

## A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit

Use this toolkit to plan book discussion groups or library programs.

Meet Ohio author Julie Zickefoose and learn about the birds she's come to know through the years.

Select from a range of discussion questions and extension activities to deepen the experience of reading and sharing *The Bluebird Effect*.

Discover interviews, informational texts, websites, and documentary videos to explore topics and themes in depth.

# The Bluebird Effect

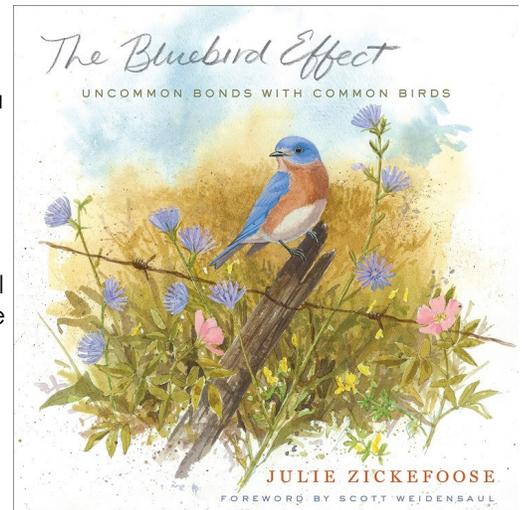
By Julie Zickefoose



## About the Book

Julie Zickefoose lives for the moment when a wild, free living bird that she has raised or rehabilitated comes back to visit her; their eyes meet and they share a spark of understanding. Her reward for the grueling work of rescuing birds—such as feeding baby hummingbirds every twenty minutes all day long—is her empathy with them and the satisfaction of knowing the world is a birdier and more beautiful place.

*The Bluebird Effect* is about the change that's set in motion by one single act, such as saving an injured bluebird—or a hummingbird, swift, or phoebe. Each of the twenty-five chapters covers a different species, and many depict an individual bird, each with its own personality, habits, and quirks. And each chapter is illustrated with Zickefoose's stunning watercolor paintings and drawings. Not just individual tales about the trials and triumphs of raising birds, *The Bluebird Effect* mixes humor, natural history, and memoir to give readers an intimate story of a life lived among wild birds.



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## Book Details

*The Bluebird Effect* by Julie Zickefoose.  
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 2012. ISBN 9780547003092. 384 pages.  
[hmhco.com/shop/books/The-Bluebird-Effect/9780547003092](http://hmhco.com/shop/books/The-Bluebird-Effect/9780547003092)

Available as an ebook through the Ohio Digital Library:  
[ohiodigitallibrary.com](http://ohiodigitallibrary.com)

"[This photo] is me with a screech-owl who rode up to Marietta, Ohio from Texas on a truck in a load of pipe, who was discovered by the driver, dehydrated and exhausted, and referred to me for rehabilitation and release. He'd probably gone in the pipe to roost for the day and got taken on a very long, very cold ride."

-Julie Zickefoose





Biographical information and author photo courtesy Julie Zickefoose, used with permission.

## About Julie Zickefoose

Julie Zickefoose started off as an illustrator of natural history subjects as a college freshman in 1976. A six-year stint as a field biologist with The Nature Conservancy's Connecticut Chapter proved a strong motivator both to learn more about ecosystems and to go back to drawing. Along the way, she began to write her own essays, studded with observations of birds and animals, and writing slowly crept into the forefront of her interests. *Bird Watcher's Digest* has been the major print venue for her writing since 1986. She writes a column called "True Nature," and she's painted 27 covers for the magazine.

Julie's first book of illustrated essays, *Letters from Eden*, was published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt in 2006. The *Bluebird Effect: Uncommon Bonds With Common Birds* was Oprah's Book of the Week in April 2012. It's an amalgam of memoir, natural history, watercolor paintings and life sketches. Her newest book is *Baby Birds: An Artist Looks Into the Nest* (April 2016). It's a groundbreaking work, depicting nestling development day by day, from hatch to fledging and beyond, in more than 500 life-sized watercolor studies. As fascinating as nestling growth is, no one had ever covered it like this. The book received raves in the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times*, as a unique crossover that's as useful to ornithologists as it is to backyard nature enthusiasts.

