



NESTBOX NEWS

Newsletter of the South Carolina Bluebird Society
(An affiliate of NABS)

southcarolinabluebirds.org



JULY 2025

President's Letter:

Has it been *HOT* enough for you lately? I believe that YES is the answer and remember that the heat can be harmful to our Monitors and our Blue feathered friends. So please be careful out there. Stay hydrated, wear a hat, apply sunscreen, and stay as cool as possible.

It is hard to believe that only a few months ago we experienced Hurricane Helene and the devastation it caused. Our Bluebird and general habitats and summer food sources are slowly returning, helped by all the rain, but still not 100% what it was. But Mother Nature has a way of healing and recovering. Plus, we were blessed to not have very many nestboxes or trails destroyed. Many thanks to all those who got them up and productive in a short time.

So far, with only about 40% of our trails reporting, we have fledged over 2,600 new cavity dwellers, of which over 1,900 are Bluebirds, so remember to get your monitoring data to Glen Hendry ASAP. We still have a few weeks to go in this season, and several third broods are now underway. Based on the current reported percentage this could be another record nesting season. We are well on our way to possibly having 7,500 + new cavity dwellers, of which 4,000 could be Blues. Such numbers helped us recently achieve our 50,000th New Bluebird since we founded SCBS in 2010. We also have several reports of White BB Eggs again this year always a treat.

Your Board of Directors sends a big KUDO to *Kevin Rice* of Beaufort. Kevin is an active member and serves as a true "Low Country" representative for SCBS. He is instrumental in educational presentations and works closely with our Treasurer, David Slaunwhite, to deliver and install nestboxes across the Beaufort / Charleston / Low Country areas. THANKS KEVIN FOR ALL THAT YOU DO FOR SCBS.

And speaking of members we are also pleased to recognize Dr Michele Vieyra. Dr Vierya is Professor of Biological, Environmental and Earth Sciences at USC – Aiken. She also instructs and guides our Junior and Senior Bluebird Scholarship recipients - students of "The Vierya Lab" - who monitor a 21 nestbox "Research Trail" on campus and assist us with various Bluebird research projects. She is joining our BOD in August. THANKS DR. V and Welcome to SCBS BOD.

Deby Stewart is currently working closely with our Membership Coordinator, Deborah Slaunwhite. She is learning the membership ropes and will be assuming the coordinator role full time in October. Many thanks to Deborah for expanding and managing this vital role for us and to Deby for stepping in to continue this very important function. MUCH APPRECIATED DEBY AND DEBORAH.

If you would like to join our Board or become more involved in educational presentations, please contact me or any BOD member

Until next time ... I / we wish you "Happy BB Trails" and do be careful and safe out there.

Cheers....Mike

Mike DeBruhl



In this issue:

- President's Letter
- The Doctor Says
 - Articles
 - Peanut Gallery
- Spotlight on the Trails
 - Pictures

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Send us your pictures,
articles and stories
about your bluebirds to
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SOUTH CAROLINA BLUEBIRD SOCIETY



THE DOCTOR SAYS...

An Article by Dr. Michelle Vieyra

Too Hot to Hatch? How High Temperatures Undermine Bluebird Nesting Success



photo credit: birdwatching.com

After our first big heat wave of 2025, with temperatures touching 100°F for several days straight, many of us probably wondered how the high heat might be affecting our feathered friends. Particularly how it may be impacting their nesting success. Sadly, high heat can be detrimental at every step of the nesting process.

Impacts from high heat exposure begin at the very beginning, with sperm production. A study done with Zebra Finches in Australia gives us a good approximation of what could happen in our local songbird males. These finches, who are used to a hot, arid environment, were exposed to 104°F temperatures for 8 hours a day. After just 3 days there was a sharp decline in the proportion of normal, motile sperm. The authors noted that sperm production, from initial cell division to fully functional mature sperm, takes 11-13 days in most birds. High heat exposure at any point could result in a decline in the number of quality sperm produced. In the Eastern Bluebird mating occurs many times over a period beginning several days before the first egg is laid, and continuing until the last egg is laid. Just a few days of high heat at any point up to two weeks prior to, or during, this mating period could compromise a male Bluebird's ability to fertilize the eggs.

