Tuesday, April 29, 2008 2:14 PM
To: hsmunro
Subject: Re: Questions

Hello Helen,
 You probably don't remember me but I said I would give you an update. You were correct in giving us hope for bluebird babies - we now have bluebird nests with 4 eggs in both the front yard AND the backyard. I guess they decided to coexist peacefully. It may seem silly to some, but I'm sure you understand how excited we are to have them.

I also wanted to share some observations my husband and I have made. My husband used the specifications found in the bluebird literature to make our beautiful bluebird boxes and place them to the specs. We had the impression that they would only take boxes that met those specifications. We have seen bluebird nests in several different kinds of bird houses and facing every different direction. We even saw a nest with eggs in the newspaper slot under a mailbox. I'm guessing that they are not as 'endangered' as they once were. Even so, we love having them.

And, a final note. Since you are probably a lover of all birds, a pair of Grosbeaks have started visiting us this week. Those are beautiful birds, as well.

I'm sure this is much more information than you bargained for but I enjoyed sharing it with you. Have a great day, Diane

On 5/9/08, [hsmunro <hsmunro@ac.net>](mailto:hsmunro@ac.net) wrote:
 Dear Diane,

Thanks for the update. I would like to use this email as an article in our November newsletter, but need your permission. If you had any pictures, I would love those too.
 Thanks. Helen

From: Diane Betsworth
Sent: Friday, May 09, 2008 9:21 AM
To: hsmunro
Subject: Re: Questions

I'm happy for you to use whatever information you'd like. I have a few pictures to share. Diane



Front



Back

Uh-Oh. Zick Dough

Artist and writer Julie Zickefoose, author of *Enjoying Bluebirds More* (Bird Watcher's Digest Press) and *Letters from Eden* (Houghton Mifflin), keeps a daily web log in which she discusses the goings on in her 80-acre Ohio sanctuary, Indigo Hill. The following posts have been reprinted verbatim, with her photos, from her June 2008 blog archives at

<http://www.juliezickefoose.com/blog>

They chronicle her search for information and the conclusions she drew when two of the bluebirds nesting in her yard turned up with debilitating foot problems. Julie has been feeding bluebirds, rehabilitating wild birds, and managing bluebird trails since 1983. In a note to the editor, she wrote, "I'm a bit concerned that the conversational tone of my blog posts does not translate well in print form. It seems too informal, and at the same time too didactic. In the blog, I'm writing to an audience of regular readers, already acquainted with me, in much the same way you'd write a letter to a friend. If your readers can forgive that dissonance, I believe the information contained in these rather loosely written posts is important, and I appreciate your giving me the chance to bring them to a wider audience of bluebird enthusiasts. By exposing my own bad judgment in overfeeding my cherished backyard bluebirds, I hope to inspire others to stop and think about their own feeding programs. Are we really helping them, or simply amusing ourselves at their expense?"

First Post: Uh-Oh. Zick Dough

<http://www.juliezickefoose.com/blog/2008/06/uh-oh-zick-dough.html>



As many of you know, I've always been a little squeamy about people calling this stuff, a mixture of cornmeal, quick oats, flour, melted peanut butter and lard, "Zick Dough." I didn't invent it; the recipe's been around for years, first as "Miracle Meal," and then, with some alterations (less sugar, fewer ingredients) as "Peanut Butter Suet Dough." I first wrote about it in *Bird Watcher's Digest* in the fall of 2004, when I'd been feeding it for two years. So I guess I've had a considerable hand in popularizing it. Every time I post about it, people want the recipe, and it pops up on blogs all the time, usually as Zick Dough.

In 2002, a *BWD* subscriber in Port Orchard, Washington had sent in photos of herself feeding it to a wild male pileated woodpecker--from her *hand*. Not only that, but over the ensuing seasons the big woodpecker brought his fledglings to her deck railing, where he'd stuff them with what she called "bird pudding." She sent me the recipe, we talked on the phone, and I came away convinced that this was some kind of stuff and I'd better start making it for my birds.