Julie had a five-year run contributing commentaries to National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* from 2005-2010, telling stories of bird-eating bullfrogs and orphaned hummingbirds. Julie Zickefoose on Blogspot, her natural history blog sustained thrice weekly since 2005, entertains more than 43,000 unique pageviews per month.

Julie and her family live in an Ohio ranch house topped by a 42 foot tall birdwatching tower. 194 species of birds and 78 butterfly species have graced the 80-acre sanctuary to date. Coy-wolves howl nightly; flying squirrels skitter on the deck, and a bobcat has been working on the squirrel explosion under the bird feeders. With a dozen species of breeding warblers and more gardens than any one person should probably try to take care of, Indigo Hill has everything Julie needs to keep writing and drawing for a very long time.

**The last time I saw him, he was perched on the front door awning, peering in the kitchen window at me as I played with our new baby, Liam, on the floor.**

**"Mealworms? Aren't you forgetting my mealworms?" he seemed to say.**

**...That afternoon, he was gone.**

## Author Resources

Julie Zickefoose's official website  
[juliezickefoose.com](http://juliezickefoose.com)

Julie on Instagram  
[@juliezickefoose](https://www.instagram.com/juliezickefoose)

Julie's official blog  
[juliezickefoose.blogspot.com](http://juliezickefoose.blogspot.com)

Julie's YouTube channel  
[youtube.com/user/juliezickefoose](https://www.youtube.com/user/juliezickefoose)

Library Journal interviews Julie about *The Bluebird Effect*  
[reviews.libraryjournal.com/2012/04/in-the-bookroom/a](http://reviews.libraryjournal.com/2012/04/in-the-bookroom/a)

Ohio University's NPR affiliate WOUB interviews Julie (audio)  
[woub.org/2016/11/15/naturalist-and-artist-julie-zickefoose](http://woub.org/2016/11/15/naturalist-and-artist-julie-zickefoose)

For speaking engagement inquiries:

Contact Julie through her website at [juliezickefoose.com/home/contact.php](http://juliezickefoose.com/home/contact.php)



"... I kept hearing a growling sound. Investigating, I discovered that it was coming from the nestling which was being beat about the head by the exerciser's wings. As soon as the first bird settled back into the nest, the growler would rise up and buffet its nestmate for awhile. And so it went."

## Talk About It

Topics to share when discussing *The Bluebird Effect*.

- In the first chapter, Julie recalls spoiling “the Troyers”, a mating pair of bluebirds, with a consistent feast of mealworms. But as she relates, “the superabundance of food brought on overproduction and exhausted their energy reserves,” (page 9) nearly killing them. Have you ever spoiled an animal so much that it jeopardized their health? What lessons can be learned from this kind of experience?
- As happens with most of the birds she interacts with, Julie never knows the ultimate fate of the chickadee runt (pages 36-39). She is simply left with a few clues to round out her glimpses into the bird’s life. How do you think the runt fared after fledging? If you were to take up Julie’s work, would not usually knowing how the stories ended be the hardest part of the job? If not, what would be hardest?
- Weighing in at less than a nickel, tiny ruby-throated hummingbirds migrate thousands of miles each year, flying nonstop across the Gulf of Mexico—twice—and reliably returning to the same breeding grounds (pages 88-90). Is this the most impressive bird described in *The Bluebird Effect*? If not, what is?
- Historically, chimney swifts (pages 116-136) adapted well to the growth of the human population (and therefore chimneys). But with chimney use declining, chimney swift populations are declining as well. This is a rare case in which human development actually benefits wild birds. Can you think of other examples of birds that benefit from human habitation?
- “Piping plover eggs kept disappearing from one small beach in Bridgeport, so I reluctantly took down the signs and string that marked the area. I gathered broken glass off the beach and scattered it near the nests, and the predation stopped. You do whatever works.” (page 181) Do you believe Julie crossed any moral or ethical lines in her efforts to protect the piping plovers of Bridgeport?
- “What does a bird know of gratitude? Perhaps quite a lot more than we think.” (page 212) Can birds like the white-throated sparrow Julie is reflecting on here feel gratitude?
- While discussing sandhill cranes (pages 267-281), Julie explores the topic of hunting, including the often surprisingly complex relationship between hunting and conservation, a link firmly established by the Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937. When is hunting appropriate? What questions should hunters and legislators ask themselves before setting their sights on an animal or authorizing others to do so?
- ***The Bluebird Effect*** contains dozens of stories of “uncommon bonds with common birds.” Have you ever had a similar bond with a creature? What was your “bluebird effect” like? What did you learn?



