



Dawn Harry

Hashawha Happenings

April 1, 2011

It's hard to describe the excitement I felt when I saw the first Eastern Bluebird this year. The group of youngsters I was with had to look for a second or two, but when I pointed out the large Mulberry tree he had momentarily perched in, they exclaimed over his bright blue color. There's just something about spotting these beautiful birds that reminds us that spring will shortly arrive.

The Eastern Bluebird is a member of the thrush family and is primarily an insect eater. As berries become more plentiful in the late summer and early fall, bluebirds will incorporate them into their diet as well. Occasionally, bluebirds have been spotted capturing salamanders, tree frogs, and small snakes to eat, too.

From the front windows of the nature center, I can see the bright male birds scouting nesting sites, perching on the nest boxes of Hashawha's bluebird box trail. They will start showing off their nesting site choice to the females in an attempt to attract mates. Once a female accepts the site that a male has chosen, she will begin to build a nest and lay eggs.

Nests are built in naturally occurring cavities such as hollows in dead pine trees or old oak trees. Old woodpecker holes make great nesting sites. Bluebirds will nest heights of 50 feet, but will also make nests in boxes about four feet off of the ground. The nest is lined with fine grasses. The female will lay 2 to 7 light blue eggs and a pair of bluebirds can have more than one successful brood every year.

Unfortunately, bluebirds are facing some tough competition for nesting sites. The introduction of the European Starling and English Sparrow (both cavity nesters, too) led to a decline in native bluebird populations. Both of these invasive species can be extremely aggressive and out-compete bluebirds for their nesting sites.

Thanks to "Bluebird Trails", like the one at Hashawha, the bluebird population is recovering. All over the country, folks are hanging and monitoring bluebird boxes, hoping that they can provide a safe place for bluebirds to nest. Sometimes, other species, like House Wrens and Black-capped Chickadees will take up residence in a bluebird box, too. All of these species are beneficial and fun to watch as the egg-laying season progresses.

At Bear Branch, we have already cleaned nest boxes, repaired broken boxes, and evicted unwanted nesters, like wasps. A few folks have inquired about helping us to keep an eye on the boxes, to see what species we attract and how many bluebirds successfully hatch. We can still

use some volunteers to help with Bluebird Monitoring, though. If you think you'd like to lend a hand, give us a call at Bear Branch and let us know!

There's a lot of blue in this park right now and I'm keeping my fingers crossed that it will be another successful year for the Eastern Bluebird at Hashawha.

March 2011

A SWEET WELCOME TO SPRING

What better way to celebrate the beginning of spring than a stack of pancakes served with real maple syrup? Here at Hashawha, that's exactly how we like to celebrate.

On Sunday, March 6th, Hashawha and Bear Branch Nature Center will be celebrating the unofficial start of spring with the Annual Maple Fest from 10:30am to 4:00pm. Admission is \$3/car. Breakfast will be served all day (\$4/plate) and other food concessions will be available later. Great activities will be available for the whole family. Living History programs will be on-going at the Martin Cabin. There will be an area for children's crafts and activities. Our birds of prey and other animal friends will be on hand to celebrate, too!



We are all pretty excited. But you might be asking yourself why anyone would hold a festival right at the beginning of March.

The weather is unpredictable and the ground is muddy. And even though the days are getting a little bit warmer, the nights are freezing. That's okay. It may not be the most favorable time of year, but it is a great time to make maple syrup. It's the only time to make maple syrup, actually.

The cold nights and warm days signal to the dormant maple trees to start producing sap. The sap is mostly water, but there is a small percentage of sweet sugar that the tree produced last spring and summer. When the days got shorter, the tree lost its leaves and stored sugar in its roots. Now that spring is coming, the trees are beginning to move that sugar back up towards their branches where leaf buds are getting ready to burst with new leaves.

For generations, folks have been tapping trees and collecting sap to boil down into sweet syrup. Not only is it a chance to get out of the house, but making syrup is a fun way to make a tasty treat while getting back in touch with nature.

If you'd like more details about the Maple Fest, give us a call at Bear Branch- (410)386-3580. Come on out to the park, beat the 'Cabin Fever', and celebrate the sweet start of spring. To comment on this blog entry, please email bearbranch@ccg.carr.org