I've posted, more or less ecstatically, about suet dough for two years now. I fed more of the stuff this winter and spring than ever before. I'd multiply the recipe (yes, it's in the link above) times six each time I made it, dragging a huge lobster pot up from the basement and using my stoutest stainless spoon to stir it. It takes all my strength to stir a batch like that, and I get down on the floor and hold the pot between my knees as I grunt and groan the mixture into smoothness. But oh, the birds it attracted, especially my beloved bluebirds. I felt I was helping them through the winter.

Most of the U.S. had an abnormally cold, wet spring (or long winter, however you want to look at it). I kept feeding the dough at winter levels well into May, because it just refused to warm up, and I knew there couldn't be many insects stirring when it rained all day, and the nights went into the 30's and 40's.

And two bluebirds in my yard turned up lame. She

looks fine--until you notice the missing scute on the outer toe--that pink zone.



First, the male from the front yard nestbox started holding up one foot, balancing awkwardly on the other and catching himself with an outthrust wing when he'd fall. Almost at the same time, the female bluebird from the backyard nestbox started sitting very low, puffed up as if she were in pain, and favoring both feet alternately. Now, this isn't necessarily something that would alarm me had it occurred in just one bird; I'd figure it had pulled a muscle or gotten its toe bent the wrong way. As I thought about it, though, I've seen lame legs in other songbirds at my suet dish over the years. I always figured they were coming to the suet dough dish because they were compromised. It didn't occur to me that they might have been compromised *because they were coming to the suet dough dish*.

Hmm. What's that going on with the heel of her right foot?



One of the nice things about having a 300 mm. lens is that you can make a close-up examination of a bird you can't handle. I decided to photograph the afflicted birds' feet and legs, to see if I could blow up the pictures and determine what was going on.

On getting my photos on the screen, I was sickened to see the backyard female bluebird's feet swollen, red



and misshapen. (See above.) No wonder she was acting as if she were in pain. She was in a great deal of pain, and she had to feed a brood of five young right through it all. And what was she feeding them? Why, Zick dough, of course.

Because the front yard male held up his foot, hiding it in his belly feathers, I couldn't get a picture of him, but I noticed that he switched off--sometimes he'd hold up the left leg; sometimes the right. That makes injury unlikely, and points even more directly to a metabolic problem. The mental leap I immediately took was that this condition had to be dietary in origin. When a pet bird turns up with a problem--any problem--the first place you go for answers is its diet. As I thought about it, these garden bluebirds, for all practical purposes, ARE pets, since they are eating prodigious quantities of an artificial diet. They're living on lard, oats, cornmeal, flour and peanut butter. Does that sound like a proper diet for a wild bluebird?

Wouldn't you think someone who has kept an orchard oriole and a Savannah sparrow going for 17 years as captives, feeding them everything from live wasp larvae to lasagna, might have figured this out before now? I can be a little slow.

As my friend Shila points out, the foods that are seasonally available to wild birds (and people) are the foods that are appropriate for them at that time of the year. Feeding unlimited lard and peanut butter all winter and well into the spring can't be a good idea. The more I thought about it, the more convinced I became that I had created this problem in otherwise healthy birds. So I got on the trail of it. I'll tell you what I learned tomorrow.

(Continued on page 6)

Crack is a Better Name for It



Second Post: Crack is a Better Name for It
<http://www.juliezickefoose.com/blog/2008/06/crack-is-better-name-for-it.html>

Upon viewing the bluebird foot photos, I put in a call to my favorite avian veterinarian: Robert Giddings, DVM, Diplomate, Association of Avian Veterinarians, of Kensington Bird and Animal Hospital in Kensington, Connecticut. Two decades ago, he was Charlie the macaw's veterinarian, he patched up my busted wild birds in return for help around the office, and I still turn to him with avian health questions.

Zick: "Hi, Bob. Can birds get gout?"

Bob: "Oh, yes. It's pretty common in caged birds. There was a pellet made by Pretty Bird that had too much protein and Vitamin D in it, that caused gout in quite a few cockatiels, but any diet that's too rich can cause it, just as it can in humans."

Zick: AH-HA!!!

I described the bluebird's feet to Bob--red, swollen, inflamed, and obviously causing the bird great pain. He agreed that articular gout was the most likely culprit. It's caused by a diet too high in protein (peanut butter?) and fat (lard-- You think?). Lots of purine in lard, it turns out. Gout is

caused by an excess of uric acid in the body, which can be caused by increased intake of foods containing purines, which are metabolized to uric acid in the body. Over time, elevated levels of uric acid will lead to deposits of it in connective tissue around joints. Eventually, the uric acid may form crystals in the joints, leading to acute pain and inflammation.

