



the Sand Bluff Birder

the official newsletter of the Sand Bluff Bird Observatory—online edition

March 2023

President’s Message

The signs are here! Listen and you may hear the melodious song of the House Finch and the *cheer, cheer, cheer* of the Northern Cardinal. Look for the Red-winged Blackbird, one of the first migrants to return to our area, and flocks of majestic Sand Hill Cranes. Spring is coming and SBBO is gearing up to greet it.

We reopen in March. Come join us in welcoming Spring!

——Ivy Otto
President SBBO

Bluebird Monitoring

——by Ashlyn Rogers

It is hard to sum up my experience bluebird monitoring at Colored Sands Forest Preserve in just one article. Sure, I could give you the numbers and statistics, but there is so much more that went into it.

For those of you who don’t know me, my name is Ashlyn Rogers. I just finished up my AmeriCorps term as the Community Science and Volunteer Management member at Severson Dells Nature Center. I have also had the amazing privilege and opportunity to volunteer here at Sand Bluff Bird Observatory for part of the spring and all of the fall season (2022). The other volunteers have taught me so much in such a short time and have made me feel at home here and part of the little “SBBO family”. As part of my AmeriCorps duties, I was also assigned to monitor the nest boxes at Colored Sands Forest Preserve as part of our Bluebird monitoring program.



My first time at Colored Sands was the day I was training my two fellow bluebird monitors, with whom I

would share the responsibility of ensuring the success of our native birds. We were all first-time monitors, even though I was training them. As we made our way around the loop of nest boxes, we found that many of them were falling apart, missing, or otherwise not up to par. I made notes of each one and, also of all the houses not properly represented on the map I had been given. Luckily, my co-monitors were patient with me and were unphased by all the is-



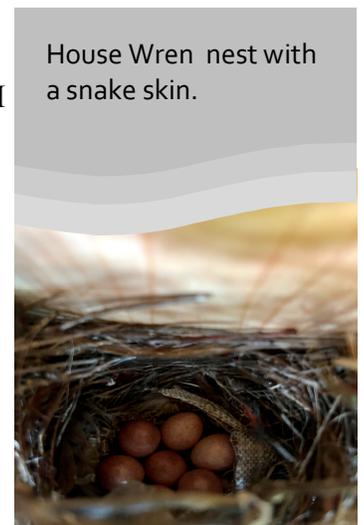
Eastern Bluebird babies



House Wren nest with a snake skin.

ssues presented to them.

Armed with several new houses, tools, and a wagon, myself and one of the other monitors returned and took on the task of getting Colored Sands’ bluebird boxes taken care of. Several hours and replaced boxes later, we now had 20 nest boxes to monitor, about 10 more than we had been able to consider usable before. We were also able to collect all the coordinates and I created a more accurate and up to date map of the area. Now we were ready for the season to begin. (continued on page 2)



Retraps and Encounters

Every banding season the question is, “What returns have we received of birds we banded in past seasons?”

2022 was a year with several migrants that returned to the Sand Bluff area. In birds that we recaptured, most notable, was an Eastern Kingbird caught in the spring originally banded in 2011 during Lee Johnson’s watch making it at least 11 years old. 2018 saw the return of a Gray Catbird and American Goldfinch. 2019 we had two Field Sparrows, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak and an Indigo Bunting.

Encounters are also of special interest as these birds were either captured at other stations and released alive or found deceased for various reasons. On the encounter list is a Slate-colored Junco found deceased in Chippewa County, Wisconsin and a Gray Catbird from Stephenson County, Illinois, a window strike. A Northern Saw-whet Owl we banded in 2021 and aged as an after-second year (ASY) female was captured at Hawk Ridge in northern Minnesota and released alive. We just must wait and see what we get this year.

If weather cooperates, we hope to put nets up March 4 or 11. Plan on a visit to Sand Bluff, but first check the weather and call to make sure we are open.

Until then good birding.

Mike Eickman, Station Master

Bluebird monitoring, continued

I must admit, the first few weeks were quite discouraging. We didn’t see many bluebirds, but we were constantly removing the nests and eggs of House Sparrows, an invasive species that competes with our native cavity nesters. But after a while, the House Sparrows seemed to start giving up (or possibly had found someone else’s house to occupy). We began to see the neat, grass nests of Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows addition to the twig nests of House Wrens. Our native birds seemed to be thriving!

It was such a pleasure to be able to watch the nest boxes as they went from empty, to an incomplete nest, to a nest with eggs, then fuzzy little chicks! And of course, the most satisfying part, seeing the empty, flattened nest left behind by the ones who had successfully fledged. Though we can’t know where they end up once they leave the

nest, we ended the season with the gratification of knowing that we helped 21 Eastern Bluebirds, 9 Tree Swallows, and 35 House Wrens fledge this year.