Even if eggs are fertilized successfully, the next high heat threat is to the developing embryo within those eggs. The optimal incubation temperature range is 96.8°F to 102°F. Temperatures over 105°F are considered lethal and extended exposure to temperatures between 102°F and 105°F can cause developmental problems. Even short periods outside of the optimal range can reduce incubation time, resulting in smaller nestlings that are less likely to fledge. After hatching, high temperatures can disrupt nestling growth leading to smaller fledglings that are less likely to survive.

Given the possible consequences of high heat, it is a wonder that we see any success at all in our boxes during the summer months. Mama bluebird does have a few tricks up her wing to help mitigate the effects of higher temperatures on her eggs and chicks. She can position herself within the nest to block light or leave the nest entirely to allow eggs or nestlings to cool down. Both parents can regulate their own body temperatures by panting (which is called gular fluttering in birds) and bathing and can help their chicks stay cooler by feeding them the juiciest insects.

There are also a few things we can do as nestbox guardians to help. Boxes should be made of a light-colored wood, constructed with adequate ventilation holes, and placed in an open, but mostly shaded location, not adjacent to dark surfaces. (Late last summer our lab recorded an internal box temperature of 125°F in a box located in full sun next to an asphalt parking lot!) Providing the parent birds with a close source of

clean water will help them stay cool, and if you are supplementing with mealworms, make sure they are alive and well hydrated. Some nestbox guardians attach umbrellas or blocks of ice to their boxes. While there isn't much research showing how well these techniques work, they probably don't hurt. If you do try one of these novel approaches think about adding a small digital thermometer to the inside of box (they are pretty cheap online) and let me know what you observe.

Sources to check out:

Hurley LL, McDiarmid CS, Friesen CR, Griffith SC, Rowe M. 2017. Experimental heatwaves negatively impact sperm quality in zebra finch. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 285(1871): 20172547.

Horacek CG, Powell W, Stumpf KJ. 2024. Temperature affects nest box selection, nest success, and nestling size in a Southeastern population of Eastern Bluebirds. *Georgia Journal of Science* 82(2):7.

Corregidor-Castro A, Jones OR. 2021. The effects of nest temperature on growth and survival in juvenile great tits (*Parus major*). *Ecology and Evolution* 11: 7346-7353.

Rodriguez S, Diez-Mendez D, Barba E. 2016. Negative effects of high temperatures during development on immediate post-fledgling survival in great tits (*Parus major*). *Acta Ornithologica* 51: 235-244.



Dr. Michelle Vieyra is a Professor of Biology at USC Aiken. Her undergraduate lab maintains and monitors 31 nestboxes on the USCA campus in collaboration with the SCBS.



Out My Backdoor: A Chorus Made by (and for) Early Birds

4/21/2025

The Carolina wren is one of the many species singing in the dawn chorus (Ty Ivey, GNPA)



By Terry W. Johnson

(Editor's note: This updated version of a 2018 column explores the amazing spring event called the dawn chorus.)

Whenever we talk about what makes spring such a glorious time of the year the discussion invariably turns to spring's well-known virtues. The pleasing scents and kaleidoscope of colors displayed by spring flowers. The many green shades of the foliage. The pleasant weather.

Unfortunately, rarely is the dawn chorus – performed by some of the bird world's most accomplished vocalists – mentioned. Yet it is Mother Nature's most extravagant musical production of the year.

This oversight is probably because the magical event is unknown to all but the inveterate birders. You can blame, too, the fact that most Georgians have yet to stumble out of bed when this songfest is staged.