In pet birds, gout is treated with alepurinol and colchicine, both antipurine medications, as well as pain medications. In wild birds, the only possible course would be to remove the offending food. I had already done that; had been cutting slowly back over the last three weeks. Now, I was putting out just enough "Zick dough" on occasional mornings to bring the birds in for a few minutes so I could photograph their poor little feet.

Bob: "Surely, these bluebirds are eating other things than this suet dough, right? A wild bird shouldn't overeat any one item when there are all kinds of natural foods out there."

Zick: "You'd have to know bluebirds. They are the ultimate addictive personalities. Offer them mealworms or suet dough, and they'll take the easy out every time, gorging on it to the exclusion of anything else."

Bob said that I should see a clearing of symptoms as time passed and the bluebirds resumed taking a natural diet. So for the past three weeks I have been photographing bluebird feet at every opportunity. It's become a little hobby. And I am delighted to say that the front yard male is standing strongly on both feet, showing just a little residual swelling in what we'd call his right "ankle"--the junction of his toes. And the backyard female now stands up tall on both feet, and the redness is gone, along with the worst of the swelling. She's not puffed up any more, and she's building a nest for her second clutch of eggs.

WHEWWW. I am so sorry, bluebirds. You deserve much better than to be fed mass quantities of a food

that's flat-out bad for you. News flash: Mass quantities of mealworms are JUST AS BAD for bluebirds as is Zick dough. They're deficient in phosphorus, too high in protein and fat, and they mess the birds up. Don't feed mealworms in summer. Just stop it. They do not need your subsidy. I know, they'll tell you they're starving without you. Don't believe it.

I know there are many of you out there having tons o' fun feeding suet dough to birds this summer, watching them feed it to their babies. I've been doing that for years. I field calls all the time from people who have their birds addicted to mealworms, who suddenly panic when they go on summer vacation, and call me to ask what they should do about their bluebirds. Surely they'll starve without me!

What's wrong with this picture? It's the conceit that we are indispensable to wild birds; that our artificial foods (and yes, mealworms, fed to the exclusion of anything else, are an artificial food) are keeping them alive.

I have one plea. Stop NOW. Feed them in ice storms; when snow covers the ground; when they truly are having trouble finding food. Give it to them when it rains for a week in June and goes down to the 40's at night. But don't give it to them in the warmth of spring and summer when natural food is abundant, when the grasshoppers, crickets, spiders and caterpillars, bursting with nutrients and live enzymes and amino acids, are everywhere to be found. You wouldn't feed your kids candy for breakfast, lunch and dinner and expect them to thrive. Make no mistake: they'd be happy to have it, and they'd gobble it down and beg for more, but kids don't know what's bad for them. Neither, apparently, do wild birds. It's up to us to have the good judgment to do what's best for them.



Bluebird fledgling,
staring at a natural
food item

*Editor's Note:
Look carefully for the
mosquito*

Never forget that we feed birds for our own pleasure and enjoyment, not because it's good for them. Feeding birds is a human conceit, and coming to the conclusion that they depend on us for their very survival is a scam that they encourage us to believe. Don't buy it. They're much, much better off without our food stamps. Mealworms or suet dough: if you're feeding your bluebirds every day, you're doing them no favors. You're compromising their health.



This photograph was taken June 12, 2008, of the same female bluebird who was suffering so in the photos taken May 28. Withholding the offending food has done wonders for her. See how the redness and swelling have subsided, and she's perching normally? Yaaaay!! She's having a little snack of mealworms here, in case you're wondering. And she'll have no subsidy for the rest of the month!

Editor's Note:

Winter and bad weather feeding only!

Zick Dough

1 cup lard
1 cup creamy peanut butter
2 cups quick oats
2 cups yellow cornmeal
1 cup white flour
2/3 cup sugar

Melt & mix in a sauce pan. Pour into a 8" square dish and cool. Cut into blocks.

A Visit with



Julian Avery, a doctoral candidate at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ, came to North Carolina to collect data for his graduate research. He is studying a resident population of Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) on the island of Bermuda.

