



Nest Box News

www.southcarolinabluebirds.org



South Carolina Bluebird Society
An Affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society

Volume 2, Issue 2
Fall 2013

A Tale of Two Owls

By: Terry McGrath

Inside this issue:

President's Message	2
SCBS Directory	
Feathers & Fluff From Terry	3
My love/hate relationship with Mother Nature	4
Events & Meetings	5
Tales from the Trail	
Ask Dr. Ron—"What's wrong with this picture?"	6
What's in <u>your</u> backyard?	7
Barred Owl Brigade, Part 2	8
Owl brigade pictures	9



It started innocently enough—an early morning walker snaps a picture of a screech owl peering out of a nest box in Hitchcock Woods. SCBS member Ron Brenneman sees the picture and traces it to a donation of two screech owl boxes that were installed in the Woods five

months earlier. The nest box held a mom and four fluffy nestlings, and a plan was "hatched" to band the nestling owls. Dr. Lehr Brisbin, Senior Ecologist/Emeritus at the SREL, was contacted and with the logistics of a well thought out mission, Ron and I, along with Bennet Tucker, Eric Green and Ben Henderson, a 2nd year student in Wildlife Management from Horry Georgetown, met in the early morning of June 3rd to carry out the mission. We hit a small snag (problem, not dead tree) in a mix-up of dates, but on June 4th we reconvened and set out for the nest box and the hopefully unsuspecting occupants. We arrived at the nest box site and got busy setting up for the banding. Ron set his ladder, donned his gloves and with a cloth bag climbed about 10 feet to the nest box. He stuffed the bag over the entrance hole and carefully slid the door open to find...**NOTHING! NADA! ZILCH!** The family apparently fledged less than 24 hours earlier! Disappointed, yes-discouraged? Never! Little

did we know when and where our next adventure would take us. Fast forward to the second part of my tale on page 8...



My favorite weather is bird-chirping weather...



Loire Hartwoud





From The President... *Jim Burke*

Fellow Bluebirders,

Looks like we have had a great year for bluebirds and other cavity nesters. Trail monitors have been busy tabulating their data and giving it to Ron Brenneman. We hope to have this project completed no later than the middle of November. We completed the year with 51 trails and 532 nest boxes. Speaking of Ron, now that the North American Bluebird Society (NABS) has made it public, Ron will be receiving a conservation award from NABS during the October 5th dinner. Be sure to congratulate him next time you see him.

Preparation for the 2013 NABS Conference continues at a good pace. The City of Aiken, Aiken Downtown Development Association, Greater Aiken Chamber of Commerce and Aiken Center for the Arts have been very supportive. There are currently 140 people registered representing 21 states, Canada and Germany. Twelve attendees are coming from California. A special thanks to Mary Schultz, our resident Excel wizard, for organizing all of the volunteer information. There have been enough artwork and other items donated for the silent auction and door prizes that if we put half of it away we could do this conference again next year. On the other hand, maybe not!

Don't forget to lend a hand to Terry McGrath (T-Bird) with the newsletter. You can help by sending her your photos, articles, happenings on your trail or backyard nest boxes and suggestions for the newsletter.



SCBS DIRECTORY

Officers

President

Jim Burke/jimburke271@gmail.com

Vice President

Maggi Howard/mhoward@golflady.us

Secretary

Mary Schultz/shultzim@gmail.com

Treasurer

Tim Bendle/tim.bendle@gmail.com

Directors

Steve Baker/sjbaker614@aol.com

Tom Dix/tomdix2011@gmail.com

Glen Hendry/gwhendry@hotmail.com

Debbie Reed/reeddebbie@bfusa.com

Bluebird Trail Committee

Ron Brenneman/birdbflies@aol.com

Roger Brock/rwbrock@mac.com

Glen & Gail Hendry/gwhendry@hotmail.com

Membership

Sharon Burke/sharonburke271@gmail.com

Public Relations

Tiajuana Cochnauer/tiwayne1@hotmail.com

Website

www.southcarolinabluebirds.org

Webmaster

Karen Raine/caveguru@yahoo.com

Facebook Page Editor

Nancy Moseley/fmoseley@bellsouth.net

SCBS Newsletter Editor

Terry McGrath/mcgrathjtl@atlanticbb.net

Feathers & Fluff
From Terry



Happy Birthday

Whether a hatchling, nestling, fledgling, or egg—we're happy you all are in our nest!

