

# *Sialia*

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Autumn 1992  
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 juvenal bluebird for its logo. Since bluebirds almost always choose to raise their young in small enclosed cavities, a young bluebird sitting near a nesting box seemed to symbolize our mission. The hope of any species resides in its young. Because of bluebird nesting preferences, the survival of their young may depend on the nesting box, especially since natural cavities, for a variety of reasons, are disappearing rapidly. The theme of bluebird young nurtured in man-made structures will be a recurring one in our art and literature. We hope that this theme will remind all about the plight of the bluebird, and will stimulate action which will allow this beautiful creature to prosper.

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# Sialia

The Quarterly Journal  
About Bluebirds

Volume 14, Number 4  
Autumn 1992  
Pages 121-160

## EDITOR

Joanne K. Solem

## CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Lawrence Zeleny

## ART EDITOR

M. Suzanne Probst

## CONTENTS

Presidential Points .....	122
Sadie Dorber	
Myths at the Bluebird Box[?] .....	123
Wayne Davis	
Literature Review .....	124
T. David Pitts	
Easy-to-Clean Nest Box .....	125
Harold Bullerman	
Wonewok Conference Centre Welcomes Business Executives and Bluebirds .....	133
Kenneth B. Brock	
Eastern Bluebird Portraits .....	140
Hubert Brandenburg	
Question Corner .....	143
Lawrence Zeleny	
Bluebird Helpers .....	144
Kathleen Casses	
Bluebirds Foster International Friendship .....	145
John Findlay, III	
Kopff Named Wisconsin Wildlife Conservationist of the Year .....	146
Speakers' Bureau Report: Georgia ..	147
Ron Kingston	
Rewards from Eastern Bluebirds ..	150
Margaret Rusnell	
Bluebird Feeder Experiment .....	151
George and Vi Nailsnik	
Camp Bluebird's Mascot .....	152
Laurance and Adelaide Sawyer	
Predator Relocation .....	153
Tom A. Barber	
Bluebird Express .....	154
Bluebird Tales .....	156
Mary D. Janetatos	
Poetry: Sawyer, Maxson .....	160

## COVER

A bathing bluebird is the subject chosen 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 Graeoch Road, Laurel, Maryland 20723.

## Presidential Points

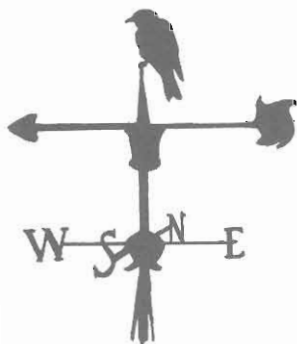
Sadie Dorber

**B**y the time you receive this issue of *Sialia*, I will have stepped down as your president. In this, my final column, I'd like to reflect on the past eight years. The bluebird movement was just starting to get a foothold across the continent when I began my term of office. As I traveled around North America attending meetings, I could see the interest in bluebirds increase and the movement virtually move from east to west. At that time, a few states had formed individual groups to assist the bluebird. Today nearly every state has implemented a bluebird organization or program of its own. The movement has also grown in Canada by leaps and bounds, and many of the Canadian provinces have their own groups. Bluebirds, at one time rare in Ontario, are now a common sight. The trail established across the state of Montana on Route 200 has resulted in nestings of the Eastern Bluebird. Just recently a male Eastern Bluebird was sighted in the Great Falls area of Montana. That old phrase "boxes make a difference" has proven true.

Placing a box in a suitable habitat still remains the most important factor for attracting bluebirds. Although I have always emphasized this point, now I take the liberty of telling a group that if boxes are placed in suitable habitat, "you will get bluebirds."

Many different styles of boxes are in use by bluebirds and other cavity nesters today and the choice is confusing to the beginner. Without a doubt, the question I'm most often asked is "Which box style is best?" I explain that the bluebird doesn't care which box we erect, it's really what the individual prefers.

Traveling to the various regions of North America always presented the opportunity to look for other birds to add to my life list. I could always find a willing birder to join me, no matter what the hour, by asking Treasurer Chuck Dupree if he'd like to go birding. One year we were in North Carolina



during spring migration so we asked several people to join us the next morning to go birding at a refuge. Nobody seemed interested in leaving at 5:00 a.m. To this day the two of us still talk about that great morning. Warblers were everywhere; at times they were so thick they nearly flew into our faces. Chuck could call the Yellow-breasted Chat; much to our delight, the chats kept coming to his call. On occasion, the chat will be sighted in my area of New York, but, unfortunately, I've never seen one since that memorable day in North Carolina.

I'm sure I'll never forget the day that Bermuda Conservation Officer Dave Wingate took me out to the little island in the middle of the harbor to see the nesting cahows. After he finally got me boosted up the sharp rocks to the top of the island, I was sure I'd never be able to get down. I can still say "I've never been so frightened doing something that I was agreeing to do."

The different locations I've visited have all been unique and beautiful in their own way, but Montana and Bermuda still hold a fascination for me. Two places so very different, but yet so tranquil: Montana with the big sky, rugged mountains, prairies and rainbows; Bermuda with the lush vegetation and aqua-colored ocean. Both provide fond memories.

During my term as president, I've seen the Tree Swallow competition for nesting boxes eased by pairing boxes. I've also seen different nesting box styles invented to discourage the House Sparrow, but control of this  
(Continued on page 142)

# Myths at the Bluebird Box [?]

Wayne Davis

*The following article is reprinted from Bluebird News 5(6):3-4. Although originally titled "Myths at the Bluebird Box," a question mark in brackets has been added here for it is by no means certain that the observations Dr. Davis describes are really fiction. The North American Bluebird Society would like to determine if the statements Davis cites are, indeed, myths. If you have observed specific instances of starling aggression against nesting bluebirds at the box or premature fledging of bluebird nestlings whose age is accurately known, let us know. Describe the circumstances and number of observations in detail and forward them to the editor of Sialia.*

When statements get into the literature they tend to develop a life, whether justified or not. Thus Zeleny, in his excellent book on bluebirds published in 1976, warned that a box must be deep enough that the nest is not close to the entrance. Otherwise, he noted, starlings, although they cannot enter the box, will reach in and destroy the eggs and young. Naturally, later writers would assume someone had seen starlings doing this and would repeat the concern. However, a letter I have from Zeleny explains that he assumed the aggressive starling would do this. I don't fault him for this assumption. Starlings are quite omnivorous and one would think that eggs and hatchlings would be eaten.

In our experiments with boxes accessible to starlings we were surprised to learn that starlings rarely bothered nesting bluebirds, even when the boxes were deep and roomy and placed on the mines where starlings were common and nest sites scarce. The boxes I am now testing are easily accessible to starlings but designed to be of no interest to them; I have had no indication of any problem with starlings. Keith Kridler showed that the Peterson box is accessible to starlings. Nevertheless, this box has been very successful and is almost never used by starlings. Apparently starlings don't bother bluebirds in Peterson boxes.

A strange and persistent myth is premature fledging. Zeleny wrote that a decided disadvantage of the front or side opening type box is that if it is opened when the young are more than about 12 days old the young birds may take flight. Elsewhere he writes that it

is best not to open a side opening box after the nestlings are 12 days old lest they might leave the nest prematurely.

Several writers have repeated this story. The Stokeses in their new bluebird book have a section entitled "When Not to Monitor" in which they warn against checking a box after the young are 12 days old. In the spring 1992 issue of *Wisconsin Bluebird*, editor Don Bragg has an article on monitoring nest boxes. It is all sound advice until a paragraph says: *Avoid opening a box when the nestlings are close to fledging (12 days of age or older).* If the nestlings leave prematurely they may become easy prey to ground predators.

Dorene Scriven in her excellent book warns against opening a side or front opening box after the nestlings are 14 days old. She says the young may panic and eject and you will have half-fluttering, half-running young on the ground.

I question whether there is such a phenomenon as premature fledging in bluebirds. Has anyone ever seen a bluebird panic and jump from a box and flutter to the ground? Keith Kridler once wrote in the *News* that in all his observations he had only one instance of young leaving the nest when he opened a box.

My boxes have a slot entrance and are hinged at the bottom so that the front swings open completely. In my experience, young that are not ready to fledge always scrunch down and strongly resist being removed from the box.

I have had two instances of young leaving the box when I opened it. The

(Continued on page 142)

## Literature Review

T. David Pitts

**Robertson, Raleigh J., and Wallace B. Rendell. 1990. A comparison of breeding ecology of a secondary cavity nesting bird, the Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*), in nest boxes and natural cavities. *Canadian Journal of Zoology* 68: 1046-1052.**—Each year many thousands of bluebirds and Tree Swallows use nest boxes specifically designed and placed for cavity nesting birds. While the dimensions and placement of many nest boxes are usually based on the measurement and location of natural cavities used by these species, the fact remains that few studies have compared nesting results in natural and artificial cavities. In this study the authors compared 110 nests in natural cavities with nests of 174 pairs in nest boxes. Natural cavities had, on the average, larger entrances but less floor area and volume than nest boxes. Swallows had to compete with more species for the use of natural cavities. Species such as European Starlings and Common Grackles were able to utilize natural cavities as a result of the larger entrances. Clutch sizes were larger in boxes than in natural cavities. The proportion of pairs that fledged young in natural cavities and nest boxes did not differ. Older females were more likely to use nest boxes, and young females were more likely to use natural cavities. The authors conclude that the breeding biology of birds nesting in nest boxes may differ from that of birds using natural cavities. Consequently, studies of populations using natural cavities should be made to supplement nest box studies.