Bermuda bluebirds have been drastically reduced in number as a result of habitat loss through urban development and the introduction of European House Sparrows and European Starlings. Julian is collecting samples to quantify the amount of evolutionary divergence between the Bermudan and North American populations.



Upper left: Julian setting up a mist-net in front of an active nest box.

Far left: male bluebird caught when attempting to enter nest box to feed the chicks.

Near left: Julian about to release male bluebird after taking measurements.

Near right: Julian taking measurements of male wing length.

Far right: male bluebird in knee-length panty hose used to hold the bird while being weighed.



The male in this case was the first to be caught in the mist-net as he came in to check on his two chicks. As Julian measured the male, his mate was up in the trees fussing down at Julian and answering the cries of the male. As Julian walked back toward the nest box to release the male, the female began an aggressive dive bombing display. As Julian came closer to the net, the female continued to try and drive him off, each time managing to avoid the net. Julian finally knelt down so he was quite a bit lower than the net. The next time she came tearing down, it was lower than her earlier attempts and she became entangled in the pocket of the net. Now it was time for the male to return to the trees and watch while his mate was measured.

This all happened in the middle of July and most of the birds were showing substantial feather wear. The adult birds will start to molt towards the end of summer, replacing the worn feathers with new ones that they will retain till the following August. Despite the condition of their feathers, the ability of these two birds to maneuver in the air and avoid a nearly invisible net was a sight to behold. It was a pleasure to watch this scientist at work as he deftly removed birds from the net and calmed them down in hand, enabling him to quickly take their measurements. Once released, these birds quickly returned to their hungry nestlings and their magical life of flight and song.

Julian Avery

By Helen Munro, Foxfire Village, NC

Editor of *Bluebird Notes*

In addition to measuring the physical characteristics of each bird (weight, wing length, bill width), Julian removed a few feathers from the head, back, and rump and also collected a small blood sample. This blood sample was then applied to a card that ruptures the blood cells and stores the DNA for later analysis. Nucleotide sequences can then be compared amongst individuals and populations to determine the relative genetic distance between different groups. The feather samples will be used to determine if Bermuda's bluebirds are evolving different plumage characteristics from those in North America

Julian, along with his advisor Dr. Julie Lockwood, will use the results from their molecular and plumage comparisons to make recommendations on the conservation status of Eastern Bluebirds in Bermuda. Knowledge of the differences between the two regions could impact conservation efforts and funding, as well as shed light on the different paths evolution can take in disjunctive populations.

Material for this piece was taken from the abstract for the NABS 2007 meeting in Athens, GA:

Avery, J. D. and J. L. Lockwood.
Conservation Status of Eastern Bluebirds in Bermuda.

Ecology, Evolution, and Natural Resources, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.



The Foxfire Golf and Country Club did not hesitate to give Julian permission to set up his small mist nets on the two golf courses. The nest boxes are never on the fairways and the goal is to place them in areas where they do not interfere with the mowers.

Julian found the Foxfire Golfers very courteous and curious. In response to a question, Julian said that he was an ornithologist. One of the golfers asked, "What is an eye doctor doing on the golf course?"

Another well intended homeowner, thinking the nets were permanent, spray painted the guide wires white that had already been marked with white plastic bags. The mist net is black and white paint would have made it visible to the birds.



This was the first bluebird that Julian caught in the evening hours.

The plumage of this male bluebird appears somewhat gray because the feathers are heavily worn. He will undergo molt soon.

Top 10 Bird

Bill Thompson, III, is the editor of *Bird Watcher's Digest*, the popular bimonthly magazine that has been published by his family since 1978. An avid bird watcher from the age of eight, Bill knew that birds would someday become the focus of his career, in addition to being his main hobby.



Subscriptions to *Bird Watcher's Digest* are \$19.95 per year. Check out their website <http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com> for details.

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10. Feeders Keep Birds From Migrating. If this were true, we'd have hummingbirds and orioles clinging to our feeders all winter long. Birds migrate when their natural internal "clocks" give them the urge to migrate. Migration is driven by instinct and external factors such as sunlight and weather, not by the availability of sunflower seed or food at feeders. One thing to note is that birds need extra food during migration, so it's a nice idea to keep your feeders stocked in case a hungry migrant plops down in your yard looking for food.

