

Sialia

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Index

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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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About Bluebirds

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CONTENTS

Presidential Points	42
Charlotte Jernigan	
Teaching Bluebird Trail Management at OWJL Academic Camp (Part II)	43
Richard M. Tuttle	
OK! Premature Fledging	52
Wayne H. Davis	
1994 NABS Research Awards	54
Bluebird Exchange	55
Bluebirds and Wrens Share a Box in Montana	58
E.J. Whalen	
Literature Review	59
T. David Pitts	
Portraits	60
Hubert Brandenburg	
In Memoriam	62
The Summer of the Bluebird	63
Elizabeth B. Nichols	
Obituary: Harry Krueger	67
Return of the Mountain Bluebird	68
Joyce Nelson	
Anybody Home?	70
Oean Sheldon	
Tree Branch Bluebird Box Update	71
Frank A. Zuern	
Bluebird Express	72
Bluebird Tales	74
Mary D. Janetatos	
Sophomore Season	76
James R. Kunz	
Index to Volume 15 (1993)	77
Poetry: Perkins	80

COVER

This cover is by Art Editor M. Suzanne Probst. It is also the cover of "Getting to Know...Bluebirds!"—the teachers' packet recently published by the North American Bluebird Society.

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 Grae Loch Road, Laurel, Maryland 20723.

Presidential Points

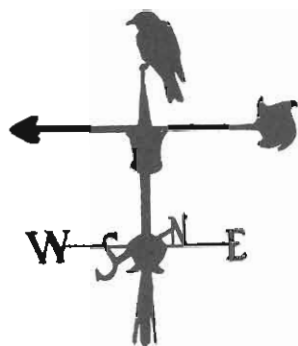
Charlotte Jernigan

The Sixteenth Annual Meeting of NABS was held in Pine Mountain, Georgia. This location gave us an opportunity to observe much of the native fauna and flora.

As members of various human communities, we have many moral obligations derived from social relationships; the biotic community to which we all belong is quite different from our social sphere. Cason J. Callaway and his wife, Virginia Hand Callaway, realized that individuals are members of a community of interdependent parts. They were inspired to create a man-made landscape in a beautiful, natural setting which includes soil, water, plants, and animals. In short, the "land ethic" that they unveiled reminded those who attended the meeting that human beings are the most capable, and, therefore, must be the most responsible, members of a given area.

Callaway Gardens is a shining example of the need to develop individual responsibility to the land. It was proof that nature knows no ugliness, but, on close inspection, consists of wonderful structures that are both useful and essential.

A drive through the gardens inspires increased attention to diversity, while a visit to the Cecil B. Day Butterfly Center will surely encourage one to put out food plants for caterpillars, and nectaring flowers for butterflies. Interpretive Naturalist Lu Ann Craighton suggested fennel, chives, dill, butterfly weed, and passion flower as plants for the eggs and caterpillars. Butterfly bush, lantana, and single petal wildflowers were recommended for nectar. It is true that hiding from wildlife to observe them can lead to memories that will last a lifetime, but no one had to hide from those flying jewels. The butterflies were attractive in flight, and



delighted many people by landing on them.

The John A. Sibley Horticultural Center boasted spectacular displays of flowers that welcomed us to one of nature's greatest shows, and the topiaries came close to stealing it.

The Victory Garden South, in season, has an abundance of flowers, vegetables, herbs, and fruits. It was here that bluebirds chose to welcome us to Georgia. Making their presence known was not difficult because we're always consciously seeking their whereabouts, but the beauty that they added to the garden created excitement among bluebirders who concluded that they were typical examples of the integrity and stability of that particular community.

As bluebirders we enjoy the fellowship and lasting friendships that our organization affords us, and as we encourage each other in the efforts that we make, there is also the reminder that mankind should conserve all parts of the earth's life systems. I want to thank *Bluebirds Over Georgia* for their wonderful hospitality that put us in close touch with these efforts.

Summer will be here before you know it, and we're looking forward to seeing all of you in Boise, Idaho, in June for the Seventeenth Annual Meeting. There is the possibility of seeing both Western and Mountain Bluebirds there, and the time will be right for viewing them. See you in Boise! ■

Teaching Bluebird Trail Management at OWJL Academic Camp

Richard M. Tuttle

(Part II of II)

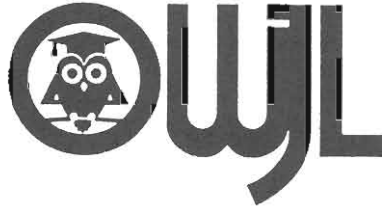
Days Two Through Four

Field trips, the heart of the course, are possible since I religiously monitor a trail of 150 predator-proof nest boxes close to the campus of Ohio Wesleyan University. The nest boxes in Delaware State Park fledge over 400 Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*), 200 Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*), and 100 House Wrens (*Troglodytes aedon*) yearly. Most of the park's boxes parallel the roadways which enables me to use a ten-speed bicycle to monitor the nests during two consecutive visits every six days. In addition to standard data, I take note of any nest phenomena that might provide possible teachable moments during future field trips. I sometimes delay and save a routine, such as bird banding, for the campers.

Field trips can be planned once I record trail observations on two forms in my data book (Tuttle 1989). Trail data calendars record the events of 25 boxes on one sheet. Nesting events are color-coded according to species and are easily interpreted later when I list numbers of nest boxes occupied by bluebirds, swallows, and wrens respectively.