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**Morton, E.S., L. Forman, and M. Braun. 1990. Extrapaar fertilizations and the evolution of colonial breeding in Purple Martins. *Auk* 107:275-283.**—Many readers of *Sialia* may, like me, not be aware of some of the features of Purple Martins. They are the largest swallows in

the world; they have only one nest per year because the nesting cycle is so long (about 65 days); both parents must feed the young; and, in part of their range (the southwest desert) they nest as solitary pairs, while in other parts of their range (forested eastern U.S.) they are colonial. The authors note that martins originally nested in abandoned woodpecker cavities; sites with multiple cavities (such as dead trees) would be suitable for colonial nesting while sites with single cavities (cacti) could be used by only one pair. The authors present data demonstrating that (1) in the eastern U.S. older martins return to nesting sites (which are now boxes and gourds) earlier than younger birds; (2) the older males defend more than one cavity; (3) the older males attempt to attract to these empty cavities the younger, and later arriving, pairs; and (4) older males copulate with the younger females. The older males may father 70% of the offspring produced by the younger females, even though the older males do not provide assistance in rearing the young. Young males apparently tolerate the forced copulations of their mates with the older males in exchange for access to nest cavities. Readers who are interested in Purple Martin behavior and nesting activities will find many points to ponder in this interesting article. ■

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.

### Art Credits

Jon E. Boone: 122, 154  
Shirley Nachtrieb: 159  
Suzanne Pennell: 143, 156  
Robert Waldmire: Barn Owl 158

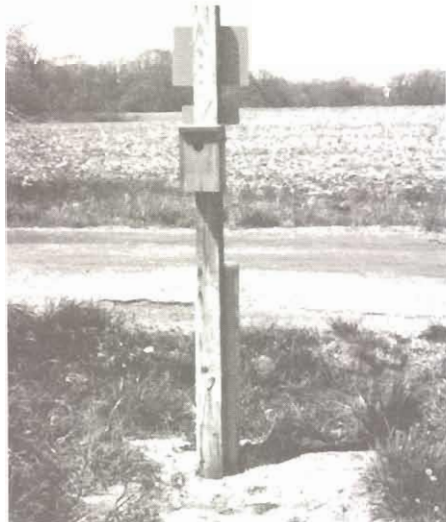
## Easy-to-Clean Nest Box

Harold Bullerman

I read with interest the Winter issue of *Sialia* which contained the Ellis Bird Farm nest box design (14(1):7). It is a fine box and similar to one that I designed, but I believe it can be made even more practical by using a few of the ideas I have incorporated in mine: 1. the floor of the Ellis Bird Farm box has the corners cut off. I found that cutting the corners off really didn't do much good as the openings frequently became plugged and didn't drain correctly. The debris then had to be poked out. My solution to that problem is to make the bottom  $3/4$  inch narrower than the width of the inside of the box and space the bottom  $3/8$  inch from each side. Two nails in the front and two in the back hold the bottom securely. This makes a  $3/8$  inch wide slot from front to back which does not plug up as it does when just the corners are cut off. Using a  $3/8$  inch board as a spacer makes assembly simple. Cleaning a box of this design is almost as easy as cleaning a front or side opening box. Simply remove the old nest; then, using a wide-bladed scraper such as a putty knife, scrape the residue over the opening and poke it down through the slots.

The slots do not interfere with the bluebirds' nest building one iota. Another advantage of the slotted bottom is that it allows air to circulate throughout the box, at least until the nest material gets matted down so tight neither air or water can penetrate it.

2. The second improvement concerns the top. The drawing shows the top insert the same size as the bottom. That would make putting the top on the box difficult; if there were any swelling at all, it would be impossible to get it on. I make my tops  $1/4$  inch smaller than the inside dimensions of the box and have no problem at all. For example, instead of a 5 x 5 inch top on a box with those dimensions, my top



A typical mounting 4 feet above the ground. A box can be mounted under the cable signs without hindering removal of the top.

would be  $4\ 3/4$  x  $4\ 3/4$  inches.

3. Of all the designs I have seen over the past several years, I have never seen as easy and practical an idea for mounting a box as the method I use. I use *plumbers hanger iron*. It is perforated galvanized steel and comes in 10 foot rolls, available at any hardware store for about \$1.50 a roll. I cut it into 12 inch lengths, fasten it to the back of the box with  $1\ 1/2$  inch galvanized shingle nails about 3 inches from the top, and clinch the nails on the inside of the box. This *must* be done before the back is attached to the sides. This holds the iron securely.

With this type of mounting, the box can be mounted on any size post or pole regardless of the shape. Using two 2 or 3 inch stove bolts, a box can be mounted on pipe from  $3/4$  inch to 4 inches in diameter. Using this type of

mounting, there is no problem in splitting the back board. Because it is mounted with just one nail on each side of the post, it is easily moved without damage to the box.

My boxes are of the flat topped type. The sides, front, and back are the same length. This simplifies cutting and uses the least amount of material. To me, there is no advantage to a sloping roof. I use a wire over the top of the box to hold the roof on and have never lost a top. The box is completely covered from the elements.

On the diagrams I give no dimensions for box size. I do not believe there is such a thing as a single *correct* box size. I've seen bluebirds build in a 3 inch fence post and in a mail box.

What qualities does a really good bluebird box have? From my viewpoint, it should have the following characteristics:

1. simple to build, so kids without power tools can make it;
2. rugged and durable;
3. easy to mount on any size post;
4. easy to monitor;
5. easy to clean;



Boxes being assembled from scrap redwood from a garage door factory. Boxes have flat roofs which make them easier to build. Since boxes are difficult to mount so that they are perfectly level, water drains from a flat roof as well as it would from a slanted one.



Note the 1 1/2 inch shingle nails that hold the wire that keeps the top on. A small piece of hanger can be seen holding the box to the post.



6. drain well;
7. easy to relocate, if necessary.

I believe the box I am using, which is illustrated with photographs and diagrams, fulfills all of these needs.

My 17 mile trail consists of 55 boxes in Shelby County in east-central Illinois. I received permission to mount

my boxes on the short pedestal posts carrying warning signs to mark buried cable erected by the Illinois Consolidated Telephone Company. The trail fledged 139 bluebirds in 1991. ■

520 N. Pine  
Windsor, IL 41957

*(Diagrams on following pages)*

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*The North American Bluebird Society continually investigates nesting boxes in a wide range of styles. Many prove to have no appreciable advantages over types in widespread use, but sometimes a design may be of value in certain climates or under particular conditions. If you use any experimental boxes, please advise Research Chairman Kevin Berner, State University of New York, College of Agriculture & Technology, Cobleskill, NY 12043.*



Copper wire can be seen across the lower lefthand side of this open box. It is wound around one nail, formed over the top, and then snapped over a nail on the other side to secure the box top. Notice the clinched nails on the inside of the box fastening the hanger iron to the box. Also note how the hanger iron mounts the box to an irregular post.

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## BLUEBIRD BOOSTERS

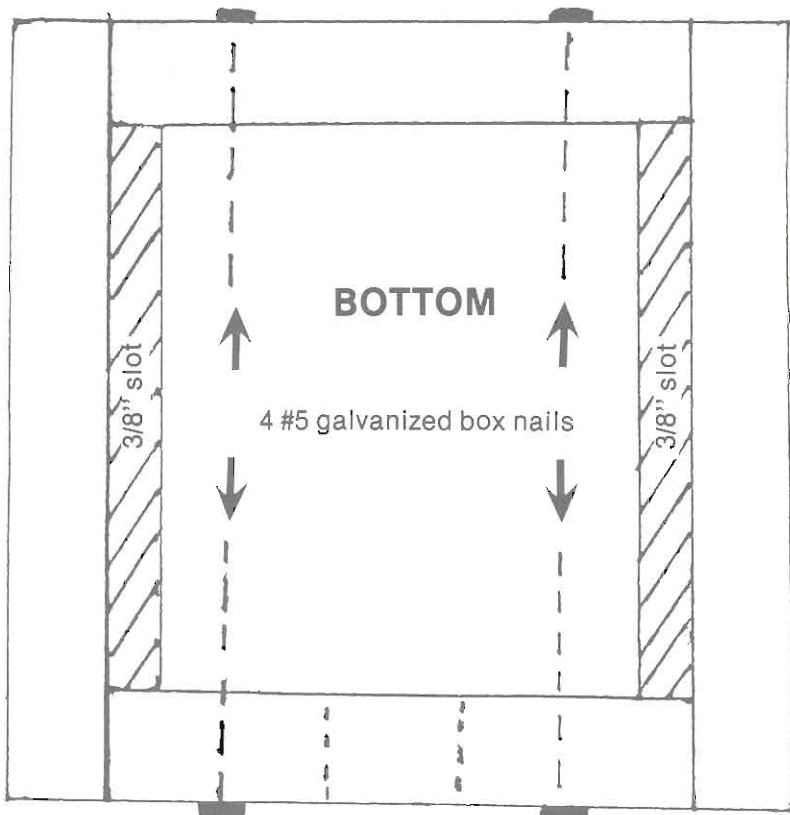
*Appearing on the inside back cover is a list of those individuals who have made a financial commitment to bluebirds and cavity nesters over and above their annual dues. Such support is essential in maintaining a stable dues structure. We thank the individuals, organizations, and businesses for their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

Figure 1. Easy-to-Clean Box Floor (View from Below).

