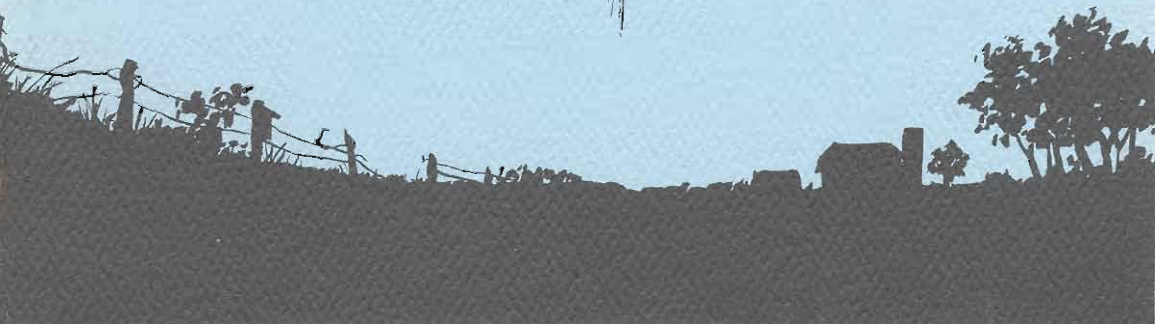
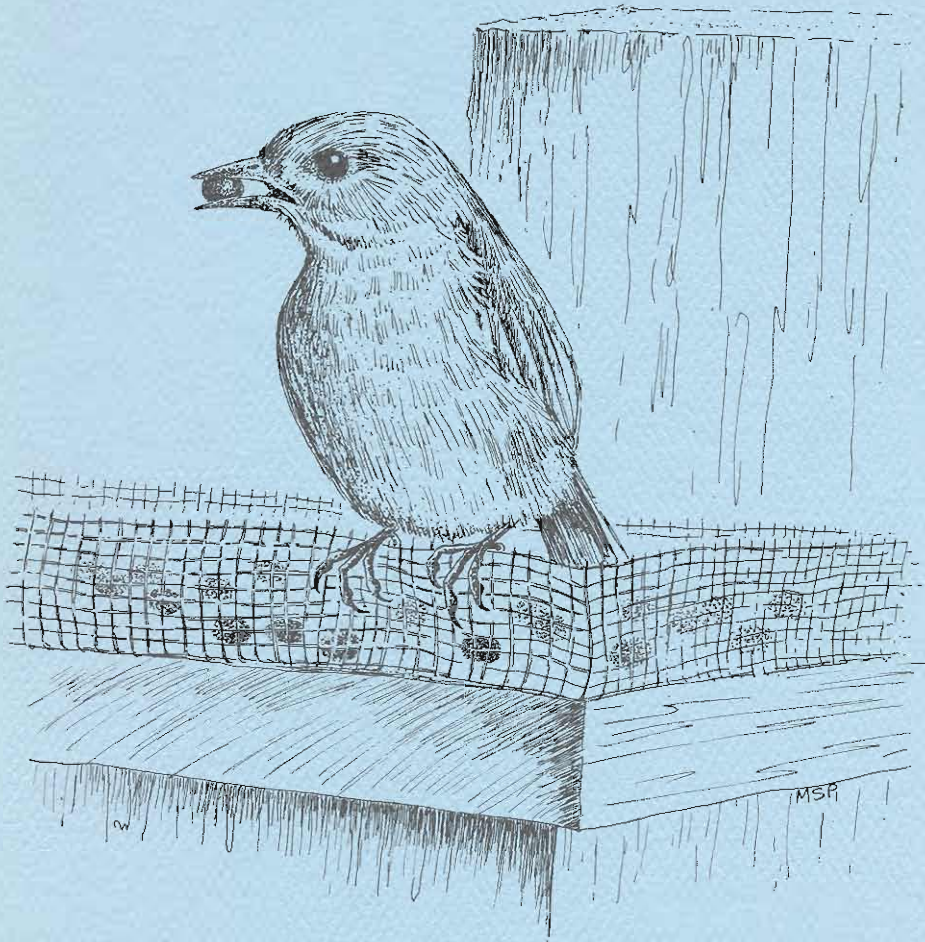


# *Sialia*

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Autumn 1991  
Pages 121-160

The Quarterly Journal  
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 *sialia*, 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 *Motacilla* 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-ahl'-ee-ah see'-ahl-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 juvenile 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 13, Number 4  
Autumn 1991  
Pages 121-160

**EDITOR**  
Joanne K. Solem  
**CONTRIBUTING EDITOR**  
Lawrence Zeleny  
**ART EDITOR**  
M. Suzanne Probst

## COVER

An Eastern Bluebird eats a dogwood berry put out by a bluebirder.  
By Art Editor M. Suzanne Probst.

*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.

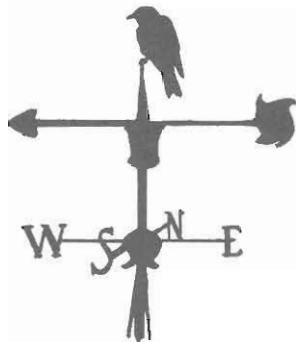
## Presidential Points

Sadie Dorber

Each year the Pennsylvania Bureau of State Parks holds a meeting to honor the many volunteers that monitor and maintain bluebird trails in the state parks across Pennsylvania. This year the meeting was held at Bald Eagle Mountain State Park in Lock Haven. The 5,000 acre park provides the habitat for many migrating birds and I had high hopes of some great birding. My husband and I drove down the evening before the meeting in order to start birding early the next morning. Unfortunately, the early summer weather had apparently moved the warblers on through, as they were scarce. Bluebirds, however, were abundant throughout the park. As we returned to the main office for the meeting, Jean Kling, Environmental Education Specialist for Pennsylvania State Parks, was erecting signs to direct the bluebirders to the meeting location. She asked, "Did you see anything?" I answered, "Only bluebirds." "Great!" Jean replied. The spring bird census was being conducted in the park the same day; I hope they had a better count than we did.

This yearly meeting also gives everyone the opportunity to share their experiences and ask others about problems they encounter on their trails. House Wrens seemed to be the number one topic of the day. For some reason, for which none of us had the answer, Bald Eagle Park doesn't have wrens. They've never nested in the boxes, and I hadn't heard their loud, bubbly song while birding that morning.

Dr. Andrew Choby was the recipient of the award this year for outstanding work in bluebird conservation. Dr. Choby has been a dedicated trail monitor for over eight years at Prince Gallitzien State Park. He keeps the trail of 68 boxes repaired and builds new boxes when needed. He has been the person responsible for recruiting volunteers to help at the park.



Dr. Choby is a devoted outdoorsman so it doesn't surprise anyone who knows him that he's so dedicated to the bluebird movement.

All of us accompanied Cecil Hazlett, the trail monitor at Bald Eagle, along his trail to band nesting bluebirds. Cecil's trail of 58 boxes usually fledges nearly 200 bluebirds annually.

Many parks send their nesting reports to NABS, but Pennsylvania is the only state that compiles the records of all the parks and submits the data to headquarters. Their dedication is commendable!

In June we attended Bluebird Day at the nature center located on the grounds of the Genesee Country Museum in Mumfords, New York. The reconstructed village takes you back to the nineteenth century. Scott Adamson, director of the nature center, offered to take me for a quick tour of the village before all the bluebird activities got underway. Bluebird boxes were located throughout the property, but as Scott pointed out, the preferred boxes are always the ones located in the village area. Years ago, bluebirds were common in villages and, no doubt, would be today if we hadn't become so urbanized. Of great interest to me was the bluebird that took over a wren nest. A few pieces of grass had been placed in the twig cup by the bluebird before she laid her eggs. Since blowflies are not usually found in wren nests, I wondered if this twig nest would be parasitized by the blowfly.

Several years ago, Dr. Robert Ahearn of this area called me to report that bears had torn up several of his

(Continued on page 159)

# A Study of Bluebird Organizations and Their Accomplishments

Joby C. Lawson

## Abstract

As a school project, I started my own nest box network in eighth grade. As part of a research project, I wrote to various bluebird organizations in the United States and Canada. A questionnaire asking about organizational structure and nesting results was the main component of these communications. The responses were intended to help me improve my own organization and are compiled in the following project report.

## Introduction

As an eighth grader in 1985, I was obligated to undertake a project for one of my classes. After reading an article in the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's *Conservationist* magazine about the plight of the Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) in New York State, I became concerned about their fate. This became the nucleus for my project of establishing a countywide nest box network, the Wayne County Nest Box Network for bluebird preservation.

Publicity was the first objective. I accomplished this by writing an article describing the bluebirds' situation and placing it in newspapers throughout my county. Using this method, I received calls from citizens wishing to become involved, and established a membership.

I've kept my network fairly simple. I recruit members annually, mostly through the newspaper articles, write bimonthly newsletters, collect nesting results annually, and keep repeating this process.

The following project was conducted recently while I was a student in a wildlife management technique class at SUNY Cobleskill [NY] in order for me to see how different bluebird associations were started and are operated, as well as to see what kinds of problems they've encountered, if any. The responses would, I hoped, give me new insights that could be used to improve my network and eventually its productivity.

## Methods

I acquired the North American Bluebird Trail Directory, which lists the names and addresses of bluebird organizations in the United States and Canada. From this listing, I randomly selected 15 organizations, trying to cover every corner of North America. To each of these groups I sent a questionnaire. In it I asked how the group was started, how they publicized themselves and obtained members, and, if they mailed newsletters, how often and would they supply examples. I also inquired if they collected annual surveys, if so, could I obtain examples of their results for comparative purposes. Organizational functions and activities were another area which I inquired about, along with a question concerning nest box monitoring problems and possible solutions to those problems.

## Results

Of the 15 inquiries that were mailed, eight were returned. These groups roughly formed the border of the United States. Two groups responded from Texas, and one group each from Arkansas, Alabama, New York, Minnesota, and the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia in Canada.

Project Bluebird: "Trails Across Texas" was started by Keith Kridler of Mount Pleasant, Texas. He began helping the bluebirds by placing hundreds of bird house gourds out from 1965-1973. In 1973 he began to erect wooden

boxes along the Texas roadsides with outstanding results. By the 1980s the bluebird population had exploded on his trail of almost 300 boxes. While traveling in 1984 and 1985, Keith noticed other nest boxes, in which he placed his name and address. The resulting contacts with Harry Krueger and Don Hutchins helped to unite their efforts in helping the bluebirds. These three men along with Robert McKinney and Dr. Shirl Brunnel form the nucleus of the group. The group sends out monthly newsletters filled with information. Their publicity is mainly through these newsletters and by word of mouth. Small aluminum tags which contain the group's address are also placed on unfamiliar boxes. Annual seminars are also held and booths are placed at various special events. Annual surveys are not sent out, so they have no problems with monitoring. Kridler stresses good nest box location, predator control, and keeping House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) out of the boxes. He feels that record keeping shouldn't be stressed. As long as people are erecting nest boxes and the bluebirds are using them, he feels his project is working (Kridler pers. comm.).

The Wildwood Bluebird Trail is located in the resort town of Wildwood in southeast Texas. The town consists of about 350 homes in which 800 people reside, the majority are retirees. In 1988, the bluebird trail grew as a project of a local birding club and is now quite popular and productive. During the 1990 breeding season, 402 bluebirds were fledged from 129 boxes. Certain members of the club construct the nest boxes which are sold and installed for a fair price. These profits are then used for further construction. There is no formal newsletter, but articles and meeting dates are placed in the resort's newsletters. The functions for the bluebirders consist of four meetings during the breeding season. These meetings maintain enthusiasm and keep monitoring problems to a minimum. If a monitor isn't recording data very well, a simple phone call asking to accompany them the next time they monitor boxes usually solves this

problem (Rodeberg pers. comm.).

The Bluebird Society of Bella Vista, Arkansas is another excellent example of a resort/retirement community that has gone to the birds. In 1980 the society was formed by a group of birdwatchers interested in helping the bluebirds. This organization has a spring meeting at which time nesting record sheets are distributed and birding experiences are discussed. At a fall meeting the year's nesting results are announced. The village's golf courses now have over 300 nesting boxes; almost 6,000 bluebirds have been fledged in the past ten years. This does not include the boxes located at private homes in the area. This group also conducts seminars for various clubs which are interested in bluebirding. These seminars cover everything from box construction and location to trail maintenance and monitoring. Bella Vista doesn't have many problems with insufficient monitoring. They have a monitoring supervisor who calls the monitors to make sure they're keeping an accurate count of their nestings and reinforces the importance of record keeping (Reed pers. comm.).

The Alabama Bluebird Management Project is a statewide preservation project supported by the Alabama Nongame Wildlife Restoration Fund, and coordinated by Doreen L. Miller. This project was established through the presentation of bluebird seminars at state parks and wildlife refuges. From the project's start in 1985 until 1989 it has presented 65 seminars to over 3,400 attendees. An annual report is distributed showing the year's nesting results. In 1989 alone, 1,582 nest boxes were reported to have fledged 3,902 bluebirds with an average of 2.47 birds per box. There is a slight problem with their annual nesting reports though. For 1989 they only received results from one-fourth of their total co-operators and roughly 2,000 known nest boxes were not reported (Miller 1990).