9. Bird Feeding Is Really Bad/Good for Birds. Let's face it, birds did just fine before we decided, a few hundred years ago, to feed them. Birds do not need the food we provide for them. It's a nice compromise between our desire to see birds in our backyards and the birds' willingness to take advantage of our largesse. Birds do not rely solely on our feeders for their survival, and they certainly do not rely on our feeders for necessary nutrients, so it's wrong to say that feeding is "good" for birds. By the same token, when bird feeding is done in a conscientious manner, it is also not bad for birds. Yes, messy feeding stations can harbor disease, and food can sometimes spoil at our feeders, but if these scenarios are avoided, bird feeding is enjoyable for us and attractive to the birds. If you wish to stretch the argument to include whether millions of bird feeders have an impact on bird populations, then yes, we can argue about the negative effects of bird feeding. But let's not do that

now. Let's go on to the next myth....

8. Birds Will Starve if You Stop Feeding in Winter. Birds have evolved over the eons as incredibly adaptive, mobile creatures. Unless a bird is sick or debilitated, it can use its wings (or legs) to range far and wide in search of food. Birds that cannot move in search of food are likely doomed to perish anyway, which is part of the natural scheme of things. So when you're going away on vacation for two weeks in the middle of a cold, snowy winter spell, it's nice if you can arrange for a neighbor to keep your feeders filled. Most serious feeder operators wouldn't think of letting their feeders go empty. But if it happens while you're gone, as it has happened to me, realize that your birds did not all starve, they just went somewhere else to find food. Now you'll have to work to lure them back!

7. The Mixed Seed at the Grocery Store Is Bad. I believed this with all my heart until recently when I saw some decent mixed birdseed for sale at a fancy grocery store. Granted, the stuff at my local chain grocery store is still absolute junk, unfit for rock doves. But some seed producers seem to be getting the message that quality seed is worth selling. The trick to telling the junk seed from the better stuff is to read the ingredients. Junk seed has almost none of the following: black-oil sunflower, peanut bits, safflower, millet, or sunflower hearts. It will have lots of milo, wheat, barley, cracked corn, and upon visual inspection, perhaps some empty hulls, sticks, and other inedibles. The best mixes feature a hearty helping of sunflower seed in some form.

6. Birds Won't Eat Milo. Years ago in an early issue of *Bird Watcher's Digest*, one of our editorial cartoons stated emphatically that "Real Birds Don't Eat Milo." Readers in the eastern half of North America nodded in agreement, but those folks in the Southwest howled their ridicule and protested loudly. Red milo is a staple of western bird feeding, especially in the Southwest where a variety of quail, doves, towhees, and sparrows readily eat it. In the East and upper Midwest, birds don't seem to eat milo much at all, so any mixed seed with a large percentage of milo will probably go mostly uneaten.

5. Blackbirds/Squirrels Won't Eat Safflower Seed. Safflower was once considered by many feeder operators to be the anti-blackbird and anti-squirrel food. Cardinals seemed to love it, but blackbirds and squirrels did not. That's not really true anymore, but nobody knows why. Many folks who feed safflower report that any bird or

(Continued on page 11)

Feeding Myths

(Continued from page 10)

mammal that eats sunflower will also eat safflower. Safflower seed is still a nice alternative food to offer—it works in any feeder suitable for sunflower seed and it can be bought in bulk at feed stores. A blackbird and squirrel deterrent it is not, but then again, what is?

4. There's Only One Hummingbird Species Found East of the Rocky Mountains. Gone are the days when this statement could be considered true. There are even breeding records for other hummingbird species (mainly the buff-bellied hummingbird) in southern Texas. In winter this statement is even less accurate because there can be as many as 10 different hummingbird species visiting feeders throughout the southeastern states. In addition to our regular eastern breeder, the ruby-throated hummingbird, eastern states now regularly play host to rufous hummingbirds, a hardy species that can breed as far north as Alaska. It is unclear if this is a new phenomenon or if the explosive growth of hummingbird feeding has made these birds more noticeable. I'm still waiting for the first good unusual hummingbird at our feeders.

