

Sialia

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Of
The North American
Bluebird Society



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Sialia means bluebirds. Hence the title of this journal. Technically, *sialia* is the Latinized, neuter plural version of the Greek word *sialis*, a noun meaning a "kind of bird." Since the Eastern Bluebird was the first bluebird classified by Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778), he gave it the species name *sialis*, though he placed it in the genus *Motacilia* which is now reserved for the wagtails. It was William Swainson (1789-1855), who, in 1827, decided that the bluebirds needed a genus of their own within the thrush family (*Turdidae*). He selected the generic name *Sialia* which he simply adapted from the species name *sialis* which Linnaeus had used. Therefore, the scientific name for the Eastern Bluebird is *Sialia sialis* (pronounced see-ah!-ee-ah see-ah!-iss). Similarly, the Western Bluebird and Mountain Bluebird, the two other species within the genus, were named *Sialia mexicana* and *Sialia currucoides* (coo-roo-coy-dees) respectively. Their species names are descriptive of their locations. All three bluebird species are native only to the North American continent, although each inhabits different regions generally separated by the Rocky Mountains and by altitudinal preferences.

While the adult birds all show differing plumages, the young of all three species look remarkably alike, prominently displaying spotted breasts and large white eye rings. This similarity in plumage was the principal reason the Society chose the juvenal bluebird for its logo. Since bluebirds almost always choose to raise their young in small enclosed cavities, a young bluebird sitting near a nesting box seemed to symbolize our mission. The hope of any species resides in its young. Because of bluebird nesting preferences, the survival of their young may depend on the nesting box, especially since natural cavities, for a variety of reasons, are disappearing rapidly. The theme of bluebird young nurtured in man-made structures will be a recurring one in our art and literature. We hope that this theme will remind all about the plight of the bluebird, and will stimulate action which will allow this beautiful creature to prosper.

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Sialia

The Quarterly Journal
About Bluebirds

Volume 11, Number 3
Summer 1990
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COVER

A brood of Eastern Bluebird nestlings is the subject of Art Editor M. Suzanne Probst's drawing.

Sialia welcomes original articles, art and photographs for publication. Although this journal is named for the bluebird, material relating to all native cavity nesting species will be considered. Manuscripts should be typed neatly and double-spaced. All material submitted is subject to editing or rewriting. Submit the original manuscript plus a duplicate copy if you wish to proof the material before publication. If the article has been submitted elsewhere (or previously published) that fact must be stated at the time of submission. All manuscripts will be acknowledged. Black and white glossy photographs are preferred. Print the subject, names of individuals pictured, photographer and return address on the back of each photograph. Art is welcome and should be in black pen-and-ink. We do not assume responsibility for manuscripts, photographs or art submitted. The editor's address is 10617 Graefloch Road, Laurel, Maryland 20723.

Presidential Points

Sadie Dorber

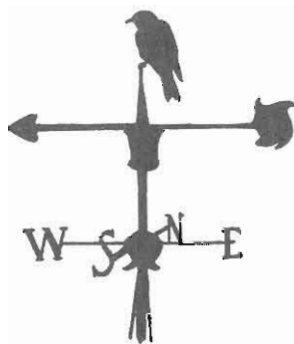
Winter passed quickly and the first of March gave us a week of early summer weather. Though the bluebirds arrived here at about the same time as usual, their numbers seemed higher. Coinciding with their arrival came the rush of slide shows and activities.

For the third consecutive year the Upstate New York Bluebird Society participated in the Northeastern Wildlife Exposition held each March in Albany, New York. This event attracts 45,000 to 50,000 outdoor-oriented people, a receptive group for the society's explanation concerning the plight of our State Bird.

Seminars are offered all day long on various topics; we participate each day with a program about bluebirds. We still chuckle over the seminar I conducted the first year of the Expo. I had been told the meeting room was set up for Trout Unlimited. Imagine my surprise when, upon walking into the room, I found the entire front section contained a large, shallow pool for fly casting!

The first year at the Expo we reached many people that were unaware of the bluebird's struggles. It was heart-warming to all of us working this year as we talked to some of the same people and heard their success stories. Many people that had succeeded in attracting bluebirds sought advice. Many had put up boxes but hadn't seen bluebirds. As we talked to them, we often found out that the boxes hadn't been placed in suitable habitat. Our seminars were very well attended; it was apparent to us that our presence the two preceding years was paying off.

Bluebirder and Purple Martin landlord Don Wilkins of Minnesota stopped at the booth to talk to me. He was visiting near Albany having previously stopped in my home town of Vestal to visit his daughter who, I discovered, lives near me. We decided it's a small world after all.



Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society Meeting

The newly formed Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society held its first meeting in April at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Hamilton, Ontario. Bill Read, of Kitchener, has primarily been responsible for getting the organization started and compiling the nest box reports. Three of us journeyed to Ontario for the weekend to attend the meeting, do a little birding, and glimpse the first spring flowers at the gardens. For me, it was nice to finally be able to put names with faces. Andre and France Dion of Quebec attended along with Norah Lane from Toronto.

The presentations were excellent and several of us participated in a cavity nester game of musical chairs. As much fun as all of us had playing the game once again, I predict it's bound to be a favorite of adults as well as children.

The Eastern Bluebird is listed as rare in Ontario. The devotion and hard work I witnessed at this meeting will play an important part in getting the status of the bluebird upgraded in the very near future.

Research Chairman Appointed

I'm pleased to announce the appointment of Kevin Berner from Cobleskill, New York, as Chairman of the Research Committee. Kevin is Assistant Professor of Fish and Wildlife Technology at SUNY-Cobleskill and an experienced bluebirder. Cobleskill is located in Schoharie County, the leading county in New York for fledging bluebirds. Welcome aboard, Kevin! ■

Testing a Raccoon's Ability to Raid a Nest Box

Kevin L. Berner, Dale McGettigan and Sherry Krieger

Introduction

Raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) are a common predator of Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) and other cavity nesting birds using nest boxes (Read 1989, Dew *et al.* 1986, Zeleny 1976). Raccoons commonly will climb up to nest boxes and remove eggs, nestlings, or even incubating adult birds. Even when raccoons cannot reach into the box, they may harass incubating or brooding adult birds enough to cause nest abandonment.

Numerous strategies have been proposed to reduce losses to raccoons. The most common strategy is to place an added thickness of wood over the entry hole to increase the distance that a raccoon or cat would have to reach into the box. Read (1989) and I have noted that these devices are often inadequate in excluding predators. Fuerst (1988) has proposed that an enlarged roof, 3 in. [7.6 cm] longer than normal on a box, might deter predators. Others have stated that installing a conical metal guard on the mount post or greasing a smooth metal support post would deter raccoons from entering nest boxes (Scriven 1989, Zeleny 1976). Scriven (1989) has also advocated mounting boxes on PVC pipe.

While numerous proposals have been made for techniques to keep raccoons out of nest boxes, few controlled tests have been reported in the literature concerning the effectiveness of these techniques. People have made various modifications to nest boxes or mounts for nest boxes which subsequently were not raided and consequently have felt that they were successful in creating a raccoon-proof box. In many instances, they may only have been successful because no raccoons attempted to gain access to the box.

My goal for this research was to identify what predator deterrent devices actually were effective against raccoons and to identify inexpensive methods for minimizing losses of cavity nesting birds to raccoons.

Methods

I borrowed a captive, but not tame, female yearling raccoon from a licensed furbreeder under a special permit from the New York Department of Environmental Conservation. It was housed in an unheated chicken brooder house and fed commercial dog food pellets from two nest boxes mounted approximately 4 ft. [1.2 m] high on poles within the brooder house. The dog food was approximately the size of a bluebird egg and was placed in an artificial grass nest 3 in. [7.6 cm] high. Some supplemental food was also given to insure a nutritionally balanced diet. A wooden box similar to a Wood Duck nest box was mounted on one wall to provide a place in which the raccoon could hide and conserve heat during cold weather. Water was provided in a large plastic tub and changed daily. During extremely cold periods, snow was provided instead of water.

Initial tests lasting different periods of time were conducted to determine the basic capabilities of the raccoon. In most tests once these capabilities were known, 10 night sampling periods were established. Each night either 75 or 100 food pellets were placed in each of two nest boxes. One box served as a "control" and the second was considered the "test" box. Only one feature was varied between the boxes to insure that differences in feeding rates were due to the box designs or mounts. A variety of box supports and roof sizes were tested. No tests were conducted using greased

poles because the raccoon would have had no grass or vegetation with which it could remove grease from its paws and body. I felt that under these conditions it would be inhumane to subject it to this type of test.

Due to the semi-wild nature of the raccoon, it would not feed or even leave its box during the day or whenever anyone was near the building. As a result, all feeding use was documented by counting the number of food pellets removed after each night of feeding. Damage to boxes was noted and repaired daily.

Results

Raccoon Capabilities

The raccoon readily learned to associate the nest boxes in the brooder house with its food. It quickly developed the ability to remove the dog food from the boxes. The raccoon could remove food from the very bottom of a nest box with a standard 3/4 in. [1.9 cm] wooden predator guard, even when no false nest was present. We also noted that a 7/8 in. [2.2 cm] galvanized water pipe was ineffective in keeping the raccoon from the nest boxes. The pipe was relatively smooth and non-rusted, and attached to the box bottoms with a threaded flange.

Tests were conducted early in the study on a commercial plastic predator guard distributed by Audubon Entities and known as the "Bird Guardian." This 3 in. [7.6 cm] guard extended out from the entry hole. During ten nights of tests, the raccoon removed food material from the control box every night, while the box with the plastic guard was never raided. It appears that these guards would provide excellent protection from predation by raccoons and are sufficiently strong to prevent their removal by the raccoon.¹

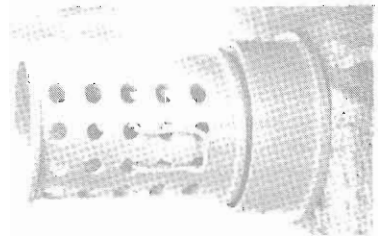
Extended Roof

During the first of the formal tests all features of the boxes were the same

except for the roof size. Both boxes were mounted on 7/8 in. water pipe and were identical, except that the control box had an 8 in. x 8 in. [20.3 x 20.3 cm] roof which overhung the front by 2 in. [5.1 cm] and the test box had a 9 1/4 in. [23.5 cm] wide by 11 in. [27.9 cm] long roof with a 5 in. [12.7 cm] overhang. Neither box was equipped with a predator guard over the entry hole. In the control box, from 95-100% of the test "eggs" were removed over the 10 night period while 0-96% of the pellets were removed from the test box. Removal rates for the test box were far more variable and averaged 63% per night, while the control box lost an average of 97% of the pellets each night. It would appear that the raccoon probably had somewhat more difficulty reaching into the longer roofed nest box, but that its persistent efforts were rewarded. Under these circumstances in the field a raccoon probably still could raid a box with a similar size roof.

Extended Roof with Wooden Guard

In the second formal test all the box characteristics were the same as in the first test, with the exception of the addition of a 3/4 in. wooden predator guard over the entry holes of both boxes. The combination of these two deterrents further reduced the raccoon's ability to raid the nest boxes. In the control box with a standard 2 in. overhanging roof, the raccoon removed from 48-77% of the pellets, averaging 64% removal each night. In the test



A commercial plastic guard known as "Bird Guardian" tested as a raccoon deterrent.

¹Mr. Berner will examine the "Bird Guardian" in an article in a future issue of this journal. Despite its effectiveness in deterring raccoon predation, bluebirds may not accept it.

box, featuring the enlarged roof with the 5 in. overhang, it removed from 15-90% of the feed, averaging 55% removal.

Box Mount

In the next test all variables were identical to the previous test except the mount type. In this test, both boxes had 8 in. square roofs with 2 in. overhang and 3/4 in. wooden predator guards. The control box was mounted on a 7/8 in. water pipe, while the test box was mounted on a slick 1 in. [2.5 cm] PVC pipe. The control box on the metal pipe had from 22-66% (average 49%) of the pellets removed during the

trial, while the PVC mounted boxes had from 40-85% (average 72%) removed over the 10 night period. More food was removed each night from the box mounted on the PVC pipe than from a box on a metal mount. These results would indicate that an ungreased 1 in. PVC pipe is not effective in reducing raccoon predation.