Leading New York State in bluebird restoration is the Schoharie County Bluebird Society. This association was established in 1985 by Ray Briggs,

a high school teacher in Cobleskill, New York. This group obtains members through many channels. News releases are placed in countywide newspapers and biannual mailings are sent to every person in the county known to have bluebird nest boxes. A "Bluebird Day" at the New York Power Authority Visitor's Center in North Blenheim is held every year. This event attracts interested people with its bluebird slide shows, displays, videos, and trail walks. They also place booths at the county fairs and many other similar events. The bluebird fledging rate of this group is outstanding. In 1985, approximately 500 bluebirds were fledged and in 1990 a total of 1,561 were reported. The group holds meetings almost every month for its members. They also hold a banquet in the spring to kickoff the nesting season and a picnic in the summer. As in most groups, they also have monitoring problems. This is addressed by educating the members through the newspapers and through public meetings held throughout the county. Visiting private homes to discuss monitoring is also done by the Schoharie Society (Berner pers. comm.).

One of the most interesting groups that responded to my questionnaire was the Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota. This is another statewide organization that is operated by the Minneapolis Audubon Chapter and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Nongame Division. It was founded in 1978 by Eagle Scout candidate Chris Valenta who was helped by Dick Peterson to establish a bluebird trail. Dick was already a 20 year veteran of bluebird recovery when approached by Chris. Joined by 11 Audubon Chapters, these two helped to form this organization. The program is promoted with workshops and programs given by Department of Natural Resources personnel throughout the state. Informational handouts are also dispersed throughout the state. A quarterly newsletter is written and distributed to the members. The letters are full of information helpful to bluebirders. Surveys are col-

lected that thoroughly gather a great variety of information on bluebird nesting. The 1990 Bluebird Directory contains the following results: 545 reports were received covering the results of 11,530 nest boxes. These boxes produced a total of 16,437 bluebirds (Henderson 1990). Several times during the course of the year an advisory committee meets to set the program's direction. An annual conference is also held which includes special speakers, films, and award presentations. Although the monitoring and reporting of nest results are optional in this association, reporting remains steady at around 500 nesting reports per season (Vetter pers. comm.).

Heading across our border to the north, I heard from the Mountain Bluebird Trail of Alberta, Canada. This trail was founded by Duncan Mackintosh in 1974. Duncan started erecting nest boxes to help restore Mountain Bluebirds (*Sialia currucoides*). The trail reached into Montana when Duncan was asked to come to Great Falls and help set up a trail through Montana. The Alberta trail alone covers almost 700 linear miles. Many articles have been written about this trail by local newspapers. This word of mouth usually help to obtain members and trail monitors. Presentations to interested groups such as Scouts usually attract members also. In the fall, an annual report is mailed containing that year's and previous years' nesting results. In 1990, 1,808 boxes out of 2,839 were used by bluebirds. These boxes fledged 3,872 young. During the 11 years of this trail's existence, an amazing 23,771 Mountain Bluebirds have been fledged. This group has very few problems with monitoring. Most of the monitors are bird banders and the government requires exact, accurate data. An integral part of this organization is the yearly conference. It usually features several speakers from varying parts of the network (Mackintosh pers. comm.).

My final reply was from the Southern Interior Bluebird Trail in British

Columbia. This group was started in 1989 by Vern Johnson after he raised six orphaned bluebirds. This event motivated him to read articles detailing the bluebirds' plight and, as a result, he took action. The nucleus of the group came from interested members of Vern's local Naturalist Club. This past year there were 17 monitors and almost 40 are expected for 1991 as the number of trails increases. These monitors are also recruited through word of mouth, local newspaper articles, and by personal contact. If a person's property is suitable habitat, they are simply asked if they would be willing to help. A lot of people are very willing once they're approached. This group doesn't mail a newsletter, but does collect an annual survey. In its second year of existence, it already has 224 nest boxes which have produced 304 Western Bluebirds (*Sialia mexicana*) and 47 Mountain Bluebirds. They have some monitoring problems. To help reduce this, nesting record sheets are distributed to monitors each season. Also, during the season, monitors are called periodically to see how data collection is progressing and to make sure it is being done. Like some other groups, an end of the season dinner is held to discuss the season's activities and to plan for the future (Smith pers. comm.).

### Discussion and Conclusions

There seems to be no one way that bluebird restoration projects are started. Many are simply the actions of individual people such as Ray Briggs, Duncan Mackintosh, and me. Others are formed by groups such as birding clubs, Audubon chapters, and naturalist clubs. Some are begun by state agencies such as the Alabama and Minnesota Nongame Wildlife Divisions.

The avenues for publicizing these groups and obtaining members are almost inexhaustible. Many of the larger associations hold workshops and seminars which cover everything that an individual needs to know about bluebirding including actually constructing nest boxes. Most other groups place

articles in local newspapers, use word-of-mouth contact, distribute free or subscription newsletters, and staff booths at outdoor events and fairs. Still others see possible bluebird habitat or nonregistered nest boxes and approach the home owners to describe the group's work. Keith Kridler (pers. comm.) has a unique aluminum plaque with his group's address printed on it, which he carries with him. When he comes upon an unfamiliar nest box, he places a plaque on the box and eventually gets a response.

The majority of the responding groups circulate some kind of newsletter. These include monthly, bimonthly, quarterly, and annual mailings. It seems that the circulation depends on the size of the organization. If the members are scattered across the state, an annual report might be the only literature that is distributed. It is possible that it might be too costly and time consuming to produce a newsletter for a large group. The two resort/retirement groups of Wildwood, Texas and Bella Vista, Arkansas (Rodeberg, Reed pers. comm.) have no formal "bluebird" newsletter. Instead, they place their information in the resort's newsletter or on centralized billboards. For my network, I write a bimonthly newsletter. Within it, I try to answer any questions that might have been asked, point out new research findings and facts, and provide general information on a variety of bluebird topics.

One area in which I've been negligent is that of providing network functions. Most groups hold some sort of formal or informal meetings. These include advisory committee meetings to plan for the future and simple get-togethers to discuss new ideas and experiences. At a more formal level, banquets and dinners are held. The ultimate function is the annual conference. These are held for at least a whole day and include speakers, films, and activities concerning bluebirds. Until recently, I have never considered meetings important. After attending a Schoharie County Bluebird Society meeting, however, I realized that if



members were not interested in the work being done, then they would not have joined. I used to be afraid of attempting to conduct a countywide meeting. After witnessing the intense interest of the Schoharie members, I feel meetings *will* work in my network. And, who knows, there may even be a banquet in the future!

I feel that the most important topic in bluebird restoration is the nest monitoring and annual surveys. Seven of my eight responding groups take a survey each nesting season. These survey results are the most important factor in helping the bluebirds for with them we can evaluate the success of our efforts. The most important result is the increase in bluebird fledglings. This helps to establish whether our experiments with nest box styles, heights, materials, and locations are working or not. It also allows us to see population improvements year after year and it helps to set goals for the upcoming seasons. Keith Kridler (pers. comm.) doesn't stress surveys. He said that numbers on paper don't impress him; it is the number of bluebirds seen along the roadside that counts. This, too, is a valid point which should be considered. The monitoring of boxes is the largest problem for most organizations. Duncan Mackintosh (pers. comm.) stated that trails can't be successful without accurate data. This statement should be etched in stone. Every organization that collects data has problems with monitoring to some extent. I think some of this is because the recording of information about nestings just slips a person's mind as they enjoy watching the birds raise a family. Also, it makes sense that if one doesn't know how or what to record, it just won't be done. Many groups provide recording sheets for their members. This helps them to know what is wanted from them. Some groups have monitoring supervisors. It's their job to contact members periodically and make sure that monitoring is being done.

I've learned quite a lot from this research project. There are many avenues in which I want to guide my net-

work. Groups seem to have good results by placing nesting boxes on golf courses and I want to look into this possibility. I also plan on looking into setting up group meetings, distributing record sheets, following up with phone calls, and getting lumber so boxes can be built for people who want them.

I hope that anyone reading this who is not in a group, will try to get into one or form their own. It's really not too difficult.

1401 Floodman Rd.  
Palmyra, NY 14522

#### Literature Cited

- Henderson, C. 1990. Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota Bluebird Directory. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.
- Miller, D.L. 1990. Alabama Bluebird Management Project 1985-1989. Nongame Wildlife, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

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## Volunteers Needed for Bluebird Feeding Study

Participants are needed to field test a feeding mixture for bluebirds. The feeding of bluebirds requires more time and attention to methods than the feeding of other birds. Participants must be willing and able to make frequent observations of the feeding area throughout each day and complete a questionnaire at the end of the study. Time and length of the study will depend on the individual's situation.

Qualified participants will have the following:

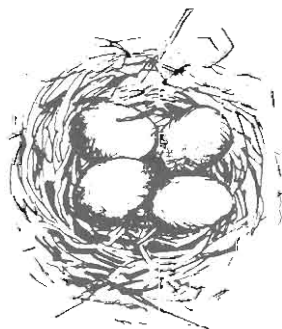
- 1) wintering bluebirds (the more southern states, for example);
- 2) bluebirds that, for some reason, do not leave an area as usual during migration but overwinter where there is a lack of natural foods;
- 3) Particularly needed are people that have overwintering Western or Mountain Bluebirds.

Interested bluebirders please contact me at the following address for further information:

Linda Peterson Janilla  
13325 4th St., No.  
Stillwater, MN 55082  
Tel. (612) 436-3396.

# QUESTION CORNER

Lawrence Zeleny



This year the female bluebird has started perching on side mirrors of automobiles pecking at the window, the mirror, and sometimes the auto body. She has also tried to fly into my neighbor's house and closed windows. Why is she doing this?

Ellen L. Mickle  
Houston, Texas

During the nesting season, bluebirds become very territorial. The male bird, particularly, will attack and drive off any other male bluebird that enters what he perceives to be his territory. Females often behave in the same manner in respect to other females. Reflections of the birds in mirrors or windows are evidently perceived and challenged as intruders. Perhaps the bluebirds consider these reflections to be particularly objectionable since they fight back and refuse to be banished!

---

**We are losing eggs from nests in nesting boxes when there is no evidence of snake or raccoon predation. All boxes in the four instances of predation are on heavily greased metal posts near fence rows along cattle pastures.**

Mary Lee Warnock  
Savannah, Georgia

It is difficult to say what may have caused the disappearance of

eggs from some of your nesting boxes. When eggs disappear from a nest in a bluebird box without any disruption of the nest or any sign of broken eggs, we always suspect either a snake or a two-legged predator, the latter being the most inexcusable of all.

Snakes and other climbing predators would surely leave evidence in the grease used on the metal pipes on which your boxes are mounted, if they attempt to climb the pipes. However, judging from the drawing you enclosed, it might be possible for a snake to climb an adjacent fence post, make its way along the top of the fence to a point just below the nesting box, then reach up to the box which is only 15 inches above the top of the fence, thus avoiding the grease entirely. Snakes are remarkably agile and capable of reaching very difficult objectives. Perhaps increasing the length of the greased pipe would be the solution in this case.

Another remotely possible predator in your case would be a flying squirrel, if the box is near a wooded area or even a single tree close enough for the squirrel to glide to the box.

Human vandalism, although usually not common, does nevertheless occur, sometimes in the most unexpected places. Don't overlook this possibility. ■

# Nest Box Fasteners: Nails, Glue and Screws

Harry Krueger

How you fasten the boards together when constructing your nest boxes is important.

Nails were so highly prized in pre-industrial America that it was common practice to burn down old houses solely to recover the nails. Now, all we have to do is go to the local hardware or home improvement store and buy what we want. But what size, style, etc. do we buy, and are nails the only fastener for joining wood?

Let's discuss nails first. Nails were cut from metal until 1855 when a French invention, the wire-nail, doomed the cut nails nearly to extinction. Today, almost all nails are cut out of metal wire, headed, pointed, threaded, polished, or galvanized by machine. Modern nails are made from steel wire. Wires are cut and shaped automatically from coils of wire of the proper size. The unusually bright finish is attained by a tumbling process. Protective treatments are galvanizing, tinning, and bluing by oxidation or cement coating. Nails of copper, aluminum, bronze, or stainless steel do not rust; galvanized zinc, cadmium, or nickel provide rust resistance.

When I first decided to build bluebird nest boxes ten years ago, I knew nothing about nails. I went to a home improvement store and found that the electrogalvanized 6d nails were 95¢ per pound. I went to another store where I noted that the hot-dipped galvanized 6d nails were 59¢ per pound. I surmised that the more expensive electrogalvanized nails were better because they cost more. Wrong!

To test the rust resisting effect of each nail, I drove one hot-dipped nail 1/4 inch (0.6 cm) into a board and one electrogalvanized (sometimes called electroplated) the same distance into the same board. I then put it outside to weather. Six months later the electrogalvanized nail was beginning to rust whereas the hot-dipped nail was free of rust.

What is the difference between these two types of nails? Hot-dipped galvanized refers to steel or iron articles that have been cleaned with acid and then galvanized by dipping them into a bath of melted zinc. When the zinc cools, it leaves small drops of zinc crystals on the surface. This is what gives a galvanized article its spotted or mottled appearance. Look for this rough surface when purchasing galvanized nails—the rougher the better.

