



Raritan Headwaters Association

For Immediate Release: Raritan Headwaters Association and Ethicon Create Bluebird Trail

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Thanks to a partnership between Ethicon and the Raritan Headwaters Association, the Ethicon business campus on Route 22 in Somerville is one step closer to achieving certification from the New Jersey Water Supply Authority as a [River-Friendly Business](#). More importantly, the 84-acre campus is now a place where Eastern bluebirds can easily nest and raise their young!

With guidance from the Raritan Headwaters Association (RHA), associates of Ethicon recently built and installed ten nest boxes in an open meadow on the campus. According to Lauren Theis, RHA's Stewardship Program Manager, the meadow is an ideal habitat for the Eastern bluebird. She explained "Bluebirds like bright sunny locations in meadows with scattered trees and shrubs nearby that they can nest in and perch on as they search for food. Their diet consists mainly of insects – moths, beetles, crickets, caterpillars and such. In the winter when insects are in short supply they consume fruits and berries. Bluebirds make their nests in cavities – abandoned woodpecker holes or other hollowed out areas in trees. Since so much land has been cleared in recent decades for development and wooden fence posts have been replaced with metal fencing, the number of natural nesting sites available to bluebirds and other cavity-nesting birds has been greatly reduced. Fortunately, bluebirds adapt well to man-made nest boxes."

The group assembled the nest boxes a few months ago and then, to celebrate Earth Day last month, they spent one morning setting them up. Theis and her colleague Robert Reid, RHA's Land Steward, directed the installation, ensuring that the boxes were strategically placed to maximize their attractiveness to bluebirds. Again, Theis explained, "Bluebirds are territorial, so it is important that the houses be spaced 100 or more yards from each other. They should be installed with the entrance hole about five feet above the ground. And ideally the boxes should face away from prevailing winds and towards a tree or shrub that is within 100 feet to provide a landing spot for the young bluebirds when they first leave the box. Their first flight is typically very short, so they need a place to land off the ground, away from predators."

Ethicon associates will monitor the nest boxes throughout the rest of the spring and the summer. Bluebirds will likely make nests in the boxes later this month, and they could have as many as three broods during summer. The monitoring will be done on a regular basis to evict any non-native birds that take up residents (House Sparrows like to raise their family in cavities and are very bold – they frequently take over bluebird boxes) and document the success of nesting activities. The efforts of the Ethicon associates will help ensure a promising future for the local population of bluebirds!

About Raritan Headwaters Association

For 52 years, the South Branch and Upper Raritan Watershed Associations served as effective advocates for conservation throughout the 39 communities in Hunterdon, Morris and Somerset Counties that make up the Raritan Headwaters region. The merger of these two organizations in late 2011 strengthens their ability to address today's water quality issues and meet the enormous challenge to protect and provide clean drinking water for future generations. The 470 square mile watershed is home to approximately 900,000 people, is a vital component of New Jersey's water supply system and contains large areas of undeveloped, environmentally significant land. To learn more about Raritan Headwaters Association, please visit www.raritanheadwaters.org or call (908) 234-1852.

Protecting water, and so much more



Photos:

1. Ethicon Associates Vincent Mignone and Jeff Moss work with Heather Barrett of the New Jersey Water Supply Authority to finish getting one of the bluebird nest boxes ready.
2. Ethicon Associates Michael Chung and Pat Keelen place a bluebird nest box into the ground. The shrubby area behind them will serve as perching spot for adult bluebirds as they hunt for insects to feed their babies and as a perch for the babies when they fledge.
3. One of the ten nest boxes installed along a new bluebird trail at the Ethicon business campus in Somerville. The baffle below the box will help keep predators such as snakes and raccoons out, and the ventilated top will keep the nest inside dry while allowing air to flow in and out of the box, keeping temperatures inside from getting too high during the hot summer months.
4. The nest box trail was well-received! Within a few days, one bluebird pair made a nest and the female laid four eggs in one of the boxes.