Sunshine, the “grateful” white-throated sparrow.

## Go Further

Ideas for extending the experience of reading *The Bluebird Effect*.

- The best way to deepen the experience of reading *The Bluebird Effect* is to do some birding yourself! See how many of the species discussed in the *The Bluebird Effect* you can observe. Take notes about your experience to share with relatives and friends. Were your interactions with these species similar to Julie’s?
- If you’re new to the world of birding, there are plenty of resources online that can help you get your feet wet, such as this article by avid birder Nicholas Lund: [audubon.org/news/how-begin-birding](http://audubon.org/news/how-begin-birding).
- Using the subscription research resources freely available to all Ohio residents through the Ohio Web Library ([ohioweblibrary.org](http://ohioweblibrary.org)), research the story of the quest for surviving Ivory-billed woodpeckers. Have there been any developments since the chapter on the species was written?



"Jeff, the young male rose-breasted grosbeak I raised, who came back long after he was released to say hello."

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Choose to Read Ohio, a project of the State Library of Ohio, the Ohioana Library Association, and the Ohio Center for the Book, encourages public libraries, schools, families, and others to build a community of readers and an appreciation of Ohio authors, illustrators, and literature. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits:  
[library.ohio.gov/ctro](http://library.ohio.gov/ctro)

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## Go Further (continued)

- Did **The Bluebird Effect** give you any new awareness of the "bird's-eye view" of your home and the area around it, especially dangers such as cats and windows? Research ways to make your living space more bird-friendly. As a starting point, read Julie's article on how to prevent window strikes, available at: [birdwatchersdigest.com/bwdsite/solve/howto/window-strikes.php](http://birdwatchersdigest.com/bwdsite/solve/howto/window-strikes.php).
- The shocking devastation of New England's osprey population (pages 93-94) was embedded in the public consciousness through Rachel Carson's **Silent Spring**. The awareness that came as a result of **Silent Spring** has saved many ospreys worldwide. Think of an issue that receives little attention today but which could be positively addressed through increased public awareness. What would a book on the topic be titled? Research the topic and write a chapter of that book. Consider checking out a copy of **Silent Spring** from your local library for inspiration. For a list of Ohio's public libraries, go to [oplin.org/fal](http://oplin.org/fal).

## Explore More

Additional ideas and resources to use with **The Bluebird Effect**.

### Bird Watcher's Digest

[birdwatchersdigest.com](http://birdwatchersdigest.com)

Julie has been a frequent contributor to *Bird Watcher's Digest* (BWD) since 1986, and has painted dozens of covers for the magazine. The BWD website offers a free and in-depth bird identification guide, birding podcasts, and more. Non-subscribers are also able to preview the BWD digital edition on the website for free.

### The Cornell Lab: All About Birds

[allaboutbirds.org](http://allaboutbirds.org)

A service of Cornell University's Lab of Ornithology, AllAboutBirds.org will prove highly useful to beginning birders. The site includes a rich array of resources, including audio recordings of bird songs and calls, as well as pictures and videos for identification help.

### John Muir Laws: Bird Drawing Tutorials

[johnmuirlaws.com/drawing-birds](http://johnmuirlaws.com/drawing-birds)

Naturalist, artist, and educator John Muir Laws includes a guide to techniques for drawing birds on his website. For more detail, consult a copy of Mr. Laws' book, **The Laws Guide to Drawing Birds** (ISBN: 9781597141956).

### Ohio Department of Natural Resources

[ohiodnr.gov](http://ohiodnr.gov)

State parks, conservation, hunting, fishing, natural resource management, and more! Whether you're more interested in recreation or regulation, ODNR offers a wealth of information and links. For example, did you know that you have a locally-designated Private Lands Biologist? ODNR can tell you how to reach him or her.



Julie, smiling at winter-plumaged laughing gulls, South Padre Island, TX.

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