

2013 North American Bluebird Society Conference

Tampa Audubon Society is one of the newest affiliates of the North American Bluebird Society (NABS). My husband, John, and I attended their annual conference in Aiken, South Carolina Oct. 3 – 6. We were mainly interested in learning how other people were monitoring their bluebird trails and dealing with predation. What we learned was that everyone deals with predators and some are more successful than others. We traded stories with people whose bluebird trail had 12 boxes all the way to a huge system of trails in Alberta, Canada that had over 2000 bluebird boxes.

We attended one day of field trips and two days of presentations. On our field trip we hiked in Hitchcock Woods, a nearby managed forest and were told of the importance of controlled burns to maintain the woods in its original state. Red cockaded woodpeckers, an endangered species, once nested in these woods, but no longer, because it had been changed from a pine forest to a hardwood dominated area. Interestingly enough, the woodpecker and bluebirds liked the same open habitat. As a result of changed habitat due to fire suppression, the woodpeckers were completely gone and the bluebirds were no longer abundant.

Our speakers mainly focused on bluebird predation in nestboxes by the predators we have in Hillsborough County, raccoons, snakes, and fire ants. In addition, they discussed other serious predators like the English House Sparrow, which we have not encountered at our Flatwoods Park, as well as house wrens and tree swallows, that don't nest in Central Florida, but are a serious competitor of the bluebirds for their nesting boxes in states north of us. We were pleased to learn that the way we handle fire ants (sprinkling ant bait at the base of the bluebird post) was the recommended way of dealing with them. We also found out that the predator guards that we are using are the most recommended ones and we were fortunate to meet the inventor of that guard, Ron Kingston. We also met with Perry Herpai, Spy On A Bird owner, who told us how to remedy a problem we have had with our cameral poorly transmitting the contents of the bluebird box in the early morning hours at Flatwoods Park.

It was a great conference and a wonderful affirmation of learning that the way we monitor and protect our bluebirds at Flatwoods Park is being done in the most recommended way (thank you Sandy Reed for teaching me the right way to monitor!).

Mary Miller