In the electroplating process, steel articles (nails in this case) are placed into a solution in which zinc or zinc salt is dissolved. With the aid of electricity, the zinc is plated (transferred) onto the nails.

To give you an idea of the merits of the two different types of galvanized nails, let me quote from a California Redwood Association data sheet: "Stainless steel, aluminum alloy and top-quality hot-dipped galvanized nails are recommended for fastening exterior redwood. Beware of nails with a thin coating of zinc applied by electroplating, mechanical plating, tumbling galvanizing or poorly controlled hot dipping." Such nails will lose their zinc coating when driven and will rust. Use hot-dipped galvanized nails—the rougher the appearance, the better.

If you are going to use nails to fasten the boards of your nest box, here is a suggestion. Practically all plans for constructing nest boxes recommend a 6d nail. I recommend a 5d nail because it is much smaller in circumference:

5d - 1 3/4 in. long (4.4 cm)

6d - 2 in. long (5.1 cm)

The smaller circumference will not cause any splitting in 3/4 in. (1.9 cm) wood and will not work its way out once it has been driven into the wood. Before I nail the sides together, I glue the edges of the wood. This makes a firmer nest box. I use a product called SEAL-ALL® that is not affected by

gasoline, oil, alcohol, or water. It seals, bonds, insulates, and waterproofs (according to the label it is guaranteed waterproof). I have nest boxes that are ten years old and are still solidly glued and nailed along the edges with no warping.

One word about nails called "sinkers." These nails have a coating of a resin-like substance that acts like a cement and as a lubricant when the nail is driven into wood giving it greater holding power. The resin is a man-made material that holds like cement, hence you may see them advertised as cement-coated nails. They do rust easily so I never use them.

Now, let's discuss screws as a means of joining wood. Several years ago, I received a nest box from Keith Kridler (Texas) which was fastened with drywall screws. Some time later, I saw some wooden feeders at the local builders' supply store in Ore City; they were put together with drywall screws. Then I received a flicker box from Don Wilkins (Minnesota) and he had also used drywall screws. All three builders were using the same type of screws. Why?

Drywall screws have very deep ridges. These are called "flights" and have the ability to hold securely because they have more "bite." Most drywall screws are black. This is a black phosphate finish that is corrosion-resistant (but they will rust). These screws have two other advantages in that they have a bugle head that sits flush without splitting wood, and they have a square-drive recess that is easier to screw into wood than the slotted-head type. If you don't have a square-drive head, a Phillips-head screwdriver will work. These screws also come in yellow zinc/chromate finish and galvanized-treated deck screws.

I have just purchased 1x100 bugle-head exterior deck screws, #8xL-3/4 at \$6.99 per 100. These have the square-drive recess and are coated with the "new POLYCHECK® Rust Guard"—and they are made in the U.S.A. I will use these on all my future nest boxes. The manufacturer of these screws claims that they will outperform hot-

dip galvanizing.

Even though I have not tested these new screws and even though the #5 hot-dipped galvanized nails are time tested and successful, I feel these new screws will be superior for joining boards. I believe they will last longer, hold better, and cause less splitting.

The above screws would not be suitable where you use screws to fasten hinged roofs, pivotable floors, or sides that open. I use a #8x1-1/4 inch stainless steel pan-head sheet metal screw for this purpose. Pan-head screws have a deep slot that will not deform or tear from continual use. If you fasten boards that pivot with a screw, I recommend that you use a lead anchor. With repeated screwing and unscrewing, the receiving hole will soon become worn. A lead anchor will last a long time and allow continued use of this effective vandal deterrent. ■

Rt. 2, Box OR28  
Ore City, TX 75683

*This article is reprinted with permission from the January 1991 (Volume 4, Edition 1) issue of Bluebird News.*

### Historian's Request

Please send newspaper and magazine articles about bluebirds to Historian Jane Williams, Box 123, Ware Neck, VA 23173. 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.

# Literature Review

T. David Pitts

Eastman, M.D., L.S. Johnson, and L.H. Kermott. 1989. Ectoparasitism of nestling House Wrens, *Troglodytes aedon*, by larvae of the blow fly *Protophthora braueri* (Diptera: Calliphoridae). *Canadian Journal of Zoology* 67: 2358-2362.—The mysterious deaths of many nestlings may be due to parasites and diseases. While the actions of nest predators, such as rat snakes and raccoons, are easily detected, the presence of most parasites and disease causing organisms in nestlings probably goes unnoticed. Among the better known groups of avian parasites are the bird blow flies in the genus *Protophthora*. Typically, female blow flies deposit their eggs in the nests of hosts; the larvae then periodically (in some species apparently at night) crawl onto the nestling birds, take a blood meal, and then retreat into the nest. The blow fly whose activities are described in this article has a slightly different strategy. The larvae embed themselves in the skin of nestlings and remain there for three days; then, they return to the nest material and pupate. The parasites apparently had little effect on nestlings more than six days old; younger nestlings may have died as a result of the infestation. The authors point out that this parasite is apparently widespread but may be overlooked because of its short stay on the nestlings.

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Highhouse, William. 1989. American Kestrel nesting box project in Warren County. *Pennsylvania Birds* 3:132.—This brief report re-emphasizes some of the conclusions of other studies: (1) American Kestrels will readily use properly built and placed nest boxes (e.g., in 1989, 34 of 40 boxes in this study were used by kestrels); (2) numerous species, including Eastern Bluebirds and the omnipresent European Starling, will utilize nest boxes designed for kestrels; and, (3) studies of

birds using nest boxes provide the most convenient way of obtaining nesting data for species such as kestrels. The largest number of young fledged in this study was 118 in 1988; the author notes that 40 kestrel nesting boxes should fledge about 100 young per year if the weather is warm and dry. Of the 550 nestling kestrels banded in the study only two have been recovered, but these two present an interesting contrast. One was trapped and released in three successive winters in Bristol, TN, about 380 miles southwest of Warren Co. The other was trapped and released near Hamlin, NY, about 115 miles to the northeast. In spite of the apparent success of this project, the author notes that, based on Christmas Bird Counts, kestrels continue their long-term decline in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

---

Pitts, T.D. 1988. Effects of nest box size on Eastern Bluebird nests. *Journal of Field Ornithology* 59:309-313.—This study was based on two sizes of nest boxes; Small boxes had a floor size of about 11 square inches (2.9 x 3.9 inches), and Large boxes had a floor size of about 22 square inches (4.0 x 5.5 square inches). Except for floor size (and, subsequently, the volume), the Small and Large boxes were identical. Boxes were erected in pairs, one Small and one Large, with the members of a pair about 30 inches apart. Bluebirds built 94 nests in the boxes during the study which extended over an 8 year period. Bluebirds did not prefer one size of box over the other, and nesting parameters, with two exceptions, were the same for both sizes of boxes. Clutch size, percent eggs hatching, percent successful nests, and the number of young fledged per nest did not significantly differ between the two types of boxes. However, nest size and percent of fledglings returning to nest did differ. In Large boxes, 8.7% of the

(Continued on page 144)

# Currants—for Bluebirds Only

Bob Josenhans

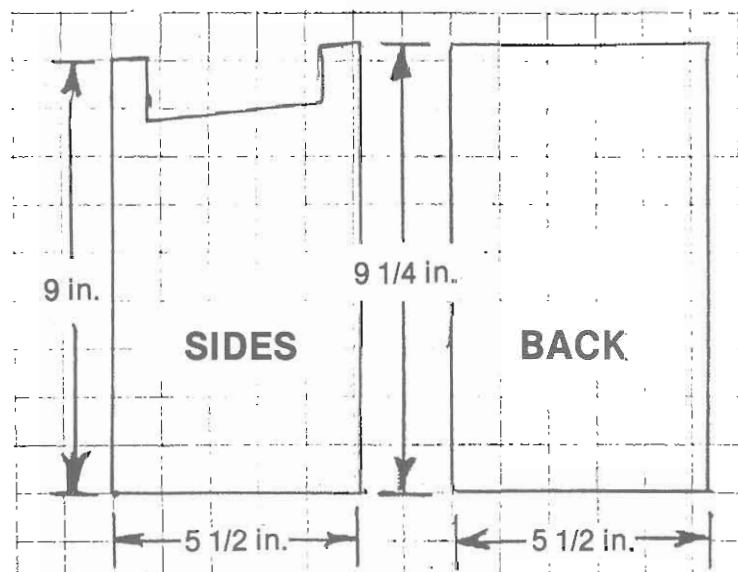
In an issue of *Sialia* (12(4):140-141) currants were described as an excellent food for bluebirds. We decided to try this as a further effort to enhance our bluebird population. We first put the currants out in a saucer. The bluebirds never had a chance. The mockingbirds loved them and the robins found them delicious. The robin, after eating its fill, stood guard over the saucer so that the bluebirds could not feed. I found this unacceptable and set out to design a currant feeder which would be exclusively for the bluebirds.

I decided to use a bluebird box as a starting point (see diagram). Access was provided through slots, as described by Richard Tuttle in *Sialia* (12(1):13-17), except that the slots were made on the three sides of the feeder that could be seen from the house. The roof was purposely made oversized for weather protection. The big question was where to locate the floor of the feeder. A fixed floor was located 4

inches (10.2 cm) below the entrance and 12 pieces of wood 1/4 inch (0.6 cm) thick were cut to fit on top of the fixed floor. When the currants were put in the feeder, they rested on a floor that was 1 in. (2.5 cm) below the entrance. The robin lost out immediately, since he could not use a vertical perch. The mockingbird was able to perch at the opening, so each time that he was successful in obtaining a currant I removed one of the 1/4 in. pieces of loose flooring. When the floor was lowered to 3 1/2 in. (8.9 cm) below the entrance, the mockingbird was defeated. He no longer visits the feeder. The feeder is attached to the railing of our deck for easy viewing. We have up to six bluebirds feeding at a time through the winter. This spring we have had up to five fledglings line up on the railing to be fed by their parents. ■

802 Bermuda Ct.  
Annapolis, MD 21401

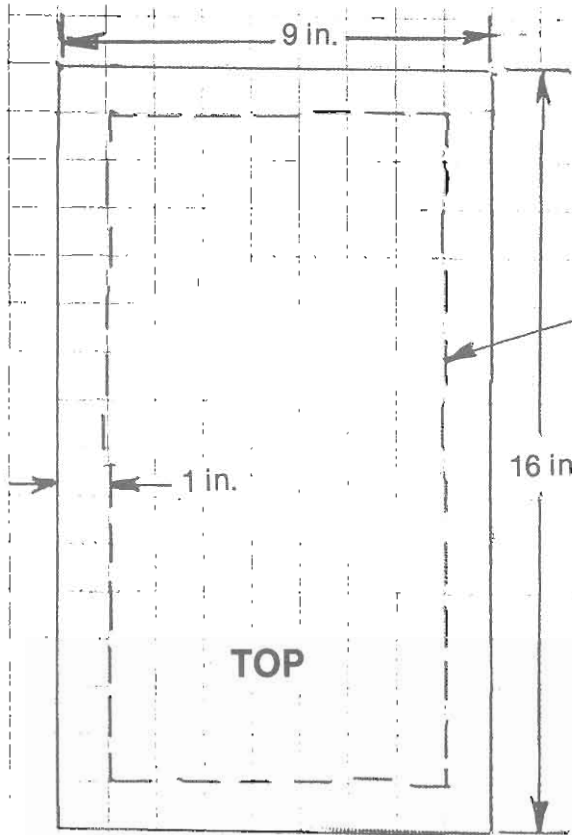
## Bluebird Feeder



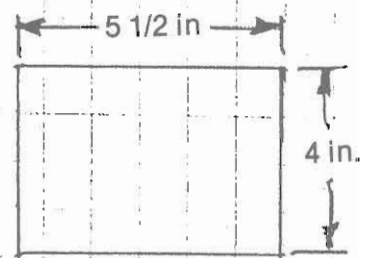
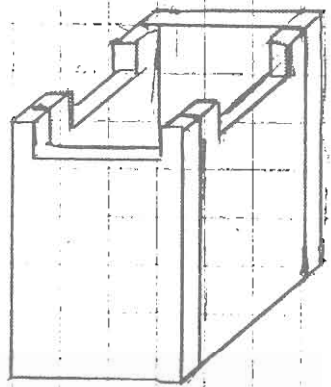
### Metric Equivalents

- 3/4 in. (1.9 cm)
- 1 in. (2.5 cm)
- 1 3/16 in. (3.0 cm)
- 3 7/2 in. (8.9 cm)
- 4 in. (10.2 cm)
- 5 1/2 in. (14.0 cm)
- 9 in. (22.9 cm)
- 9 1/4 in. (23.5 cm)
- 16 in. (40.6 cm)

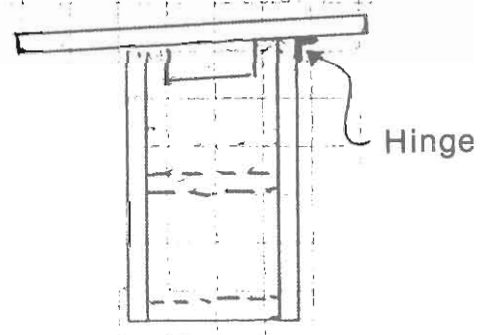
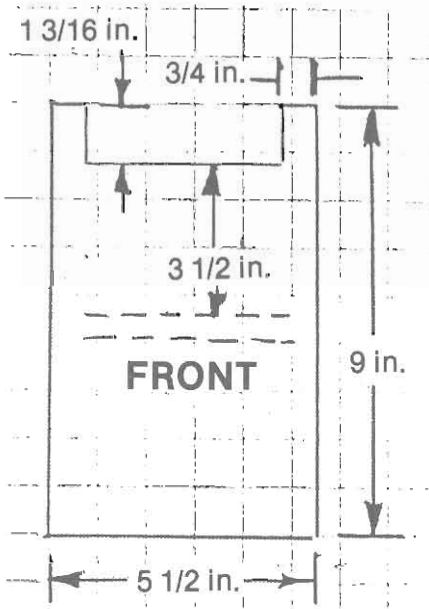
Diagram by Bob Josenhans



Underside  
routed  $\frac{3}{16}$  in.  
for drip guard



**Base & Shelf**



**SIDE**



Eastern Bluebird feasting on summer fruit in a Maryland yard.