Box Size

The fourth formal test involved a comparison of a 4 1/2 x 4 1/2 in. [11.3 x 11.3 cm] box with a box having a 5 x 5 in. [12.7 x 12.7 cm] floor. Both boxes were supported by the 7/8 in. water pipe. Similar amounts of food were re-

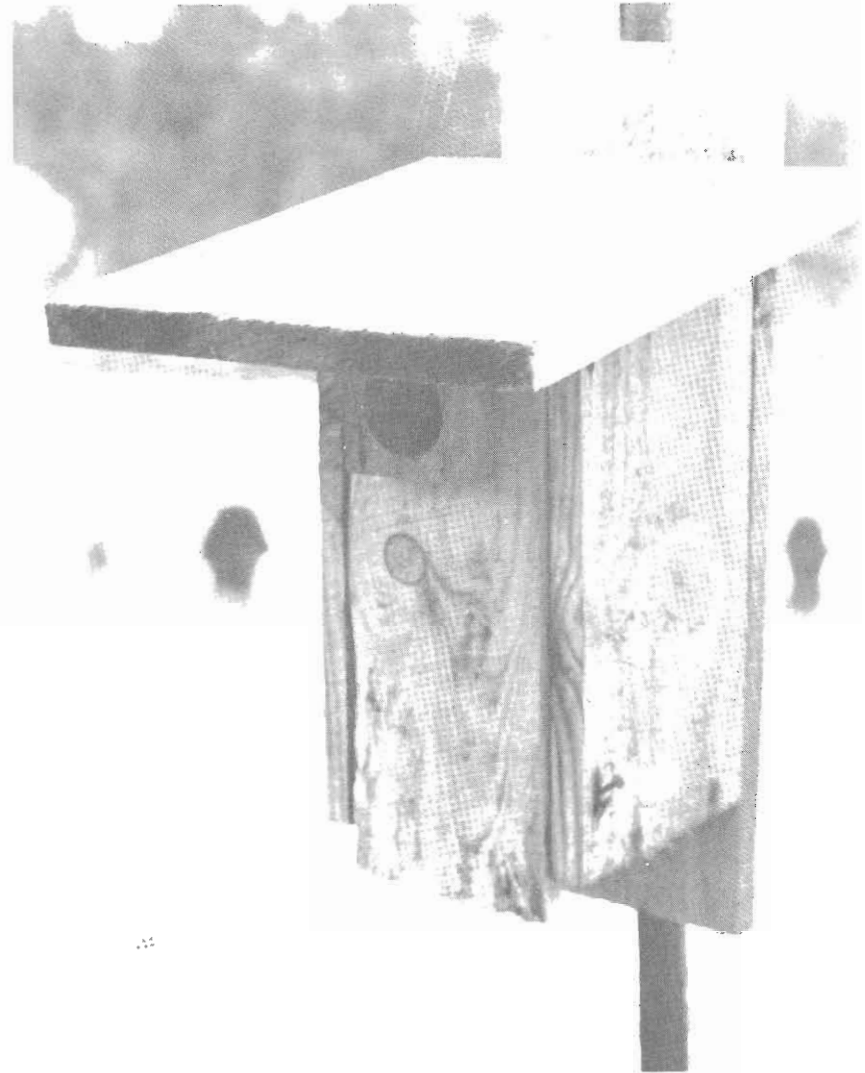


A standard nesting box with a 3/4 in. predator guard.

moved from both boxes on most nights, with the larger boxes being more heavily raided on four nights and the smaller box having more pellets removed on the other four nights. The smaller box had from 26-100% of the pellets removed, while the larger box suffered 26-68% removal. The average number of pellets removed per night was 45% for the smaller box and 47% in the larger box. It did not appear that the larger box significantly increased the difficulty of reaching most of the pellets in the box.

Super-Extended Roof vs PVC Pipe

The fifth test involved increasing the roof overhang from the standard 2 in. to 7 in. [17.8 cm] on a box mounted on 7/8 in. water pipe. The second box had a standard size roof and was mounted on a 3 in. [7.6 cm] PVC pipe. During the first two days of the test the raccoon did not feed from either box. For the next 9 days it removed from 82-98% of food from the shorter roof box mounted on the PVC pipe. In the box with the extremely long overhang, it was unable to remove any food for the



Photographs by Kevin L. Berner

Nesting box with an extended roof (5 in. overhang).

first nine nights. On the last two nights it removed 86% and 73% of the pellets. It would appear that the raccoon was highly challenged by this long extension of the roof. It is likely that a wild raccoon with a similar challenge would not persist in its efforts to enter this type of nest box, but would seek out alternative food sources. Since the captive raccoon had no alternative food sources, it naturally would put an unusually large effort into learning how to defeat this deterrent.

In the sixth test, both boxes had 13 in. [33 cm] roofs which overhung 7 in. [17.8 cm]; however, the control box had a 7/8 in. metal pipe mount and the test box was mounted on a 1 1/2 in. [3.8 cm] PVC pipe. Due to box damage only four nights of valid results were recorded for the PVC mounted box while 6 nights of data are available on the box on the metal pipe. The average use level was 59 and 57% for the metal pipe- and PVC-mounted boxes, respectively. The PVC pipe did not provide any more protection for the box than the metal pipe did. It was noted that the raccoon had apparently mastered the technique of defeating the greatly extended roof.

Conclusions

These tests illustrate the remarkable level of dexterity and intelligence possessed by the raccoon which aid it in defeating the deterrent devices. These abilities make it difficult to protect cavity nesting birds against its attacks. I feel that these tests give a less biased evaluation of commonly applied deterrents than field tests could yield. In many cases a deterrent feature is tried in the field and no further predation is observed. Without controlled experimentation, it is impossible to know if a deterrent actually was successful, or merely if no predator attempted to enter the nest box after the modifications were made.

My goal was to determine which deterrents would be effective against raccoon predation while remaining relatively cheap to use on extensive

nest box trails. Since one of the needs is for inexpensive deterrents, I did not test structures such as costly conical metal baffles or other commercial pole guards. The results of my research challenge the belief of many individuals that PVC or smooth metal pipes serve as adequate deterrent mechanisms, at least when used without grease. The most promising feature that I tested was a long roof extension. This feature completely excluded the raccoon for several days, and probably would be an effective deterrent against most wild raccoons. My field tests described in other reports of four deterrent features under uniform habitat conditions compared extended-roofed boxes to standard boxes in the field for their acceptance by bluebirds. In those experiments, the test boxes used most by bluebirds featured a 5 in. overhang. Thus it appears that extending the box roofs is acceptable to bluebirds and aids in deterring predation. I would recommend that more individuals test extended-roofed boxes as an inexpensive means of reducing raccoon predation. ■

Acknowledgements

The North American Bluebird Society provided a grant to fund this research. We would like to thank Dwight Harpp for allowing us to borrow his raccoon for this study and Nancy Niles for reviewing this manuscript.

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UPDATE: Observations from a "Bluebird Field" in Western Oregon

Elsie K. Eltzroth

In an earlier issue of *Sialia* 9(4): 133,136 Robert L. Altman and I mentioned a special male Western Bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*) on the Audubon Society of Corvallis Bluebird Trail. In 1989, we again approached his territory with cautious optimism realizing that, if he were still alive, he would be in his seventh year. He DID return!

This male, color-banded as a nestling in 1983, had several boxes to choose from on a large ranch. Since 1984 he has nested 10 of 14 times in one box and has had three different mates. There may have been others banded in similar fashion, but we could not identify them individually. Table 1 lists numbers fledged and lost ().

During the 14 years that data have been compiled, third broods have been noted where bluebirds are fed mealworms the year round in special feeders, but this particular site is not suitable for supplemental feeding.

In 1988, as in 1986, this color-banded male allowed another banded adult male to "help" with his second brood showing no aggression or antagonistic behavior toward the younger bird. "B/O" has been prolific. He and his mates averaged 5.1 eggs per clutch and he sired third broods during three of his breeding seasons. Perhaps we should call him "B/O Plenty" after a cartoon character some of us might remember. ■

Table 1. Nesting Record of Male Western Bluebird Banded "Blue over Orange," 1983.

YEAR	BROOD I	BROOD II	BROOD III
1984	3 (3)*		
1985	4 (3)*	7	
1986	7	6 (1)**	5
1987	(5)***	5	
1988	(5)*	5	3
1989	5	(1)* (3)**	3 (3)*
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	19 (16)	23 (5)	11 (3)

* Eggs did not hatch.

** Died in nest.

*** Gopher snake predation.

6980 NW Cardinal Dr.
Corvallis, OR 97330

THIRTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NORTH AMERICAN BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

The 13th annual meeting of the North American Bluebird Society will be held in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, October 26-28, 1990.

This meeting is being sponsored by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources, Bureau of State Parks.

RECYCLING FOR BLUEBIRDS:

1. The California Connection

Dean E. Sheldon, Jr. and Eric P. Mayer

No, this isn't an article about saving aluminum cans and donating the money from their recycling to a local bluebird society. That might not be a bad idea, but someone else will have to write that story. This article describes how to transform an ordinary throwaway item into something that can help save bluebirds. We're speaking of the lowly wooden grape crate which is buried by the hundreds of thousands in landfills from coast to coast. The plans provided in this article show how to make simple but well designed bluebird nesting boxes using recycled grape crate wood. The idea allows for saving precious landfill space, helping a threatened species, and conserving wood resources.

The story begins in 1981. Since that time we've been making bluebird nest boxes of all different shapes and sizes from many different kinds of materials for our north central Ohio bluebird trails. After trying several experimental designs, we finally settled on a box originally developed by Richard M. Tuttle of Delaware, Ohio, the acknowledged Grand Visier of Ohio bluebirding. The design makes for simple building, easy-access monitoring, and easy winterization. Tuttle's design has been adopted by the Division of Wildlife of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR). Plans for the nest box and other information relating to the development of bluebird trails are contained in ODNR publication 339 entitled "Hit The Trail For Bluebirds."

The Tuttle design calls for the front-opening box to be constructed of 1 in. x 10 in. [2.5 cm x 25 cm] white pine. We've made them of white pine and other woods such as tulip poplar, oak, and 3/4 in. [1.9 cm] CDX plywood—all with satisfactory results. Not content with the plain appearance of the box, we began to experiment with the ink-imprinted ends of California table grape crate ends for the front of the

box and predator guard. The ink-imprinted designs are colorful, weather nicely, and seem to have no effect whatsoever on the birds' interest in the box. The grape crate fronts add an interesting touch.

We've given away dozen of these boxes to people interested in backyard bluebirding or trail development. With each box we provide a packet of information on all aspects of bluebird trail management. We always include the "Hit The Trail For Bluebirds" pamphlet and plans both for the Peterson nest box and the side-opening Michigan United Conservation Clubs' (MUCC) nest box. The reverse side of the MUCC plans contains an excellent synopsis of bluebird trail management. The MUCC nest box is constructed from a single 6 ft. [183 cm] piece of nominal 1 in. x 6 in. lumber, usually pine or spruce. (Note: The actual dimensions of a nominal 1 in. x 6 in. board are 3/4 in. x 5 1/2 in. [1.9 cm x 14 cm].) The box is very simple to make; there are no angular cuts and no waste of materials.

In the summer of 1989 we purchased a quantity of 1 in. x 6 in. #3 spruce (a few knots but definitely usable and inexpensive) and began to make the MUCC nest box. Like the Tuttle box, the MUCC box was plain. We soon began using the ink-imprinted California grape crate ends on the front of these boxes. In measuring, cutting, and constructing the ink-imprinted fronts of these boxes, we soon discovered that many California grape crate ends were made of 3/4 in. x 5 1/2 in. pine lumber. The whole "Recycling For Bluebirds" concept took off from that point. The *entire* side-opening nest box can be made of recycled California grape crate ends.

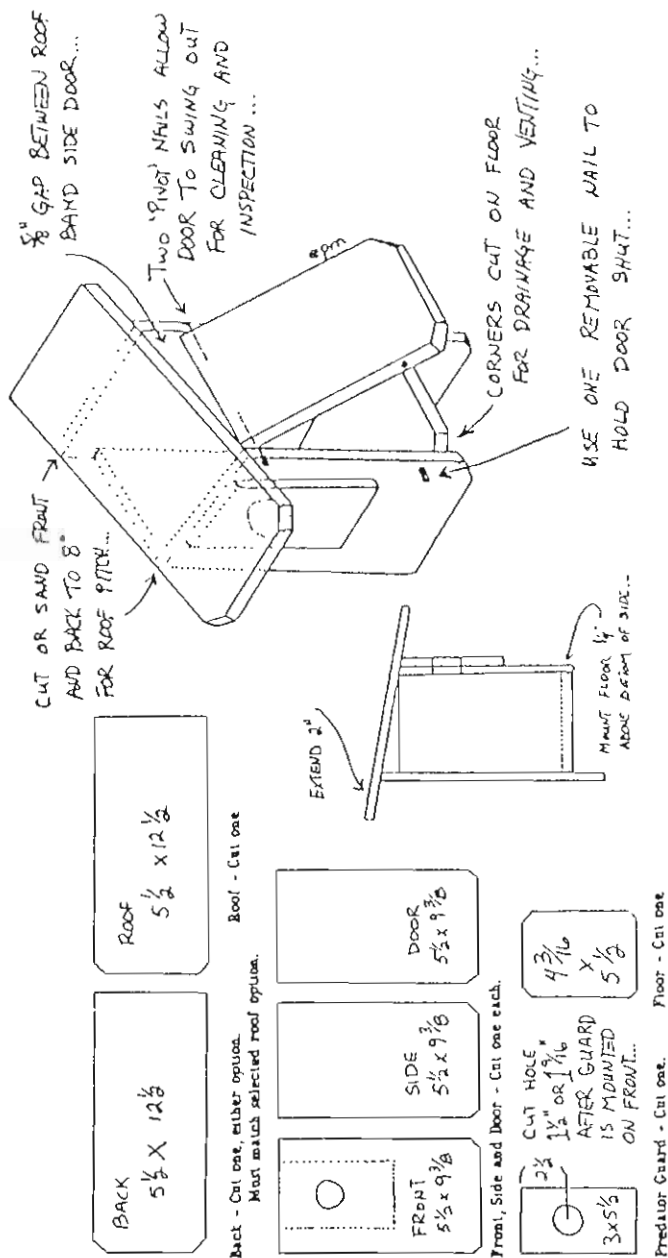
From about July to November, table grapes are shipped in wooden grape crates from California vineyards

Grape Crate Bluebird Nest Boxes

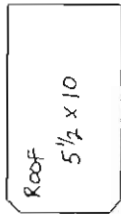
Made from three recycled California grape crates

Option #1 ...continuous roof design

by Eric P. Mayer

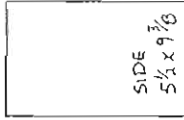
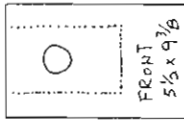


Option #2 ...continuous back design by Dean E. Sheldon, Jr.