3. Red Dye in Hummer Food Is Bad. We'd like to think we know what is best for the birds we feed, but in a lot of cases, we don't. It certainly seems logical that adding food coloring to hummingbird nectar solution might not be good for the birds drinking it, but the fact is, we don't have any scientific proof to that effect. So it's one of those innocent-until-proven-guilty things. And until some scientist does the testing, there will continue to be millions of packages of red-dyed hummingbird nectar being sold and used. As Jerry Seinfeld used to say: "Not that there's anything wrong with that." This is what I'm saying: Hello out there. Any ornithology graduate students reading this? I've got an idea for your dissertation!

2. Perches on Hummer Feeders Are Bad. It started out as anecdotal evidence that grew into a wave of mild hysteria. Hummingbird feeders with perches were killing hummingbirds! How? Well, the hypothesis was that hummers would land on a feeder perch in the early morning and drink a deep slurp of very cold nectar, and this jolt of coldness would cause them to go into torpor, a trancelike state in which body functions slow drastically to conserve energy. Some hummers were found hanging upside down from their perches, while others fell to the ground and were at the mercy of predators. Witnesses reasoned that the hummers did not generate

enough body heat while sitting and thus succumbed to the cold.

Removing the perches would force the hummers to hover while feeding, thus generating body heat. Now, before you go out and rip the perches off your feeders, consider that there are lots of reasons why a hummer might behave in this way. The bird could be in a natural state of torpor, which is how hummingbirds survive in extremely cold weather. A hummer that has been stung by a bee or wasp will behave strangely, as will one that is sick or perhaps injured from the fighting that occurs near a busy feeder. In my experience a feeder with perches allows many hummers to feed at once peacefully. Hummingbirds forced to hover at feeders seem to fight more readily, and are more active in defending a feeder. As with red dye, we don't have scientific evidence to prove that feeders with perches are bad for hummingbirds, so until we do, use your own good judgment. As for me, I'm pro perch.

1. This Feeder Is 100% Squirrel Proof! I am sorry, but there's just no way! Here I am setting myself up for angry letters from feeder manufacturers, but it is simply impossible to believe this statement. Oh, yes, you can make a feeder squirrel proof by placing it in the middle of a treeless lawn with a pole-baffle that would do the Pentagon proud. But nail that same feeder to your deck railing and watch the squirrels remove the confident smile from your face, along with all the seed in your feeder. Squirrels have the luxury of being way more resourceful than any bird feeder designer. Why? Because a squirrel is working to feed itself and its offspring, and it will throw itself into the task with all its might every single day. The squirrel thinks of nothing else but the seed inside that feeder, and how to get at it. The feeder designer, meanwhile, is thinking about lunch and vacation and next Tuesday's staff meeting and bowling league. That's why the squirrels win every time.

FYI—Mealworm Sources:

Nature's Way— 1-800-318-2611

Sunshine—1-503-873-8989

Grubo—1-800-222-3563

Rainbow—1-800-777-9676



Bluebirds, Inside the Nest Box

Recorded by the Cornell Birdhouse Network

Summer 1999

Produced by the North Carolina Bluebird Society

VHS available for \$15.00 including shipping and handling.

DVD available for \$13.00 including shipping and handling.

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Bluebird Note Cards (12)	\$ 12.00	X _____	= _____
<i>Carolina Blue</i> Tote Bags	\$ 15.00	X _____	= _____
<i>Carolina Blue</i> T-Shirts by Dempsey Essick (S, M, L, XL)	\$ 20.00	X _____	= _____
Cloisonné Bluebird Pins (1inch, 4 colors)	\$ 5.00	X _____	= _____
<i>Bluebirds</i> , a poster by Roberta Lee	\$ 12.50	X _____	= _____
<i>On the Wings of a Song—CD</i>	\$ 8.00	X _____	= _____
<i>Bluebirds, Inside the Nestbox</i> -DVD (DVD special 2 for \$20; 3 for \$30; 6 for \$60)	\$ 13.00	X _____	= _____
<i>Bluebirds, Inside the Nestbox</i> -VHS	\$ 16.00	X _____	= _____
<i>Bluebirds Forever</i> (12 page booklet)	\$ 3.00	X _____	= _____
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Meet Catawba County Coordinator

My name is Kristin Dzimitrowicz, I am the new Catawba County Coordinator. I am 33 years old, married to my loving husband, Jeff, and we have two young girls. Sara is five years old and in Kindergarten, Megan is two and spends her weekdays at daycare. When I'm not with my husband or girls, I'm hard at work as the Assistant Director for Reporting Services with The Jackson Group – a wonderful family owned business here in Hickory. I am currently using some of my community contacts to assist in getting another Bluebird Trail setup. I have already been able to assist the local College, now Lenoir-Rhyne University to get a Bluebird Trail built.

My interest in Bluebirds first started when my husband (fiancé at the time) and I purchased our first house back in 1999. It was on an acre of land in the suburbs of Hickory, and a nest box came with it. Oh, how we enjoyed having those Bluebirds. We now live in Hickory, since 2003, and



last year I just couldn't stand not having any Bluebirds. I had my father build me a nest box, and we had our first Bluebird the day after it was setup! The following year, early 2008, I saw in the Science Center mailing that there was going to be someone speaking about Bluebirds. Bob Warmuth was the speaker, and his message not only inspired me, it motivated me to want to do more for the Bluebirds. So, I went online, to the NCBS website because I wanted to contact, meet, and volunteer my time to assist the County Coordinator. Well to my disappointment, there was no one for Catawba County. After the disappointment quickly subsided, I felt a great pleasure and thought, hey, this is meant for me. This is what I can do to make a difference. I then contacted Virginia Pickles, and I couldn't say no. Thank you for this opportunity to make a difference in the future of Bluebirds.

KRISTIN DZIMITROWICZ

Lenoir-Rhyne College Bluebird Trail Kristin Dzimitrowicz, Catawba County Coordinator

Being the new Catawba County Coordinator for the NCBS, I had a very satisfying and pleasurable first contact from Erin Seiling, Assistant Director of the Reese Institute for Conservation of Natural Resources at Lenoir-Rhyne University here in Hickory. Dr. John Brzorad, Director of the Reese Institute instructed her to go to the NCBS web site to gather information on building a Bluebird trail, and that is how she was able to get in touch with me.

When I first received Erin's message, I was excited – and nervous – with this being my first item of business for the Society. However, I was very pleased with the extent of information Virginia Pickles prepared me with when I first volunteered for this position. With her knowledge and my recent studies, I was prepared to lead Erin in the right direction when we first spoke. Erin explained to me that the University has a 10-acre Nature



Erin Seiling, Assistant Director of the Reese Institute

Preserve on campus where LRU wanted to construct the BB Trail. The preserve is named after Tally O. and Marjorie B. Bowman who were charter members and had left their estate to LRU. Tally was an avid photographer who was a member of the Catawba Valley Camera Club and had taken many shots of nesting birds at his home. Erin went on to explain that the BB Trail would make the Tally O. and Marjorie B. Bowman Nature

Preserve come full circle because of their love of Bluebirds.

With the information Erin supplied to me I was able to apply for a NCBS grant for their Bluebird Trail. The grant was approved and once Erin received the grant she and Joseph White, a rising senior in the Conservation of Natural Resources program, went right to work that same day. All ten nest boxes were in place within a couple of days. There are currently 15 students enrolled in the Conservation major at LRC, and these students will be monitoring the trail. There are also students there during the summer months, and they will continue the monitoring. LRU is planning on increasing the enrollment in the Conservation major to approximately 50 students, in the next 3-5 years.

This was a great learning experience for me, not only in regards to the BB trail, but also with learning about our local University. It was very pleasurable to assist LRU in their effort to help the Bluebird population. I cannot wait to build upon that as a foundation. I have another trail, one for my personal maintenance, already in the planning stage. Thank you, Virginia and Helen, for your assistance with my first project, both of you have been very helpful and informative.



Joseph White, a rising senior in the Conservation of Natural Resources program

North Carolina Bluebird Society

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Please complete this form and send it with your check made payable to "NCBS" to:

North Carolina Bluebird Society
ATTN: David Hindsley
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Tarboro, NC 27886

I am interested in:

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 _____ Helping with the newsletter
 _____ Conducting a bluebird workshop
 _____ Contacting my local paper with news
 _____ Volunteering to be a NCBS County Coordinator
 _____ Other (please explain)
- _____
- _____

Contributions to the Newsletter

Sharing Bluebird information and stories make this an unique publication

Please submit to: Helen Munro, Co-editor
 22 Bobolink Rd. Jackson Springs, NC 27281
 Phone - (910) 673-6936 Fax - (910) 673-7345
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Slide Programs, Videos and books can be borrowed,
 Please Contact: Hank Moss, Jr.