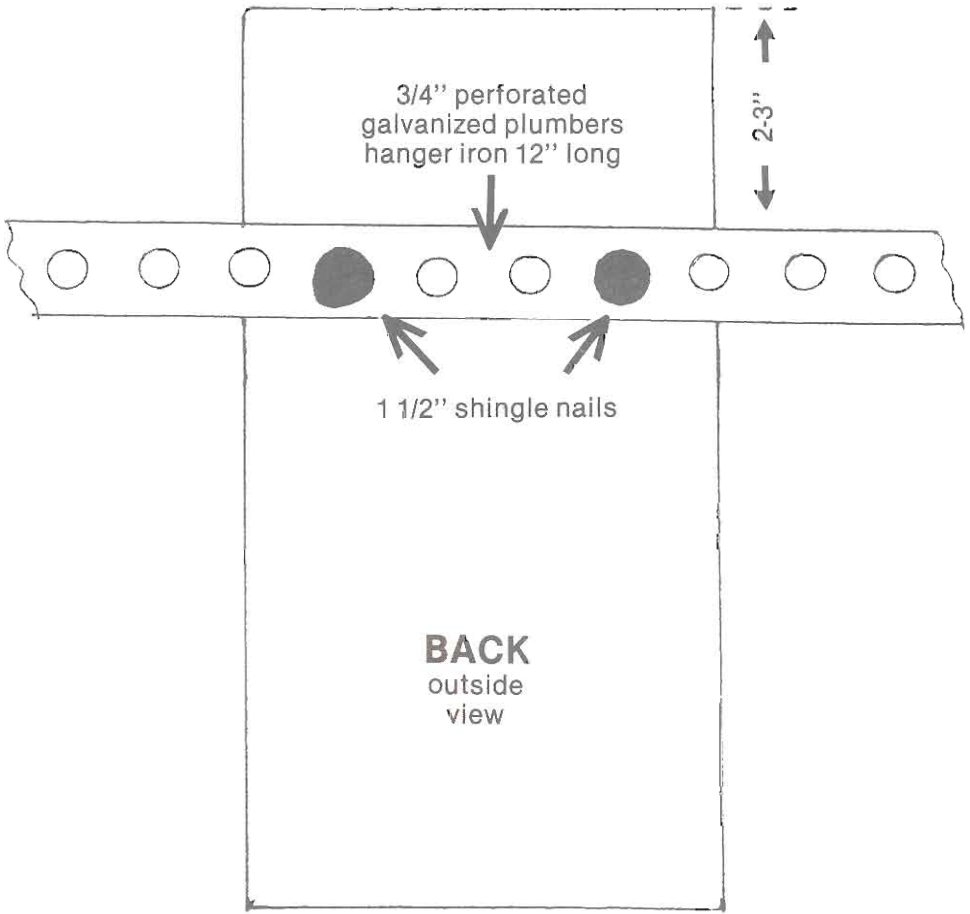


The shaded portion shows the 3/8 inch slots between the sides and bottom (floor) of the box. The bottom is held in by four no. 5 galvanized box nails. This design makes cleaning top opening boxes as easy as cleaning those that open on the side or in the front. A wide flat blade such as a putty knife is used to scrape the dust and debris to the slots.

**Metric Equivalents**

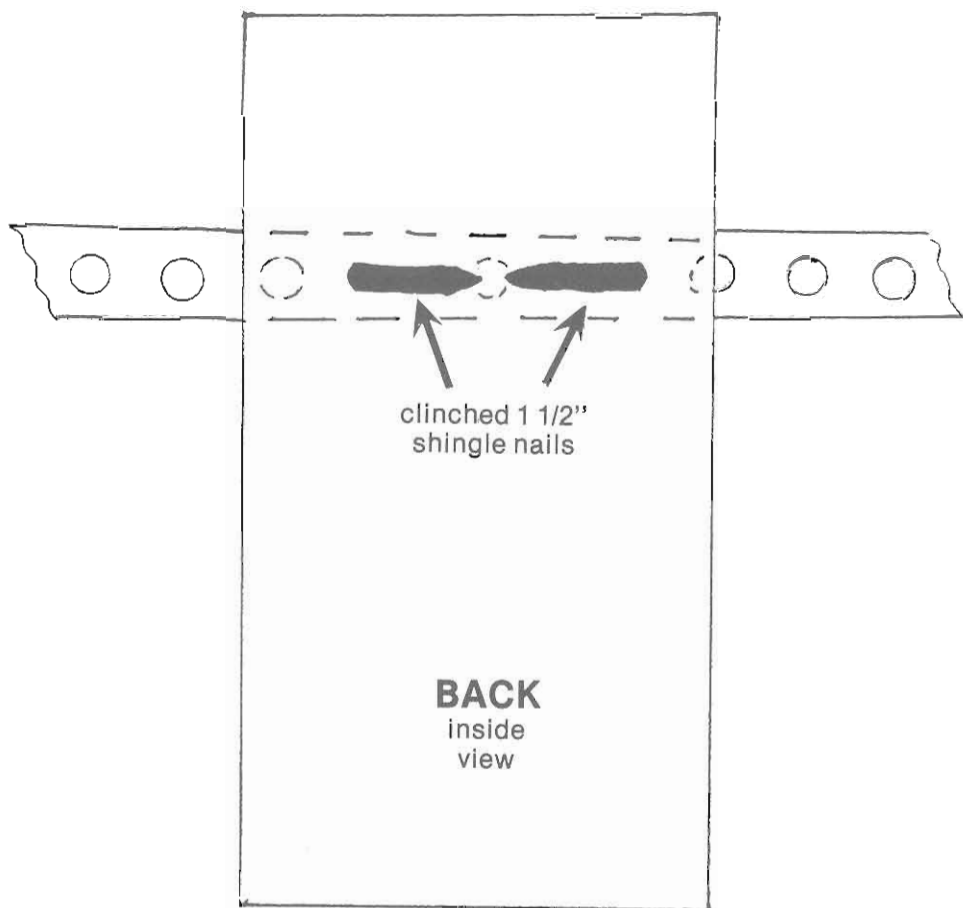
- 0.25 in. (0.6 cm)
- 0.38 in. (1.0 cm)
- 0.75 in. (1.9 cm)
- 1.0 in. (2.5 cm)
- 1.25 in. (3.1 cm)
- 1.5 in. (3.8 cm)
- 2.0-3.0 in. (5.1-7.5 cm)
- 12.0 in. (30.0 cm)

Figure 2. Outside View of Back Board of Box Showing Perforated Mounting Strap.



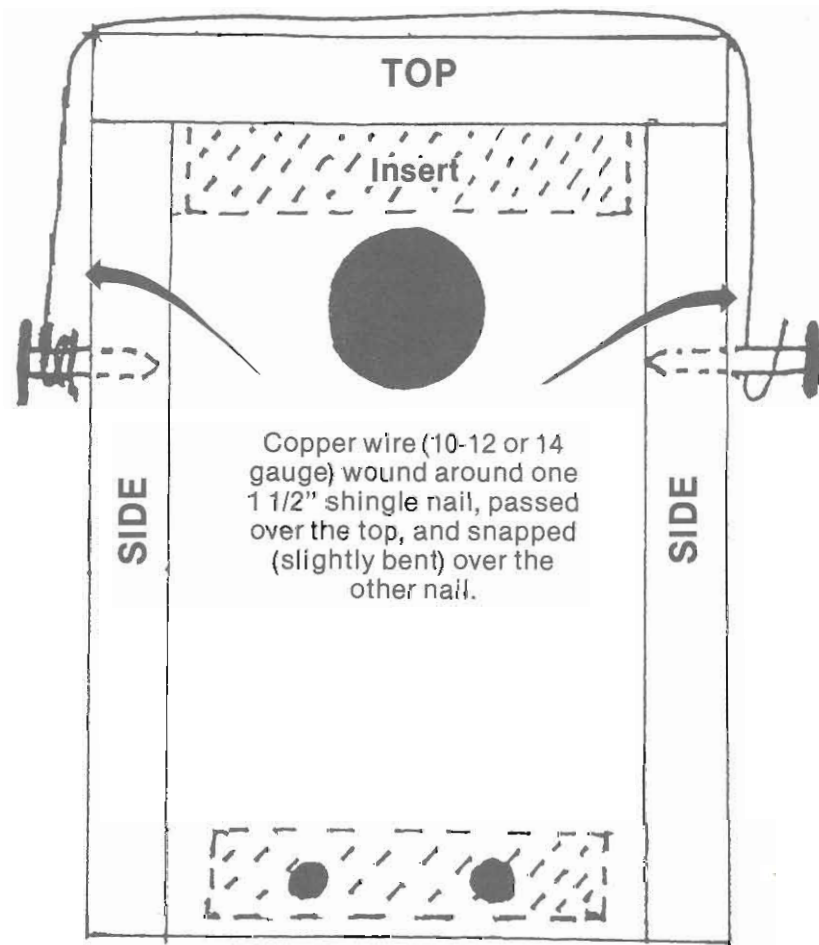
This view of the outside of the back board of the box shows how the 3/4 inch perforated plumbers hanger iron is fastened with two 1 1/2 inch large-head galvanized shingle nails. About 10-12 inches of hanger iron is ample for bluebird boxes. A longer strip would be needed for Wood Duck or other large boxes.

Figure 3. Inside View of Back Board of Box Showing Perforated Mounting Strap.



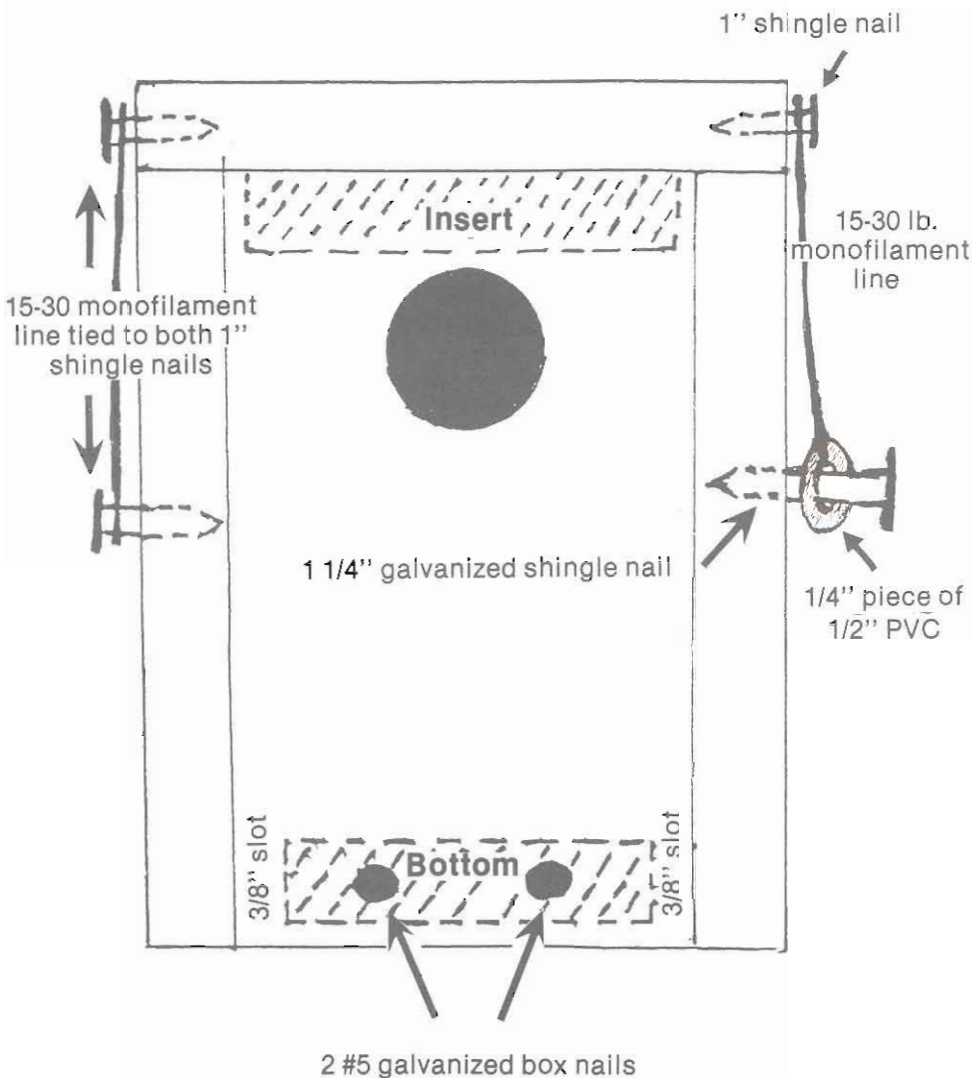
This view shows how the shingle nails are bent (clinched) on the inside of the back board of the box. Shingle nails used this way provide great strength, much greater than screws. The perforated iron can be bent to fit a post of any size or shape. A single shingle nail on each side holds the box firmly. The nails must be clinched before assembly.