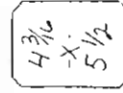
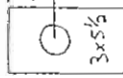


Back - Cut one, either option.
Must match selected roof option.

Roof - Cut one

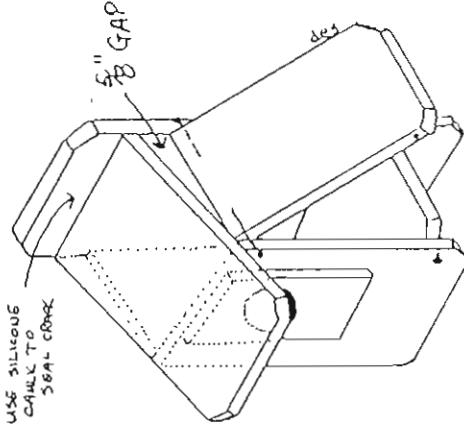
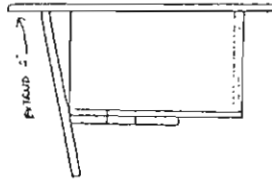


Front, Side and Door - Cut one each.



CUT HOLE
1 1/8" OR 1 1/16"
AFTER GUARD
IS MOUNTED
ON FRONT...

Predator Guard - Cut one. Floor - Cut one



ALWAYS FACE ROUGHEST SIDE OF BOARDS
ON THE INSIDE...

to supermarkets all over the nation. When the grapes arrive at the supermarket they are removed from the crates and repackaged for retail sales. The crates are then discarded in the market's dumpster, trash compactor, or incinerator. Thousands of board feet of wood suitable for bluebird nest box construction are thrown away every year only to be burned or buried in landfills throughout the country. In our experience, supermarket produce managers are eager to give these crates away; not only do they take up considerable dumpster space, but the store actually has to pay money to have them hauled away. A bluebird nest box can be constructed from three of these discarded crates.

Certainly California grape crates are not made of the highest quality lumber. Warps, knots, and cracks are commonly encountered. Imperfections may render some end pieces unusable, but most of the wood is quite suitable for box construction. Many crates have paper labels glued to one end. These can be left in place to weather off the box or they can be removed mechanically. Because of their shini-

ness, the label ends should not be used on the fronts of boxes or the predator guard. Always observe common sense safety practices when disassembling crates and constructing nest boxes.

Before proceeding further, we wish to recognize that making bluebird nest boxes from recycled grape crate ends is not new to Ohio. Cletus Perl has made over 1200 nest boxes (including 750 for bluebirds) from recycled grape crate ends. He has donated dozens of them to the Gorman Nature Center in Mansfield, Ohio. The Nature Center has an extensive bluebird trail which includes these boxes. His beautiful boxes are also sold in the Nature Center's bookstore for fund-raising.

The accompanying illustrations show two nest boxes made of California grape crate ends that we developed from the original MUCC design. ■

4569 Greenwich-Milan Townline Road,
Greenwich, OH 44837 (Sheldon); 501 Edgehill Avenue, Ashland, OH 44805 (Mayer).

Part 2. The Chile Connection will appear in the Autumn 1990 issue of this journal.



Beresford Proctor (left) Mamaponeck, New York, presents his 3,000th bluebird nesting box to Tom Meyer. It is inscribed inside "Built specially for Tom Meyer, Feb. 1988."

Eastern Bluebird Encouraged to Return to Southern Quebec

Daniel Asselin

Introduction

During the winter of 1988, Hydro-Quebec granted the Societe Linneenne du Quebec (a non-profit association dedicated to natural science education and to wildlife preservation) a contract for the installation of 100 bluebird nesting boxes. These boxes were placed on electric pylons in an area northeast of Quebec City on an 18 km [11.2 miles] by 4 km [2.5 mi] area between the cities of Charlesbourg and L'Ange-Gardien.

Methods

In 1989 the 100 nesting boxes were re-installed with a certain number mounted in the same area as the previous year. The remaining boxes were placed either northeast of St-Fereolles-Neiges or in the southern portion of Portneuf County which is the most productive area for the Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) in Quebec.

The nesting boxes were made of western cedar boards of 1.9 cm [3/4 in.] thickness; each entrance hole was exactly 3.8 cm [1.5 in.] in diameter; and the floor was 10.7 cm x 10.7 cm [4.2 in. x 4.2 in.]. The roof could be removed for inspection and cleaning.

The nesting boxes were installed on the pylons by fastening clips furnished by Hydro-Quebec (see photographs). The height of the boxes from the ground varied from 1.5 m [5 ft] to 2.1 m [7 ft]. In our latitude solar heating is desirable. The entrance was generally oriented to the south in order to obtain maximum exposure to the sun. Visits to the boxes were made at least once a week. Boxes occupied by bluebirds were inspected once a day.

Results

In 1988, six nesting boxes were

occupied by Eastern Bluebirds, 26 by Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*) and one by a Black-capped Chickadee (*Parus atricapillus*). As for the remaining boxes, 20 had been destroyed or stolen by vandals and 47 had remained unoccupied or were unsuccessful (abandoned nests were found in half of these).

Of 121 swallow eggs, 65 young fledged, a reproduction rate of 54%. The bluebirds laid 33 eggs, 31 of which fledged, a reproduction rate of 94%. For the Black-capped Chickadee, the success rate was 100% that is 8 for 8.

In 1989, the results for the same number of nesting boxes were 20 broods of Eastern Bluebirds, 83 eggs and 69 fledglings for 83% success. For the Tree Swallows there were 28 broods, 123 eggs, and 105 young fledged for an 85% reproductive success rate. The remaining nesting boxes produced one successful brood (5 for 5) of Black-capped Chickadees and one brood of House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*). The 50 other nesting boxes were not occupied or were abandoned before egg laying.

Conclusion

As far as we can tell, this was the first time that a study had been undertaken in this area to determine bluebirds nesting success in boxes installed on energy transport pylons.

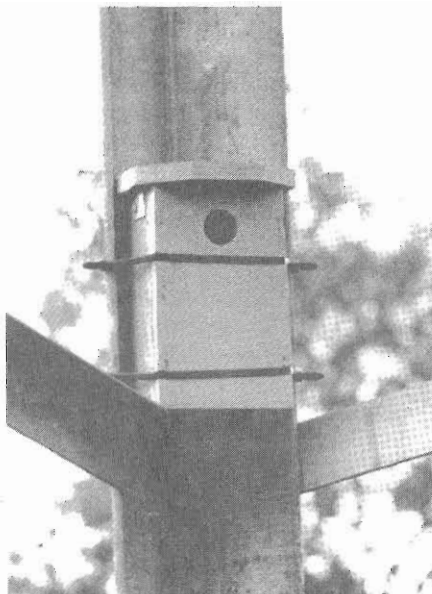
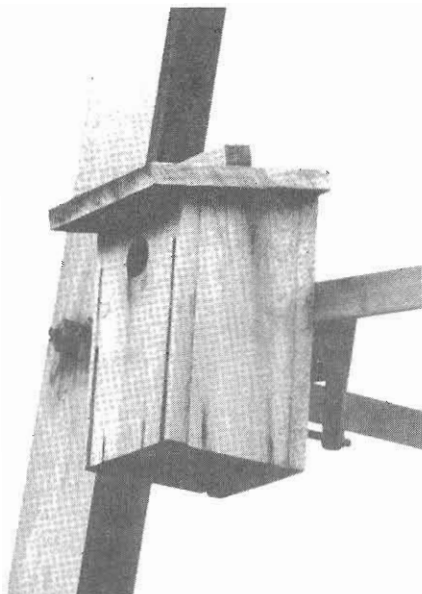
During the first year the production of six bluebird broods had been amazing. The marked increase to 20 broods in 1989 was unexpected. It appears that the deforestation caused by pylon erection and maintenance can be manipulated to create and maintain a habitat that corresponds to the species' needs. The 1989 results provide sufficient encouragement to continue with this experiment.

We are planning to install new

nesting box models (see photographs) that we hope are less attractive to vandals as well as to relocate the unused boxes. This should permit us to explore new potentially productive areas in order to locate bluebird pop-

ulations that may be lacking nesting sites. ■

555 7e rang-ouest
St. Neree, Quebec
Canada 6OR 3VO



Photographs by Daniel Asselin

Photographs of old model (left) nesting box and new model box (right). Note improved fastening devices on right hand box.

Bluebirds Return to the Bluegrass

Wayne H. Davis

When I first arrived in Lexington and saw the vast acreage of excellent bluebird habitat at the agricultural experiment farms of the University of Kentucky (UK), I thought I had an opportunity to do some experiments on ideas that I had for a better box design. In the early spring of 1965 I put out 66 experimental boxes. Only eight were used, too few to provide useful data, so I gave up bluebird experiments.

In 1984 I learned from Pierre Allaire that bluebirds were numerous on the strip mines of eastern Kentucky, so my new colleague W.C. McComb and I designed an experiment for an area two hour's drive from Lexington. This work was successful.

In 1985 Bill McComb decided to see if he could build up a population on the University farms so that we could work closer to home. He placed 86 boxes on the farms. Only eight of these were used by bluebirds; however, the boxes were maintained and monitored in subsequent years and the bluebird population increased. In 1988 enough boxes were used so that I decided to move my experimental work for the next season from the mines to the UK farms. In 1989, 36 of my 64 boxes on the farms were used by bluebirds. Before Bill McComb put up his first boxes only a single pair of bluebirds nested on these farms; they used a natural cavity in a post.

In 1986 the local chapter of the National Audubon Society initiated a project of building and selling bluebird houses. This effort has grown each year, with the result that over a thousand of their boxes have been placed in the central Kentucky area. Many people have been successful in getting bluebirds to nest in these boxes.

One can now drive any of the country roads in this area and notice

the striking increase in the number of bluebirds that has occurred in recent years. There seems no doubt that their numbers were limited by lack of suitable nest sites, and that efforts expended to help them have been successful. ■

School of Biological Sciences
University of Kentucky
Lexington, KY 40506

WHF Ruritan Club Bluebird Project

During February of 1989 the WHF Ruritan Club of Church Road, Virginia, made and sold 600 bluebird boxes in the Petersburg-Dinwiddie County area. Each box sold contained a NABS "Where Have All the Bluebirds Gone?" brochure plus a flyer from the club giving details and instructions on how to attract and monitor boxes in our area. Local newspapers ran a feature story complete with pictures about our project and interesting details about bluebirds. The article in the paper and the flyers in the boxes resulted in over 200 letters of inquiry.

The club monitored a total of 42 boxes and fledged 492 bluebirds. All but a few boxes had nests and the majority had three. During the breeding season the club submitted bluebird tips to local papers via "Voice of the People." For instance, early in the season we advised everyone to check boxes frequently to make sure that bees, wasps or hornets were not occupying them. Later we mentioned the snake problem. We suggested strips of carpet tacks (they may be purchased in any carpet store) nailed onto the post. We have no scientific evidence for this advice. All we know is that we haven't lost a nest to a snake where strips have been placed. They cost about .75 for a three foot section in this area.

The project will continue in 1990. A bluebird orientation hour is planned for February. Refreshments will be served, the NABS slide program will be

shown, and door prizes and awards will be given. Everyone who fledged bluebirds will receive a NABS bluebird patch. Newspaper coverage is planned. We also have several speaking engagements and demonstrations scheduled with garden clubs and scout troops. Bluebirding is truly a fascinating hobby for young and old. *Fred Sahl, Rt. 1, Box 910, Church Road, VA 23833* ■

Bluebird Boosters

Appearing on the inside back cover is a list of those individuals who have made a financial commitment to bluebirds and native cavity nesters over and above their annual dues. Such support is essential in maintaining a stable dues structure. We thank the individuals, organizations, and businesses for their generosity.

You, too, can become a Bluebird Booster. For a donation of \$25.00 per issue or \$75.00 per four issues, you can be designated as an Eastern, Western or Mountain Bluebird Booster (your choice); for \$15.00 per issue or \$50.00 per four issues, be a Fledgling Booster; while \$10.00 per issue or \$25.00 per four issues makes you a Nestling Booster.

All contributions are tax deductible. Mail your check to NABS Boosters, P.O. Box 6295, Silver Spring, MD 20906-0295.

Bluebird Neighbors

Catheryn M. Weymer

I can't remember when I first became obsessed with having a pair of bluebirds nest here, but I *do* remember my disappointment two years ago. A pair arrived, stayed seven days, and left. Rather, they were run off by House Sparrows.

I wrote to the North American Bluebird Society and learned that bluebirds find it difficult if not impossible to nest where House Sparrows are numerous.