As a Wildlife Biologist and a Naturalist, I couldn’t help but also be grateful for all the time this allowed me to spend outside, taking care of our cavity nesters, but also admiring the occasional snake, raptor, bumblebee, and so much more. *(All photos provided by Ashlyn Rogers)*

Motus Update

Dave Huffman

The Motus station is up and mostly operational as of January 2023. It made it through the cold and winds of late December after replacing the battery. After an initial data extraction, some troubleshooting of the receiver configuration and operation was required, although the antenna and physical installation were working as expected. In consultation with Mike Avara of the Ward Avian Ecology Lab at the University of Illinois and a scientist with Sigma Eight, the manufacturer of the Ares receiver, our goal is to resolve the configuration issues and be well-prepared for the start of migration. Stay tuned for further updates.

SBBO Annual Meeting

The 2023 annual meeting of the Sand Bluff Observatory was held January 14 at 10:00am at Severson Dells Forest Preserve. Nine board members plus guests attended. General business was conducted concluding with election of Dave Huffman, Stacy Taritas and Sharon McCoy to the Board of Directors, as well as, re-electing all Officers to another term: Ivy Otto, President; John Longhenry, Vice President; Stacey Clark, Secretary; and Deb, Eickman, Treasurer.

Tree Swallows



Tree Swallow nest and eggs



PLEASE HELP US ... in any way you can

Our non-profit organization survives because of private contributions of time and money from friends just like you. Please examine the list below and help us continue our important banding program by making your contribution!

Please return this form to: Sand Bluff Bird Observatory, P. O. Box 2, Seward, IL 61077 or donate through PayPal on our website: sandbluff.org

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2022 Volunteers and Donors

Despite continuing Covid-19 concerns throughout 2022, SBBO volunteers carried on operating the banding station with a smaller dedicated group. The estimated value of a volunteer hour in 2022 was \$29.95, up \$1.41 from 2021. The goal is to resume volunteer recruitment as we all learn to live with Covid risks. In the fall, drop-in visitors were once again allowed in the building on Saturday and Sunday mornings to observe with masks optional for both volunteers and visitors. An invitation only Donor Breakfast was held October 15 preceded by an Owl Night with fewer participants. It felt wonderful to welcome guests again for having visitors was sorely missed since the spring of 2020! And our generous donors continued with unreserved support. Thank you one and all.

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Founders Memorial Library/NIU/retirement gift

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P. O. Box 2
Seward, IL 61077



Barometer Earthstar at Colored Sands, photo by Ashlyn Rogers

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR CLASSES AND GROUPS

This spring, SBBO is easing back into allowing small groups and drop-in visitors to observe banding.

Thursday or weekend mornings, groups of 10–15 can schedule a “group presentation” with a suggested donation of \$5 per person. Smaller groups may join the general visitors.

Call Kathy Hoel (pictured), 815-877-2938 or e-mail

kathyhoel6@gmail.com/subject: SBBO group visit, for details and to reserve your spot. Allow 1½ hours to watch the banding process and visit the nets.



Photo by Thelma Bottum

Here's How To Reach Us!

During Operating Hours: 815-629-2671

Mailing Address: Sand Bluff Bird Observatory
P. O. Box 2
Seward, IL 61077

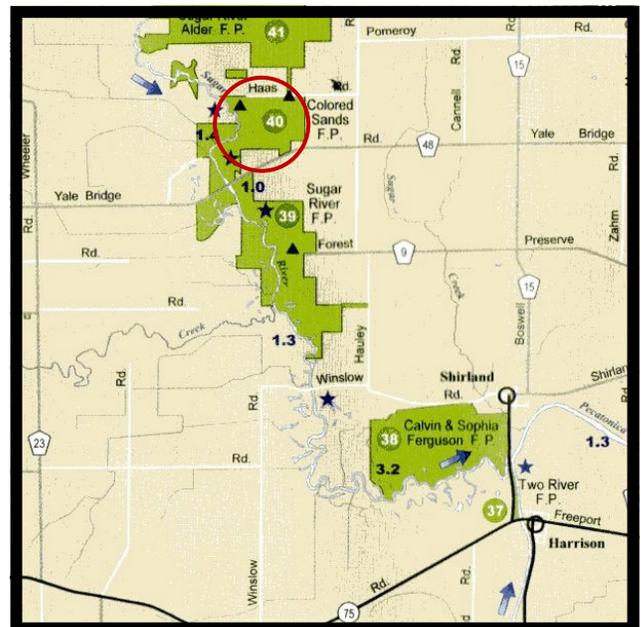
GPS Address: 10602 Haas Rd, Rockton, IL

Be sure to visit our website at: www.sandbluff.org



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