

Concerning Other Species

By: Monty Carter

These thoughts I bring before you today are something I've been mulling over for several months now. I've had a growing interest in bird watching as I've gotten older. It's the growth of a seed planted by my father several decades ago. This past year is the first time I've reached out, to get more involved with others that share this interest, by joining the South Carolina Bluebird Society. And while I don't live close enough to Aiken to be at regular meetings (even before the virus put them on hold), I've still been enjoying the connection to a group who shares this interest, not only in our beautiful Bluebirds, but many other native species. The one meeting I was able to attend this year was a good first introduction to SCBS. The quarterly newsletter is always a pleasure to read through as soon as it's published. And the society Facebook page has been a great distraction for sharing photos and information as our cavity nesters prepare the home and raise the family.

It is, however, this last medium which has shown me a mindset perhaps some of us need to reconsider. While we are the SC **Bluebird** Society, it is the stated purpose of this society to aid all native cavity nesters. The Eastern Bluebird is certainly one of the most beautiful songbirds in our region, with a temperament we find endearing, who also provides hours of joyous entertainment. Sadly, this love for our Bluebirds has, in some posts, manifested as disdain for other cavity nesters who compete with our beloved Bluebirds. In recent months, I've seen many posts or comments, indicating a level of open hostility towards other species. The most common of these are about tearing out nests of other native cavity nesters, or even a case of destroying a Mockingbird nest in a bush because they eat the mealworms intended for "my Bluebirds." It is this mindset I wish to address. (I should note, in fairness to our members, some of these posts may come from individuals who aren't in our society, as the Facebook page is open to the public.)

When we put out a nest box, hoping to attract a family of Bluebirds to our backyard, it's not the same as setting out a doghouse for our pet. We don't get to choose who uses it or dictate what happens inside. We're seeking to provide aid in the conservation of our feathered friends. But not just one species, any native bird that chooses our backyard as their home is well deserving of our help. I, like most of you, think the Bluebird is certainly a pleasure to watch from the back window; however, I wish to suggest equal joy can be gained from watching the fierce little Wren (House or Carolina) raise her brood or the spirited Chickadee watching over his family while feverishly bringing in caterpillars from the yard. Every species has its own personality and has every right to compete for the nest box we've provided. Unfortunately, some in our communities need to be reminded that all native birds are protected by law. Even when they're in a nest box we provided in our yard, it's still illegal to harm, harass, or destroy them, their eggs, or their nest.

Therefore, let me make this simple recommendation. When it comes to the competition and interaction between native species, don't feel you need to police them to help your personal favorite. They've been fighting it out amongst themselves for a very long time, before we ever considered getting in their way. They always flourished under that system, until we started destroying their habitat. Habitat loss is the true enemy we're fighting with that box in the yard. So, mount that nest box, protect it with a baffle,

and grab the binoculars for a wonderful show every day, no matter the species that makes your yard their home.