Another year passed and I tried not to get my hopes too high, when, on 8 April 1989, I spotted a pair of bluebirds in my yard. I prayed they would stay. I didn't see them again until the thirteenth. They began inspecting all the houses and on the fourteenth the female began taking nesting material into a box. I was thrilled! By the end of the week, the nest was finished.

It was beautiful: a small well-constructed cup of soft grasses and small twigs. During this time, I would lie as motionless as possible 10 feet in front of the nest box taking photographs. The female did not seem to mind; I'm sure she was aware of me.

Once the nest was built, the pair left again. I was frantic! I wrote to Lawrence Zeleny who was encouraging. He said it was quite normal for the couple to build the nest and then go somewhere secluded for the "honeymoon."

On the twenty-sixth of April, I unscrewed the lid to check on things and was met with two eyeballs staring up at me. I quickly replaced the lid and waited until she left. She had laid her first egg. I thought it was very fitting because it was Audubon's birthday.

On the thirtieth she laid her fifth egg and started incubating. Five chicks hatched on 14 May, Mother's Day. The male sat in a nearby tree and watched.

The nestlings all fledged between the thirty-first of May and the second of June. The last chick was utterly pathetic to watch. You could see his

head peeking out the hole, but he took a long time to work up the nerve to fly.

I was astounded when I walked out the morning of June third and saw bluebirds everywhere. The young do have blue wings, but have lightly spotted breasts which lets one know they're in the thrush family.

By the time the last chick fledged, the parents already had another nest built and on 5 June the female laid her first egg in a different box. I have four nesting boxes. Although I had removed the old nest on Dr. Zeleny's instruction, they chose another box.

The male had become quite tame and had chosen one spot on the clothesline to perch. When I hung clothes, I left a four foot space empty for him.

During this nesting I was able to observe the comings and goings of the parents. This nesting box is about 35 feet from my kitchen window in a hedgerow at about a five foot level. The female went out for a snack, the male went inside to sit on the eggs. The five eggs hatched on the twenty-third of June and all fledged on the seventh of July. Again the sky was alive with bluebirds. I silently wondered where they would go. Would they stay here in our area or take off to some unknown place?

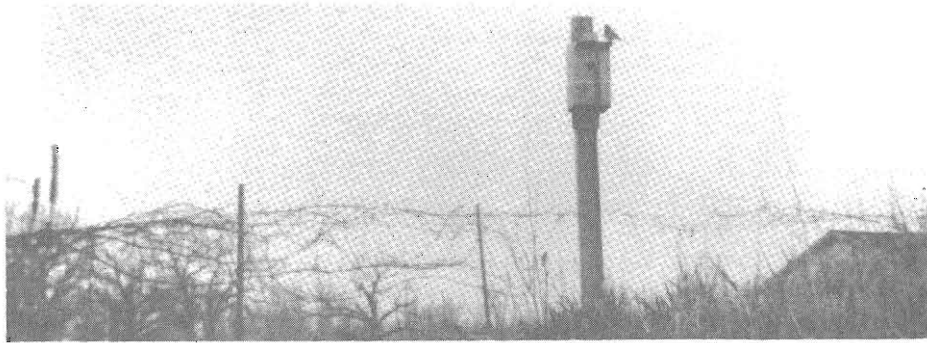
Either way, I felt lucky to have been hostess and proud to say I had helped increase the bluebird population. Then something totally out of the ordinary took place. While cleaning the boxes on 8 July, I discovered a NEW nest with one single blue egg in box no. 1.

The female laid four more eggs. The chicks hatched the twenty-fifth of July and fledged the eighth of August. The pair had raised three broods. Out of 15 eggs laid, 14 hatched and fledged.

The bluebirds continued to stay in the area until 15 November at which

time I observed them going in and out of the nest boxes. Maybe they were deciding if they would nest here again in

the spring. I hope so!
15267 W. Portage Rd.
Bowling Green, OH 43402



Photograph by Catheryn M. Weymer

The following corrections and changes should be made to the Bluebird Trail Directory and Bluebird Trouble Shooters compilation published in *Sialia* 12(1):30-35.

ALABAMA	Findlay, John III (205) 967-0955	2749 Millbrook Rd. Birmingham, AL 35243	W:D-E;SS:D-E Tours*
MICHIGAN Tuscola County	Clark, Harry		delete tours
MINNESOTA Wright County	Scriven, Dorene (612) 922-4586 [correct the tel. no. under trouble shooters]	2044 Cedar Lane Pkwy Minneapolis, MN 55416	W:D;SS:D Tours*
VIRGINIA Westmoreland County	Daley, Robert E. (804) 493-9853	440 Independence Dr. Montross, VA 22520	W:D-E;SS:D-E Tours*

[R.E. Daley has taken over Frank Laubinger's trail at Stratford Hall Plantation. If he cannot be reached, call Robert Furcolow (703) 671-8497 or Frank Laubinger (804) 224-7881.]

A Simple, Humane Sparrow Trap

Jayne Young

The two photographs (Figures 1 and 2) show how my simple sparrow trap operates. A lever is attached near one end above the entrance. A long string is attached to the other end, runs through a screw eye below the entrance, and then runs along the ground for some distance to a hidden observer. My string runs behind a nearby shed. My experience was quite satisfactory.

I hid behind the shed. When the sparrow entered the bluebird box, I pulled the string and he was trapped (on the third attempt). Then I removed him from the box and transferred him to a cardboard box. My husband works in Washington, D.C. so he took the sparrow there and released it in a park which is at least 50 miles from us. It was all quite humane.

I don't know if this type of trap would work every time, but it worked when I needed it. Incidentally, there were no bluebird eggs or babies in the box at the time for the sparrow to harm when trapped.

Once I freed the box from the House Sparrow last year the bluebirds were able to nest. They had a great summer rearing three broods for a total of 14 babies. All lived to fledge, but three of the first brood died in stormy weather their first night out of the nest. I was thrilled since last year all died due to heat, a snake, and a starling. ■

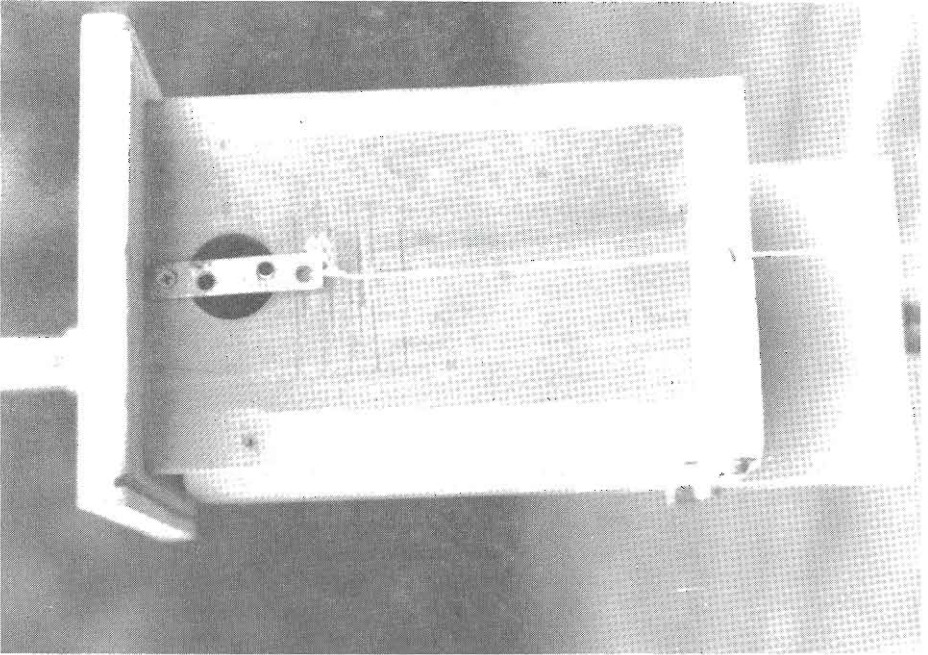


Figure 2.

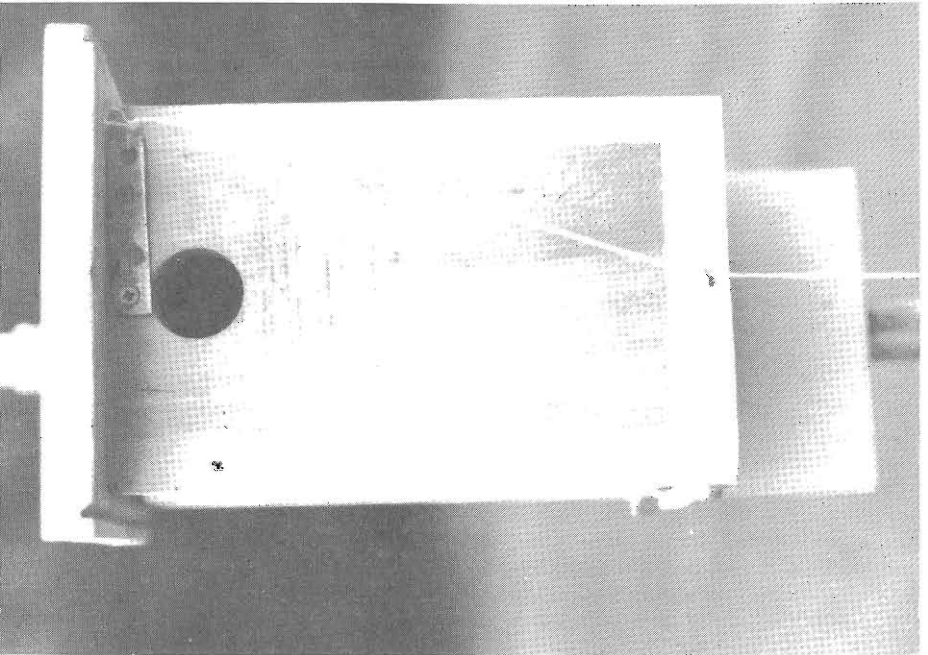


Figure 1.

Rt. 1, Box 50-A
Lovettsville, VA 22080

Sialia, Summer 1990

QUESTION CORNER

Lawrence Zeleny



We had a pair of bluebirds which nested in one of our boxes. The female laid five eggs, but they never hatched. I noticed the female stopped sitting on the eggs. Why would she abandon a nest?

Terri Forstner
Campbell Hall, New York

There are quite a number of reasons why unbroken bluebird eggs fail to hatch, some of which are as follows:

1. Infertility. Frequently one or more eggs of a clutch, sometimes all of them, are infertile.
2. Chilling of the partially incubated eggs, usually as a result of neglect by the female bird.
3. Death of the female bird before incubation is complete. The male bird is not capable of incubating the eggs.
4. Overheating of the eggs in extremely hot weather, sometimes as a result of improper nesting box construction or placement.
5. Abandonment of the nest and eggs, usually as a result of excessive human activity close to the nest.
6. Ingestion of toxic chemicals by the female shortly before egg laying. Not much is yet known about this possible cause. It is safer, of course, to avoid the use of pesticides in areas where bluebirds feed.

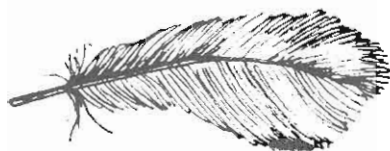
Fortunately, bluebirds are not easily discouraged. When a nesting attempt is unsuccessful the birds will almost always try again rather soon unless it is too late in the season.

I know that bluebirds live about six to eight years. Does the same pair of bluebirds return to my box each year? Do the babies ever nest in the box in which they were raised?

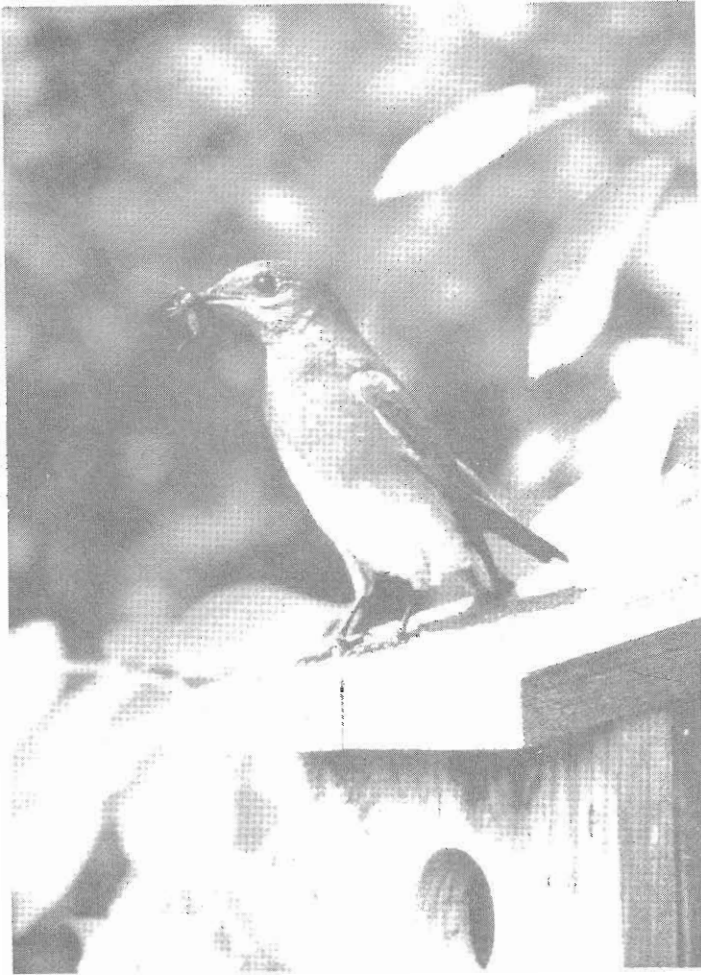
Brian Miller
Fredericksburg, Virginia

It is quite possible but not at all certain that one or both of the same pair do return to the same box for two or more years. You pointed out that bluebirds can live for six or eight years. This is true under ideal conditions, but the hazards of being a wild bird are so great that the *average* life of most songbirds is probably not more than about two years. This is one of the reasons why birds may have different mates from year to year or even between broods in the same year.