The dawn chorus commences long before the first rays of sunlight appear on the eastern horizon. Often, the songs start at about 4 a.m. In my neck of the woods (middle Georgia), the American robin often sings the overture. As the minutes pass, more and more birds begin their solos. Before long, the air is rich with the songs of countless birds. The cacophony peaks about an hour before daylight, then subsides, ending when the countryside is bathed in the first full light of day.

During this special time, the air is awash with songs vocalized almost exclusively by the males of scores of birds. These include the northern cardinal, Carolina wren, northern mockingbird, brown thrasher, vireos, eastern bluebird, wood pewee, wood thrush and many more.

The dawn chorus can be enjoyed daily throughout the entire spring. Since it begins before the first neotropical migrants arrive, fewer birds will be heard early in the spring than after the long-distance migrants arrive.

One thing I find amazing is this performance takes place in rural locales, suburban neighborhoods, cities and deep forests alike. I have enjoyed it in serene hardwood bottoms and large subdivisions. While I expect to hear a plethora of birds in or near woodlands, I have been pleasantly surprised how many birds I have heard singing in subdivisions. Although the variety of songsters performing in this seriously altered habitat is limited, the number of individual birds that participate in those choruses has been surprising

The songs of the birds contributing vary widely. However, each male bird has two things in mind: He is putting all other males of his species on notice that he has staked out a breeding territory and they should not even think about coming into this realm and trying to lure prospective mates away.

The second thing is that each male is announcing his presence to females in the area. It seems the females are attracted to males that display the loudest, finest and most energetic vocalizations. It is remarkable that the females can distinguish the calls of one male from another. To us, the songs uttered by each male of a species might seem identical; however, the females can detect the slight nuances between the songs.

I would be willing to bet those turkey hunters who ease into the woods long before daylight comes and gobblers leave their nighttime roosts hear the dawn chorus far more often than any other group of outdoor enthusiasts. To me, listening to the dawn chorus is one of the bonuses of hunting wild turkeys.

However, you don't need to be a turkey hunter to enjoy this amazing event. Regardless of where you live in the county, you don't even need to leave home to hear it.

If you haven't heard the dawn chorus and you're not adept at identifying birds by their songs and calls, download the free bird identification app called Merlin onto your smart phone or tablet. The Cornell University app will identify all of the birds you are likely to hear. Once your phone or tablet detects a song, the name and picture of the songster appears.

I am certain that the number of birds that are calling will surprise you. In addition, knowing the names of the birds singing adds a whole new dimension to your enjoyment of the event. Over time, it will also help you learn to identify the different species without the aid of [Merlin](#).

If you want to be present at the next dawn chorus, set the alarm clock for well before daylight. Then go outside, sit down in a lawn chair and listen. Don't be discouraged if you do not hear many birds when you take your seat in nature's concert hall. If you have the patience to sit through the concert until the last note is sung, you will probably be astounded there are so many birds within earshot.

In fact, do not be surprised if you are left asking yourself whether the dawn chorus is a symphony or what the father of wildlife management, Aldo Leopold, described as bedlam.

Terry W. Johnson is a retired Georgia DNR program manager and executive director of The Environmental Resources Network, or TERN, the friends group of [DNR's Wildlife Conservation Section](#). Check out [past columns](#), his [Backyard Wildlife Connection blog](#) and his book "[A Journey of Discovery: Monroe County Outdoors.](#)" Permission is required to [reprint a column](#).



Our Rescue Stories

by Greg & Shirley Myers

For several years we have had cameras in our nestboxes. We monitor all nests from first through last stage. This monitoring is an added treat to watch the development and process of our feathered friends. Over the past 16 years we have saved a number of various young bluebirds on a few occasions including these:

After only three days something happened to the mother and the five young babies were turned over to the father - who could not singly provide adequate food:

1. We brought the five babies indoors to a "make-shift" nest and started hand feeding them (live worms). Note: Our neighbor, Mike DeBruhl advised that the trick in getting them to open their beak is "Just a short whistle" that sounds like their Mom or Dad. It worked like a charm.