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO EVERYONE WHO HATCHED
in July, August and September!!**

Cornell University called on viewers' of their popular nest cam sites to send in pictures, art, poetry, etc. to their **Funky Nests in Funky Places** contest. With Donna Lee Houle's open cup bluebird nest pictures (Summer 2013 SCBS newsletter) and my poem, "Home Is Where The Nest Is", we were one of the 900 entries shown on their website. Go to [Cornell Lab of Ornithology - Celebrate Urban Birds](#), click on [Browse Funky Nests in Funky Places](#) here. You'll find the entry on page 10 in the [Most Inconvenient](#) category. Great fun! So grab your camera and snap a pic of your funky nest and send it in for Funky Nests 2014.

By: Terry McGrath



As we go to print, 36 members of Aiken's SC Bluebird Society have registered to be a part of The 36th Annual NABS Conference on Oct. 3rd-5th. An additional 37 members have graciously donated their time and energy behind the scenes! And 100% of our members have given us a big "thumb's up"!

Pass it on!



Find **Bluebert** and get a \$5.00 gift certificate from **Birds & Butterflies**. Email Terry McGrath at mcgrathjtl@atlanticbb.net with your guess!

REMEMBER TRAIL MONITORS: Your buckets, notebooks and pink tabulation sheets should be turned in to Ron at **Birds & Butterflies ASAP** so we can start compiling our 2013 trail statistics...
Thank you!

At press time, we still have room for a few people for the excursion into the jungles of Costa Rica for an unforgettable birding adventure!
CONTACT: Jennie Mechanic



The Travel Mechanic
803.335.1411

jennie@thetravelmechanic.com



May 3rd-10th, 2014



My Love/Hate Relationship With Mother Nature



*Mother Nature can
be so cruel*

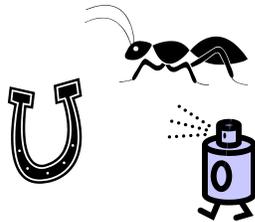
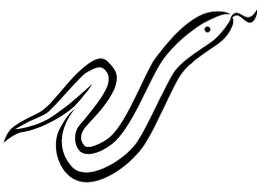
*She gives us blue-
birds, Nature's jew-*

els

*Then we do a double
take—*



*For
now she's given us a
snake!*



Looking back at my second season as a trail monitor at Equine Rescue Center, I can't help having somewhat mixed feelings. After a great year in 2012 with variety of birds and the success of each brood, 2013 finds my trail stats very different. First was the relatively late start of nesting—mid April in some boxes. Then came the snakes and fire ants. I lost several nests due to "Who knows what?"—which gave me great frustration and feelings of helplessness. I had a box fail on the second brood due to the door being open—5 nestlings gone and only a scattered nest remained—the parents didn't try again. On the up side, my wood ducks went crazy with 117 eggs between two boxes (two broods each) and the birds that did fledge, (I would like to believe), were made of a very sturdy countenance! I'll be back next year, armed with ant control, snake repellent, and an ever present attitude that, maybe this year, Mother Nature will be on my side!

The Bluebird and the Coyote—Native American Lore

A long time ago the Bluebird's feathers were a very dull ugly color. It lived near a lake with waters of the most delicate blue which never changed because no stream flowed in or out. Because the bird admired the blue water, it bathed in the lake four times every morning for four days, and every morning it sang:



There's a blue water.
It lies there.
I went in.
I am all blue.

On the fourth morning it shed all its feathers and came out in its bare skin, but on the fifth morning it came out with blue feathers. All the while, Coyote had been watching the bird. He wanted to jump in and catch it for his dinner, but he was afraid of the blue water. But on the fifth morning he said to the Bluebird: "How is it that all your ugly color has come out of your feathers, and now you are all blue and sprightly and beautiful? You are more beautiful than anything that flies in the air. I want to be blue, too."