Young birds frequently remain in or return to the same general area of their birth. It is doubtful that they have any particular attraction to the box in which they were hatched, but it would not be unusual for one of them to choose such a box. ■



North Carolina Bluebird Society



This photograph by John A. Alderman is the winning entry in the North Carolina Bluebird Society's 1989 contest. It has been reproduced as a full color postcard in order to help spread the bluebird message in the state. Over 100 people attended the annual meeting on 24 March in Forsyth County. Bluebirders came from 29 counties to spend the day swapping bluebird stories and advice. This five year old organization would like to share ideas with other state bluebird organizations. Contact the group at the following address: NCBS, Box 4191, Greensboro, NC 27404.

Bluebird Boxes Are Memorial to Sons



Photograph from Coachmen Capers magazine

Gordon and Bobbie Boyle are shown with a bluebird box erected in memory of their adult sons. Since the deaths of Jimmy and David in separate accidents in 1984 and 1986, the Boyles have established a scholarship in their honor at the Enterprise State Junior College and have left a trail of bluebird boxes wherever they have traveled in their recreational vehicle. They received permission to erect the box pictured at the state fairgrounds in Illinois. They began the project in February 1989 and have placed boxes in most Alabama state parks and in the recreational vehicle parks in which they have camped. Out-of-state they place nesting boxes wherever individuals agree to monitor them. Although they originally planned box placement as a one year memorial project, they have decided to continue it through 1990. This year they received permission to erect six State of Alabama, Department of Conservation boxes at the Meadowlawn Cemetery in Enterprise where their sons are buried. Each box will contain a state plaque on the side and their memorial plaque on the front which reads, "In memory of our sons, Jimmy and David Boyle, Enterprise, Alabama." These boxes will be part of the more than 4000 placed by Alabama Nongame Wildlife Program Volunteers which are regularly monitored by more than 400 people. The Boyles encourage others to adopt this type of project, "It is great therapy for those who have lost loved ones (especially children) or that may wish to honor someone special." 111 Willow Dr., Enterprise, AL 36330. ■

Perils of a Bluebird Box Monitor

John P. Hickey

While monitoring bluebird boxes at Stony Kill Farm Environmental Education Center in southern Dutchess County, New York early in June 1989, I was faced with a perplexing dilemma. Approaching box #1 in the middle of a field, some Red-winged Blackbirds making a commotion caught my attention. After observing them for a few minutes, I concluded that their nest must be nearby and was in peril. I found their nest in a rose-bush. It contained three eggs; a broken one lay on the ground. I wondered why the birds were so agitated. I searched and found a snake in the grass. Because I love snakes as much as St. Patrick, I decided to get a 10 foot stick and drive the snake away from the nest. The snake resisted by curling up and sticking out its tongue at me.

I was unsure what to do since I was unable to drive the snake away. I did not want to kill one of God's creatures nor did I wish to pick up a seven foot snake with my bare hands. The snake solved the problem by curling around the end of the stick. With a verbal plea for him to please stay on his end of the stick, I headed toward a rock pile a quarter of a mile away. Between me and the rock pile, however, was an electric fence that I had previously crossed many times without incident, but never with a snake on a stick. The electric fence was about three feet high and must carry a "million" volts of electricity. Keeping a cautious eye on the snake while pushing down the electric wire with a pencil was too much. The pencil slipped and the wire gave me a

most terrific jolt in a very tender area. With a leap, the fence was cleared. The snake smiled a "served you right" smile and continued to stick his tongue out at me. With a sigh of relief, the snake was deposited in the rock pile and I happily continued my rounds feeling the glow of a deed well done.

An hour later I returned to check box #1. The Red-winged Blackbirds were still agitated. So again I went to the nest to see what was wrong. Imagine my chagrin to find that the eggs were gone from the nest. A faint rustling in the grass left me wondering if the snake came back from the rock pile, whether it had an accomplice, and whether it was laughing at me while it curled around the stick. The moral to the story is Mother Nature knows best, leave well enough alone! I felt sadness for the Red-winged Blackbirds, but knew they would soon have another nest perhaps with happier results. ■

2 Monroe Drive
Poughkeepsie, NY 12601

Historian's Request

Please send newspaper and magazine articles about bluebirds to Historian Jane Williams, Box 123, Ware Neck, VA 23178. Be sure name and address of publication, volume and date are included. Photographs of members engaged in publicizing bluebirds or those documenting some unusual occurrence are also welcome. They will be added to scrapbooks which are a permanent record of activity on behalf of bluebirds and other cavity nesters.

Helen Bruss

It is easy to understand why the bluebird has declined in many areas. In the past seven years, we have dealt with flying squirrels, cats, snakes, and even mirrors while trying to encourage bluebirds to nest near us. Last year brought two predators we had not encountered before—House Sparrows and raccoons.

My husband made three nesting boxes, each with a heavy peaked top that could be removed for monitoring or cleaning. He mounted the boxes on free-standing posts covered with four inch PVC pipe. Throughout the winter a pair of bluebirds periodically inspected the box in front of our house (box #1). They seemed pleased with what they found and ready to move in at a given signal. However, on 8 March, a pair of House Sparrows were flying in and out of the box. Whenever the bluebirds appeared, they were driven away.

While trying to decide how to handle the situation, we watched the birds for a few days. The sparrows were definitely building a nest in box #1, while bluebirds, chickadees, and titmice were squabbling over the other two boxes. The strategy we decided upon was that, if the bluebirds selected another nesting box, we would not disturb the sparrows in box #1 until the baby bluebirds had safely fledged. We would then put a net over the sparrow's box and capture the female and any eggs or nestlings. If we evicted the sparrows before that time, they might attack the bluebirds.

On 23 March, bluebirds started a nest in box #3, which is farther from our house and difficult to monitor, but, fortunately, nothing bothered them there. Chickadees won the battle for box #2, a few feet from our back door, and on 27 March started carrying in gobs of moss. By this time, the sparrows in #1 and the bluebirds in #3 had almost finished their nests.

I found three blue eggs in box #3 on 1 April; box #2 was now half full of

moss with a few feathers added. Sparrows were still carrying building materials into box #1 even though the box appeared to be overflowing. The fifth and final bluebird egg was laid on 3 April. I could not see any eggs in the chickadee nest, although they could be hidden under the flap Mrs. C. weaves to cover the eggs when she is away.

By 11 April, I had, on three different days, lifted the lids of the bluebird and chickadee boxes, and each time the female sitting on the nest looked me in the eye but did not fly away. I wondered if this strange attachment to the nest was caused by the presence of sparrows in the vicinity. I did not know how many eggs the chickadee was incubating until 23 April when I discovered three nestlings. This was two days after the fifth bluebird egg had hatched.

The five bluebird fledglings left box #3 on 4 May, and the three chickadees vacated box #2 on 12 May. As planned, we disposed of the female sparrow and her five eggs in box #1. The next day, the male sparrow came for a last look around, then disappeared.

Bluebirds rebuilt a nest in box #1, and on 21 May there were five eggs, all of which hatched by 4 June. Then, DISASTER! It was 16 June and the young were due to fledge in a few days. When I looked out a window early in the morning, I saw the top from the box lying on the grass and nesting debris scattered all around. The birds were gone. What animal was agile enough to climb the slick pole and strong enough to knock the heavy wooden top from the box? We suspected a raccoon, but caught a possum in the Havahart trap that night and another one the next night. We put hooks on all boxes so the tops could not be pushed off.

The bereaved bluebird parents wasted little time in mourning. They started rebuilding 18 June in box #1.

On 26 June there were four eggs; but the next day tragedy struck again. All eggs were destroyed. The top was still on the box, but straw was dribbling from the entrance. It had to be raccoons, they were also stealing our grapes and other fruit. As it turned out, we caught three of them in the trap during the first week of July.

Undaunted, the bluebirds seemed determined to start another nest in box #1. Hoping to steer them to box #2

where we could see them better, we removed the top from the ill-fated box #1 and left it off. It worked. When bluebirds began nesting in box #2, we put a thick coating of axle grease on the pole. Although the fourth clutch consisted of only four eggs and one remained unhatched, three fledglings departed safely on 9 August. ■

Rt. 1, Box 197
Midway, AR 72651

Success with Plastic Jugs in Kansas

Wes Seyler

We added four plastic jugs to our trail two summers ago. I understand that this is not a real test of their value; however, we have had some surprising results. We have not had *any* sparrow use. This past year two of the jugs fledged two broods of nestlings and one of them fledged a nesting of four birds. This was a total of 22 birds produced from four houses. This is a better percentage by far than we are getting from our wood houses.

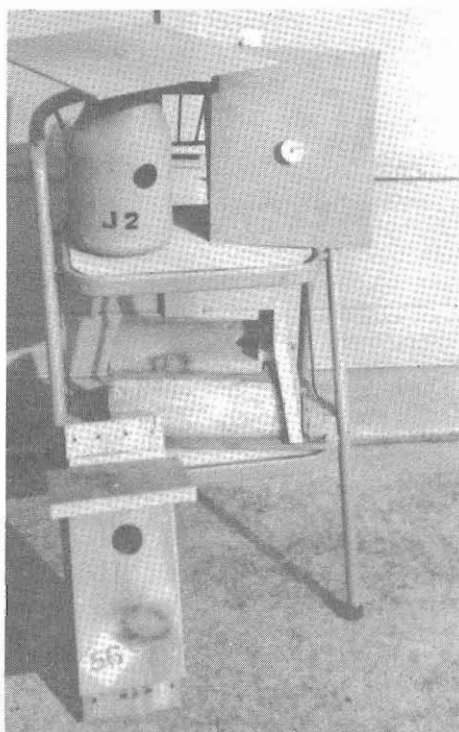
During the months of July and August, the hot Kansas sun can really warm up the inside of the jugs. The accompanying photograph shows you what we have done to make these houses a little more comfortable.

Use a 12 in. to 14 in. piece of masonite or 1/8 in. pegboard. Drill a 1/8 in. hole in the center of the board and the jug cap. Connect these with a 1/8 in. by 3/4 in. stove bolt and draw tight. This cover will give some protection during the middle part of the day.

Because the plastic jug is so very light it can be mounted to the top two strands of barbed wire or to the top of a woven wire fence.

This location between the posts tends to eliminate some of the predator problems. ■

2220 Westdale
Lawrence, KS 66049



Photograph by Wes Seyler

Hagan School
Room 4 (Grade 4)
42 Hagan Dr.
Poughkeepsie, NY 12603

North American Bluebird Society
Box 6295
Silver Spring, MD 20906-0295

Dear Sirs:

We read in our local newspaper, The Poughkeepsie Journal, that the Eastern Bluebird has declined in population. Our class government has elected to try to increase the bluebird supply by building bluebird houses and by making a bluebird trail in our local community. For us, this has involved a lot of research since we knew little about the bluebird to begin with.

We have had an experienced bluebirder, Mrs. Florence Germond, come to our class to tell us a lot about the bluebird and to answer our many questions. We have written to the 4-H Club and now we own plans to start building our boxes.

Our next problem was getting enough revenue to supply wood and other materials to construct our boxes. Our Room Four government decided to tax the citizens in our class; we all bring in deposit cans and bottles each week and are saving the money for materials. So far we have saved over \$30.

We did not have a way to cut the wood. By writing to our district Industrial Arts teachers and explaining our project, they generously offered to cut our wood to plan specifications. You can see that we have had a lot of experience in decision-making and problem-solving with this project.

Because we care about the Eastern Bluebird so much, our class has joined the North American Bluebird Society. At the same time we also ordered the book entitled The Bluebird by Lawrence Zeleny which we received in November. We also are entering a contest sponsored by Scholastic News. This contest is very hard to win. It is entitled KIDS CARE. We thought our caring about the bluebird was an appropriate entry. If we are one of the six grand prize winners of this contest, we will donate our award of \$1,000 to the North American Bluebird Society. We thought you would like to know this.

Mrs. McCarron's
Room Four Citizens

Thank you for letting us know of your tremendous interest in and support of the bluebird. The Society would gratefully receive any donation you would care to make if you should win; however, with this project there are no losers and the bluebird wins in any event. Room Four students as well as many people in the community will learn about the bluebird and how important it is for individuals to act to improve the environment. We hope your class project and your trail meet with success! ■

Retirement Home "Blues"

Connie Green

In 1976 my husband and I started looking for a few acres to buy for recreation and future retirement (not *far* into the future as we had just celebrated our fiftieth and fifty-first birthdays). Our search took us over 200 miles east of our home in Portland, Oregon, before we found 20 acres that suited us both. It was remote, peaceful, and on the fringe of the Blue Mountains adjoining the Umatilla National Forest. It had no power or utilities, but did have lots of "water signs" and a little creek running through the land with a terrific view of mountains and hills to the south of us.

