



Dean and Ray install the first new home



Dean, Ray, and Makayla

## **Brunswick Wildlife Scouting for Bluebirds**

From the beginning it was a family affair. I was to meet Dean Deviney and his father, Ray, at Brunswick Town to discuss restoring the bluebird trail. The whole family showed up...including Trenna and Makayla, Dean's mother and sister. My initial impression was later confirmed by Trenna: "Makayla and I have been involved. We've tried to make it a family project and it has given us the opportunity to work together and spend more time together".

Dean needed to complete a leadership service project as part of achieving Eagle Scout rank. He is a member of Boy Scout Troop 207 of Winnabow and is beginning his twelfth year in scouting. Ray is a committee member of the Cape Fear Council, Brunswick District and has been very involved with scouting since Dean started as a Tiger Cub in 1997.

In February, Dean asked the folks at Brunswick Town for suggestions. They decided their biggest needs were rebuilding bluebird boxes, picnic tables, and benches plus adding a couple of wood duck boxes.

Brunswick Town's staff directed Dean to me for advice on bluebird trail redesign and, in early March, we met onsite to complete the design of the project and receive approval from Brenda Marshburn, Brunswick Town's Director.

Dean, Ray, and several other scouts started on the bluebird trail first. The plan was to clean existing boxes of wasp nests and previous year's bluebird nests, trim brush well away from the poles, construct new bluebird boxes using an improved design, and then gradually replace the old boxes. The scouts also plan to provide ongoing maintenance.

The new design features improved ventilation, metal protection plates to keep woodpeckers from enlarging the holes, and the installation of baffles to deter snakes. Snakes are good climbers. If box poles lack baffles or brush grows too near the box, snakes may climb in and prey on the bluebirds.

Everyone who owns bluebird boxes should note these potential problems. Your boxes should be monitored and these conditions corrected as part of normal box maintenance.

Execution of the plan was not as straight forward as the plan itself. Getting birds to cooperate is as difficult as herding cats. Breeding activities had to be taken into account. After the old boxes were cleaned, the team had to ensure they were not being used before replacing them. For example, a Carolina Chickadee quickly grabbed a box that had been cleaned but thankfully was finished with it before the replacement box was ready.

Later two old boxes suddenly had new nests in them, delaying replacement of those boxes. They were nicely constructed nests but were never used...probably built by a Carolina Wren.

Male wrens usually choose the initial site and may then build several nests; however, females make the final selection. In our case, she did not choose one of the boxes and, after waiting ten days to ensure no eggs were present, Dean and Ray were able to replace them.

While few bluebirds have used the trail this year due to conditions, there is hope that some of the new boxes will be used for second broods this summer and all be totally occupied by next breeding season.

The final of the twelve new bluebird houses was installed last week. The remaining deliverables were scheduled for the weekend, to be ready for the scoutmaster's inspection. By the time you read this, Dean will be an Eagle Scout.

"We very much appreciate the Boy Scout's effort. With our budget reductions we need to partner with community volunteers to maintain our grounds and assist as greeters" said Marshburn. Brunswick Town employees, Kent Snyder and Chris Jackson, also assisted with the project and appreciated the help.

The project turned out to be a five-win scenario. The bluebirds and Dean won as did the entire Deviney family and Brunswick Town. Dean stated "I'm confident that the bluebirds now have a safer and better place to raise their young...the new houses have been improved with special protection features."

"There has been a lot of wildlife habitat destroyed in Brunswick County in the last few years" said Ray. "Working on this project with my son has been a great opportunity to give something back to nature."

The fifth win? That would be me. I enjoyed participating but more importantly, it was rewarding to me to see young people learning about nature while they completed a very worthwhile project.

All nature organizations I belong to have identified the need to get more young people involved in birding and wildlife conservation; however, all are struggling with how to do it. I think family may be one of the keys. For you binocular-toting folks out there take a kid birding...even if you have to borrow one from next door.

John Ennis



The “Before” photo: A yellow rat snake was easily able to climb the bare pole



Work-in-progress photo with new baffle installed but the bushes still needed to be cut back



After! Ready for occupancy!