Figure 4. Box Top Fastening with Copper Wire.



The top has an insert 1/4 inch smaller than the inside of the box. A 1 1/2 inch galvanized shingle nail is driven into each side of the box about 2 inches from the top, about in the center of the box. A length of bare 10-12 or 14 gauge copper wire is wound around one nail, bent over the top, and then hooked over the nail on the opposite side. The wire needs only a *slight* bend, just enough so that it doesn't slip off the nail. It will hold the top on securely (I have never lost a top). Both this drawing and Fig. 1 show how the bottom is nailed in the box. They also show the slots between the sides and bottom. The box is easy to clean and drains well.

Figure 5. Box Top Fastening with Monofilament Line and PVC.



This method can be used with any top opening box that has an insert under the top. A short piece of 15-30 lb. test monofilament fishing line is tied and nailed to the top and one side of the box with 1 inch galvanized shingle nails. A piece of 1/2 inch PVC pipe is cut into 1/4 inch sections (a steel washer with a 1/2 inch hole could also be used). A 1 1/4 inch shingle nail is driven into the other side. A length of monofilament line is tied securely to the PVC ring and slipped over the nail. The other end of the line is tied around a 1 inch shingle nail that has been driven into the top. The large nail head prevents the PVC ring from coming off. The other line prevents the loss of the top.

# Wonewok Conference Centre Welcomes Business Executives and Bluebirds

Kenneth B. Brock

The 3M Wonewok Conference Centre consists of more than 700 acres of woodland on Mantrap and Petite lakes in northern Minnesota. The word Wonewok is Ojibway for "peaceful waters." It is designed as a meeting center for business professionals in a rustic setting that promotes communication between participants and innovative problem solving. Wonewok is equipped with modern telecommunication and computer services along with ample facilities for work and relaxation.

Historically, plentiful fish and game made the region, 17 miles from Park Rapids, so popular that in the late 1920s a land development company purchased 200 acres of what is now the Wonewok Conference Centre as a summer retreat for individuals from the cities.

At about the same time Chicago industrialist Fred A. Nachman, inventor of the coiled spring used in mattresses and automobile seats, was forced by ill health to sell his business and find a healthier climate. After much searching he discovered the Wonewok parcel and bought it. He constructed a large building which became the central lodge, 180 feet long, of local pine logs, containing much fine detailing and local craftsmanship. Many of his original furnishings remain, supplemented with works from the 3M corporate art collection. Nachman summered at Wonewok for nearly two decades after the 1929 completion of the lodge and gradually added to the estate until it totaled more than 600 acres. He sold the property in 1952 to a St. Paul businessman who, in turn, sold it to 3M in 1955.

Together with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Wonewok is working to stock both lakes and provide protection for a wide variety of birds and mammals. The Bald Eagle and Osprey management programs in-

augurated to protect several nests on the property are of special interest.

I work at the Wonewok Conference Centre and help take care of the needs of the 4,000 annual guests. During the spring of 1991, I initiated a program to establish bluebird trails on the property. The first 24 boxes were not put in place until after 4 July, but six boxes fledged 22 bluebirds. Nearly all of the boxes were occupied by the end of July by wrens, chickadees, and nuthatches.

The boxes were erected along some of the approximately 25 miles of hiking trails or firebreaks that are kept mowed all summer. We also added more Wood Duck boxes and two floating nesting rafts for Common Loons. Because the tree that Ospreys nested in went down in a storm a few years ago, we replaced it with a pole and a nest platform which the pair have used since. At about the same time we erected the 24 bluebird boxes, we put up four bat houses near some of the cottages. Guests have confirmed that one bat house was used for roosting.

For 1992 I plan to add a Northern Flicker and a Pileated Woodpecker box, each made out of 2-inch rough cedar, and a Barred Owl box constructed of 3/4-inch plywood. I discovered an occupied Great Horned Owl nest, but it was in such bad shape that I will replace it with a wire-netting supported stick nest.

The Purple Martin house in the centre's flower garden was beyond repair, so I constructed a new eight compartment, two level house of my own design. Each compartment has two rooms, thereby making it impossible for raccoons to reach the nesting room. It was put in place in the private trout lake, 25 feet from shore. The house has a built-in square hole in the center which slips over the 1 1/2-inch galvanized pipe permanently mounted

in the lake. The bottom of the house is only five feet above the water. Every winter, when the ice is safe, the house can be lifted off the pipe for cleaning and painting, then replaced for use in the spring. Dowels and cross pieces atop the house for perching make it look like the martins enjoy television.

We have come up with a program to further bluebirding by providing our group hosts with a special gift option for the guests they bring to Wonewok. They can elect to give each person a bluebird box with a side opening door. Depending on the group's budget, they can choose to add other items inside the box: a 1 lb. box of wild rice pancake mix, a 1 lb. bag of wild rice, a cork puller, and a Wonewok cookbook. My son burns a tepee brand on the front of each box identifying it with part of Wonewok's logo. A knotted rope through the mounting back provides

each guest with a carry-on package for his trip home. Wonewok management further suggested that each guest receiving a bluebird box be automatically enrolled in the Wonewok Society of the Non-game Bluebird Club. Each box has a certification tag number and forms are provided to record use of that box. Members are also asked to share special stories at the end of the nesting season. The collected information is printed and mailed as the fall bulletin. Other helpful information collected is mailed to club members throughout the year as special bulletins. We hope these efforts further the bluebird's comeback. ■

Route 3, Box 327  
Park Rapids, MN 56470-0327

*(Wonewok Bluebird Society information on following pages)*

## NORTH AMERICAN BLUEBIRD SOCIETY RESEARCH GRANTS

*The North American Bluebird Society announces the tenth 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 1992; decisions will be announced by 15 January 1993.



*Wonewok Bluebird Society*  
*Membership Registration*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Membership #: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

*Welcome to the Wonewok Bluebird Society! We hope that you will enjoy this handmade cedar bluebird house and that it will provide a good home for the bluebirds in your area. As a Wonewok Bluebird Society member, we will be updating you regularly with news from other members as well as news and hints from the head bluebird himself - Ken Brock.*

*If your house does not already have one, we will be mailing you a metal tag to attach to your bluebird house. This number is your membership number. Please take the time to fill out the membership card and mail it to:*

*Wonewok Conference Centre  
Bluebird Society  
Route 3, Box 327  
Park Rapids, MN 56470  
U.S.A.*



*Wonewok*

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HOUSE CERTIFICATION NO. \_\_\_\_\_

DATED: \_\_\_\_\_

MEMBER OF WONEWOK'S SOCIETY OF THE NON-GAME BLUEBIRD CLUB

Welcome to a great conservation club in providing bluebird nesting houses. Bluebirds are one of the most popular songbirds through out the United States and Canada. Their brilliant blue colors, delightful calls, clean habits, and family devotion have long provided happiness and inspiration to people.

During the first half of this century, bluebirds faced serious survival problems. The decline in their numbers resulted mostly from a loss of habitat caused by development or overgrowth of farms and open spaces, leaving the birds to struggle against fierce competition for nesting sites with the more aggressive European Starlings and House Sparrows. Fortunately, the bluebirds have been making a comeback in recent years, mostly due to a growing public awareness of their problem. By providing more open habitat and especially bluebird houses, we as Wonewok Club Members will help this bird of song.

As a member of our Wonewok Bluebird Club, you will be receiving our bulletins, reporting your nesting successes and any special stories you would like to share with the club. We will provide you with forms to record number of nesting, dates and numbers of young birds fledged from your house. Nesting two times a year is normal and sometimes three are not uncommon. After a clutch of 5 blue eggs appear, the eggs will hatch 14-18 days later. It is important to clean the house after each nesting and spray if bugs or blowfly larvae are present. Consult a pet store for best spray.

The ideal bluebird habitat is comprised of mixed hardwood forests and grasslands. The grassy areas may be either meadows, pastures, residential yards, cemeteries, highway right-of-way, or prairies. It is best if the grass is short or sparse. Mowed or grazed areas provide the best habitat, as the bluebird's diet is mostly crawling or flying insects.

The placement of your house should face east, northeast or north, and facing open areas. The house should also be mounted on a metal or wood post, 5 to 6 feet above the ground. Predator guards should also be installed around the post. Bluebirds are very territorial to their own species, and each house should be placed at least 100 yards apart. If another bird species is persistent to nest in your house, put up a second house 15-25 feet away.

Your solid cedar bird house is provided with a carrying rope for your trip home. The access door in the side of the house is snugly held shut with a double headed nail. Before placement of your house, enlarge the nail hole with a drill, so you can more easily remove the nail to monitor your bluebird's family.