The first spring vacation we spent there we had stopped on the highway to prepare for the three mile drive up the rough rut road leading to our property when we saw a flash of blue across the highway. It was the most beautiful of all bluebirds: a male Mountain Bluebird. What a surprise and thrill to realize that there might be more of them in the area. Maybe I could lure them up the road to our land, possibly by putting up a bird house near the highway and moving it later a little bit at a time. I soon discarded the idea. It would take too long, and, besides, we had met enough of the local people to know that they would think we were crazy city slickers.

I had never seen a bird box within 100 miles of Spray, our mail drop. The locals don't get very excited about birds or wildflowers, both of which are plentiful in the area. Upon returning home to Portland, I headed for the public library and checked out books about bluebirds and bird house building.

It must have been May when we went back to Spray, this time equipped with four bluebird boxes. After nailing them to fence posts and doing a few woodcutting chores, we returned to Portland to wait for summer vacation. Two months later, back at the "old homestead" (there really had been an old homestead there but it had burned

down about 30 years before, leaving only the big logs of the corral and lots of old wagon iron) what a surprise to find tenants in all the bird houses. Three bluebird families and a pair of Tree Swallows were nesting. I was just a tiny bit disappointed to find Western Bluebirds instead of Mountain Bluebirds in my boxes, but the letdown didn't last long. I was glad to have *any* kind of birds in my houses.

Every time we returned to the acreage I took more nesting boxes until I had put up about 25. Not many were alike as I kept trying to improve the design. The larger, deeper boxes didn't work because the starlings chose them right away. Of course they were evicted quickly. The wrens nest in *any* house in *any* location. It is getting to be quite a battle because the little rascals raise large, healthy families. I try to tempt them with smaller houses hung on the sheds and in the trees around "camp." The chickadees and Tree Swallows are always welcome. Many times the bluebirds were outmaneuvered by other birds for occupancy and were so eager that they would land on a house as I was nailing it to the post. Staking an early claim!

I have been using the metal or plastic single outlet wall electrical plates for covering the entrance holes to keep starlings and squirrels from enlarging the holes. I still find a nery chipmunk now and then, but they don't loiter long after being discovered. It is harder to find the 1 1/2 inch single outlet cover than the more common 1 3/8 inch cover, but, if the hardware clerk will let you look for yourself, sometimes they can be found in the bottom or back of the bin or stored in some dusty corner (sometimes at an old dusty price too).

Nailing strips of aluminum to the posts didn't keep the squirrels out of the boxes, they dug their sharp claws into the soft metal and went right up.

I love to build the houses and put them up and take care of them just for the pleasure of watching the birds. My husband has turned into a bird watcher, but that's as far as his interest

goes. He keeps asking "Haven't you got enough bird houses yet?" Does a millionaire want another million? ■

402 Taylor, Box 386
Ryderwood, WA 98581

Concord Girl Scouts Help Bring Back Thoreau's Bluebirds

Tom Blanding

"The bluebird carries the sky on its back."

When Henry Thoreau recorded this pleasing image in his Journal in 1852, the beautiful sparrow-sized bluebird was still reinforcing the Concord sky. The bluebird was once one of New England's most abundant songbirds and, as Thoreau observed, the spring air was liquid with its warble. Now the bluebird rarely sings in Concord and, without its colorful complement, it seems the sky is falling.

The scarcity of places where the bluebird can breed successfully has led to its virtual disappearance from our New England landscape.

But now come hopeful signs. Over the past few years there have been several bluebird sightings in Concord. Ed McCaffrey described one such sighting in his "Incidentally" column in the *Concord Journal* in November of 1989, adding that such a report "gives us courage to face the winter knowing that when the snow melts we may again see a bluebird in Concord."

If we do, it will be because the Concord Girl Scouts have established bluebird trails on three pieces of Concord Conservation Land: the Old Calf Pasture along the Lowell Road, Ponkawtasset in the Estabrook Country, and Harrington Park near the Assabet River in West Concord.

The bluebird trails were established by Girl Scout Troop 2681 of the Patriot's Trail Girl Scout Council. These fifth graders from the Alcott School

hosted the program for other Concord Girl Scouts. Karen Cease, leader of the troop, directed the program with Pat Waggett, Service Chairman of the Concord Girl Scouts.

On 3 November a party of about 30 girls and six adults set up 24 bluebird houses on the three tracts of Conservation Land. (A third-grade group had put out five boxes in the Calf Pasture two years ago.) The boxes were made by the Girl Scouts themselves from fully equipped kits prepared by Dick Cease.

From the beginning this program has been a community project. Concord Selectman Bill Sullivan donated wood for the boxes. Dan Monahan, Concord Natural Resources Coordinator, helped set up the program, and the whole enterprise benefited from his encouragement and advice. Lillian Files of Tyngsboro, past-president of the North American Bluebird Society, presented an educational slide program and helped select the sites where the boxes were set up.

Henry Thoreau would have greatly admired the work of the Concord Girl Scouts to bring back the bluebirds. Perhaps before too many springs have passed, the air again will be liquid with its warble. Then we will have Concord Girl Scout Troop 2681 to thank when the bluebird once again carries the Concord sky on its back. ■

100 Barrett's Mill Road
Concord, MA 01742

Bluebirds in My Life

John A. Peterson

In August of 1927, our family moved to Alma Hill, the highest point in Allegany County, New York. Mother was to teach a rural school. This was before the school systems were centralized. During the winter Dad made a bluebird nesting box and put it up on a tree at the edge of our yard. A pair of bluebirds came in the spring, looked the box over, and set up housekeeping. I was five years old. I was admonished to stay away from the box, but told I could watch it from a distance, which I did.

Each year the bluebirds came back to their home. As I grew older I became an avid bird watcher—the bluebirds was my favorite.

When we moved away it was after the nesting season so we took the box with us and put it up on one of the two trees by the road at the edge of our new yard. In the other tree my dad put up a swing for us children. We spent a lot of time playing there only about 40 feet from the nesting box. This didn't seem to bother the bluebirds who occupied the box each summer and raised their young undisturbed by our close proximity. I remember that a couple of times Dad had to evict some sparrows.

When we moved from this place, it was in June after school was out for the summer. The box had a family of bluebirds in it so we left it there. Dad never got around to making another nesting box, but there was a pair of bluebirds around our new yard. There was an oil well about 100 yards from the house; near the well a

three inch pipe stuck up out of the ground at an angle. A bolt went through the pipe about two feet from the top end. The bluebirds had built a nest in the pipe at this point.

That summer our weather turned very hot and dry. I noticed that the bluebirds were not around. For several days there was no activity around the pipe, so I went over to investigate. As I tried to see down the pipe, an awful stench reached my nose. Then I realized that the babies, and possibly the mother, had suffocated from the heat caused by the sun on the steel pipe.

The next year bluebirds didn't come back. Down through the years the only bluebirds I saw were but fleeting glimpses as one flew by on an average of every four or five years.

In the summer of 1988, when traveling from Ohio to Michigan, I saw nesting boxes along the freeway near Findlay, Ohio. I had learned about bluebird trails while reading issues of *Sialia*, but this was the first one I had seen. By the time we arrived home, I had decided to make a bluebird nesting box so that when spring came the box would be waiting for them.

On Thursday, 7 April, while I was eating breakfast, I looked out the window. There was a bluebird sitting on the flowering almond bush near the bird bath. He sat there for several minutes before flying to the walnut tree. Then I spotted the female among the branches. What a thrill it was to

(Continued on page 118)

IMPROVING WILDLIFE HABITAT IN TENNESSEE



Photograph by Jerry Martin

For several years Jerry Martin of Bell Buckle, Tennessee, has installed and maintained a variety of bird feeders and nesting boxes on the family farm. As part of a 4-H conservation project, he has conducted classes and tours of wildlife installations for Scouts and church groups. The above photograph shows his booth featuring wildlife habitats which was displayed at the 1989 Tennessee State Fair and at the Shelbyville Garden Club Flower Show.

Seven Eastern Bluebird Nestlings in One Box

Tom A. Barber

The 1989 bluebird season started out on a sad note when more than 42 nestlings were lost to the cold rainy weather. Parents just couldn't find food for their young. Despite the large number of losses something pleasantly unexpected happened on my 56 box trail. Two boxes contained seven eggs in each nest. One box was on my next door neighbor's property. We really didn't know how many eggs the female was sitting on, but she had so many she couldn't cover them all. Each time I looked in she was incubating and stayed put. My neighbor, Mark Secrest, said he thought he had counted eight eggs. Finally the hatch day arrived. Still not knowing precisely how many eggs there were, I thought my neighbor had miscalculated and that it was a clutch of perhaps six. At the same time I had a clutch of seven eggs on the state hospital property so I knew it was possible to have seven. All seven eggs in Mark's box hatched. I felt one or two might die immediately because the weather still wasn't that good.

We decided to band the nestlings on 17 May 1989. Now I was concerned. This was a NABS box with a 4 in. square bottom. How could all these nestlings fit on the bottom of this box when they got bigger? Wouldn't they smother each other? That sometimes happens when many adults get into a nesting box in the winter to keep warm. I had had six nestlings in these same boxes before and they were very crowded when the birds were close to fledging. I decided to call Larry Zeleny, founder of the North American Bluebird Society, for advice.

I had a plan. I thought maybe I could move the nestlings from the 4 in. square bottom box to a 5 in. bottom box. That way they would have plenty of room. I asked Larry if he thought that was a good idea, but I'm getting ahead of myself. My first question to Larry was whether seven Eastern Bluebirds could fledge from a 4 in. square

box. He told me that once in Maryland a friend had sent him an experimental box that had a 3 1/2 in. bottom. In Maryland it's unusual to have a six egg brood, but it happened on his trail in that 3 1/2 in. square box. He was very concerned and felt that they surely wouldn't survive. But they climbed on each other's backs and although the box wasn't kept as clean as bluebirds normally keep it, they all fledged.

So my next question to him was whether the adults would know that I changed the box. He said they certainly would and related another story which I loved. He told me about a box on his trail which had a problem with a screw in the lid. It was worn out so he changed it right in the middle of nesting. He told me the male bluebird spent three to four hours trying to remove that new screw because it was so much shinier than the old one. So my idea of moving the nestlings to a new box in the middle of a nesting was chancy. There was a real possibility that the parents might abandon the young.

My neighbor voted to leave them in the box they were in. Dr. Steve Pierson, who is the master bander who had banded the seven, also voted to leave them in the box because he felt the less disturbance the better. Larry Zeleny wanted me to tell him what we did. We left them alone. They climbed on each other. You could see six birds when they were close to fledging; only the beak of the seventh was visible. Our newspaper came out to take a picture of the box, my neighbor, and his family. Yes, they did all fledge on 28 May 1989. On 22 June I saw all seven fledgings with the male.

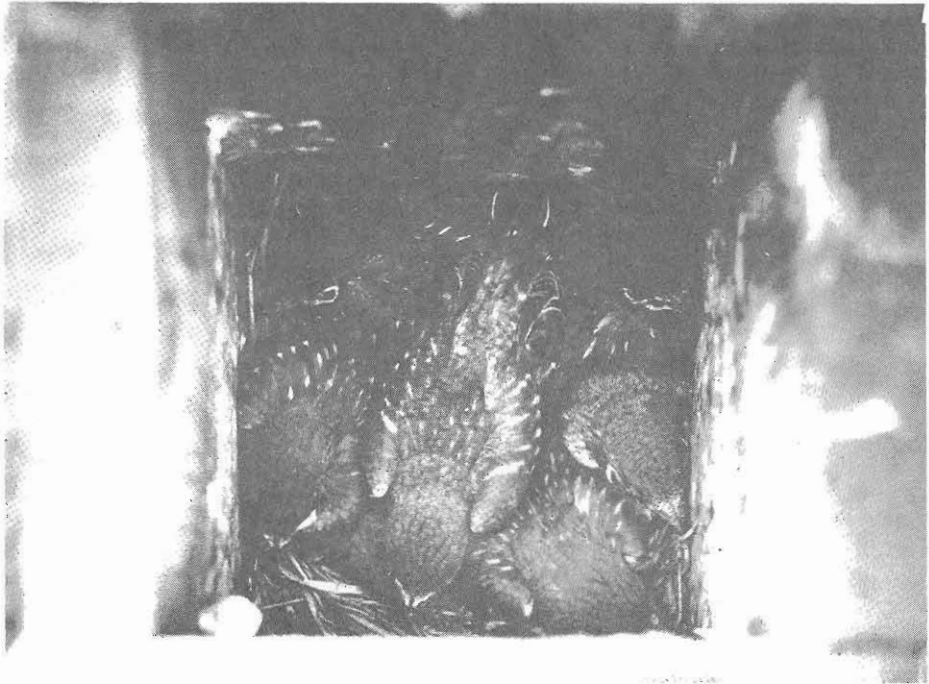
And what happened to the clutch in the box on the state hospital property that also had seven eggs? Only six eggs hatched and one nestling died so it turned out to be a normal five nestling group. But to have had two nests with seven eggs was a surprising and

rewarding experience.

I would like to close with one other experience that I feel is equally as exciting as the above. During the cold spring, I found four dead nestlings along with one survivor still in good shape in box no. 9. He or she was dry and well fed. Because of the weather the parents could only find enough food for one. I changed the nest and removed the dead. That single bird fledged, but an interesting incident took place during the second nesting.

I was checking 10 day old nestlings in box no. 9 when I spotted three bluebirds in a nearby tree. One bluebird looked different. The male bluebird began diving at me. With him came the different bluebird. I realized it was the same single fledging who had survived in the spring. He was learning from his "Dad" how to protect a nest. This really brought home to me how bluebirds are like a family. ■

60406 Stewart Rd.
Cambridge, OH 43725



NABS ANNUAL MEETING

There will be a diverse group of interesting speakers on the program at the thirteenth annual North American Bluebird Society meeting October 26-28, 1990, in Gettysburg, PA. James Brett, a raptor authority and director of the famous Hawk Mountain (PA) Sanctuary, will be the featured speaker at the Saturday night banquet. Participants will also have an opportunity to learn about the natural features of the Gettysburg National Historic Site, the growing Bald Eagle population in the

Susquehanna (PA) River Valley, and the far-flung land preservation efforts of a widely-known land conservancy.

The bluebird spotlight will shine on successful bluebird nesting box projects in Pennsylvania's state parks, at the Philadelphia Electric Company's Muddy Run Recreational Park, and at the famous Eisenhower farm outside Gettysburg.

Kevin Berner, Chairman of the NABS Research Committee, will discuss his latest research results aimed at designing a raccoon-proof nesting box. *Bob Bodine, Convention Chair.*

Bluebirds in My Yard

Vicki S. Johnson

We live in a very small rural town and have been amazed at the variety of birds throughout the years that we have attracted to our backyard. We began seriously feeding the birds approximately six years ago and during that period have completely relandscaped our backyard. Our 80 ft x 100 ft lot is planted solely with trees, shrubs, and other plants that will attract and be beneficial to the birds. We have areas throughout the yard which are mulched with pine straw and leaves that provide great breeding areas for crickets. The crickets in turn attract insect-eating bird species. We provide water throughout the year by using three birdbaths, one of which is heated. We do feed year-round supplementing with black oil sunflower seed, wild bird seed, peanut butter/lard/cornmeal mixture; fruits/berries are provided by our plantings. We also provide bakery products and frozen fruits during severe weather. (These are picked from other areas during the summer and frozen.) We have approximately 120 plantings for the birds (mostly shrubs, some trees) consisting of about 40 different varieties. Some of our plantings are older trees while most of the shrubs are plantings of the past five years.

I can't say that I have a favorite species of bird as each one is special in its own way. However, the bluebirds (which are permanent residents) are so interesting that they can certainly become addictive.

Bluebirds happen to be one of my husband's favorite birds. We began a trail last year with 12 boxes which my husband and our next door neighbor built. I believe that we had great success for our first year. We were a little late in getting our boxes out but ended the season with 75 babies. We now have a total of 34 boxes having gotten an earlier start this year by putting the

new ones up by the end of January. The word about bluebirds is really spreading throughout this small farming community. We have yet to be refused when asking neighboring farmers for permission to use their fence posts for our boxes. We even have people asking for box patterns and requesting that we put boxes on their property.

Last season two broods were raised from a nesting box located on a post beside our driveway. People seem overly concerned with interfering with nature. Natural instinct appears to be much stronger than our interference. I am, however, talking about beneficial interference, not the destruction of natural habitats. My husband and I are only familiar with our experiences. I believe that the remainder of our story will show that helping does not cause obvious harm to the birds.

During the nesting of the second brood in our yard, I developed a daily habit of going out and sitting on the tailgate of our truck to watch the bluebirds' activity at the nesting box. Sometimes both parents would sit above me on the electrical wire; at other times the male would sit by himself and occasionally check on his mate. One afternoon my son brought home some leftover crickets from a fishing trip. I decided that I would use the crickets to feed, or try to feed, the birds. The catbirds (which are quite tame) took an immediate liking to the insects and were most appreciative of such an easy meal. To my surprise the male bluebird, sitting on the wire, suddenly flew down to the street and took one of the crickets that I had tossed out. The street to which I refer is beside our house. Because there are only three houses located on it, there is little traffic so it is safe for such bird activity.

I began buying two to three hundred crickets weekly from the local bait store. The male and female bluebirds began sitting together on the electrical wire and enjoying my handouts. Obviously, this was not their only source of food as I certainly could not sit for hours feeding them. This supplemental feeding continued with the adults until the babies were hatched, and then the fun really began. The adults really kept me busy as they flew back and forth with crickets feeding the new babies. After the nestlings fledged from the box, the parents and babies would line up on the electrical wire waiting for me to throw them crickets. Sometimes when I went out I could not see them anywhere; then, suddenly, all six would appear on the electrical wire. For several days the parents would catch the crickets and return to the wire feeding the wide-mouth, wing-flapping babies. I never knew baby birds could hold so many insects at one time.

Soon the babies would attempt to catch their own crickets. I have never seen a funnier sight than those babies trying to catch a hopping cricket. I don't know who was more scared, the baby or the insect. The cricket would hop and the babies would hop. Sometimes they would move for several feet trying to catch up with the crickets. Once in a while they would catch a cricket but then didn't know what to do with it. After several days they decided if they were going to eat as much as they wanted (the adults by this time were supplying only part of their food), they had better figure out what to do with the bugs. As you can imagine, the young birds were most entertaining for several weeks. As the fall days grew shorter I did not have as much daylight after arriving home from work, so we could only spend a few minutes together each evening. They were better than clocks; each evening at 6:45 p.m. they would appear on the wire and wait for their supply of crickets. Soon our feedings were limited to weekends. The bait store stopped carrying live crickets when fishing season ended and so ended my treats to the bluebird family.

You can be sure that I will purchase crickets earlier this year as the catbirds, robins, and wrens enjoy them as much as the bluebirds. The bluebirds remained the entire winter and seemed to thrive without my handouts. They never became dependent on me. I just helped them out and enjoyed myself immensely, increasing the bait store's profits as well.

When it came time for the catbirds to migrate, my feeding of them and their two broods did not make them linger. Instinct won. I do expect the catbirds to return in May as they have for several years; their food will be waiting. As for the bluebirds, they are checking the nesting box near our driveway. We hope that he will convince her for the third year that it is a perfect place for them to raise another family or two. ■

P.O. Box 633
304 Lincoln St.
Coats, NC 27521

Banded Bluebirds in the Saguenay/ Lac-Saint-Jean Area (Quebec, Canada)

In order to learn more about Eastern Bluebird migrations and to estimate the success rate of the trails, banders of the Saguenay/Lac-Saint-Jean area (Quebec) have provided young Eastern Bluebirds with rings (bands).

Each bluebird has been provided with a numbered metal ring and with a red or yellow plastic ring. The latter allows easier recognition in the field.

Your cooperation is requested in reporting observations of bluebirds with yellow or red rings. If you see such a bluebird, please note when and where observation was made, the leg on which each band was located (and the color). Please send your notes to the following address:

Chriantiane Girard
Comite de conservation du Merle-bleu de l'Est
C.Q.A.S.L.S.J. Inc.
C.P. 1265
Jonquiere (P. Quebec)
G7S 4K8 Canada

BLUEBIRD EXPRESS

SIALIA welcomes the correspondence of its membership. Bluebird Express should become a forum for all who are interested in communicating their ideas and actions concerning bluebird conservation. We will attempt to publish a wide range of views in a responsible manner. Keep your letters coming!

Dear Editor:

Our area fledged about 600 bluebirds last year. Ten were seen eating sumac fruit last week (Jan.). Wish they'd gone south—our winters can be severe.

I do a weekly column on non-game species and flora for the local paper.

Margaret Drake Elliott
1530 Nelson St.
Muskegon, MI 49441

Dear Editor:

Some interesting notes from my trail during 1989:

1. A female bluebird used a dummy wren twig nest adding no grass lining of her own. She laid 4 eggs, 3 hatched, and 3 nestlings fledged successfully.
2. I have had bluebirds using hanging nesting boxes made of heavy lumber (2x4s, 2x6s, and 1x6s).
3. A Tree Swallow placed a piece of peacock tail feather in its nest. The peacock farm is 3/4 mile away.
4. I no longer use 4" PVC pipe nesting boxes because they are too small for a clutch of 5 or 6 young. Now I add only 5" PVCs to my trail. I also use them to replace vandalized wooden nesting boxes. I then place a NABS vinyl decal on the smooth PVC surface; it seems to discourage further vandalism.

Bob Early
R.D. #3, Box 196
Pleasantview Road
Hummelstown, PA 17036



Dear Editor:

Our granddaughter visited Bermuda recently, saw this item in a newspaper, and carried the paper home. She was surprised and pleased when she found that we were aware of Tom's history and friendship.

Laurance and Adelaide Sawyer
Route 1, Bluebird Lane
Ringgold, GA 30736

The following item was printed in the letters to The Royal Gazette for March 5, 1990.

Dear Sir:

Further to my letter of January 3 to you, which suggested people should start thinking about bluebirds again. I am pleased to report that volunteers have come forward to help build nest boxes. People may order them by calling 293-1970.

Have you got yours all set, Mr. Editor?

Tommy Outerbridge
Summerhaven
P.O. Box HS30
Bermuda

Dear Editor:

Last winter I was given a bluebird nesting box by a friend whose son had built several as a Boy Scout project. In late February my sister saw the box sitting in my kitchen and inquired about its purpose. I told her about the plight of the bluebird. I also told her that although I had never seen a bluebird in the area I was willing to give it a try.

Less than two hours later my sister pointed to a bird in a tree less than 30 feet from my kitchen window and asked what kind of bird it was. To my amazement it was a male Eastern Bluebird, the first I had ever seen in my life. That moment sparked a year long love affair with "my" bluebirds. The next day I mounted the box on a post in my backyard and the following morning a pair of bluebirds were sitting on the box. After about a week of investigation, they started to build a nest.

Although the first clutch of 4 eggs failed when sparrows drove the parents from the nest, they rebuilt their nest within days of my cleaning out the old nest and dead chicks. The second clutch of 5 eggs successfully fledged and I have watched all 7 bluebirds throughout the fall.

I couldn't have dreamed of such success. I owe a debt of thanks to my friend, Jim Muchler (one of your members), who introduced me to bluebirding and to your society.

Eugene L. Spencer
505 Locust Lane
Danville, PA 17821

Dear Editor:

Just a note to let you know how much I love the tape "Bluebird, Fly." I just can't seem to play it enough.

Carol McDaniel
14953 Hwy 23
Darlington, WI 53530

Dear Editor:

With reference to biologist Hal Schaeffer's comments about flying squirrels in 12(2):73. Evidently the only flying squirrel he is familiar with is the northern species.

Information from biologist Alan Boynton of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission's official educational publication lists the northern species at 95 to 145 grams and the much smaller southern flying squirrel at 50 to 75 g.

The smaller southern species can enter and exit the 1 1/2 inch opening in a bluebird nest box with ease. It can probably do likewise with an opening as small as 1 1/4 inches.

We likewise use metal plates to deter the "pickers and gnawers"; however, the southern flying squirrel needs no assistance from either.

Willard A. Cash
1906 Carolina Circle
Goldsboro, NC 27530

Dear Editor:

For the past three years a pair of bluebirds has successfully raised their young near my house, two broods the first year and three each of the last two years.

Last fall I gathered cedar berries and put them in my bluebird feeder. Fearing my supply of berries would be exhausted before winter's end, I began mixing "store-bought" currants with the cedar berries. Much to my surprise, the bluebirds preferred the currants. Now I put only currants in the feeder and have many bluebird visitors daily.

Joy M. Tiller
Route 4, Box 430
Glen Allen, VA 23060

Dear Editor:

Over the past few months our family has paid two visits to Mt. Vernon. Although we did not see any bluebirds while we were there, we did see plenty of evidence that enthusiastic bluebirders were at work on General Washington's estate. We were particularly pleased to see bluebird memorabilia on display in the gift shop and we wondered who the bluebird lovers might be.

Thanks to the Spring 1990 issue of *Sialia* we now know and we wish to express our appreciation to Gen. and Mrs. Seedlock and Mr. & Mrs. Horstman for their efforts in keeping Mt. Vernon as Washington himself must have known it—full of bluebirds.

Marjorie Seymour
303 Allen Hall
Harrisburg, PA 17104

Bluebird Tales

Mary D. Janetatos

"Those bluebirds are so beautiful I have to watch them all day on my day off and I don't get anything else done!" said Voula, my hairdresser recently. Of course, I quickly provided her and her husband, Tommy, with nest box plans. Two nest boxes now grace their lawn and I get an update on their bluebird activity on each visit. We might even be converting some other customers (and hairstylists) because a hush always seems to creep over the salon when bluebirding is discussed. You never can tell when someone will be alerted to this wonderful activity, especially since "Earth Day" observances have captured the attention of the general public.

Betty Goza of Lilburn, GA, described an Earth Day activity by Scout troop 100 in four recreational parks in Gurnett County. Certainly 4-H clubs are also naturals for NABS bluebird conservation projects. Diana Pederson of Lansing, MI, described that of her group. "I joined the NABS in January 1990. Since that time our six member 4-H club of 8-10 year olds has constructed four nest boxes and were given one. These were placed in prime bluebird habitat on April 1. Bluebirds arrived the morning of April 2....Our 4-H members are about as excited as they can be. I have continually emphasized that this was a project which would really help a bird species and that they, as children, could make a difference! It's a lesson I hope they remember for a lifetime."

Max Forbes, of Granite City, IL, is a bona fide member of the NABS Speakers' Bureau even if he did misplace Chairman Ron Kingston's form. He described a fine flyer put out by the Millstadt Unit of Homemakers Extension Association. Their advocacy of the front-opening box was to his liking. According to his letter, "We are experiencing a notable increase in bluebirds in this area of Illinois, thanks to the cooperation of many, many inter-



ested people."

That crucial factor (interested people) will surely be addressed when a new video is widely seen. *Bluebirds Up Close* was videotaped in late 1989 by Michael Godfrey for Nature Science Network, Inc. [108 High St., Carboro, NC 27510; tel. (919) 967-3531]. The jacket includes the following description of the contents. "This 50-minute video cassette is your invitation from the National Audubon Society to share in this uniquely American conservation success. Watch and listen as all three of our native bluebirds—Eastern, Western and Mountain Bluebirds—reveal their intimate family stories. Thrill to the song and color that radiates from bluebirds alone. Best of all, learn in *Bluebirds Up Close* how to attract and care for your bluebirds—wherever you live in the U.S.A." Michael interviewed me for this video and, except for this, the video has much to recommend it.

Lillian Files of Tyngsboro, MA, past president of NABS, pointed out that the Winter 1990 issue of *Massachusetts Wildlife* featured the Eastern Bluebird on the cover. The informative article inside gives Lil's address as well as that of NABS. Frederick C. Harwood's article entitled "A Family Affair with Bluebirds" is subtitled "A little faith in a flimsy house blossoms into lifelong wonder."

"Flimsy" houses seem to be just what Arlene Dziedzic of Lusby, MD, encountered when she approached her employer, the Baltimore [MD] Gas & Electric Co. In late winter she wrote, "The trail (at Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Power Plant) was originally installed for public relations reasons. No one

took care of it. Houses were put up all wrong and they were only breeding House Sparrows. So now, after begging and begging upper management, I am the proud landlord." Hooray for your efforts, Arlene!

Across the Chesapeake Bay in Hurlock, MD, **Ray and Marjorie Lanham** described their excitement upon seeing their first bluebirds—four of them. Now they will add helping the bluebirds to their other love—helping Purple Martins. To do this, they visited Smith Motors in Denton, MD, where **Oliver Smith** sells bluebird nest boxes that he has made. In other Maryland bluebird news, **Dana Saluga** of Abingdon, reported placing a bluebird display again at Harford County's Fallston branch public library, then plans to move it to the Bel Air branch. She has also placed a nest box facing an open field at the edge of the library property. She and the Fallston library staff are "anxiously hoping for a pair of bluebirds to find the box this spring!" If they do, they join other "library bluebirds" including those at the downtown Columbia location in Howard County where **Alice and Clif Grant** originally placed a box.

From Winchester, VA, veteran bluebirder **Charles Clevenger** reported, "I have a 120 box bluebird trail scattered along the rural roads and one golf course. I build Barn Owl, Wood Duck, bat, wren and bluebird boxes. I don't make much money, but I enjoy every minute."

Carl M. Keefer of Montague, NJ, recently wrote, "This is my second spring building and placing bluebird houses. I've enjoyed seeing the nestlings of many types of birds fly from my humble works of art, but so far I've had no success with bluebirds. Perhaps they know that I am not an official member of the North American Bluebird Society! I don't have any property as such and have to go door to door and ask permission to place my boxes."

Then we hear from **John G. Davidson** of Barnesville, MD, a veteran of World War I.

"I am enclosing a check for \$275.00 which is money collected from

the sale of bluebird houses. The last one I numbered was 857 and have material here for 38 more. I have donated houses to churches, schools, senior citizens for their money raising projects. I donated nine houses to a Girl Scout troop for a trail."

Whether awesome (as in John Davidson's work) or modest and growing, as in **Dan and Marcy Hoepfner's** efforts, all accounts are greatly appreciated. Dan and Marcy wrote this spring, "We are doing our share to help increase their numbers—from three bluebird boxes the past two years to 20 this year!"

It all seems to add up to good news for our banner bird. Witness this account from **Amelia McKee** of Bald Knob, AR: "I'm 83 years old and fell in love with bluebirds as a child when my father showed me a nest and told me what wonderful little birds they were and to cherish and protect them. Then they were everywhere. When I was about 50 years old all at once I asked, 'Where are the bluebirds I enjoyed as a child?' I found out. Started with about 30 boxes. The most I ever remembered was six occupied boxes in one year. Sometimes none at all. Now, out of 14 boxes, more than half are used. It makes me feel grand to see bluebirds again and to know that they are making a comeback."

Several writers from New England report with joy sighting greater numbers of bluebirds. Among these were **Bonita Dundas** of Bennington, VT, **Edith Leopold** of East Hartland, CT, and **Michael McMorrow** of Hampden, ME.

Often our efforts to help bluebirds spill over into the area of helping humans as well. One instance of this was the donation by NABS of a pair of nesting boxes with habitat and monitoring instructions to an auction held by the Barker Foundation, an adoption agency. **Robin Lustig** of Barker wrote that interest in bluebird conservation was high at the 1989 auction and bidding was brisk.

Congratulations are in order for **Arlene and Walter Kunkel** of Fredericktown, OH, who celebrated their 60th

wedding anniversary on March 4, 1990. Arlene, another of our "awesome veterans" enclosed a note with the newspaper clipping. "I'm 80 years old and in good health. I plan to do my bluebird trail again (12 miles long with 57 houses). This will be the 18th year for me and our North Liberty Garden Club. In 1989 we fledged 239 bluebirds and 29 Tree Swallows. I fledged 138 bluebirds and 18 Tree Swallows."

In that same category is **Fran Hanes** of New York Mills, NY. Fran is founding [now past] president of the wonderfully successful Upstate New York Bluebird Society. She has been a NABS board member and award plaque recipient; she is also a talented artist working in several media. Now suffering from ill health, she wrote describing the local bluebird activities: "If I only felt better I'd be in the thick of things." Our prayers and best wishes are with you, Fran, and your years of inspired and dedicated leadership will energize our own efforts!

Always energizing to me are the efforts of our many volunteers. Among those volunteers are **Dr. Royal** and **Maxine Montgomery**. Maxine is a "Sialia-stuffer" and Dr. Royal builds nest boxes saying that he copies them "from the last one I make."

There's almost always an "astounder" item in the mail. This time it came from **Mike Bourgeois** of Baton Rouge, LA. "I hope your organization still exists. The envelope I have used to mail this note came to me as a response to an article about your organization which appeared in *Parade Magazine* a number of years ago. I built bluebird houses from the information you sent and witnessed the production of several broods."

We have (delicately) spoken on the subject of advancing age. At the other extreme is sixth grader **Ruth Dykstra** of Marion County, TN. She sent a newspaper clipping describing her project. When a student "contracts" (builds) a bluebird nesting box, Ruth gives him or her a "happy-gram," a clever humorous note with "Greetings to a Bluebird Lover!"

Mrs. Rose Marie Ranck of Down-

ington, PA, wrote that she teaches "a nature class at a pre-school. You're never too young to begin learning about bluebirds!" This neatly answers **Candice Miller** of Columbus, MS, who asked, "How old do you have to be to help save the bluebirds? I am in the fourth grade. I am nine years old."

But the last word just has to go to **Meera Palani** of Concord, CA, for her Earth Day 1990 letter. "My name is Meena Palani. I am 8 1/2. Our nature club is interested in putting up nesting boxes. Please send information about bluebirds and nesting boxes and how we can save endangered species. Thinking globally and locally, Your friend."

May each of us do just that as we offer God a prayer of gratitude for our fragile planet and for the strength to restore it, as so many are doing through effective bluebird conservation! ■

(LIFE-continued from page 108)

really see a bluebird, not just glimpse a flash of blue as one flew past.

I have five acres and while rolling the yard that day I saw the pair several more times. I saw one of them fly to the tree the nesting box is in, drop down to the top of the box, sit there a few seconds, then fly to a nearby tree.

On Monday, 11 April, I saw the female picking up something along the edge of the drive. She was gathering grass. Soon she flew to the nesting box and went in. How happy I was to know that again, after all these years, the bluebirds would enrich my life. They successfully raised two broods, four the first time and three the second.

More boxes have been built and next spring they will be up and waiting for the return of the bluebirds. ■

1175 County Rd. 26
Marengo, OH 43334

Bluebird Man of Georgia

One hundred thirty miles he came from south Atlanta's coast.
He came to see a bluebird; no bluebird lore could boast.
His face was young and honest, neither fat nor thin.
No fancy airs—no hippy hairs were hanging from his chin.

Straightforward he bespoke his mind, when I asked what was on it,
Said he, "I hope to see a bluebird, here; I've banked my trip upon it,
For here, they say that every day the bluebirds fly about.
I thought that I'd arrange this trip, and maybe I'd find out."

"Just turn around and look aloft to that high hanging wire.
No reason now to look in vain for your hungry heart's desire.
A bluebird's there on that high perch from which he scouts the ground,
And now you've seen your first bluebird, and now just look around.
There's a house contains a nest on that pole in the shade.
Your trip of all those weary miles was not thus vainly made."

"Excuse the tears," the young man said, "my age is thirty-four;
I've seen the prize with my two eyes, and now I would see more."
I took him all around the place to see each bluebird's nest,
Of all the days of all his life, he said this was the best.

He bought of our log houses for bluebirds four or five.
Around his yard he put them up, and his place came alive.
Brown-headed Nuthatches, bluebirds, titmice, and chickadees,
Woodpeckers, and other birds nested there—and bees.

And then he sent to Washington for the famous NABS slide show,
With the taped narration so everywhere he'd go
He'd show the birds of beauty and information true,
To inspire his growing audience with those great birds of blue.

Ere long his reputation for knowledge of the game
Had grown beyond his fondest dreams, "The Bluebird Man" his name.

But when he found himself so-called—"the Georgia Bluebird Man,"
He quickly said, "Thank you, kind folks, I'm doing what I can,
But you've not see him yet, you're premature I fear;
The real Bluebird Man lives a hundred miles from here.
He's the one that showed to me my first bluebird there,
His knowledge far surpasses mine, and he has pictures rare
That far outdo the shots I get of bluebirds at their nest.
One shows a Daddy feeding young on his wife's head—the best."

Ron Lee goes now from place to place a-spreading bluebird lore.
The only way to tell his pace is to say more and *more!*

Until the bluebird calls again from every field and farm,
As he did in years gone by, and is again beyond all harm,
We'll keep on keeping on, good Ron, and keep that goal in sight,
And labor on through rain or shine, all trusting in his might
Who made the creatures great and small, and made man over all;
We'll labor on with love of God to aid lest one should fall,
May we with His Spirit guiding us, keep on 'til prize is won,
And seek His will to guide us still, 'til all life's duty's done.

Laurance Sawyer

The Apocalyptic Bluebird

A bluebird appeared
At the edge of the wood
One chilly spring morn.
Head slightly bent,
Eyes open wide, and back
the color of the sky.

Rapturously
Bathing in his presence,
I awaited his magic,
Melancholic melody.

"How can I
A bluebird of happiness be,
Inspiring you to romantic glory?"
He cried,
Somewhat out of character.
"Acid rain,
Deforestation,
And greenhousing
Have spoiled the show.
Clean up your act,
Lazy poet,
Your fellow man's as well.
Or I could be
The last bluebird
You'll ever see."

Dennis W. Brezina

Art Credits

Jon E. Boone 82, 114
Suzanne Pennell 99(2), 116

(BOOSTERS-continued from inside back cover)

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Deborah L. Van Dyke
Lorraine D. Watkins
Norman B. Wilcox
Robert D. Williams, M.D.
Robert H. Williams
Michael Owen Willson
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Mrs. Albert Tilt
Cheryl Smith Tolley
(Continued on page 120)

Western Bluebird

Mary L. Contakos
Robert Crumpton
Barbara Moore

Mountain Bluebird

Martha Jane Dodd
Thomas C. Matsko
Barbara Wise

Nestling

Dorothy Bruton
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Marge & Martin Smith

Fledglings

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Founded in 1978, THE NORTH AMERICAN BLUEBIRD SOCIETY is an incorporated non-profit organization determined to increase the populations of the three species of bluebirds on this continent. Inasmuch as the populations of these birds have diminished due to the maladroit actions of human beings, as well as other natural disasters, the primary objective of the SOCIETY is to educate all who will listen about the importance of preserving these singular creatures in their native environment.

Toward this end, the SOCIETY will work, within the bounds of effective conservation, to study those obstacles impeding bluebird recovery; to publish results of those studies; to promote ideas and actions which might reduce the effect of those obstacles; and to obtain a more complete knowledge about bluebird ecology, in the hope of learning more about the ecology of humankind.

Membership: Student (under 21) \$10.00; Senior (over 60) \$10.00; Regular \$15; Sustaining \$30; Supporting \$50; Contributing \$100; Corporate \$100; Donor \$250; Life \$500. Add \$2 per year for Canada and Mexico and \$3 per year for other countries (Surface mail). U.S. funds only, please. Amounts over \$6 are tax deductible.

Address:
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