After two days of feeding and comforting, we took them to the Wildlife Rescue center in Columbia who took over from there. All were saved & released.

2. Our second occasion involved a snake / predator entering the box ready to feast but thankfully, before it could grab the eggs it triggered the motion camera alert. We immediately dashed out, pulled open the door and jerked that little monster out and relocated him far away. To prevent future occurrences, we installed several nestbox defense mechanisms including double baffles, netting below the baffles, & sharp tacks circling the pole to prevent snakes from crawling up. Mike called it "a Bluebird Fort Knox".
3. The third happened this past week, when a bluebird nest (7 days old) was heavily infested with mites. They were moving about and visible on our screen. One of the four young ones died and the other three were covered with hundreds of mites (which can be fatal to young birds). So just before turning in we viewed the screen again contacted Mike DeBruhl, then dressed up into makeshift "protective suits" - - similar to what they wear at nuclear plants 😊. Our dangerous & complex Rescue Plan" was very similar to what you might see from the Pentagon:

- ☐ Pa Greg was in charge of pulling out and discarding the old nest, and thoroughly cleaning out the box.
- ☐ Ma Shirley was in charge of moving the babies to a bucket, blowing off all mites, confirming all were well, and applying DE dust on the babies' backs, then placing them into a new dry nest.
- ☐ Note: during this entire process we were concerned that the babies were dead. They remained motionless, but Mike advised that they do "play dead" as their defense tactic.
- ☐ Pa Greg constructed a dry nest in a small box.

- ☐ Ma Shirley then placed them into the new dry nest and put the nest back into the nestbox.
- ☐ Mom and Dad Bluebird soon returned and began feeding them 🐣.
- ☐ All three did great and fledged one week later SUCCESS !

Greg & Shirley Myers also are the ones who rescued “Blinky” the owl.

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Those Darn House Sparrows!



By Charlene Talcott, State Coordinator
(Virginia Bluebird Society)

House sparrows (HOSP) are a perplexing problem for Eastern Bluebird (EABL) monitors. HOSP are an invasive species introduced in 1851 to control caterpillars on linden trees. They quickly spread across North America and have become a nuisance species. They multiply quickly, having 3 or 4 broods between May and August.

They will enter boxes intended for EABL and kill any birds inside, including eggs, nestlings, and their parents. Sometimes a deceased bluebird is incorporated into the HOSP nest. Because they are designated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as invasive and a nuisance species, it is legal to kill HOSP and to destroy their nests and eggs.

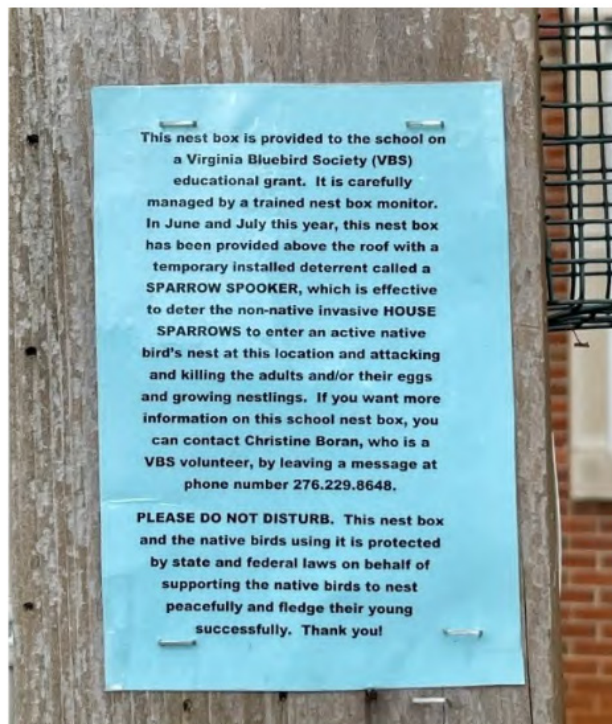
An email conversation about HOSP recently took place between Virginia Bluebird Society (VBS) County Coordinators (CC). Their answers were compiled into this article. Several Coordinators found that two-hole nest boxes offer protection for the EABL. When a HOSP enters a one-hole nest box with a sitting EABL, the nesting bird is trapped. The two-hole boxes allow EABL to escape when a HOSP enters. The EABL can then attack the HOSP outside the box and usually drive it away.