"I went in only four times," replied the Bluebird. It then taught Coyote the song it had sung. And so Coyote steeled his courage and jumped into the lake. For four mornings he did this, singing the song the Bluebird had taught him, and on the fifth day he turned blue as the bird. That made Coyote feel very proud. He was so proud to be a blue coyote that when he walked along he looked about on every side to see if anyone was noticing how fine and blue he was. Then he started running along very fast, looking at his shadow to see if it also was blue. He was not watching the road, and presently he ran into a stump so hard that it threw him down upon the ground and he became dust-colored all over. And to this day, all coyotes are the color of dusty earth.



Member Meetings

Sept. 24, 2013 7:00 p.m. at Birds & Butterflies

Board Meetings

Nov. 4, 2013 6:00 p.m. at Birds & Butterflies

**Nature Series-at Birds & Butterflies
7pm**

Tues. Sept. 10th Snakes of the Southeast: How Do You Know Who is Who?

**Tues. Oct. 8th Ancient Life in Aiken-
Fossils in Our Area (NEW)**

**Sat. Oct. 12th Hitchcock Woods Field
Trip 9a.m. (Rain date: Oct. 19th)**

Tues. Nov. 12th Images of the Polar Regions (NEW)

Events

Oct. 3-5, 2013 36th Annual NABS Conference



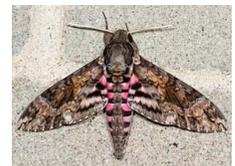
Tales From The Trail

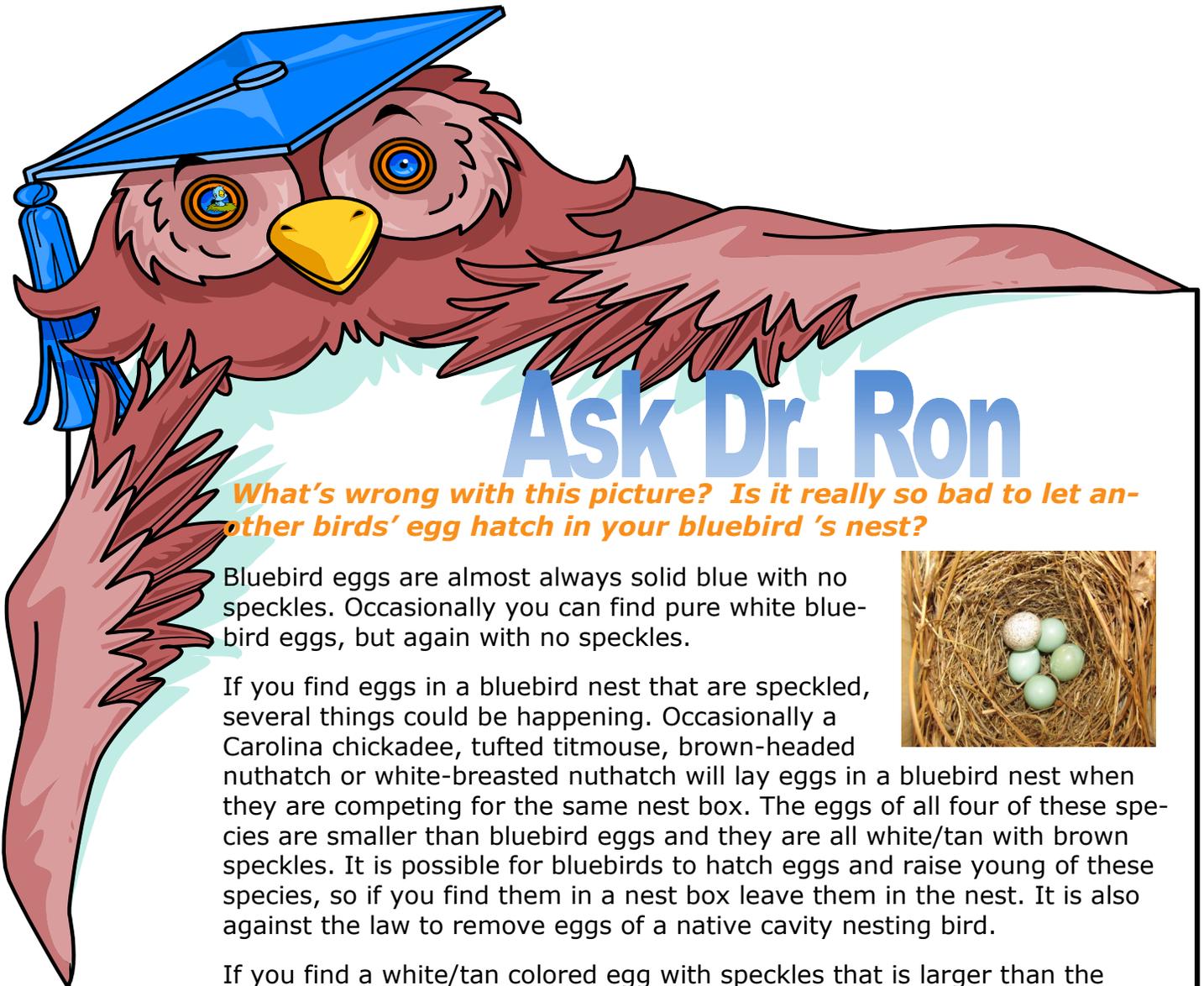
By Thomas Brandner, SCBS member

Putting netting around the poles holding the bluebird nest boxes **does** work to stop snakes. I have caught four rat snakes on my eight bluebird boxes at Prayer Island Park. One of the houses had been cleaned out the week before, but must have still had the smell of bluebirds in it. The snake was dead as it was caught in the netting while I spent two weeks in Alaska. The other three snakes took two people to cut them loose—these were not small snakes; they were very strong. I relocated them away from the nest box area.