**HAPPY BLUEBIRDING CLUB MEMBER...**

# Wonewok Bluebird Society

Year

Total Bluebirds is...  More  Same  Less  than last year.

	House 1	House 2	House 3	House 4	House 5
Date of First Arrival					
Date of Nesting	1st Nesting	1st Nesting	1st Nesting	1st Nesting	1st Nesting
#Eggs					
Date Fledged					
Number Fledged					
Date of Nesting	2nd Nesting	2nd Nesting	2nd Nesting	2nd Nesting	2nd Nesting
#Eggs					
Date Fledged					
Number Fledged					
Type of Mount <i>(Wood, steel, other)</i>	House	House	House	House	House
Type of House <i>(see below - eg. A,B,etc)</i>					
Color of House <i>(Natural, Color)</i>					
Height of Hole <i>(measure in feet from ground)</i>					
Size of Hole <i>(1.5" x 2", 1.375" x 2.25", etc)</i>					

Direction of Hole Facing  
(N, NE, E, etc.)

Nearest Bluebird house  
(occupied house in feet)

Food	Food	Food	Food	Food

Food Type  
(pasture, lawn, etc.)

Dist. to Feeding Area

Location	Location	Location	Location	Location

Dist. to Protective Cover

Dist. to Nearest Out Bldg.

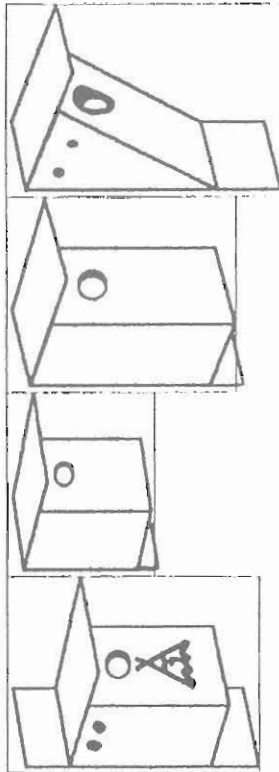
Dist. to Nearest Home

Dist. to Nearest Road

Amount of Vehicle Traffic  
(light, medium, heavy)

Kind of Soil  
(sand, loam, clay, etc.)

Dist. to Nearest Water  
(lake, stream, birdbath, etc.)



Please specify type.

A. Wonewok      B. Shallow      C. Deep      D. Peterson      E. Other

### **Eastern Bluebird Portraits**

*The three Eastern Bluebirds shown on these two pages were photographed by Hubert Brandenburg in central Maryland.*





## Bluebird Box Presented to Jimmy Carter



Gary L. Martin is shown presenting former President Jimmy Carter with a bluebird nesting box in 1985. Three years later he gave him another, this one of his own design. With the help of people from the Atlanta, Columbus, and Fortson, Georgia areas, Martin reports that a number of trails for cavity nesters have been started. In addition to Eastern Bluebirds, other species being aided are American Kestrels, Great Crested Flycatchers, several species of owls, and woodpeckers. Structures are also being built for Ospreys and floating platforms for some species of waterfowl in order to reduce predation.

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**(POINTS—Continued from page 122)**  
alien species still remains the most important factor for a successful bluebird trail.

During difficult situations at headquarters, we often remind each other that the bluebird of happiness doesn't always result in rainbows, but, in time, those rainbows would once again appear. I value the many friends I've made across North America and Bermuda the past eight years—it's been my pleasure to serve as your president. ■

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**(MYTHS—Continued from page 123)**  
first was when newspaper reporters wanted a picture of young in a box. I took them to a box where I knew fledging was near. A young bird was at the entrance looking out. When I opened the box the young flew about 100 yards

in a semicircle and lit on the fence where both parents joined it. The [second] instance occurred this spring. I opened a box and two young burst out and flew off into a tall tree. There had been five young in this box; apparently these two were the last to fledge.

In both instances the young were ready to fledge; there was nothing premature about it. Young bluebirds do not voluntarily leave a box until they are quite capable of strong flight. I think it is best to monitor your boxes until the young fledge. It would be interesting to hear from readers who have had some experience on the bluebird trail. Write to the editor of *Sialia* and tell us whether or not you have ever had young leave as a result of your opening the box when they were unable to fly. ■

130 Jesselyn Dr.  
Lexington, KY 40503-2013



# QUESTION CORNER

Lawrence Zeleny

When checking boxes on my bluebird trail, I have found beautiful tightly woven grass nests. Why do bluebirds build so many nests and fledge broods successfully from only half of them? A few abandoned nests have eggs in them. Nothing is disturbed, not even the eggs, but the parents are gone. Sometimes they will build over the abandoned nest and then abandon it again. Have families grown and fledged without any disturbance of the nest? Snakes are not common at this 7300 foot altitude, but nests are occasionally disturbed by a squirrel, raccoon, weasel, cow, or another bird.

Ruth Ann Steele  
Elbert, Colorado

It is impossible to say for sure the cause of your bluebird trail problem. It would appear, however, that the most likely cause is predation of some kind, probably resulting in the death of the female bird.

In considering the various predators that could be causing the trouble, do not overlook the two-legged kind, the most inexcusable of all. Small boys have been known to completely disrupt bluebird trails. During the nesting season the female bluebird, while incubating her eggs, is usually easily removed from her nest by hand. Also, both adult birds during this period are rather easy targets for anyone with a simple air rifle. If this should prove to be the answer to your problem, a little tactful educational work could solve the problem and might even enlist new converts to the cause of bluebird conservation.

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Would you please comment on the following observations/speculations:  
1. bluebirds sometimes build a new nest on top of a nest still in use with-



out the eggs in either nest hatching; 2. bluebird nestlings sometimes appear to fledge from the bottom of the box by flying through the hole without pausing; 3. snakes do not get chicks after they are well-feathered and, if true, it is likely because the feathers insulate the body heat which attracts the snakes.

Leonard Confer  
Springfield, Missouri

It is true that bluebirds sometimes build a new nest over a nest containing a full clutch of eggs. In such cases, the eggs in the original nest are usually all infertile. The female bird often appears to recognize the fact that the eggs are infertile well before she has brooded them for the full incubation period, probably by failing to detect any motion of developing embryos.

It is unlikely that bluebird nestlings ever fly directly from their nest up through the entrance hole of a nesting box without hesitating for a short period at the entrance to survey the landscape which they have never seen before. In case of some emergency, of course, this period of hesitation may be very short.

It is quite possible, as you suggested, that snakes can detect the presence of bluebird nestlings more easily before they are fully feathered. However, on several occasions I have known snakes to take entire clutches of bluebird nestlings from nesting boxes when the nestlings were fully feathered and almost ready to leave the nest. ■

# Bluebird Helpers

Kathleen Casses

A mild winter reinforced my ever present eagerness to see spring return. Overwintering bluebirds helped the days pass. I had a flock of five visit almost every day—two males and three females. I had had a pair raise two broods that summer. Most likely these were that pair and their young. I set out hoarded dogwood berries and raisins for them in a bluebird feeder. I wanted to accustom the birds to this box in hopes of being able to set out grubs and meal worms in the spring. The box was a great success. Bluebirds popped in and out on a regular basis.

I live in a semi-rural community 20 miles south of Atlanta, Georgia. Most of my 10 acres are wooded. Because the clearing occupied by my house and the bluebirds is only one acre, I hoped to increase my breeding pairs by placing a new box on the roadside, giving my two boxes a belt of woods as a barrier. This spring I saw no attempts by any bluebirds to occupy the new box or any of my other various sized boxes edging the woods. Last year I had witnessed several male-male and female-female conflicts. Again this spring my pair occupied the old bluebird box in the clearing.

I monitor the box but at a minimum, mainly looking out for wasps and Brown-headed Cowbirds. Fortunately, I don't have any resident House Sparrows or European Starlings. I do have snakes and enjoy them. Of course, my box has a snake guard. I give the bluebirds a lot of privacy, even detouring away from where they perch scouting for prey.

The first indication that this

spring's nesting was to be a bit different was my observation of a male perched on top of the nest box post, a female atop the box, and, at the opening, a second female—all in harmony, no hostilities. I checked the box. The nest was complete although minus a lining; no eggs were present. I did not make note of the date.

On 4 April, the next occasion that I checked the box, there were four eggs present.

There was to be an Atlanta Audubon meeting about bluebirds on 16 April. That day I checked the box—four nestlings, quite bare, but of a size to fill the nest nicely. I had planned to establish a new butterfly garden bed near the occupied box and went at the ground with my new tiller. This work was enough to put off the bluebirds. I noticed them arriving at the bare mimosa tree across from the nest box, ready to feed the young but apprehensive of my presence and the noise. I stopped work and stepped back to observe. That is when I saw her again—the extra female. Each in turn flew down and fed the young. A helper at the nest! I made mention of it that night at the meeting. One member, whose knowledge and experience I know and respect, was excited by this observation and made me feel encouraged to further observe and share.

Two days later, 18 April, I made another close watch of the box. I saw female number one enter the box while female number two waited in the mimosa. Another bird entered the area. It flew across to where I definitely could make

(Continued on page 158)

## Bluebirds Foster International Friendship

Enroute from Texas in late March to their home in Quebec, North American Bluebird Society director Andre Dion and his wife France happened to stop in Oak Mountain State Park near Birmingham, Alabama. They were pleasantly surprised to see active bluebird nest boxes in the park and campgrounds.

My name plate was on the boxes and maybe it rang a bell with them. After all, my wife and I had attended NABS meetings in Bermuda, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and Montana. Andre called us. The four of us got together the next morning, monitored a few of my trail boxes, and enjoyed lunch together as our friendship grew.

The love of bluebirds can bridge the time and distance between countries, cultures, and languages making for common ground and lasting friendships!

—John Findlay, III

2749 Millbrook Rd.  
Birmingham, AL 35243



Photograph by John Findlay, III

France and Andre Dion on John Findlay, III Drive in Oak Mountain State Park, Birmingham, Alabama, 30 March 1992.

## Kopff Named Wisconsin Wildlife Conservationist of the Year

Beaver Dam resident Don Kopff was named Wisconsin Wildlife Conservationist of the Year on 25 April 1992. He was honored at the annual meeting of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation in Eau Claire.

Kopff was nominated for the nest box building project he initiated at the Beaver Dam Senior Center. After attending a Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW) meeting and volunteering to become the Dodge County coordinator, he launched the nest box building project at the local senior center. In the last seven years he and an enthusiastic volunteer crew have built more than 13,000 bluebird boxes which are sold for \$2.00 each. The group also constructs boxes for Tree Swallows, Wood Ducks, Purple Martins, American Kestrels, wrens, owls, and bats. In addition to the nest box building project, Kopff presents slide programs in the county helping to educate area residents as to how they can help cavity nesting birds, especially bluebirds.

Don Kopff credits Purple Martins with interesting him in cavity nester preservation. Because there was a successful colony of martins at his home on Beaver Dam Lake, he found the jump to bluebird conservation an easy one. ■



Photograph by Don Kopff

Purple Martin colony in Don Kopff's backyard at his home on Beaver Dam Lake in Dodge County, Wisconsin.

## Speakers Bureau Report: Georgia

### *Georgia Speakers On My Mind*

Ron Kingston

If the people of Georgia are seeing more bluebirds lately, there must be a reason. These many excellent speakers are telling everyone who will listen how to help the bluebirds.

**NANCY DUNCAN** of Woodstock likes NABS slides better than the videos. "It's different," say the children and it seems to be a treat to learn this way. Also from Woodstock, **NANNETTE JOHNSON** uses nest boxes and Dr. Zeleny's book with her NABS slide program.

**EDWARD GRAY** of Atlanta has been giving programs for over nine years and has compiled an incredible record for number of programs per year: 20. He uses NABS slides and brings completed nesting boxes and kits to the program. He often raffles a couple of boxes at the programs making him a very big hit on the speakers' circuit.

**ANN SATCHER** also of Atlanta loves to speak to garden clubs giving them reasons why they should help the bluebird. She says that often the men are more interested than the women.

In La Grange, in western Georgia, bluebirds must be increasing in numbers because of the four excellent speakers in the area: **LYLE ALLEN**, **HELEN HOLLIS**, **EDITH REAVES** and **HENDERSON TAYLOR**. In the southwestern corner of Georgia, **OSCAR DEWBERRY** of Bainbridge is

speaking for the bluebirds and **EDDIE CLEMENTS** of Hazlehurst, an hour from the Atlantic Ocean, is doing his part in eastern Georgia.

**FRANCES SAWYER** of Stone Mountain, 20 miles east of Atlanta, is busy giving NABS programs and being the president of the new state organization called "Bluebirds Over Georgia." She uses the video "Bluebirds Up Close" and hands out NABS brochures. She says that the new state organization is well on its way with their next meeting in October in Columbus.

**LUANN CRAIGHTON** of Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain, speaks to hundreds each year on bluebirds and distributes beautiful Eastern Bluebird bookmarks at each program. The vegetable garden at Callaway Gardens, maintained by Mr. Callaway, has many bluebird boxes for all visitors to see.

**DERRELL RUSH**, Floyd State Park Manager, gives programs at schools, camps, churches, and senior citizen groups where he gives tips on caring for the bluebird nesting box and explains where winter roosting boxes should be located. **CHUCK GREGORY** of Atlanta uses nest boxes and a modified slide program to explain the plight of the bluebird to Elderhostels and other interested groups.

**TERRY JOHNSON** of Forsyth works for the Department of



## EASTERN BLUEBIRD

*(Sialia sialis)*

The delightful eastern bluebird has long been a symbol of love, hope and happiness. A true friend of the gardener, bluebirds dine on insects most of the year and seek out berries when insects are unavailable. Look for these birds in open habitats such as pastures, golf courses, ball parks, orchards and along highways.

## Invite bluebirds to your garden!

Bluebirds are *cavity nesting* birds. They use an enclosed space like a hollow tree, a hole in a wooden fence post or a man-made nesting box to raise their young. Today bluebirds are having trouble finding nesting cavities and in many areas their populations have declined. This year invite these beautiful birds into your garden by providing a bluebird nesting box.



For more information on bluebirds  
and nesting box plans, contact:

(404) 663-5153



**Callaway Gardens**

Ida Cason Callaway Foundation  
Education Department  
Pine Mountain, Georgia 31822-2000

Natural Resources and is currently busy with 11 projects linked to cavity nesters. Many of these will benefit the bluebird. He uses NABS slides in a program developed specifically for Georgia. After completing *Hummingbird Helper* he is busy editing a special edition newsletter called *Bluebirds Over Georgia*.

These enthusiastic speakers

are building on the dedication of two individuals who have promoted bluebirds in Georgia for decades. Because of the pioneering work of **LAURANCE SAWYER**, known as the "Bluebird Man of the Mountains," with his log nest boxes, and **Col. W.R. ROBERTSON, Jr.**, "Mr. Bluebird," who brought bluebirds to the area around Atlanta, many bluebirds are and will forever be seen over Georgia. ■



Photograph by Laurance Sawyer

Male Red-bellied Woodpecker at entrance hole of one of two log nest boxes made by Laurance Sawyer of Ringgold, Georgia.

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## Easy Bird Bath

Two plastic buckets of equal size may be fastened together bottom to bottom with small stove bolts. They serve as the support for a wash basin half full of small stones, river gravel, or even a flat rock for the birds to rest on. Even if the result is not perfectly level, the pan may be adjusted so that it is level by observing the water line. This is inexpensive and efficient. The birds love it.

—Laurance Sawyer

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## Rewards from Eastern Bluebirds

Margaret Rusnell

I want to tell you the many wonderful things Eastern Bluebirds have done for us!

Our first encounter with bluebirds was in the spring of 1979, a short distance from our home on a country road. Seeing a pair of these beautiful birds gave us a thrill that has not diminished over the years.

It was the Eastern Bluebird that opened the door to our membership in the Ontario Bluebird Society. We attended our first conference in 1990 at the Hamilton Arboretum in Hamilton, Ontario where we met other trail operators for the first time. President William Read's suggestion that we join the North American Bluebird Society led to another delightful conference, this one in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania in 1990. It was preceded by a pleasant drive through the beautiful mountains in that state. The following three days at the conference were most enjoyable and extremely informative for us. In October 1991 we attended the NABS conference in Bermuda. Once more our knowledge of trail monitoring was enhanced by all of the excellent meetings and tours within the beautiful setting of gardens and the biological station. Another treasure to add to our memory bank.

Our retirement years have been enhanced ten-fold with our trail involvement. From April to August all thoughts of travel are put on hold as our weeks are filled with "agony and ecstasy" while caring for "our" bluebirds. Such a privilege cannot be weighed in dollars or time. The ecstasy far outweighs the agony now that we have learned to reduce raccoon predation, blowfly infestation, vandalism, etc. We have gained much knowledge from experience on our trails, from reading material, and from other trail operators.

Each spring is welcomed with excitement as we travel along the country roads watching, listening, and hoping to see the first bluebird, then another, and another. And so another year begins as we recall all the memories of years past and anticipate the season ahead.

In retrospect, our humble contributions to the welfare of the Eastern Bluebird are a mere shadow beneath the wings of "our" bluebirds as they fly overhead.

Bluebirds Eastern, Mountain, too,  
Bluebirds Western, all of a hue,  
Bluebirds singing, what a joy!  
Bluebirds saddened, Bluebirds dead,  
Bluebirds flying overhead!  
Nest again our birds of blue,  
We'll do all we can for you! ■

RR#1, Box 101  
Kleinburg, Ontario  
Canada L0G 1C0



## Bluebird Feeder Experiment

George and Vi Nalisnik

We have bluebirds around all winter and thought it would be nice to be able to provide them with food they liked, so we made two feeders with plexiglass side panels and 2 1/2 inch holes on each end.

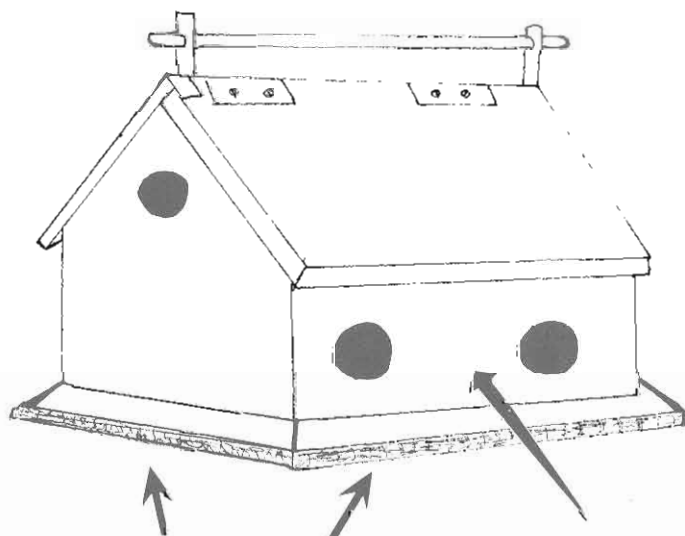
We put the boxes up in November, but had no luck in getting bluebirds to enter the boxes and feed. I even strung currants from the nesting box to a hole in the feeder. We then took out one side panel and the bluebirds finally found the food; unfortunately, so did every European Starling and House Finch in the neighborhood.

We then replaced the plexiglass panel with a 1/4 inch thick piece of wood with two 1 1/2 inch holes about 2 inches up from the bottom and 2 inches in on each side. We also added

a 1 inch perch across the front of the box. It took about a week for the bluebirds to get used to the new entrance holes, but now they love them. They are in and out, sometimes using the end holes as exits. They never did get the idea of using the end holes as entrances. The roof is hinged and the front panel lifts out for cleaning.

Titmice and chickadees also use the feeder. They dart in, grab a mouthful of food, and zoom out the other hole. Starlings get their heads in but can't reach the food because we push it to the rear of the box. One House Finch became trapped and had to be rescued. ■

Rd. 1, Box 313B  
Sunbury, PA 17801



1 inch perch  
all around

1/4 inch wood panel  
with 1 1/2 inch holes

## Camp Bluebird's Mascot

Laurance and Adelaide Sawyer

*The Winter 1990 issue of Sialia contained an article entitled "Camp Bluebird—An Adult Cancer Camp." We here in northern Georgia were already alerted to its existence and, accordingly, laid plans to put out a few nest boxes in 1990 at a Tennessee state park campground where the campers could view them to advantage. Although the boxes were put out early enough to permit occupancy by the time of the camp, there were no takers excepting a pair of chickadees. The campers enjoyed the slide show we presented, and the state camp leader requested that we present a show at another site in October, this one near Nashville. A copy of the accompanying poem written by Laurance was distributed to each person at the lecture.*

I'm just a little mascot of red and white and blue;  
I'm too small to play the game, but I can cheer for you.  
To human people life is hard, you have to work and sweat.  
I'll help along by chirp and song, and be your birdie pet.

You picked me out from all the rest because you liked my ways;  
And I picked you though you didn't know of all those cloudy days  
When my lovely mate and I sought vainly for a house,  
But this is not the time for blame, nor now the time to grouse.

The natty little house you made for me, and placed upon its pole,  
Will be for years our home sweet home, for years delight the soul,  
And if the weather's mild and warm, and bugs not hard to find,  
We'll raise three families of young, and thanks to you so kind.

Now I would fain bespeak my mind on other things left out;  
You humans often suffer pain, from itchy scalp to gout;  
But even if you're free from pain, then why the anxious eye?  
You've nothing more to worry you than have bluebirds such as I.

Have you seen the list of dangers that beset us every day?  
A thousand critters great and small would make of us their prey.  
Just one small tick may take my life, or a moment's pause to sing  
May let a hawk or snake get me, let alone the insect's sting.

A snake will climb my own home pole, steal eggs or all my young,  
A cat or owl or youngster's gun may silence my sweet tongue.  
Should I survive and stay alive to bring you folk some cheer;  
Then I'm content I've filled my place, my cause for being here.

If the world's a wee bit better for my cheerful presence here,  
Then I've fulfilled my little mission, pass on and nothing fear.  
To Him who gives to each a life in his own special place,  
We all must give our highest praise when looking on His face.

By beholding His own majesty in forest stream and hill  
We've changed from cringing cowards, a hero's place to fill;  
In His image standing, and facing every evil thing,  
We find a strength not of our own to mitigate the sting.

If one should hear this song of mine and glimpse my coat of blue,  
The circle's come full 'round again, again from me to you.  
Oh, somewhere hearts are lighter, and peoples' smiles are bright.  
And somewhere sweethearts plight their troth and faith gives place to sight.  
And somewhere the sun is shining most beautiful and bright;  
And a little bluebird mascot will sleep content tonight. ■

# Predator Relocation

Tom A. Barber

In early June I had one of the most interesting experiences I've ever had in my nine years of bluebird monitoring. Around 6:00 p.m. one evening I opened box no. 14 expecting to find four 12-day old bluebird nestlings; instead, a snake was curled up inside the box. The nestlings had already been eaten. I touched the snake on its back with my screwdriver, but it didn't move much. I could not see the head but thought it might be hidden at the bottom of the box.

I didn't know what to do so I put the lid back on and left. The pole that the box was on had been greased completely with about a 3 foot section of grease, but that hadn't stopped this snake.

In the middle of the night I awakened thinking about that snake. I decided I would go back to the box early the following morning to see if it was still inside the box. If it was, I would take the box off the pole and relocate the snake.

The next morning it was very warm after a humid night. When I got to the box, I put duct tape over the entrance hole. I opened the lid; the snake was still there. I was happy. My plan had worked so far. I closed the lid and proceeded to remove the box from the post. Now, to be honest, snakes make me nervous. All the while I was removing the box from the post, I worried that it might get out in the truck while I was driving it to a new environment. I was determined, however, to give this plan a try.

I got the nest box off the post noting that it was much heavier than normal. I carried the box to the truck. I held it up like it was still on the pole and put it in the cab of the truck that same way. I drove with one hand on the steering wheel and the other holding the box. The duct tape holding the entrance hole never moved.

I drove 3.5 miles away from my bluebird trail to an area that had "no hunting" signs posted prominently. I laid the box on its back and opened the lid. I stepped back about ten steps to observe. The snake's head appeared at the top of the box. It put out its tongue to test the air and its surroundings, but stayed in the box. After about a five minute wait, it still hadn't left the box. I decided to lift the back side of the box and let gravity do the rest. It fell out but just lay still. I estimated that it was a 3-foot long black snake, but that is a guess because it was still in a ball. At that point I got back in the truck.

About two weeks earlier I had lost five nestlings in box no. 19 to a snake. I believe they would have also been around 10-12 days old when they were eaten. It seems that this snake was an expert at climbing poles and never getting any grease on himself.

Now he has a new home far from my trails. I hope this is the last time I ever open up a box and find a snake inside. ■

# 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:

I thoroughly enjoy receiving the magazine and find many informative articles included. One article that I particularly enjoyed was about trail record keeping by Richard M. Tuttle (11[2]:49-55). I wondered if you plan to publish other articles on this.

Our bluebirds have returned and egg laying is underway with the first hatching this week—just in time for a spring snowfall yesterday and today. We worry and wait and hope all will be well.

Kathleen Williams  
15312 Rio Terrace Dr.  
Edmonton, Alberta  
Canada T5R 5M5

*If bluebird monitors have record keeping systems they would like to submit, we will be glad to consider passing them along to Sialia readers. Just as there is no one bluebird box design that is the best everywhere and in all circumstances, there is no one best system for keeping trail records. Share the system that works for you!*

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*The following letter was received by Ron Kingston regarding his snake guard described in Sialia 13(2):56-57.*

Your snake guard is great; all material is easy to purchase and easy to make. I gave up on certain bluebird



boxes because I could not stop rat and corn snakes. They come out when nobody is around and eat the eggs, shell and all, and leave no marks behind.

As a mechanical engineer I should have gotten the picture years ago. Very effective—most effective against both raccoons and snakes. Of 70 bluebird nesting boxes I'll need 9-10 guards for certain boxes at Ridley Creek State Park and Paxon Hollow Golf Club.

Hal M. Schaeffer  
2218 Windsor Cir.  
Broomall, PA 19008

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Dear Editor:

In reply to the article in a recent issue of *Sialia* (14[2]:76), I would like to reply that we here in Idaho use fence posts a great deal on our Mountain Bluebird trails. We have had no problems whatsoever; in fact, the ranchers to whom the fences belong seem pleased with our endeavors. Some of them are removing fences now, but they always leave any posts standing if a nesting box is atop it.

We have maintained our three trails for some 12 years furnishing many little blues for travelers over the Bennett Mountain range to enjoy. Luckily we have not had to combat House Sparrows, European Starlings, snakes, or even raccoons. They do not seem to live in the neighborhood of our trails. Sometimes in the spring we find that a packrat has made himself cozy in the box during the winter or a weasel has to be removed by force even in the sum-

mer, but these occasions have been rare. We do have to share the nesting boxes with House Wrens and Tree Swallows, but those two species are insectivorous so deserve a place to live, too.

We are indeed grateful we do not have the troubles of many who report predation. Our trails total some 26 miles; we travel about 20 miles from our home base to the start of the trails.

Elma M. Goodman  
Box 847  
Glenns Ferry, ID 83623

*handle injured and orphaned wildlife. Make every effort to put orphaned nestlings in the care of a rehabilitator both to comply with state and federal laws and to increase the chances of survival of nestlings. Raising tiny birds, especially before they have any feathers, is a specialized and difficult job. Even those with experience and knowledge suffer a substantial number of failures.*

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Dear Editor:

On May 31st our bluebird box contained a nest with five eggs that were nearly ready to hatch. A parent bird was flying to the box when suddenly a cat took a flying leap and caught the bird as we watched. Of course we chased the cat, but it got away—with the bird.

I remembered that a neighbor had an incubator (she had raised quail). I called her and she said she had hens' eggs in the incubator. She told us to bring the bluebird eggs in the nest. She put them in the incubator and they hatched the next day.

Another neighbor that had successfully raised some baby mockingbirds that had fallen from a nest in a storm, volunteered to care for the bluebirds. She fed them worms and crickets, but they only survived a few days.

There are a lot of folks with a large number of bluebird houses in our area helping a lot of bluebirds grow.

Jean Cooper  
Route 1, Box 148  
Surrency, GA 31563

*Every year emergencies occur in which nestling bluebirds are left without parents. The most successful solution is to find several other nests with nestlings of the same size and add one or two birds to each existing brood. If that is not possible, a licensed rehabilitator is not only the individual with the most experience and best facilities, but legally has been approved to*

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Dear Editor:

Plans for the Second Annual Wildlife Fair in Lewistown, Montana, are underway for Saturday, May 9, in the Fergus Trade Center at the Central Montana Fairgrounds. There will be numerous outdoor and wildlife activities and displays.

Edgewood Building Supply and UBS have donated enough wood to build 100 bluebird boxes which will be pre-cut and ready for children to assemble at the fair.

Now that the Mountain Bluebird is the city bird for Lewistown, perhaps these boxes will encourage more bluebirds to nest in the area.

Edwin Ocenasek  
c/o Eadie Schultz  
Box 995  
Lewistown, MT 59457

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*Sadie Dorber received the following letter:*

I spent the last weekend in the Great Falls area with a new bluebirder by the name of Bob Niebuhr who is caring for 100 boxes south of Raynesford, Geyser, and Stanford on highway 200 between Great Falls and Lewistown, MT. About 25 miles south of Geyser we located an Eastern Bluebird male who has claimed a nest box; there is a partial nest in it. Because there is no Eastern female in the area, the assumption is that he's been trying to talk a Mountain Bluebird female into being his mate. I called an excellent birder in Great Falls and asked her and

(Continued on page 158)

# Bluebird Tales

Mary D. Janetatos

"Oooh! They look like they're made of rubber!" was the comment of eight year old **Michael Terao** of Silver Spring, MD describing baby bluebirds as he peered into a nest box on **Larry Zeleny's** bluebird trail in Beltsville, MD. The annual tour of Larry's trail drew a good-sized group—around 25-30—and the weather was perfect. Michael attended with his parents **David** and **Sherry Terao** who had been anxious to see baby bluebirds. The group was satisfied and delighted to see bluebirds, as promised, in all of their stages: eggs, young newly hatched, more mature nestlings, and adults. I know they experienced the same feeling of elation as did **Stephen Taylor**, of Terre Haute, IN who wrote to NABS: "I am a young Boy Scout working on a bird study merit badge. I recently saw my first bluebird and I felt great. But when I found out that there was a bluebird association, I was thrilled."

Bluebirder **R. Leatherman** of Soudertown, PA has assumed much responsibility by showing the NABS slide presentation to a number of church groups. "The bluebirds in my area (Bucks and Montgomery counties) have profited because of the efforts of people learning about helping them. My friends keep asking for more bluebird boxes and I keep on making them to fill the demand." From East Coulee, Alberta came a report on **Ray** and **Jean Hummel's** bluebird trail which recounted starting with 25 nest boxes and expanding to over 400! They mentioned the hope that they might attend a conference, perhaps the 15th in Minneapolis, MN in September.

Interest in helping bluebirds can help to ease the grief of a lost loved one. **Frances Cutchall** of Williamsport, MD renewed her membership after the death of her husband **W. Dan Cutchall** in December of 1991. "We have had many happy years showing 'Where Have All the Bluebirds Gone?' slides to many groups—garden clubs, senior



citizens, school groups, and others."

**Jack** and **Dorothy Hanna** of Lisbon, ND have taken the step of assembling a conservation ecology fact sheet with many good hints, including the suggestion to "Make a home for birds. To learn how to build a bluebird house write to [you guessed it] NABS!"

**Ray Smudski** updated us with this information. "About three years ago I wrote and ordered the plans to build bluebird houses. At that time I had seen a very few [bluebirds] here in middle Tennessee. This spring I must have at least 10 to 12 pairs plus lots of babies."

**Hammond Adams** had good news from Eatonton, GA. "I have seen 69 springs come and go and this year there have been more bluebirds in central Georgia than I can ever remember ....I suppose their number is partly due to the fact that we have had several mild winters here, and a mild and beautiful spring this year. Furthermore, more people seem to be putting up nesting boxes and taking an interest in them.

"The only calamity or near calamity that we have had this season is the result of a cat, our cat, taking undue interest in one of the boxes. The nest box is mounted on a wooden post five feet tall and said cat can climb the post, get on the roof of the box, and try to reach his paw in the birds' front door. The overhang of the roof over the door is such that he has been unable to reach inside so far. Now I have wrapped barbed wire around the pole from

2 1/2 feet above ground level on up to the floor of the bird house. I hate to do this to a pet cat, but I doubt if he will land on those barbs more than once or twice. The barbed wire could, of course, be dangerous if there were small children playing around near it."

A truly impressive report in very few words with a request for NABS membership came from **Chris and Art Schroder** of Mekinock, ND: "We monitored 250 bluebird boxes this [past] summer." **Andrew Aiken** may be representative of an improving U.S. economy. He had not renewed for several years, but now can re-join. "I truly enjoyed the *Sialia* journal for its information and interesting stories about the beautiful bluebird which I truly love. I am devoted to helping this little bird. I have maintained nesting boxes in my backyard for many years and have got family and friends involved in the effort. I am currently building boxes from plans I received when I was a member, to sell to others to get them involved also."

**Mr. & Mrs. Lurton Gesell** of Connersville, IN reported giving "the story [of how to help bluebirds] to several groups and have more coming up.... Found out from the autumn quarterly (13[4]:137) that we only live about 15 miles from the Michael Matherly of Cambridge, IN who painted the Eastern Bluebird for the U.S. Postal Service. Have contacted him on the phone."

Another renewal note from **Anton Berg** of Long Grove, IL reported, "We had bluebirds nest in our yard this year for the first time in 30 years!"

Long-time NABS member **Gary Martin** of Fortson, GA enlightened us about his contacts with former **President Jimmy Carter** and **Rosalyn Carter**. Gary had presented them with bluebird nest boxes several years back. Now I have read that President and Mrs. Carter benefit needy people by personally helping to build homes through their project, Habitat for Humanity. Bravo for them with a much-needed project!

**Ed Ocenasek** of Lewistown, MT reported back in the spring that Lewistown's elementary school students voted overwhelmingly in favor of mak-

ing the bluebird the city's official bird. The Lewistown City Council concurred. Bird activist Ocenasek was delighted for he was the driving force behind the choice.

When **Al Drollett** of Weymouth, MA called NABS, I answered and discovered that Al had photographed bluebirds in such an arrestingly beautiful way that his snapshots took two honorable mentions in a wide-reaching competition. At that time they were still hanging in the Cranberry Bogs—Plimpton Pond Meadows area, at a table for bluebirds.

Member **Susan Monteith** of Vidette, GA called to tell us she had stayed home from work just to care for her bluebird pair who had lost a brood of young to a predator. Susan ended up catching three snakes and snake-proofing her nest box with hardware cloth.

**Bundy H. Boit** of Penobscot, ME described a wonderful experience raising five orphaned bluebirds and how they bonded with the parents of a brood still in the nest. **Keith Kaiser** of Bremen, IN wrote that his saga of the bluebirds started last spring when a pair of bluebirds tried to enter a wren house. "I took an old wren house, made the hole 1 1/2 inches, and they went right in." I'll bet he would not have had the same result if any House Wrens had been in the area!

**Robert Rager** of Rockford, OH annually migrates with his wife, Lois, to Florida. He wrote to NABS in the spring of 1992. "Last year I cleaned all my boxes during the last part of October. Did see bluebirds in the area up to November 10th, departure date. Upon our return the middle of March, have had sightings daily....Have 35 nests in 125 boxes, 21 of those nests have 84 eggs so it looks like a banner year....Have been told bluebirds were seen in this area all winter for the first time." Now with the bluebirds seen in Rockford all year round, will the Rogers be seen in Rockford all year round?

From **Robert D. Williams, M.D.** of Markleville, IN came this heartening report: "Every day is bluebird day for me! On my 126 acre farm, totally dedicated

to conservation of wildlife, there is a 52 box bluebird trail. I walk these hills whistling the bluebird call, making my counts, and helping keep me sane and healthy. My desire is to introduce as many people in Indiana to bluebirding as possible. I am 71 years old but my enthusiasm knows no time limit."

Readers in the Ida, MI region might consider this way to ease into the upcoming holiday season: visit the Matthes Evergreen Farm owned and run by **Wilbert** and **Peg Matthes**. You might not see a bluebird in winter on their bluebird trail, but you *might* want to have your picture taken on Santa's lap while he visits there at their annual Christmas Tree Festival. It's held on the weekend of Thanksgiving and sounds like "fun for the whole family!" They wrote that "last year were delighted to have helped produce 60 bluebirds, 20 House Wrens, and 17 Tree Swallows. Our 60 houses were scattered over our three Christmas tree plantations. We checked each house weekly and charted the progress using our farm map and numbered boxes. This season we will have about 80 houses up."

For the rest of us who can't make it to Michigan, may you have a happy holiday season with Christmas bluebirds you see or you dream about! ■

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(EXPRESS—Continued from page 155) her friend to go and verify this. They just called me this morning and had

been out and verified that it is an Eastern Bluebird.

The interesting part of this is that this bird is within 100 miles of where there are Western Bluebirds and it's more than 300 miles farther west than they've ever been reported before in this state. I thought it was so interesting because those Eastern Bluebirds are so much smaller than those big old male Mountain Bluebirds that we had been looking at all day. There was just no comparison.

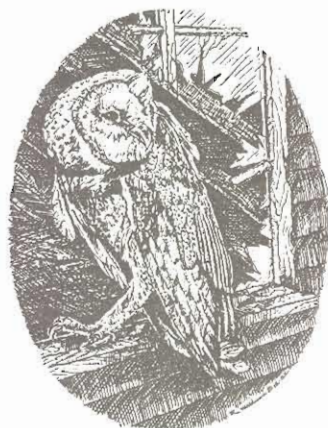
Art Aylesworth  
P.O. Box 794  
Ronan, MT 59864

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(HELPERS—Continued from page 144) out that it was a female. The male was present also. I kept checking back on all their whereabouts to make sure of my count. Absolutely, *four* adults and all were feeding the four young. Since then I've seen the male and three females all perched together on the utility wire above my small meadow.

I have heard of helpers at a nest, but this was my first experience in observing this behavior. The young are now close to fledging any day and I'll continue my watch. As far as I'm concerned, with bluebirds, the more the merrier! ■

6000 McClure Rd.  
Fairburn, GA 30213



## 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.





### *Bluebirds Came By*

Bluebirds came by this morning,  
As leaves were falling down—  
They seemed to say, we're here to play  
In our houses wooden and brown.

Bluebirds came by this morning  
As snowflakes began to fall—  
They seemed to say, we'd love to stay  
In our houses cozy and small.

Bluebirds came by this morning  
As springtime blossomed anew—  
They seemed to say, it's time to build  
A nest for our eggs of blue.

Bluebirds came by this morning  
Singing their soft, sweet song—  
They seemed to say, thank you dear friend  
for helping us all year long!

Frances Sawyer

### *Bed-Maker*

Yesterday

I saw you come and go, ceaselessly  
bringing to your nesting box  
twig, grass, pine needles, string—  
soft things  
to make ready soft nursery.

I peeked inside and wondered at your skill.  
Who taught you, bluebird,  
how to make that wondrous bed?

Marion Maxson

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#### (BOOSTERS—Continued from inside back cover)

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Laura Rainero  
Gayle C. Reddick  
Roger E. Roberts  
Col. W.R. Robertson  
(Continued on page 160)

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

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

**Membership: Student (under 21) \$10.00; Senior (over 60) \$10.00; Regular \$15; Family \$25; Sustaining \$30; Supporting \$50; Contributing \$100; Corporate \$100; Donor \$250; Life \$500. Add \$2.00 per year for Canada and Mexico and \$3.00 per year for other countries (surface mail). U.S. funds only, please. Amounts over \$6.00 are tax deductible.**

**Address:  
North American Bluebird Society  
Box 6295  
Silver Spring, MD 20916-6295**