—Hubert A. Brandenburg

## NORTH AMERICAN BLUEBIRD SOCIETY RESEARCH GRANTS

The North American Bluebird Society announces the ninth annual grants-in-aid for ornithological research directed toward North American cavity nesting species with emphasis on the genus *Sialia*. Single or multiple awards may be made within the following three categories:

**Bluebird Research Grant**—Available to student, professional or individual researchers for a suitable research project focused on any of the three species in the genus *Sialia*.

**General Research Grant**—Available to student, professional and individual researchers for a suitable research project focused on a North American cavity nesting species.

**Student Research Grant**—Available to full time college or university students for a suitable research project focused on a North American cavity nesting species.

Further guidelines and application materials are available upon request from Kevin L. Berner, Research Committee Chairman, State University of New York, Cobleskill, NY 12043. Completed applications must be received by 1 December 1991; decisions will be announced by 15 January 1992.



# I'll Take the High Road

Robert A. Stevenson

*My quest was o'er, the race was run, he lay there in my sights,  
He was unaware of my presence, I had him "dead to rights."  
A gentle squeeze of the trigger-----  
"Kingdom Come!"*

I walked over and stood there as his great black body thrashed in its final throes. His yellow-brown eyes were open and, as the last golden flecks of life faded, a whoosing sigh of escaping air seemed to whisper to me, "You cheated."

'Twas ever thus, man against beast, man against man, might makes right, someone cheats. Hold that scenario.

We first met about a year ago. He visited my bird feeders. Not satisfied with what was on the ground, he proceeded to pull down and trash 13 feeders. We found the last feeder, dragged far into the woods, when we came across it during deer season. Sometime before hibernating he pulled down one of my bluebird boxes; tore off the door and one side looking for food.

I replaced the box but, woe is me,

he began working my bluebird trail before I did this spring. He didn't destroy the box, just bent the steel post into a hairpin, as if to warn me.

Spring worked its way into summer and he, in turn, worked his way through my trail. An excellent crop of Tree Swallows occupied the nests. On each of my rounds there was evidence of his visits: another bent post, two nests of eggs destroyed, a mother bird



Photograph by Robert A. Stevenson

Black bear which has been destroying feeders and bluebird nest boxes near Robert Stevenson's home in northeastern Minnesota.

dead, four boxes of nestlings eaten. All those boxes ended up as kindling.

Taking everything into consideration, who am I to be judge and jury? In my pre-cholesterol days, I consumed dozens of eggs, and I regularly eat chicken and turkey. Must the pot call the kettle black?

Now he is back in my yard again. Two more feeders taken down, one smashed, the other carried off. Someone offered a cure: "Put a cup of household ammonia in a plastic bag, coat the bag with peanut butter and hang it where the feeders were." (He's a big one, baits were seven feet high.)

He returned in 15 minutes; we watched as he stood on his hind legs and bit into the sack: a faceful of ammonia. He shook his head and ran into the woods. In 30 minutes he was back, none the worse for wear. He did, however, ignore the second bait—temporarily. If I were still teaching, I would classify him SLBP (slow learner, behavior problem). He returned two nights later for that one. Garbage is the great enticer: drag it into a secluded place and scatter and sort it at leisure. Three nights of this and patience wears thin.

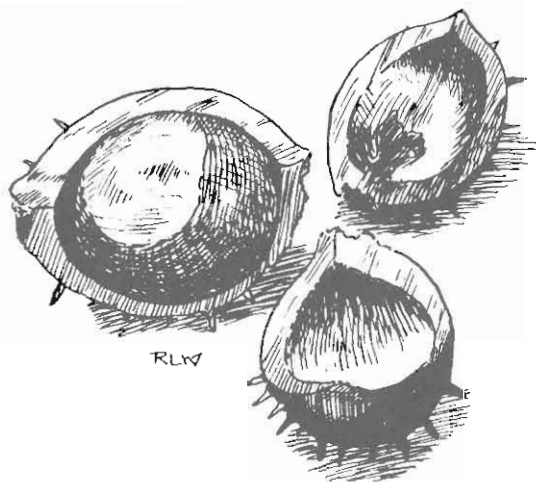
He lay there on his belly lapping up my sunflower seeds. I really did

have him "dead to right," (with the game warden's permission to destroy him), but, as I began to squeeze the trigger, the cross hairs blurred and I blinked hard. When I opened my eyes, he was disappearing behind a screen of leaves.

The older I get and the more that ills besiege me, the more precious life becomes. Do you suppose my subconscious blurred my eyes at the last moment? I only know that he is still out there, somewhere. When the chips were down, I didn't cheat! The old adversarial condition still exists. When I crawl into his bower to retrieve the strewn garbage or when I walk through a particularly dense section of woods, near where he destroyed three boxes, the hairs on my neck prickle, a small mouse with cold feet and sharp toenails climbs my spine, my heart may skip a beat, and my blood shifts into overdrive. Sort of adds spice to living.

Only time will tell if I made the correct choice, but, for now, I'm rather glad I took the high road. I'll grant him his main entree, but if his appetite extends to bluebirds for dessert, I shall write "The Final Chapter." ■

11043 Willow River Rd.  
Gheen, MN 55740



## POSTAL SERVICE ISSUES BLUEBIRD STAMP

Some members of the North American Bluebird Society may remember a letter dated February 3, 1981, which appeared in the Spring 1981 issue of *Sialia* (3(2):71). It was directed to the Postmaster General and the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee by Jeanne Price, on behalf of the North American Bluebird Society, requesting that the Postal Service issue one or more bluebird stamps. Executive Director Mary D. Janetatos' column in that same issue included a request for members to write a letter to encourage the committee to designate at least one bluebird stamp.



Many of you *did* write. Less than a year later, Jeanne wrote in her Presidential Points column (4(1):2) that, although many letters had been written on behalf of the bluebird, "...the outcome is not exactly what we had anticipated. Would you believe we're getting *four* bluebird stamps?"

Our request had been turned down because commemorative stamps depicting all 50 state flowers and birds were scheduled to be issued in March 1982. The Eastern Bluebird would appear on the New York and Missouri stamps and the Mountain Bluebird on the Idaho and Nevada stamps. Because the Western Bluebird was not a state bird, it was not depicted.

Now, just over ten years from the time of our initial request, the Postal Service has issued an Eastern Bluebird stamp in a 3-cent denomination. It will be part of a new group of stamps called "feathered friends." Two hundred million will be printed so perhaps they will be around to supplement outdated first class stamps and postcards as prices continue to rise in the near future.

Michael Matherly of Cambridge City, Indiana, painted the Eastern Bluebird sitting on a flowering crabapple tree branch. The Postal Service news release described the bluebird stamp and the 1-cent American Kestrel (another cavity nester) issued at the same time and painted by the same artist as "the first multicolor denominated postage stamps to be printed entirely on offset presses," by the American Bank Note Co. of Chicago, Illinois. Both stamps went on sale on 22 June 1991 in Aurora, Colorado. ■

# Bluebird Nest Box from Scrap Wood

Richard Decker

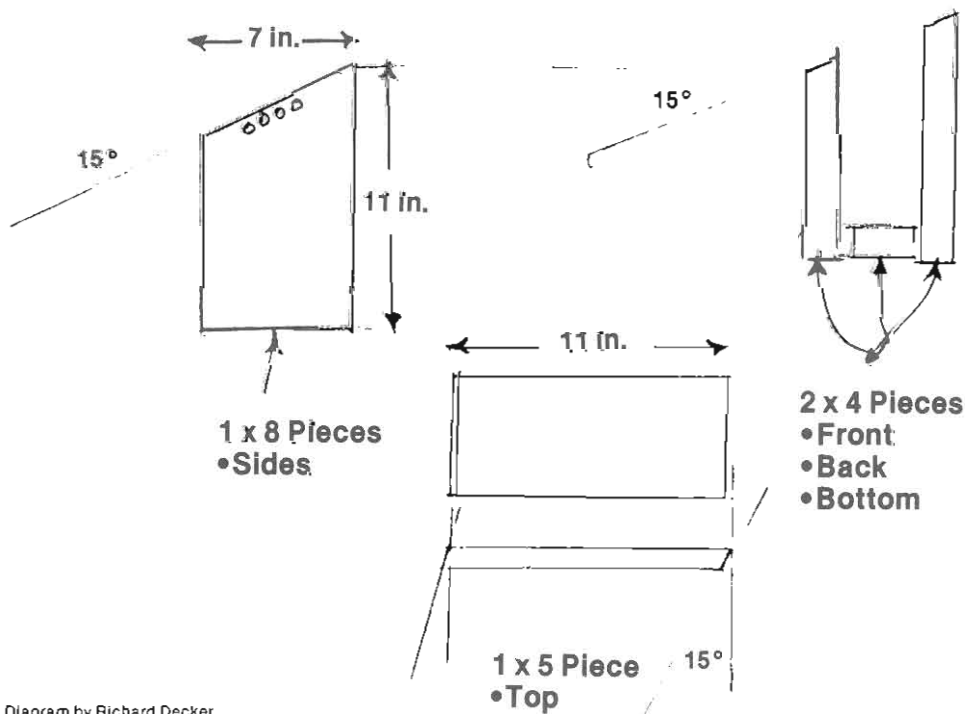
In reviewing several articles I had borrowed from Sister Barbara Ann (author of *Beakless Bluebirds and Featherless Penguins*), on the sizes of bird houses, I decided to try to combine them into an easily made box using the short pieces of lumber everyone has. Since all pieces of the box are less than 11 inches (27.9 cm), it is hard to cut a nice long board. Most of the short pieces left over from big jobs are this long. Also 2 x 4s are more available than 1 inch boards.

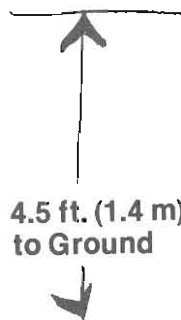
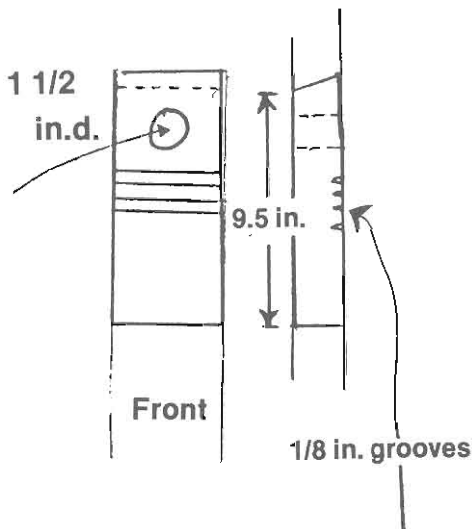
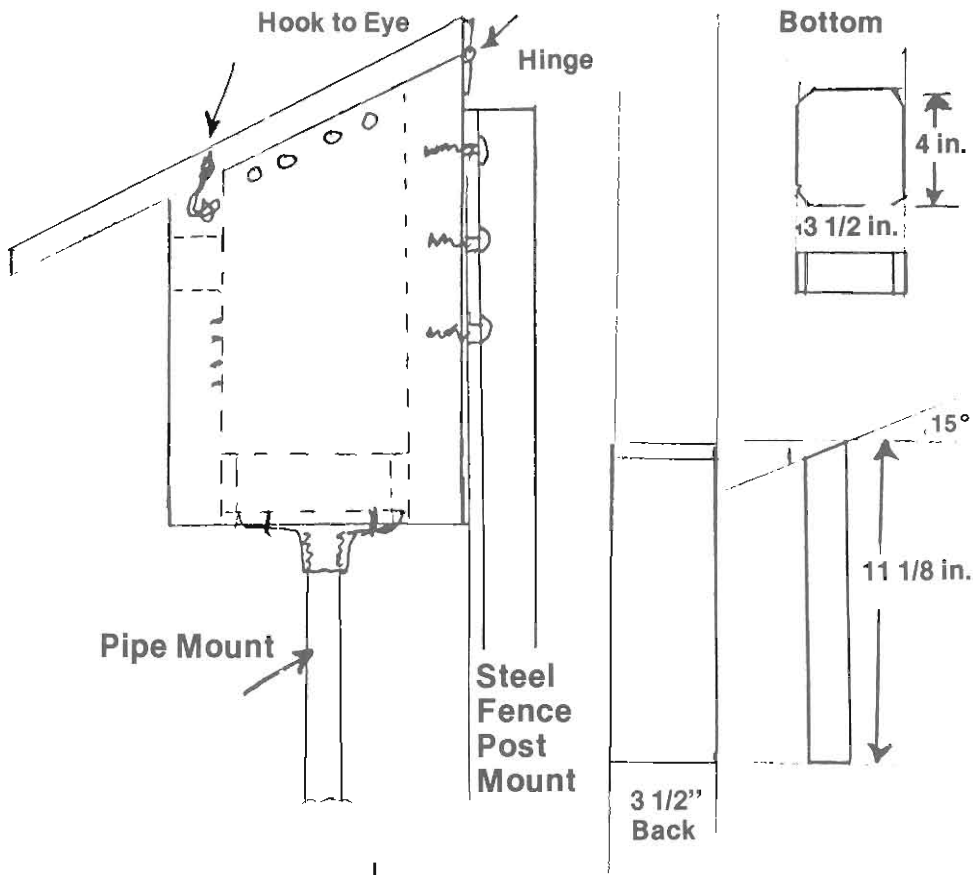
In the Autumn 1990 issue of *Sialia*, Kevin Berner pointed out that the reason for having a thick entrance hole was to act as a deterrent to predators. He also demonstrated the advantage of a roof overhang of several inches. I also saw some boxes that had been in the field for a year or two which were not holding up too well. The thin material split and fell apart. To build a better box is easy with all of the information supplied; in addition, I always look for a method that will make use of the small scraps I accumulate.

My design consists of the front, back, and bottom made of 2 x 4s, as shown in the attached sketch. All of the boards are a standard width so that they only have to be cut to length. The roof is at a 15 degree angle so the front and back are cut to fit that angle. The sides are from a 1 x 8 and the top is from a 1 x 6.

I assemble the 2 x 4 pieces first with a little glue and a couple of nails. I then put on the sides. Because I have a belt sander, I sand it all around. I then put the hinge on the top and the hook comes last. Since it is a very solid house, it can be mounted in many ways. I think using a pipe flange on a 6 or 7 foot (1.8 or 2.1 m) pipe would be best if that is available. However, any post will do. ■

10 Holmehurst Ave.  
Catonsville, MD 21228





Assembly

- Step 1. Glue 2 x 4 pieces, front, bottom, back together
- Step 2. Attach sides
- Step 3. Sand all sides
- Step 4. Attach top
- Step 5. Mount on pole.

All pieces are stock sizes, i.e., 1 x 6, 1 x 8 and 2 x 4. Maximum length of any piece is 11 in. (27.9 cm).

# Richland Bluebird Society

Gretchen Y. Maysek

"How would your class like to make a bluebird trail around the school?" Mr. Freed, our principal, asked one Monday in February.

"Sounds good to me. What do we need, how do we do it, and where will we put it?" I responded.

I shouldn't have worried. Mr. Freed had already talked to a man from his church who had the house pattern and would pre-cut the wood for us. It would be up to us (Mrs. Dailey's class and mine) to provide the labor and maintain the trail. This sounded like the perfect project for our group of third, fourth, and fifth grade emotionally disturbed students. Not only would we have to work as small groups to build the houses, but we would also have to work as a unit to maintain the trail and keep our logs.

I called my recently retired father-in-law and asked him to help us with the construction. He appeared with tools, aprons, and plenty of patience on the appropriate day. The children were very excited about the project and could hardly wait to begin. Each group consisted of two or three children. Hammers and nails as well as the pre-cut wood pieces were at each table. As Mr. Freed demonstrated what to do, the children took turns following his instructions and constructing the bird houses. It took us about an hour to put the wood together to make a complete house. Each team then numbered their house and received a notebook in which to record house information. "I've never held a hammer before and look what I did!" was one response. Others just smiled and giggled all afternoon. Self-esteem and pride were evident on all faces including mine.

Mrs. Dailey and I painted the houses after school so that they would dry by the next day. We also placed a number on the outside of each house so that each could be easily identified.

Mr. Freed and Mr. Quay, our cus-

tomian, had obtained sign poles on which to mount the houses. The children were shown how to scrape the poles using wire brushes. Simultaneously, some students were drilling holes in the back of each house so that they could be attached to the poles when they were ready. Mr. Freed took the poles home and painted them for us. When they were ready, he and Mr. Quay used a sledge hammer to pound the poles into the ground around the perimeter of the school. The trail is approximately one-half mile long with the ten houses evenly distributed along it.

The day finally came to go outside and attach the bird houses to the poles. The children were beside themselves. Each group, dressed in coats and boots as it was a blustery March day, went out to mount "their" house. I trailed along watching the enthusiasm of each group and praying for just one nest.

We then developed binocular teams. Each day at lunch recess one team walked around the playground observing the houses from a distance. After all, we didn't want to disturb anything that was trying to nest. Our students happily gave up their recess in order to take their turns observing the houses. It was amazing what they saw and had never seen before. We all learned words like kestrel, sparrow hawk, migration, prey, etc.

Each Friday afternoon Mr. Freed and I (or Mrs. Dailey and I) took a group of children around the trail, carefully opening each house and observing any changes. We noted the skull of a mouse left by a bigger bird of prey, fur, wasps, fecal matter, and finally, after three weeks, the beginnings of a bluebird nest! We knew it was a bluebird by the materials used in construction. We had also seen the female come out of the house. The children were shrieking with glee and could hardly wait to get around the trail so that they could run inside and tell the others. Our log



Photographs by Ronald Freed



Above two photographs show students at Richland Elementary School, Quakertown, Pennsylvania, building nest boxes for bluebird trail they established around the school.



Students at Richland Elementary School monitor bluebird nest box on school grounds.

keeper noted the date, time, and number of eggs in the nest (four) so that we could announce this to the rest of the school.

Sadly, after three weeks we saw no further activity around the nest and the eggs had not hatched. It appeared that the nest had been abandoned. Our binocular team reported that the two bluebirds who had been in the area were no longer around. We cleaned out the old nest and brought it inside for further inspection. The nest was soft, full of grass and feathers, and was perfectly constructed. The children were amazed at the patience it must have taken to build the nest by something as small as a bluebird. The eggs were also marveled over because of their size and color.

That was our only bluebird nest. We had many wren nests. The children became quite adept in naming the kind of bird which had constructed any nest. Our last observation was on 10 June. My most introverted student asked, "Could I come over here this summer and walk the trail and check our houses? I promise that I'll keep the log." Music to my ears!

A huge surprise came at the end of the year. Mrs. Savidge, a fourth

grade teacher who was also interested in our project, had submitted our names to the North American Bluebird Society. Each student was called in front of the entire student body to receive a certificate which recognized each one as someone who had built the houses, maintained the trail, and generally took an interest in wildlife. We all stood there amazed by her kindness in submitting our names; we were filled with pride that our class had done something so important. We also made Richland Bluebird Society buttons which we wore proudly and Mrs. Dailey made us all T-shirts. We left school with buttons on our shirts and certificates in our hands declaring us official bluebirders!

Will our houses be here next year?" someone asked. "Will we be responsible for them?" I just smiled and nodded. Thank you, Mr. Freed, for giving all of us something to be proud of for many years to come! ■

*If you are interested in our trail and how it was fully developed, please contact me at the address below.*

Richland School  
500 Fairview Ave.  
Quakertown, PA 18951



# Diary of Three Bluebirds

Mary Reed

*Three Eastern Bluebirds were hatched in a martin house at the home of Ruth and Robert Allton near Warren, Texas, on or about 23 April, 1991. We do not know if there were any other siblings or what caused their lives to be upset, but on Saturday, 4 May these three little birds fell out of the tall martin box onto the ground. As no one could put them back into their nest, I was called to get them late that same afternoon.*

**Saturday, 4 May 1991** —Later that night my husband, Eldon, and I dug worms from our garden by flashlight. I cut the worms into inch long pieces and, using tweezers, fed the very hungry birds. After eating until satisfied, they were bedded down in a box filled with fresh pine straw in our warm dark laundry room.

**Sunday, 5 May 1991**—I dug worms before going to church at 8:30 a.m. and all birds were very active. When I turned on the light in the laundry room, they started cheeping loudly causing me to feed them as fast as I could.

Sunday afternoon I boiled chicken parts. I then molded finely chopped livers, etc. into little balls. The birds seemed to love these, but we found ourselves digging worms many other times. The nestlings were fed every three to four hours on Sunday. Between feedings I searched our bluebird trail records and visited boxes attempting to locate possible foster parents for these orphans.

At this time we noticed that one bird seemed smaller and slightly less active than the other

two. I tied a piece of red yarn around one of his legs and cut it very short to keep track of him.

**Monday, 6 May 1991**—We were very busy preparing for a dinner party, but my husband dug worms and I fed the birds on schedule at 7:30 and 10:30 a.m. At 11:30 a.m. a repairman came by and, without giving me any warning, turned on the light in the laundry room. The birds awakened and acted as if they had not been fed for hours. By noon they had been fed and bedded down on clean straw again.

Again at 3:00 p.m. my husband dug a full can of worms and the birds were fed again. We began to notice that they always ate as if they were starving, but once that hunger was appeased they could not be tempted by the juiciest of worms. In spite of all our planning, they were starving again—right in the middle of our dinner party for 20. So my guests and I had to feed them again as their cries were too insistent to be ignored.

A final feeding at 10:00 p.m. ended their day.

**Tuesday, 7 May 1991**—The birds were so very active today that I fed them at 7:30 a.m. and then, knowing that they needed adult bluebird supervision for two or three weeks after fledging, I took them to boxes which contained little ones approximately the same age.

“Red” as we called the smallest one, was put into box no. 10 of our bluebird trail where there were already four young 14 days old, but they looked very much like him. (It was really a guessing game!)

Eldon had instructions on how and when to feed the other two while I played in a golf tournament and thought through future plans for them.

Between 3:00 and 4:00 p.m., I took the well-fed young to boxes hoping foster parents would accept them. One was tagged with blue yarn and joined three others in box no. 17 that our records showed were 15 days old. The last little one, tagged yellow, settled down with three young in golf course box no. 141-G-7. The young in this box were also 13-15 days old.

Late Tuesday I anxiously checked box no. 10 and found that all five young birds were asleep. Red was present on top of two others and sort of wedged in between.

**Wednesday, 8 May 1991**—All three boxes were checked twice during the day. My reasoning was that in the event of fledging I would be able to rescue the little orphans once again. In each box all the young were obviously well fed and content.

**Thursday, 9 May 1991**—In the morning all young in all boxes were fine. Late in the afternoon while checking 141-G-7, I counted to make sure all four birds were accounted for. Much to my dismay one of the young flew out, across a creek, and into a pine tree. He landed on the trunk of the tree about 30 feet above the ground. The adult female flew to him immediately. When I checked I discovered that this was not one of the orphaned birds. Sometime late that same afternoon the birds from box no. 17 fledged successfully.

**Friday, 10 May 1991**—All birds

from 141-G-7 had fledged so I cleaned the box. The five birds in box no. 10 are still very content to remain in the box.

**Saturday, 11 May 1991**—Checking both morning and afternoon I found that all birds in box no. 10 were still being fed by adults in the box. Red was nearest to the opening and looked ready. All five birds in box no. 40 fledged successfully.

In all three areas where orphans had been placed, bluebirds were heard along with extra cheeps which we had to assume were young. The foliage was dense so that only a male was seen in the vicinity of box no. 17 looking for insects.

**Monday, 13 May 1991**—This day ends the diary of the three bluebirds. Reason and fact indicate that all three birds fledged successfully with their foster families near the golf course on the Wildwood Bluebird Trail. ■

P.O. Box 816  
Wildwood, TX 77663

**(LITERATURE REVIEW**—Continued from page 131)

fledglings returned to the study area to nest, but only 3.2% of the fledglings returned from the Small boxes. While the number of fledglings returning was small, the striking difference between Large and Small boxes indicates that the young from Large boxes were more successful. This type of study needs to be repeated on a larger scale and in different parts of the range of Eastern Bluebirds before a definitive answer can be given to the frequently asked question, "What is the best size of nest box for Eastern Bluebirds?" ■

Dr. Pitts welcomes reviews from members. Readers should submit material to Dr. T. David Pitts, The University of Tennessee at Martin, Martin, TN 38238-5014.

# 1989: My Year of Agony and Ecstasy

Shirley Foley

22 April—Bluebirds checking yard boxes, especially no. 1.

24 April—Back to same box this a.m. Male only p.m. This fine young fellow is sticking around. Because he has no wife to talk to, he loves to chatter away to us. He seems to be totally unafraid of us.

1 May—Our beautiful young male was gone when we got up this a.m., but we now have an older male and a female. They like box no. 1 too, probably because that is the only one that is still vacant. It has been protected from Tree Swallows (all except one that has been a real pest).

2 May—When Harold got up this morning, both males were here, but by the time I got up only the young male was still here. I was so happy because we had grown quite attached to the little fellow. He and the female started to build a nest almost immediately.

17 May—Female appears to be starting to incubate six beautiful eggs.

22 May—Male is missing, has been gone all day.

23 May—Still no sign of male. I spend most of the day close to tears as I know he is dead and I miss him so. I am worried because the female will soon have six young to care for all by herself. To help her, I went to the pet shop and got maggots, mealworms, and worms and put them out close to the nest box in the hope that she would eat them. Maybe when the young hatch, I can help her feed them. She won't touch them, but each day I put more fresh ones out.

30 May—9:45 a.m. second baby is just hatching. 8:20 p.m. only one egg left. All eggs hatched by next morning. Raining. It continued to rain most of the time as she continued to feed all those little ones all by herself. I felt so sorry for her as she looked so wet and cold, but she just kept going.

15 June—Home from husband's mother's funeral; see we have a new male. I am so happy. I think from all I have read that he will help her raise those little ones. Boy, am I in for a shock!

19 June—12:30 p.m. first little female left the nest. It was a very sad time as I knew they were now at risk. Little did I know how much. As soon as the male saw the little fledgling, he figured that he should mate with her, not feed her. 2:45 p.m. first male left the nest. As soon as the old male saw him, he chased him, forced him down, and fought with him. The young female is starting to fly really well and is flying around the top of the garage when a group of Tree Swallows spotted her, chased her, and forced her down in the grass. I never saw her again and never found her. Another female left the nest and then another male. The old male chased him and forced him down in the grass. 3:30 p.m. male and female still left in nest and both males and the one female are still around. Male is still attacking the newly fledged males and trying to mate with the young female. The mother bird appears to be starting to build a new nest and has abandoned her babies. 4:05 p.m. final male left nest. 4:20 p.m. final female out. Male is attacking mom when she tries to feed the babies. She finally got smart and flew away with the five remaining babies, leaving him behind.

22 June—Mom brought all five babies back it seemed just to show me that they

were all still alive and O.K. Then they all left again.

23 June—Only four babies now, two males and two females. We put up a brand new box on the garage, just outside the sundeck on the house. The old male insisted that this was the box his mate was going to build in. He carried grass in and back out again every day.

26 June—Female is starting to build nest. She still has four fledglings with her. Male will not feed them but will watch over them. Occasionally, he will bring his mate something to eat and will allow her to give it to the babies.

30 June—Two eggs in nest; only one young from first brood still here.

1 July—Three eggs which female appears to be incubating. Two young females and one male here. No signs of babies again for a long time.

16 July—Three fuzzy babies approximately four days old.

27 July—One male "baby" here.

30 July—Young female back. Male bluebird checking other nest boxes after chasing brood one babies away. Baby female appears to have brought food to new nestlings.

3 August—9:40 a.m. first new baby left nest. Appear to be three males. 4:00 p.m. two still in nest, but they left shortly. All have left.

5 August—All three babies back this a.m.

11 August—Mom and first brood female here bathing.

14 August—Mom and a second brood male here.

27 September—Young male and a female were here checking out the nest boxes, so maybe I will have another story to tell next year.

It is my feeling that we still have four from first brood and all three from the second brood out there somewhere. For my first year seven live babies isn't bad. I guess that will help compensate for the loss of our first true bluebird friend. He will always be remembered and missed. I'm sure I will never forget my first year as a true, blue bluebirder! ■

Box 7610  
Bonnyville, Alberta  
Canada T9N 2H9

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### Announcements

Announcements of regional or state meetings pertaining to cavity nesters should reach us at least four months before publication date of issue in which item will appear. For example, the winter issue is published on 15 January so material should reach us by 15 September.

Mail to Editor J. Solem, 1067 Graeclow Rd., Laurel, MD 20723.

*We welcome all reports of plant use by wildlife. Please be as specific as possible, including such information as the name of the plant (botanical name when known) and the approximate time of year when the observations were made. Send your reports to Karen Blackburn, 4961 Dogwood Drive, Marianna, FL 32446.*

# Happiness Is a Pair Of Bluebirds Nesting in Your Own Back Yard

Maibelle Dickey Hodgins

In Thomas D. Burleigh's magnificent book *Georgia Birds*, the Eastern Bluebird is described as a common permanent resident throughout the state. He pictures them as happily flocking together in the winter while roving through open country and feeding at the edges of woods or roadsides. Then in spring Mr. Burleigh explains that these lovely birds pair off to find old woodpecker holes or other cavities in which to nest.

This is quite true, of course; however, since *Georgia Birds* was published in 1958, over 30 years have passed. At the present time, "old woodpecker holes" are sort of hard to come by. Yes, we still have woodpeckers, and these expert carpenters continue to work hard excavating cavities which they use only one season. These holes then become available to other species who depend upon them as nesting sites. Nevertheless, the demand for cavities is so great that the bluebird has been edged out time and again and has been diminishing in numbers. Since this dainty bird cannot chisel a hole of its own, it has become more and more apparent that if we want to keep the bluebirds, nesting boxes must be made to accommodate them. Now that our garden clubs, Scouts, various organizations, and dedicated "birders" have become involved, this "bird of happiness" is finding the welcome mat out in many a back yard and bluebird trail. As a result, these colorful birds are already on the increase in certain areas.

I suppose that almost everyone who first becomes aware of the fascinating world of birds wants to have bluebirds in his yard, but some of us don't know quite how to go about attracting them. I recall so well my first experience. It happened while I was dressing for breakfast. I heard my husband shout, "There's a bluebird in the

dogwood tree!" I rushed to the dining room where John was viewing the garden from our picture window. Before I could get there, a second cry rang out, "There's another one in the bird bath!" I finally reached my husband, grabbed the binoculars, and settled down to enjoy the spectacle. It is amazing to see how really blue these charming birds are—somewhere along the French Riviera I have seen water the color of the bluebird. Females are not quite so blue, but both have the brick-red breasts. They are not large birds, only 6 1/2-7 1/2 inches, smaller than a cardinal.

These particular bluebirds were flying around the garden inspecting every nook and corner. They were even going in and out of the various bird houses scattered about the yard. Finally, they began concentrating on our special bluebird house, one that had been waiting to be discovered by bluebirds for several years. It was quite evident that the bluebirds were pleased with this house. To our delight, they began gathering nesting materials. John was so entranced that he could hardly tear himself away to go to work that morning. However, he finally did, and I was left to keep a sharp eye on the birds' activities.

Needless to say, I found it difficult to do even the necessary household chores because I was so busy looking out the window. Finally, I managed to put the dishes in the dishwasher and started making beds, all the while singing excerpts from *Song of the South*: "Zip-a-dee-doo-dah, zip-a-dee-ay, wonderful feeling, wonderful day! There's a bluebird on my shoulder"—wait a minute, hold on, what's with the bluebirds? Oh, no, not the mockingbird. He couldn't! But he could, and he was! Our mocker was indeed scolding the bluebirds. He was being as disagreeable as only a mockingbird can be,



Pair of Eastern Bluebirds nesting in flowering dogwood at author's home.

which is plenty.

At first, the bluebirds continued with their building but the handsome mocker also continued with his fussing and fuming. What could I do? He seemed to be beside himself with rage. Well, there was absolutely nothing to do except watch. How can you reason with a mockingbird? I wanted to tell him to go back to the front yard and perch on his special telephone wire over the well house, where he had his very own feeder all complete with suet and raisins. I wanted to tell him that there were robins on the front lawn for him to chase. The robins could take the mocker's antics; the bluebirds couldn't. They left.

When John returned from that night, his face was wreathed in smiles. He had told everyone at the office about his bluebirds. It was a dejected husband who dragged himself to bed that evening. In the meantime, the mockingbird had returned to his wire where he perched as complacent and arrogant as you please, magnificently surveying his domain.

The year passed, and then it was spring again. I was taking color pictures of birds through the picture window. I stepped out of the room for a

moment. When I returned, bluebirds were in the feeders, in the bird bath, and perched in trees. There were four or five, and it seemed that they were everywhere; however, try as I could, it was impossible for me to get a picture of one. As soon as I focused my camera on one, he flew to another place. Suddenly, all the bluebirds were gone. They had found nothing to interest them in my yard. The feeders were full of all kinds of seeds, but bluebirds are not seed eaters. I was crushed. Then one afternoon while visiting a neighbor, I discovered that she has bluebirds all year. They nest in one of her bird houses and make regular visits to the feeding stations—for corn bread.

Corn bread! Back home I went. That evening when John returned from work, he found me in the kitchen making a batch of corn bread to a lively rendition of "Shortnin' Bread." After serving half of it to my family for supper, the rest was saved for the feeder.

Next morning, I placed corn bread crumbs in the feeder farthest from our house, the feeder at the edge of the rose garden. If bluebirds came, they were going to find something that they would like this time. In the days that

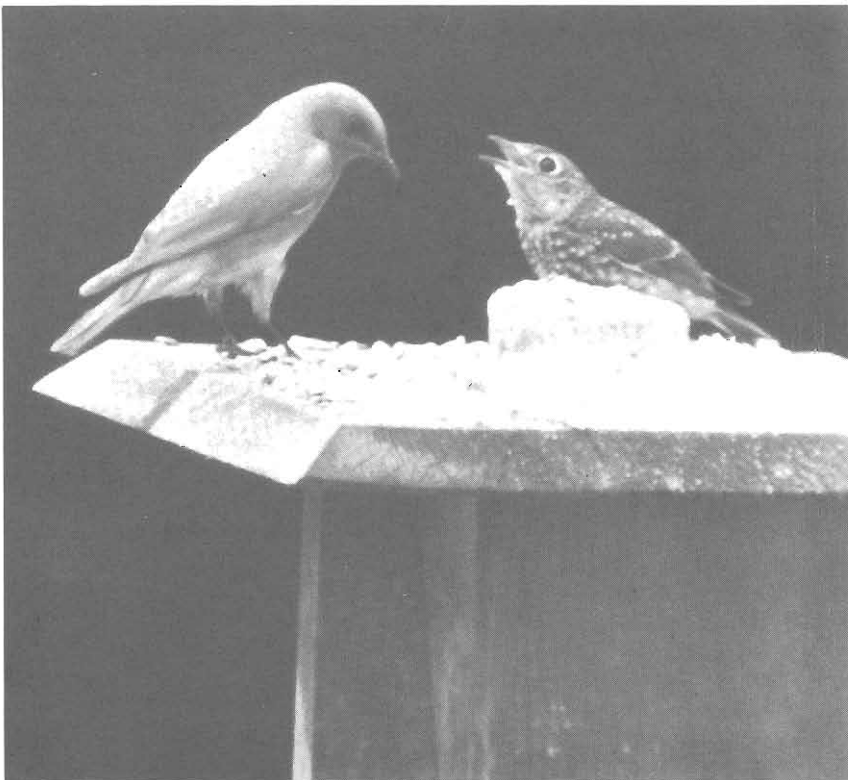
followed, I found that practically all of the birds loved corn bread. Never a day passed that I didn't place corn bread crumbs in the feeder.

Finally, a brisk March wind blew the bluebirds to our yard once more. Again, I was taking pictures at the time. The birds flew around the garden, drank water from the bird bath, and ate corn bread. I was fascinated. They were even lovelier than I remembered. After awhile the pair chose a house hanging in the dogwood tree and soon began gathering nesting material. In time the eggs were laid. It is interesting to note that the female bluebird lays a blue egg. Not many birds produce eggs the same color as their plumage. During the incubation period, our glamorous male stood guard on top of his bird house most of the time. How brave he was. I saw him dive at a squirrel who was attempting to eat his corn bread. How different from those

other timid bluebirds who had come the year before and let the mockingbird frighten them away.

After the eggs hatched, both parents were busy taking food to the tiny birds. Since insects form the bulk of the bluebird's natural diet, you may be quite sure that our garden greatly benefited from their sojourn in our back yard. However, judging from the frequent trips made to and from the feeding station containing the corn bread crumbs, which was now the one nearest to our house, it was obvious that our bluebird, like a true southern gentleman, was raising his children on corn bread.

The bluebirds stayed in our garden a long time. When they arrived, the dogwood was in tight bud; by the time the baby birds hatched, the blossoms had come and gone leaving only green leaves on the old dogwood tree. One morning I went out to feed the blue-



Photographs by Maitelle Dickey Hodgins

Adult male Eastern Bluebird feeding one of his fledglings corn bread at Hodgins' feeder.

birds and discovered that the male was not on top of his house where he usually perched until I put the corn bread crumbs in the feeder. I waited, thinking he might be in a nearby tree eating insects, but he did not swoop down for his favorite food as he was in the habit of doing. Yes, our family of bluebirds had gone without so much as giving us a glimpse of the fledglings.

How lonely it was—even the roses were hanging their heads, or so it seemed. The White-breasted Nuthatch came down the tree head first to get some suet, but his antics did not amuse me. The stunning female Summer Tanager, who never fails to please me in her dark yellow plumage, brought her handsome mate in his equally striking bright red plumage to the feeder for some of the corn bread. This did pep me up for a moment, but I was still morose. I felt like my beautiful bluebirds had let me down. How could they leave their very own feeding station complete with corn bread and other tidbits I had placed there for their enjoy-

ment?

Very early one day a short while later, I awakened to find a delightful surprise awaiting me in the feeder. Not only was my glamorous bluebird back, but he had a bonus with him—one of the fledglings. Yes, he was feeding his young offspring corn bread!

It wasn't long before I noticed more activity around the nesting box, and it was soon apparent that more eggs had been laid. There was the male on top of the house again, standing guard, not leaving for a moment unless to visit the bird bath or feeder, and always remembering to take some crumbs to the little mate who was sitting on the eggs. In fact, everything really was "coming up roses" in the garden. John and I were happy. The mockingbird? I thought you might ask about him. Well, he had become involved in more interesting occupations. After all, spring is courting time for mockingbirds, too! ■

190 Dalrymple Rd., N.E.  
Atlanta, GA 30328

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## Neighbors

Barbara Hollister

*They are back! My excitement was spilling over as I entered the house.*

*After having spent almost ten years in the desert of New Mexico, returning to western North Carolina's mountains and hills sprayed with dogwood seemed more inviting than ever. We decided to defy arthritis and give this climate another chance.*

*We found a house to suit our needs. There were no neighbors close enough to chat with over the fence (which I had hoped for). One day a lovely couple decided to build next door. I was overjoyed.*

*They had been looking quite intensely for just the right site. When Mrs. B. finally agreed to this one, Mr. B. seemed relieved, even jubilant.*

*We watched them build their home. They worked diligently together. They had help with the exterior, but the interior they did themselves. Once in a while they would share a meal with us, but they liked to grab a bite to eat on the lawn which we kept cut for them.*

*After the house was finished, Mrs. B. (who was expecting) spent quite a bit of time indoors by the window, so I could chat with her through my kitchen window. The little house may have been a wee bit hot for her, but she never complained.*

*Mr. B. was very busy around the place, but he would often stop and*



give his wife a peck. We never heard them scuffle. They seemed to get along beautifully. They were so neat. They had no garbage pickup, but Mr. B. carried off the refuse regularly. No problem there.

They loved to sing and we loved to listen to them. To my ears it was like angels' music right out of heaven. Many a time they made my day. Their favorite colors were the same as mine—shades of blue. Do these neighbors sound too good to be true?

They left us for the winter.

The other day when I returned from my daily walk, I noticed a familiar flutter. I looked up and there they were. "Welcome home," I shouted.

I LOVE MY BLUEBIRDS! ■

Box 165  
Dillsboro, NC 28725

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## Winter Food for Bluebirds

Joan Lane

I have read with interest all the foods put out to attract bluebirds to feeders. We have had great success with "Magic Meal" or "Miracle Meal" which was printed in *Sialia* a few years ago. Since it is so successful, it is worth mentioning again. My proportions may be a bit different from the one printed, but it works well.

- 1 2 lb. bag of yellow cornmeal
- 1 lb. of all purpose flour
- 1 lb. of lard
- 3 tbsp. corn oil

Melt lard and add other ingredients. Stir until mixed. Let set and cut into chunks for suet feeders or press into wire grids.

Hang under baffle because squirrels like the mix, too! We hang ours from a suction cup at the window or on a baffled post.

We also pick dogwood berries in the fall and freeze them for the bluebirds. We have 10-12 coming regularly all winter. ■

10523 Walter Thompson Dr.  
Vienna, VA 22181



Photograph by Joan Lane

Eastern Bluebirds and Carolina Chickadees eating "Magic Meal" at Joan Lane's feeders.

## Are Bluebirds Being Sold?

Lorna B. Beasley

My husband and I have been members of NABS for several years, have monitored a bluebird trail, and have interested many people in Live Oak in bluebird conservation. This includes my husband's sister who lives about one-half mile from us on the same county road in a rural area of northern Florida.

My sister-in-law has fallen in love with her bluebirds and faithfully watches her few boxes plus one gourd. This year a pair nested in a gourd. We had a rain storm and the bottom fell out of the gourd. At the time, the nest contained five baby bluebirds. Her husband found another gourd, cut a hole in the front, and carefully moved the entire nest with the five baby birds into the new gourd. We watched and within 20 minutes the adults were back feeding the young. This was another incident in which bluebirds didn't seem to mind human interference.

About a week later when the baby birds should have been about to fledge, a tragedy occurred. In addition to the family of five in the gourd, there was also a family of four in a bluebird box my husband had built for his sister. The side of the box opened on hinges when a nail was removed from the front panel.

When my sister-in-law went to check the gourd and the box, they were both empty. Not only were the baby birds gone from the gourd, but there was no sign of the nest; it was not on the ground below the gourd. The nest box was also empty—neither birds nor nest remained. The only way the nest and birds could have been removed was by someone removing the nail, opening the door, and taking the nest

and birds. If we had had a windstorm it might have been possible for the nest in the gourd to be destroyed, but we had had no storm. The next day we were told that two young men had been seen around the house, one of whom was carrying a crowbar and the other a stick. We were also told that it is well known in our community that baby bluebirds and baby cardinals are being stolen and taken to Miami, Florida to be sold.

Is anyone else aware of similar incidents? If it happened in our rural area, it might be happening elsewhere.

Rt. 7, Box 368A  
Live Oak, FL 32060

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*The possession and sale of native songbirds is a federal crime. Incidents should be reported to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Law Enforcement in your region. Be sure all other types of predation are ruled out before making such a report.*

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### NABS SLIDE SHOW

The NABS slide show is available for rental at \$10.00 or purchase at \$55.00. The show consists of 141 collated, cardboard-framed 35 mm slides and a printed script (no slide tray). If a cassette narration is desired add \$5.00 to the purchase price.

To rent or purchase the bluebird slide show, write to the following address: NABS Slides, Box 6295, Silver Spring, MD 20916-6295. Please allow a month for delivery and, if possible, specify several dates.

## Florence Porter

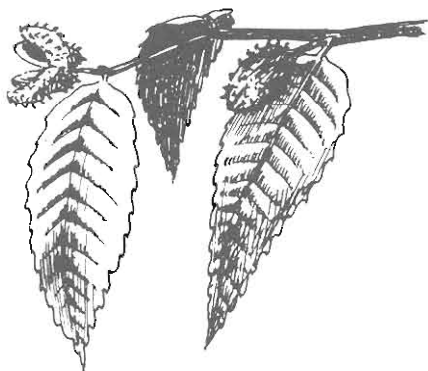
Long-time bluebirder Florence Porter passed away in June 1991 in Colorado. A charter member of the North American Bluebird Society, Florence was the widow of the late William A. Porter. For many years, she and her husband made their home in Potomac, Maryland. Florence had nesting boxes on their property. One spring day she entered a neighborhood hardware store to purchase another nest box. Advised by the clerk that the store did not carry them, a voice behind her said, "I can give you a nest box. It's out in my car." Florence turned to find Larry Zeleny offering her the box. A bluebird friendship was forged that lasted from that day on. Years later when she was widowed, Florence moved to Rossmore Leisure World in Silver Spring, Maryland. There she was the inspiring force in reactivating a bluebird trail on the community golf course. Four times a year Florence gathered a group of volunteers from Leisure World and arrived at NABS' headquarters to "stuff" *Sialia*. She assumed this responsibility early in the life of the publication. It was one of God's numerous blessings to me to have had Florence's friendship during her NABS years. May she rest in peace.

—Mary D. Janetatos

## Meade Flinn

Veteran bluebirder Meade Flinn of Alberta, Virginia, died July 15, 1991, in his one hundredth year. Meade was a charter member of the society and was known locally as "Mr. Bluebird." On a journey to a NABS annual meeting, Treasurer Chuck Dupree, Founder Larry Zeleny, and I made an unplanned stop in Alberta to visit him. Although we did not have his address, it was easy to find his house because everyone in the tiny Virginia town knew where "Mr. Bluebird" lived. Meade was successful in monitoring his trails and in inspiring others to become involved in bluebird conservation. Many were his letters to the editors of local newspapers. He was also a constant benefactor of the Society. Even in his later years, Meade was an enthusiastic attendee at several of NABS' annual meetings. Many thanks must go to grassroots efforts like his. Because of committed individuals like Meade Flinn, bluebirds were able to maintain their precarious population in some areas prior to the coordinated continent-wide bluebird movement which NABS embodies. May God grant him bluebirds of happiness in eternity!

—Mary D. Janetatos



# 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:

One threat to bluebirds that seems to be ignored in *Sialia* is the young boy with an air rifle who shoots birds. I found a dead male bluebird in a slightly weeded area, killed by a pellet. A Scarlet Tanager was found in the same area. How much of this goes on? Bluebird enthusiasts should always be on the alert.

Joseph E. Suthren  
306 Stanley St.  
Port Colborne, Ontario  
Canada L3K 3A2

Dear Editor:

A friend brought me a small metal object and invited me to come and see a most unusual sight.

It seems he entered his shop a few days ago to find the floor strewn with these metal tabs that he was using to secure counter tops to their frames. Puzzled, he picked them up and dropped them in a handy box. Next day they were again on the floor. Several days went by before he discovered that a wren had sufficiently depleted the pile of these items in a cutoff gallon plastic jug so that there was room for a nest. A large double handful had been removed. The nest that I examined in the jug contains four or five eggs.

A certain amount of intelligence

beyond instinct would seem to have been in operation—not too far from the sagacious action of the crow in the fable who raised the water in the pitcher by dropping pebbles into it, enabling him to quench his thirst.

Laurance Sawyer  
Rt. 1 Bluebird Lane  
Ringgold, GA 30736

Dear Editor:

*Sialia* readers may be interested in knowing that a new society called the Sumner Wild Bird Society was organized in Gallatin, Tennessee in January 1991. President Bill Wheeler and Vice President Artice Martin are both members of NABS. The first meeting was a film about bluebirds and our March meeting about another cavity nester—owls.

Bill Wheeler  
655 Chitwood Dr.  
Lafayette, TN 37083

Dear Editor:

In response to a letter by William F. Read in *Bluebird Express* 13(1):37, I would like to know what evidence he has that Texas bluebirders are killing rat snakes using a special trap set up around nest boxes.

There is a growing implication that, in Texas, we are killing snakes.

This is an assumption by many people. Some snakes *do* die in the Krueger Snake Trap. While monitoring nest box no. 37 in 1990, a rat snake had become enmeshed. Vultures had torn it into three pieces (vulture feathers were on the ground). The snake was fresh and, if he hadn't been attacked by vultures, he probably would have been alive when I arrived. Occasionally, I miss seeing one and it will die in the net, but the majority are cut loose and released. I do not want the implication that we are killing snakes to persist.

Harry Krueger  
Rt. 2, Box OR28  
Ore City, TX 75683

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Dear Editor:

During 1990 my bluebird trail had 68 boxes, all with wren guards. The wren guard was a small U-shaped 3/4 inch cedar board mounted upside-down around the entrance hole. I do believe it helps keep out the House Wren.

The boxes were mounted on steel fence posts either isolated or located in a farm fence. They were mounted from three to six feet above the ground. The lower elevation fledged the most bluebirds. The posts were painted with a mixture of turpentine and axle grease just below the box and on the fence wires where needed. There were no ant infestations.

I located half the boxes in native pastures (bluestem) and the remainder around farm fields. There were none located along roads. Those located near the fields fledged more bluebirds than those in the pastures.

The boxes that I checked weekly fledged more bluebirds than those I checked less often.

James E. Fitzgerald  
2910 SW Arvonla Pl.  
Topeka, KS 66614

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Dear Editor:

I had a million ants in box no. 399 on Basian. Many boxes have paper wasps and so I wear gloves in order to

swat and kill these insects. They stung me in July of 1978 and I had to go for help to a hospital. In my little bucket, I now carry an antidote called ANAKIT in case of a bad sting. How do NABS members deal with these unwanted guests?

L.A. Smith  
65 Sympatica, Apt. 408  
Brantford, Ontario  
Canada, N3P 1M7

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Dear Editor:

I enjoyed Wayne Davis' article, "Foiling House Sparrows," which appeared in the Spring 1991 issue (13(2): 51-53). He concluded that House Sparrows were not interested in shallow boxes made of plywood, mounted on fence posts, and placed away from buildings. He suggested that if you have a bluebird box in your yard where House Sparrows are a threat, you should consider adding a shallow box to the area, preferably one made of one inch thick lumber.

I question the appropriateness of ANY SHALLOW bluebird box where starlings are present. While they are unable to enter a box with a 1 1/2 inch opening, they can push their heads inside and easily puncture the eggs, disrupt the nest, and kill the brooding mother. Since starlings are rapidly moving into rural areas, why bother building shallow bluebird boxes in large numbers when these houses will inevitably be obsolete?

Also, a friend of mine in West Virginia has told me that hornets can be prevented from building their nests inside nesting boxes by lubricating the ceiling with Vaseline® petroleum jelly. The nests cannot adhere to the greasy surface, and the insects will move elsewhere. Locating the boxes far away from streams and ditchlines will also discourage wasps and hornets.

Ed Barnett  
7 Donna Heights  
Huntington, WV 25704

# Bluebird Tales

Mary D. Janetatos

**SWOOP!** The flash of blue past my window signaled the male bluebird, father of the second brood of five, landing on top of his nest box. But what was exiting from the box? TWO female bluebirds?? I rushed downstairs and pushed open the sliding doors to the patio and back yard. The soft pre-warble twitters that greeted me indicated a possible solution to the mystery: first brood juveniles were involved in some "helping" behavior. This very successful bluebird season in my yard now has the following score: five fledged (two still accounted for), five young in box getting plenty of attention from two adults, and at least two juveniles. Will they grow up to be SUPER BLUES? Stay tuned....

What I need now is the help of **Melinda Hefner**, Harmony, NC, to identify and name all these bluebirds. In mid April she wrote, "I have got a bluebird box. Two bluebirds are making a nest in it. They have completed the nest. It's about time for them to lay their first egg. I named the female bird Swifty and the male bird Speedie.... I will be thinking about what I want to name the baby birds." There was also a letter sent to NABS from five year old **Robin Mark Soukup** of Gap Mills, VA, written with the assistance of his grandfather, **William Gutjahr**, of Florence, IN. "My grandfather and I built three nesting boxes and we put them up on a small farm. We both want to learn more about bluebirds."

Kindergarten teacher **Virginia Carlson** of South Bend, WA, introduces her students each year to bluebirds with my own long-time favorite, *Bluebirds Seven* by **R. Bruce Horsfall**. The book was written in 1917 by the naturalist/bird artist in collaboration with his wife **Carra E. Horsfall** who wrote the story text. It lay forgotten in the basement of the Portland [OR] Audubon House and was discovered in the course of a clean-out there in 1978. The discovery coincided with an upsurge in interest and efforts on behalf of Western Bluebirds in the Willamette Valley. The story and pictures were published in 1978 by the Portland Audubon Society. I agree with Virginia Carlson that this is an excellent way of presenting the bluebird story to young children. (NABS includes this lovely book and the accompanying coloring book in its catalog, no. 401-402.)

From Belle Mead, NJ, in the central part of the state, **Alfred Hadinger** wrote



from Orchard Road School, "We [live in] a slowly developing former farming community that still has some excellent bluebird habitat areas, especially around our school complex. We now have a modest trail of some 12 boxes, which I am in the process of expanding. For Earth Day the last two years, we have been constructing and installing the boxes with 4th-6th graders. This year we have two nesting pairs, one of which we observed with my two classes on Earth Day."

The summer 1991 issue of *Countryside* magazine had a very fine article entitled, "Rebirth of the Blues" by **Chris Jerome**. Since it contained NABS' address, we received a nice volume of mail from readers requesting our brochure, "Where Have All the Bluebirds Gone?" Quoting the article, **Donna Klassen** of Vanderhoof, British Columbia, wrote "We have lived here for 20 years and never noticed bluebirds until three years ago, when a pair showed up at our place looking for a home. Thrilled beyond words, we quickly tacked a box up on a shed and they accepted it! We watched them raise two broods of young ones that summer and also the next year."

Another *Countryside* reader, **Bette Hilfman** of Manassas, VA, wrote NABS, "After telling my father that I had spotted bluebirds in the woods behind my townhouse, he built a house (to bluebird specifications, of course) in the spring of '89 and just ten days after hanging it on my fence, a pair had moved in! One brood was raised that year. Then last year a relative sent me a copy of **L. Zeleny's** bluebird book and it was then I learned to clean out the house after the brood leaves, and I watched with enjoyment the raising of two broods that summer. The first brood for this year has just left the nest."

**Eleata Staley** of Nashville, TN, also en-

Joyed the article and said, "My husband and I are blessed and fortunate enough to have a golf membership at the wonderful Honors Course in Ootewah, TN, just outside of Chattanooga. The owners, **Jack and Alice Lupton**, were thoughtful enough and in their consideration of Mother Nature have placed bluebird boxes all over the course! Bill and I go over on an average of every 5-6 weeks and I always see many Eastern Bluebirds.... We also golf on Daufuskie Island, SC, where we always spy bluebirds as well. Thought that you would like to know of these two havens for these lovely creatures of the skies."

Take note, spouses "widowed" by golf. You might take up bluebirding as your spouse traverses the greens! One successful bluebird trail I know of locally here in the Maryland area is at the Rossmoor Leisure World golf course. Reactivated through the late **Florence Porter's** inspiration (note Florence's obituary elsewhere in this issue), **Myron Whitney** now spearheads the bluebird conservation efforts, assisted by other stalwart bluebirders: **Royal Montgomery, Harriet Shaplo**, and **Lillian Warfield**. Some of these resilient retirees are "double-dippers." They monitor the Leisure World bluebird trails and they volunteer at the NABS office stuffing *Sialia*.

Bluebird trail monitoring turns up many interesting things, among which is the variety of native bird species which will utilize nest boxes. When the species is Tree Swallows, there is a common problem noted: death of adults or young in the boxes. **Bill Slagle** of Bruceton Mills, WV, reported this recently: "To help eliminate this problem [of trapped swallows], we have sawed horizontal grooves across the face board every 3/4 inch from 1 inch below the entrance hole down to 2 inches from the bottom. This allows the birds to hook their toes into the slots enabling them to climb out."

Another winged predator, the House Sparrow, was blamed for the death of a swallow by a bluebirder who had tried my "flagpole" as a sparrow deterrent, but found it didn't work. Probably nothing works 100% of the time against sparrows. Anyway, it was **Tina Sparrow** of Barrie, Ontario, who reported this, so you see, in spite of everything, some "sparrows" are working to help bluebirds!

For a really effective way to address a sparrow problem, do as **Cynthia Johnston** of Lebanon, PA did: build a Huber sparrow trap and place it inside the NABS standard 4x4 inch box. Cynthia wrote that after she did this, she got a bluebird nest with eggs in it. (To receive the Huber trap plans, mail a

SASE with "Huber Trap Plans" written on it. There is no charge for the plans.)

**Janice B. Jones** of Winston-Salem, NC, reported that there were no sparrows in Danbury, NC. She also wrote that "my husband, **Bill**, built me a large woodpecker box and we placed it in the woods beside the house. A pair of titmice are building in it!" One correspondent wrote saying that efforts to attract bluebirds to the yard had succeeded and one pair of bluebirds delighted the family by staying "close to their house all winter" and nesting "when the time came." The source and name of the correspondent were both coincidental for me: **Mona Daugherty** (my maiden name) of Chambersburg, PA (my native state).

Sometimes visits by members punctuate life around the NABS office. This was the case when **Gordon Webber** of Ontario called and asked directions to headquarters. He told me he was in town for a convention, but I was not prepared for the surprise I felt when, after he rang the doorbell, he said to me, "Is this where I'm supposed to stop?" I looked behind him, and his 4-wheel drive vehicle was labeled "Metro Ambulance." So that's the kind of convention he was attending! **Shirley Adams** of Alton, IL, must know I enjoy a chuckle as often as possible. She sent wonderful snapshots of her baby bluebirds, telling how **Lloyd Wilson** of Godfrey, IL, had introduced her to bluebird conservation. My favorite photo was one posed, a la **Laurance Sawyer**, with several feathered nestlings in a small ribboned and flowered Easter basket.

Bluebird conservation gets into the "good(?) neighbor" department now and then. **Lewis Cook** of Gaisessville, NY, lamented: "Each of the past two years has brought a pair of bluebirds which fledged a family of four and then moved to a neighbor's box and then raised a family there. But I haven't seen a bluebird here this year."

Then **Howard C. Black** of Kodak, TN, sent his glowing account of the church youth group assisting church members on an Indian reservation selling the 50 bluebird nest boxes made by Howard for \$10 each.

I guess **C.L. Phillips** of Carbondale, IL, hopes everyone gets bluebirds in his neighborhood. "We have been very interested in the preservation of the bluebird for the past eight years. We have eight houses on our rural property which have been very productive each year. At Christmas time I build houses for our neighbors in our area and

they report two to three hatchings per year."

My home state, Pennsylvania, has, like many other states, incorporated bluebird conservation into its Department of Environmental Resources. In a recent letter from Elva Miller, aide to Environmental Interpretive Technician, Audrey Wirick at Laurel State Park, we learned that they have "established a 16 box bluebird trail through PA State Parks Bluebird Trail Program and will be expanding it this year."

In Stanton, KY, Dr. Wayne Davis, former NABS Education Committee member and long time professor of biology at the University of Kentucky, marshalled the resources of the U.S. Forest Service and the Buckley Hills Audubon Society in the spring of 1991. Dr. Davis conducted a workshop which was a first in that state and was highly successful. Also reporting from the lecture circuit (NABS Speakers' Bureau) was Arne Fillet of Aiken, SC, who gave a presentation at the Academy for Lifelong Learning, sponsored by the University of South Carolina-Aiken, entitled "A Report from Bluebird Country." The talk promoted bluebird conservation in the "bluebird friendly" state of South Carolina.

Locally, Larry Zeleny and I conducted a tour of the Beltsville, MD bluebird trail which Larry himself (NABS' founder) has installed and monitored for so many years at the USDA Experimental Farm. Twenty-seven persons, including several Girl Scouts and their leaders, car pooled around the vast acreage and observed bluebirds in all stages. Their appreciation and enthusiasm was stated well by Ken Lehnert of Silver Spring, MD, who later sent NABS a

donation and wrote, "I thoroughly enjoyed the bluebird tour on Saturday, June 1, 1991, and thank you and Larry for an outstanding job. I hope to be included in future tours."

Donna Finnestad of Marysville, British Columbia, reported on a new group aiding bluebird conservation. She said of the Rocky Mountain Naturalists, "We had an interesting, but frustrating first year due to a snowstorm in June and cool wet weather which turned into very hot summer. Public interest has been wonderfully supportive. We are presently giving classroom talks and showing a bluebird video to elementary school students. Later, we take them out on a field trip."

Coburn Britton of Lebanon, NJ, wrote of three pairs of bluebirds nesting in his "geriatric apple orchard." After praising Sialia, John S. McCall of Cleveland, TN, claimed poetically "Bluebirds are truly one of God's most beautiful creations. My spirits are lifted every time I see one!" But for true jubilation over bluebirds which came to nest at last, Robert C. Cypher's letter enabled me to close this column on high hopes for all of you devoted bluebirders. Robert wrote from Brewster, NY, last May: "Hallelujah! After three years of waiting and hoping and setting out three bluebird houses we were accepted as homesite for a fine young pair of bluebirds. We have always sighted 'blues' in very early spring but only for a day or so as they paused for a day or so before passing on through. People have told us we could never expect bluebirds to nest on our property. It was not open enough—we are in the middle of the woods and have less than 1/4 acre of our 1 1/2 acres open. Hallelujah!" ■

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## BLUEBIRD BOOSTERS

*Appearing on the inside back cover is a list of those individuals who have made a financial commitment to bluebirds and 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 20916-6295.*





Photographs by Mike Jones, Pennsylvania State Parks

Environmental Education Specialist Jean Kling, Pennsylvania Bureau of State Parks (left) presents the Bluebirder of the Year award to Dr. Andrew Choby for his outstanding service to the Pennsylvania State Parks Bluebird Trails Program. Dr. Choby has been a state park bluebird trail monitor for more than eight years.



Bald Eagle Park bluebird trail monitor Cecil Hazlett (right) presents state park bluebird trails volunteer hat to Sadie Dorber, North American Bluebird Society president.

**(PRESIDENTIAL POINTS—Continued from page 122)**

boxes and had apparently eaten the young birds. Though I'd never heard of this happening, I never doubted Bob's report. A few weeks ago, Rick Dunbar, Superintendent of Oquaga Creek State

Park, called to report that bears had destroyed a few boxes on the trail at the park. During the night, Rick's dogs were raising such a commotion that he got dressed and took a ride through the park. Two bears crossed the road and ran toward the woods. The next morning the damage was evident. The metal fence posts had been pushed over and the boxes completely ripped apart.

Jessica, my first grandchild, arrived on 4 May and, as many babies do, she soon developed colic. On my way to check boxes one Saturday, I stopped at the house to leave items needed for the next day's christening luncheon. She had fussed all morning and my daughter-in-law wasn't getting anything done toward the next day's preparations. I offered to pick her up on my return trip, but then said to my daughter-in-law, "All the boxes are on the road. Jessica quits crying when she's riding in the car. Why don't I take her along?" So, we packed up the diaper bag—Jessica was "hitting the trail for bluebirds" when only 6 weeks old! ■

## Return of the Bluebird

He left his winter home, that sunny day,  
"The time has come," the warm breeze seemed to say  
"Up, up, bluebird, soar up and into flight,  
Your wings must rest but seldom, day or night."  
Beneath his feathered breast small stirrings urged him on,  
Familiar old sensations that had gone,  
Since last he left his little prairie home.

And so he flew due north, though not to understand  
What instinct drew him like a magnet to this chilly land,  
And though the wind blew cold, he faltered not,  
But stayed on course, and finally reached the spot  
Which he remembered, by a wind-swept field,  
The acres would, perchance, small kernels yield  
For sustenance, as snow still lay upon the land.

Then he espied the old and weather-beaten home  
From which, last year, his family had all flown.  
So now, to find a mate, and once again,  
The yearly cycle to repeat itself, as then,  
His tired wings stretched in the warming sun,  
The bluebird has returned, and spring has come. ©

—Hazel A. Bowie

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(Continued on page 160)

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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.

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