Usually, I have Carolina chickadees in my bluebird boxes along with Tufted Titmice and bluebirds. The Carolina chickadees have **not** been nesting this year in my houses. The Tufted Titmice are doing well. The Damselflies came out at the usual time this year, but not the dragonflies. They were not seen until after July 4th, but are now making up for a slow start! Also, the butterflies were slow to show up, but now it is not uncommon to see, at one time, five butterflies up close! Hawk moths, which look like small hummingbirds, have been active during the day. The Sphinx moths (which are the size of hummingbirds and look just like them) come up at sunset and stay active during the





Ask Dr. Ron

What's wrong with this picture? Is it really so bad to let another birds' egg hatch in your bluebird's nest?

Bluebird eggs are almost always solid blue with no speckles. Occasionally you can find pure white bluebird eggs, but again with no speckles.



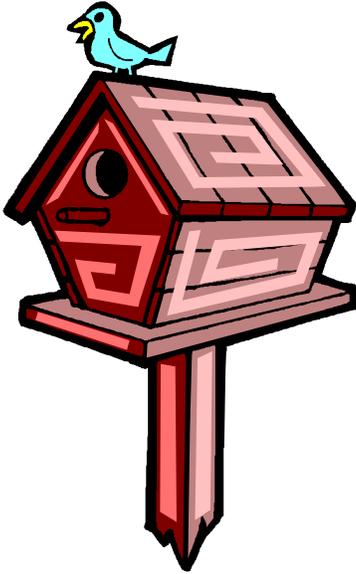
If you find eggs in a bluebird nest that are speckled, several things could be happening. Occasionally a Carolina chickadee, tufted titmouse, brown-headed nuthatch or white-breasted nuthatch will lay eggs in a bluebird nest when they are competing for the same nest box. The eggs of all four of these species are smaller than bluebird eggs and they are all white/tan with brown speckles. It is possible for bluebirds to hatch eggs and raise young of these species, so if you find them in a nest box leave them in the nest. It is also against the law to remove eggs of a native cavity nesting bird.