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Special for On-line Memberships

Every effort is made to keep the cost of printing and mailing four newsletters a year down. Members that choose an on-line membership enjoy the beautiful bluebirds pictures in color and contribute to maintaining the current dues because the newsletter is NCBS' major expense.

The on-line members' list will be sent to Christine Ammons and you are invited to order two *Bluebirds, Inside the Nestbox* DVDs for the price of one (\$13). These make great Christmas gifts, are easy to wrap and even ship.

The VHS version is being phased out, but twenty-five have been ordered. They are \$16 each including shipping, but on-line members may order two for that price. The VHS tapes will not be ordered again. Due to the popularity of the DVDs, the cost of the VHSs has doubled.

Anyone wishing to switch to an on-line membership should email David Hindsley at jdhind@earthlink.net.

Bluebird Books

The shelf above my computer is full of books about bluebirds. They are my helpmates when the phone rings or the email arrives with bluebird questions. Each one is a little different. Each one has valuable bluebird information in it.

Captivating Bluebirds Exceptional Images and Observations by Stan Tekiela. 2008. 142 pages. ISBN 1-59193-073-1. List Price \$14.99. This is the most recent addition to my bookshelf. It is a collection of photographs by the author mixed with informational text. This makes it easy to read and the pictures are delightful.

The Bluebird Monitor's Guide by Cynthia Berger, Keith Kridler, Jack Griggs. © 2001. 128 pages. ISBN 0-06-273743-0 Cost \$18. Here are some of Jack Finch's contributions to bluebird monitoring along with many others.

Bluebird Trails, A Guide to Success by Dorene Scriven. © 1999 Third Edition. 210 pages. ISBN 0-9639661-1-1. Cost \$14. Created by the Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota. This guide is a wonderful source of bluebird information based in part on the bluebird surveys submitted by 500 bluebird monitors.

Enjoying Bluebirds More, The Bluebird Landlord's Handbook by Julie Zickefoose. © 1993. 32 pages. Published by Bird Watcher's Digest. Cost \$5. This booklet contains much information in a small space. It includes thirty-nine plants for bluebirds.

Bluebirds Forever by Connie Toops. © 1994. 128 pages. ISBN 0-89658-249-3. Cost \$25 to \$35 depending on whether it is paperback or hard cover and where you buy it. Woven around nine bluebird trails that were visited in 1993 and full of beautiful photographs, this book manages to include practical information presented beautifully.

Mountain Bluebird Trail Monitoring Guide by Myrna Pearman. © 2002. 56 pages. ISBN 0-9685765-2-4. Cost \$5. Even though the emphasis is on Mountain Bluebirds, there is much information that applies to the Eastern and Western Bluebirds.

Bluebird Book, The Complete Guide to Attracting Bluebirds by Donald & Lillian Stokes. © 1991. 96 pages. ISBN 0-316-81745-7. Cost \$17. I bought my original copy in a national park, but this is one that you will find in many local bookstores. Again, it is filled with many pictures and reliable bluebird information.

Which one to buy? Which one to read? Which one is the best? It is a matter of personal preference.

The North American Bluebird Society (www.nabluebirdsociety.org) carries all except the books by Connie Toops and Stan Tekiela. It is their prices that are quoted here. This does not include shipping. Amazon.com has used copies of some of these. Libraries and local bookstore are sources of these and other bluebird books.

Helen S. Munro, Editor



Letters from Eden, A Year at Home, in the Woods by Julie Zickefoose is technically not a bluebird book, but bluebirds steal the show with the first painting titled "Winter." Julie combines her talents as a naturalist, artist and author to bring us this collection of essays describing her world as it progresses through Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall. The events did not happen all in one year.

When Julie spoke to the North Carolina Bluebird Society meeting in April of 2001, she told the story of Big Fergus, a bullfrog in her water garden. I was delighted to read Big Fergus' story in the chapter called "Paradise Lost." Big Fergus learns to eat more than insects!!

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