More information about the types of “Two Hole Mansions” can be found here: [Nestbox Styles: Pros and Cons - Sialis.org: Info on Bluebirds & Other Small Cavity Nesters](#).

Some CC mentioned duct taping the holes closed if HOSP nesting activity is detected. This seemed to work for many; however, when I tried this on the trail that I monitor, within days the HOSP pecked on the tape until they had a hole big enough to enter.

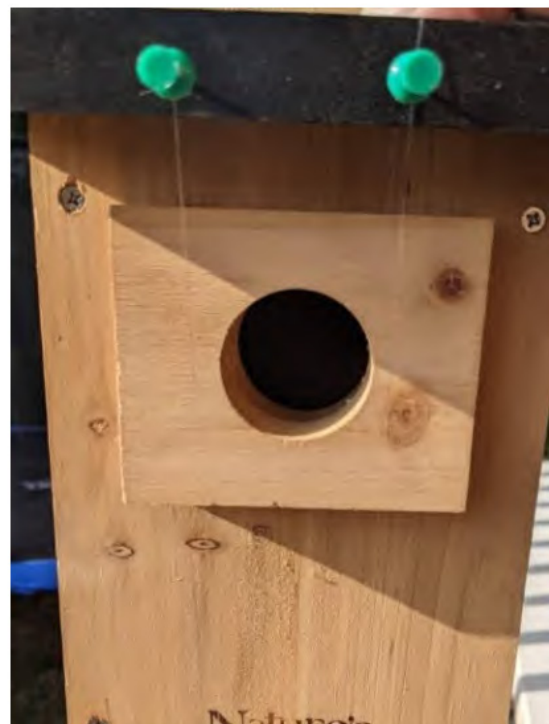
There was discussion about using fishing line. This is accomplished by hanging fishing line from two nuts above the entrance hole and seems to deter HOSP without deterring EABL. This is illustrated in the accompanying photo. However, there was concern that the bird could become entangled. Therefore, careful observation is needed. More information can be found here: [How to Deter House Sparrows with Fishing Line \[Illustrated Guide\] - Bluebird Landlord](#).

Christine Boran battles house sparrows at Woolwine Elementary. For years she used VanErt traps. This year she added a sparrow spooker and was concerned that someone might misinterpret the spooker and remove it. She added this sign to the side of the box.



Above left:

Christine Boran posted this sign on a bluebird box to explain the spooker that was added to deter House Sparrows.



Above right: Sparrow spookers on a bluebird box.

Both Christine and Anne Little add the following information about sparrow spookers: once the nestlings fledge, the spooker should be removed immediately so that the House Sparrows do not become accustomed to seeing the spooker on that box. (Permanently installing a spooker and leaving it during the full nesting season is not as effective to deter HOSP.) The bluebirds will indeed re-enter the box with the spooker still on the box. They are not spooked by it much due to the bluebird's keen eyesight. Being seed eaters, House Sparrows have poorer eyesight and tend to be cautious of the "scare tape" used on the spooker, as the mylar tape reflects sunlight, flashes, and moves from breezes. The mylar scare tape has a bright shiny silvering on one side with color on the other side, which creates the flash effect. Also, the spooker should be installed after the bluebird first egg is laid because it solidifies/encourages the bluebird's bond to stay with that nest and not possibly abandon it.

Another suggestion was to lower the boxes to about 3 to 4 feet high, which seems to deter the HOSP.

Interrupting the HOSP nesting also seems to work. Removing the HOSP eggs and putting in artificial eggs tricks the mother HOSP into thinking that she is incubating. After a while, she realizes that her "eggs" are not viable. This takes observation as she will soon build another nest and lay eggs, which must be replaced again with artificial eggs. Another tip was to addle the eggs so that they cannot develop. This also takes regular observation as the mother will abandon the clutch at some point and lay more fertile eggs.

I took over a trail that was unmonitored for 2 years. House Sparrows were persistent. They even pecked through the duct tape that I put up. I found putting an empty 20 oz water bottle inside the box deters them (so far). It will be removed later to allow nesting by other species.

Thank you to the following for your contributions to the discussion: Judy Jones (CC Williamsburg), Brion Patterson (CC Rappahannock County), Christine Boran (CC Patrick County), Anne Little (CC Fredericksburg), Joni Carlson (CC Surry County), Donna Haley (CC Roanoke), and Valerie Kenyon Gaffney (CC Prince William County).



PEANUT GALLERY

A Question from Grier in Aiken:

I have an abandoned nest at my house. The male was killed I believe. Just dispose of the eggs, I guess?

Thank you.

Grier

SCBS Response:

Thanks for your inquiry and sorry to hear about your nest being abandoned.

I am assuming that the nest is of Bluebird ... How many eggs do you have and how long have Mom and Dad been missing? If the nest has been abandoned and no adult bluebird activity for over a week or so If the eggs have been sitting for 3 weeks without hatching, then it is safe to assume that the nest has been abandoned. If so, thoroughly clean out all nesting material (usually pine straw) and the eggs, placing them in a plastic bag and disposing of the bag into the garbage. Then brush out the nestbox and, if you have it, sprinkle the floor of the nestbox with some Diatomaceous Earth (DE) to deter any insects. DE will not harm the birds. 😊

Hopefully, you will have another nesting soon.
Cheers



PEANUT GALLERY

SCBS Successful Upload of 2024 Nesting Data to Cornell NestWatch

Hi Glen,

Thanks so much for your patience. I can confirm that your data is now all uploaded into your account for the South Carolina Bluebird Society. Please [take a look](#) and let us know if anything doesn't look right.

Thanks again for your support and participation in NestWatch!

Holly Grant (She/her)

Project Assistant

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[Cornell land acknowledgement](#)

SPOTLIGHT ON THE TRAILS



John Helmick at Winthrop Polo Field, Aiken, SC

From Student to Steward: My Path into Bird Conservation

John Helmick - 22 June 2025

My name is John, and I am 17 years old, and I am a homeschool student with a deep interest in wildlife conservation. I became involved with the South Carolina Bluebird Society after completing a yearlong ornithology program at Pinizy Swamp Nature Park. Through that experience, I gained a strong foundation in bird identification, ecology, and conservation. I also participated in bird banding and field studies at several local sites, which gave me valuable hands-on experience. These classes deepened my interest in ornithology and inspired me to take an active role in protecting native bird species, especially the Eastern Bluebird.

Wanting to stay involved after completing the ornithology class, my mom and I searched for a local program where I could continue contributing, and that's when we found the South Carolina Bluebird Society. One of the most meaningful ways I've been able to help is through my work on the Winthrop Polo Field with the Bluebird Society. While helping maintain the field, I saw firsthand how open, grassy areas can serve as valuable nesting and feeding habitats for bluebirds and other native species. My responsibilities included clearing brush and maintaining the habitat, so it remained a safe space for the wildlife. It was incredibly rewarding to spot bluebirds actively using the space we worked hard to preserve.

This hands-on experience not only deepened my appreciation for habitat conservation but also strengthened my commitment to the mission of the South Carolina Bluebird Society. Working on the polo field reminded me that even small, local efforts can make a meaningful difference for wildlife.

SPOTLIGHT

ON THE TRAILS



MY TRAIL

Hello..... I'm Bryce Murray and I am a member of the SCBS (South Carolina Bluebird Society). I have my very own trail at Boyd Pond, which has more than a dozen boxes.

I'm going to highlight a few of the most productive boxes. The first box I'm going to tell you about is box #13. This box was moved from sitting on a fence post. Number 13 was never a high producer and was recently attacked by a snake who devoured six eggs. Since moving it, this box is now on its second brood, and we only moved it about 20 yards.

The next box (#10) is on its second brood, which has three young with one egg still to hatch. We will have to wait till next week to remove the egg if it has yet to hatch.

Box #18 had a live fledge, which means that when my grandfather and I opened the box, all the babies flew out of their nest and flew up to their parents. That was exciting to see for the first time!



Doug Woods, Mark Rettig (Bryce's Grandpa) and Bryce Murray

The last box I'm going to tell you about is Box #20, which is on its second brood. What's exciting about this box is both broods were white eggs. It's exciting to see nature in action from nest building, to laying eggs, to hatching, growth and flying away.

My trail summary:

first, second, and most of third brood:

25 fledged

8 babies

10 eggs (right now out of the 10 eggs, there are 4 white eggs).

A special thank you to my best bluebird friend, Mr. Woods, and my supportive grandfather, for mentoring me. I love this incredible society!

AND KEEP ON BIRDING!!

PHOTO GALLERY

Katharine Shapiro



Harriette Edmonds

Glen Hendry

Harriette Edmonds



Glen Hendry

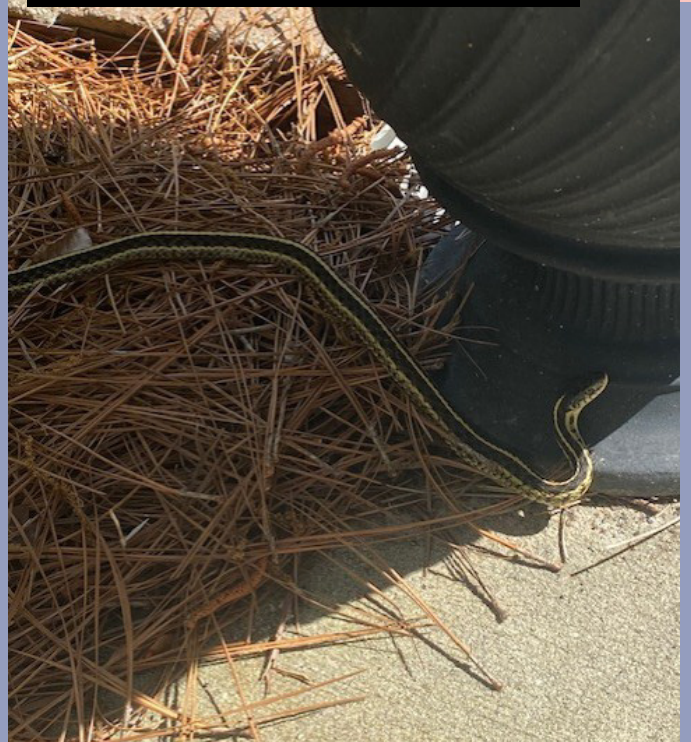


Doug Woods



Mike DeBruhl

Glen Hendry



Vanessa Swartzbaugh



Mary Jo Dawson



Elisabeth Allen



2025-04-20 17:22:15



Rich Duloft

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We appreciate your support and will continue to spend your membership dues responsibly to ensure the continued viability of the Bluebird population in South Carolina and adjoining states.

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MISSION:

To engage in such educational, scientific and charitable pursuits as may be beneficial to the prosperity and well being of the three species of bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting bird species.

The South Carolina Bluebird Society is an affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society (NABS). NABS needs your support to continue their mission in Canada, Bermuda, and the USA.




Mandy Gubsch

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Cozy spaces & beautiful artwork

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