If you find a white/tan colored egg with speckles that is larger than the bluebird egg, it has probably been laid by a brown-headed cowbird. There will be no additional nest material in the box brought in by the cowbird. The brown-headed cowbird is a brood parasite that does not build a nest of its own but lays its eggs in other bird's nests. Cowbird eggs have been found in nests of 220 species of birds including hummingbirds and raptors. One female brown-headed cowbird can lay up to 36 eggs in a season. Some birds will desert the nest if brown-headed cowbirds are laid in them, some will bury the eggs under nest material, others will physically remove the eggs and still others will hatch and raise the young cowbirds. Since the cowbird babies are often larger and more robust than the native cavity nester, the native nestlings may not get enough to eat or get pushed out of the nest. If you see brown-headed cowbird eggs in a nest box you **can** remove the eggs because they are not native birds.

We have had a couple of reports of brown-headed cowbird eggs in SCBS nest boxes this past breeding season. A couple of years ago I found a brown-headed cowbird nestling in a nest of Carolina wrens in my backyard. The cowbird nestling was at least twice as large as the wren nestling.

What's In Your Backyard?

...photos by our members for our members...



Ronnie Hucks of Florence, SC



Nancy Mosley of Aiken, SC

Mike Rupard of Florence, SC



Don Hendry of North Augusta, SC



A loggerhead shrike



The “Barred Owl “ Brigade Tale of Two Owls, part 2...

It was a dark and stormy night...okay, it was really a sultry, steamy morning. We met early (7:30 a.m.) on June 27th, between rain showers, at Hitchcock Woods to check the location and condition of three barred owl nest boxes that were placed in the woods a decade ago.

Success with the first screech owl nest box brood in April got us going to expand housing for



Ron Brenneman, Marty Foss, Bill Foss, Linda Burgess

more of our cavity nesting feathered friends. The brigade included Ron Brenneman, Bill and Marty Foss, Linda Burgess, and Terry McGrath. Ron was outfitted with a two piece deer stand, and the rest of us schlepped buckets of tools, pine shavings, wasp repellent, ropes, etc. A short hike and Ron found the first box, some fifteen feet up a large pine tree. He fastened the “arm” piece of the deer stand around the trunk of the tree, then the bottom piece. After climbing in and securing his feet in

toe straps, he did a kind of shimmy-pull up the trunk until he reached the nest box. This box, and the other two, netted no recent nest activity (by barred owls) but had evidence of squirrels and a healthy community of wasps! Trying to get the can of wasp spray up to Ron by rope wasn't working out, so Marty gave it a “heave ho” and the can was deftly caught by Ron. A quick spray of the sleepy wasps' nest and Ron was able to clean it out and a bucket of fresh pine shavings was pully-ed up. Coming down looked easier, and after extricating himself from the stand, we headed to the next nest box, which was a repeat of box #1. Locate box, shimmy-pull up, can toss, spray, clean, fresh pine shavings, descend...you get the idea. The third box found our luck running low—Marty's arm gave out, Ron missed the toss, the can almost hit Bill and in his hurry to duck, he slipped and knocked over the bucket of tools! The spray can tumbled down a ravine. Terry slid down to retrieve it, and Linda tossed her a vine to pull herself up! And did I mention that it is now raining cats and dogs? Ron quickly descended, we gathered up the buckets, and traversed some really sticky mud and small rivers to get back to our cars! Results: in 90 minutes three freshly prepared nest boxes for barred owls, 66% success rate for Marty and the can toss, five *extremely* wet SCBS members, and a heckuva good time!

Barred Owl Brigade, *continued from page 8*



Hello, up there!



A few repairs...



A turtle out for a morning stroll



Barred Owl Facts

Large, stocky owls with rounded heads, no ear tufts and medium length rounded tails.

Large black eyes

Brown streaks on belly, brown and white mottling above. Easier to hear than see

Barred owl species call "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?"

Readily take to nest boxes in mature forests of deciduous trees and evergreens, near water

Facts courtesy of Cornell Lab of Ornithology



That's one big wasp nest!

Like us on Facebook! For answers to your questions and membership information to the **South Carolina Bluebird Society** and the **North American Bluebird Society** go to:

<http://www.southcarolinabluebirds.org>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/SouthCarolinaBluebirdSociety>



South Carolina Bluebird Society

P.O. Box 5151

Aiken, SC 29803-5151

TO:

