

From the Natural Resources Stewardship Cm

It Takes a Village to Raise a Bluebird

By Mary Freudenberg (for the NRSC)

Did you Know? There are close to 80 bluebird houses strategically positioned around Connestee. Each house needs a good cleaning before the bluebirds' nesting season begins. And, if it weren't for the unofficial "Clean Team," this important work would not be possible.

On Wednesday, February 18th, Tom Reinke and I set out to do our part by cleaning out the bluebird houses (aka. bluebird boxes) on the golf course. The sun was shining and, although it was windy, the temperature in the low 50s made it fairly comfortable to be outdoors. Although it wasn't a "birdy" morning, we heard and saw some robins, red-bellied woodpeckers, dark-eyed juncos and our resident red-shouldered hawk.



Tree Swallow Nest, Photo Credit Amy Hopperstad, USFWS. The popularity of the bluebird has been a boon to the tree swallow, which nests in holes of exactly the same size as the bluebird. Three swallows have taken advantage of bluebird houses over much of North America. Did you know the female tree swallow builds a cup-shaped nest of grass, pine needles, and weeds, lining it with a thick layer of white feathers for insulation?

Cleaning out the 58 bluebird boxes on the golf course usually takes us about 2 to 2 ½ hours to complete. The biggest challenge is staying out of the way of the golfers. This year brought some new squatters to the boxes. Little brown mice were found living in boxes on two different holes. The squatters last year were Southern flying squirrels, which are definitely much cuter than mice. It's a good thing I don't have a fear of mice, because a few of them flew out of the boxes and almost hit me right in the face! This year, we removed a total of 52 nests: 25 chickadee nests, 23 bluebird nests, four tree swallow nests, and a few wasp nests.

In addition to the 58 houses on the golf course, there are bluebird boxes along the driving range and on Wanteska, Atagahi, Ticoa lakes and at the Organic Gardens for a total of almost 80 houses. On Lake Wanteska, volunteer Lorraine Rourke cleaned out the bluebird houses near the dam, and she found a total of three chickadee nests, one bluebird nest and one nest that we think may have belonged to a flying squirrel. On Lake Ticoa, volunteer Lee Allaben, who maintains the boxes and monitors them using NestWatch, reported three chickadee nests, one bluebird nest, and one tree swallow nest with a total of 13 successful fledglings. When my husband and I cleaned out the boxes at the driving range, Lake Atagahi dam, Atagahi park, and the Organic Gardens, we found a total of 17 nests: nine chickadee nests and eight bluebird nests. Because some of the monitoring of these boxes revealed predators getting to the nests, we are exploring options to increase the chances for more successful fledges in the future.

Thank you to all my Connestee neighbors and friends who volunteer their time and do their part in helping Connestee's birds continue to thrive. I'd like to include a special "shout out" to Nathan Owen and his Maintenance team for building the wooden poles, installing the houses and never refusing when I ask for their help.

If you would like to volunteer to monitor or clean-out any of the bluebird boxes, please send an email to cfpoanrsc2021@gmail.com. And for further information, you can go to <https://nestwatch.org/> to learn more about Cornell Lab's monitoring program, which is designed to track status and trends in the reproductive biology of birds, including when nesting occurs, number of eggs laid, how many eggs hatch, and how many hatchlings survive.

Natural Resources Stewardship Committee News (cont.....)

EcoForesters Invasive Species Presentation

By Mary Freudenberg (for the NRSC)

Please join the Natural Resources Stewardship Committee (NRSC) for a presentation on "Invasive Plants in Connestee" on Friday, April 3, 2026 at 1pm in the Hemlock Room at the Activity and Wellness Center. The presentation will be made by EcoForesters, an Asheville-based non-profit professional forestry organization dedicated to conserving and restoring our area's Appalachian forests through education and stewardship.

As most of you know, the NRSC engaged with EcoForesters in 2025 to conduct an assessment of Connestee's forested common areas and develop a Forest Management Plan (FMP), as an extension of the Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) conducted by Equinox Environmental in 2023. The purpose of the FMP is to:

- further explore and define the conditions of Connestee's forests
- identify threats and make recommendations to address these threats
- help Connestee make sound decisions on how to promote ecosystem health and long-term sustainability

One of the FMP's priority recommendations is to address invasive plant species found in Connestee. The presentation will focus on a number of invasive plants, including, but not limited to, Multi-flora Rose, Japanese Stiltgrass (JSG), Asiatic Bittersweet (aka Oriental Bittersweet), Princess Tree and Chinese Silvergrass.

The goal of this presentation is to inform and educate the membership about the importance of identifying and controlling invasive species, and to help avoid bringing invasive plants into Connestee. If we are to be successful in reducing these invasive plant species in Connestee, collaboration and cooperation from everyone is a must. Please

mark your calendars to attend this important and informative presentation.

For further information about EcoForesters, visit the organization's website at <https://www.ecoforesters.org/>

Since Asiatic Bittersweet was found only at a single location on the property, we have a good chance of eradicating it entirely.



Asiatic Bittersweet, photo credit: Leonora Enking.



Red fruit close-up, photo credit: Douglas Goldman, USDA.