I then examine a box data calendar for each active nest box and extrapolate future nest events to within one day of accuracy. The box data calendar has a square for each day. Data are recorded within the day squares. From 10, 20, or more boxes for each species, I select four or five nest stops that compose the smallest route that tells the "natural history within the nest box." I try to select boxes that are close to parking lots which cuts down driving and hiking time, saving time for hands-on experiences.

On field trip days, I meet the



campers at their dormitory and we leave one-half hour earlier than other classes to save 1-1/4 hours for field time; loading and traveling to the park takes less than 15 minutes each way. Recently, we have used one van instead of two which limits the class size to 13. Since we are always together, team unity develops to enhance the course on a personal level. A college-aged dorm counselor drives the van five miles to the park. I ride "shotgun" and become a tour guide as soon as we enter the park. Usually, we spot bluebirds and swallows before we reach our first destination.

On each field trip I develop a theme around the habitat and natural history for each of three species. One field trip features bluebirds, another highlights Tree Swallows, and one, usually the last, features House Wrens. Campers experience a nest with eggs, another with newly-hatched cold-blooded young, a nest with young within a day or two of being eight days old, and large warm-blooded nestlings still young enough to band.

I most enjoy introducing the campers to the birds. As we step out of the van, I warn the students about three hazards in the park: poison ivy, grease on steel pipes, and dog ticks

(*Dermacentor variabilis*) that carry Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever bacteria. So far, ticks that carry Lyme disease have not appeared in central Ohio. Almost always, as I use a screwdriver "spatula" to lift a nest containing blue eggs, a student will question whether the female bird will abandon the nest. I explain that even though we will leave our scent at the nest, trail birds have a poor sense of smell, and, if our visit is short, the parents will not abandon their nest, especially since I have selected only nests of females that have invested at least five days incubating the eggs (Burt and Tuttle 1983). Mammals, on the other hand, have a keen sense of smell, and our scent can lead them to the nest. Bart (1977) found that most nest predation takes place within the first day after a nest visit. My first year of bluebirding in 1968 became a nightmare as raccoons raided my fence-mounted boxes after most of my visitations. Since then, my boxes have been mounted on steel gas pipes protected with thick layers of lithium chassis grease. Slipperiness does not deter climbing predators, but stickiness does. Usually, an excited and distracted camper will bump into the grease and inadvertently reinforce this point before the course is completed.

Once the focus returns to the eggs, students begin to warm up to the course. Nest construction and egg production, incubation, calcium use by the female, and egg coloring are some of the topics that may be covered at the first stop. White bluebird eggs, when available, are also shown and discussed. Also, if poison ivy blocks a path to any of my selected boxes, I will plug the entrance with tissues and bring the nest to the campers who wait on the berm. Of course, I remove the plug when I return the nest to the box. I have no reason for plugging the hole other than I am not sure what would happen if a parent bird entered an empty box!

On the next stop, I show the youngsters newly hatched young. Personally, I think that "new" nestlings are ugly, or, at least, not cute. To my surprise, campers always express their

excitement when I extract a nest with featherless newborns; much "baby talk" tells me that the ugly nestlings are cute to others. The boys are usually more reserved and rarely react verbally to the sight of the youngest birds.

The young birds always gape for food when I make sounds by sucking air between my front teeth. As the students make kissing noises of their own, we notice that the birds gape most often to sounds of higher frequencies. I replace the nest and many times a parent will be on the box before we board the van. This is a good time to teach the students how to properly use binoculars.

At the next stop, I encourage the campers to hold 5 to 7 day old chicks as I want them to feel the coolness of the cold-blooded nestlings. When I extract the nestlings, I tickle their bellies with my little finger causing them to expel their fecal sacs. I try to catch a fecal sac to describe its function. Birds have no bladder, a weight-saving adaptation that supports flight. Their urine is channeled into the cloaca where water is absorbed and recycled turning the nitrogen waste into a thick white paste. The dark solid waste from the intestines mixes with the white nitrogen product to emerge from the body packaged in a covering of mucous which facilitates the fecal sac's removal from the nest by parents. Denser fecal sacs that lack a thick mucous covering alert the trail monitor to dehydrated nestlings, possibly caused by a lack of food, high temperatures, and/or blowfly infestations. The fecal sac display is etched into the campers' memories and some always gasp at the sight of the first sac. As I "unload" each nestling, I place it into a pair of cupped hands. At this point the boys may still be mute, but their eager outstretched hands tell a different story; everybody wants to hold "baby" birds. Sometimes a nestling will delay its fecal sac release and a camper's indignant scream will herald the christening of a new field ornithologist. The young students adjust quickly to this professional hazard.

I always recommend that one

hand cradle the nestling as the other shades it. I also caution students never to grab birds tightly since they lack diaphragm muscles and use muscles between their ribs to draw air into their lungs and air sacs. Holding a bird tightly around its body will cause suffocation. Many of the youngsters report that the bluebirds feel cool as we discuss cold-bloodedness and the reptilian ancestry of birds. When discussing feather growth zones, I like to compare feather zones to men that comb lengths of hair across their heads in efforts to cover their "thin" spots. Of course birds are much better at this than we (men) are.

The next stop is the most exciting for the campers: we band birds. Young Eastern Bluebirds can be banded safely between 7 and 12 days. The legs of younger birds are too thick with soft tissue to safely accommodate bands. I try to pick a family nearer 12 days since they are usually plump, feathered, and cute. I examine the legs of the first nestlings for small scabs and hematoma, sure signs of blood-sucking blowfly larvae. If blowflies are present, I replace the original nest cup with a new one, careful to pick out as many larva as possible, offering them for hand-held examinations. Fresh blood appears red in larval gullets; older, more digested blood, appears black in others.

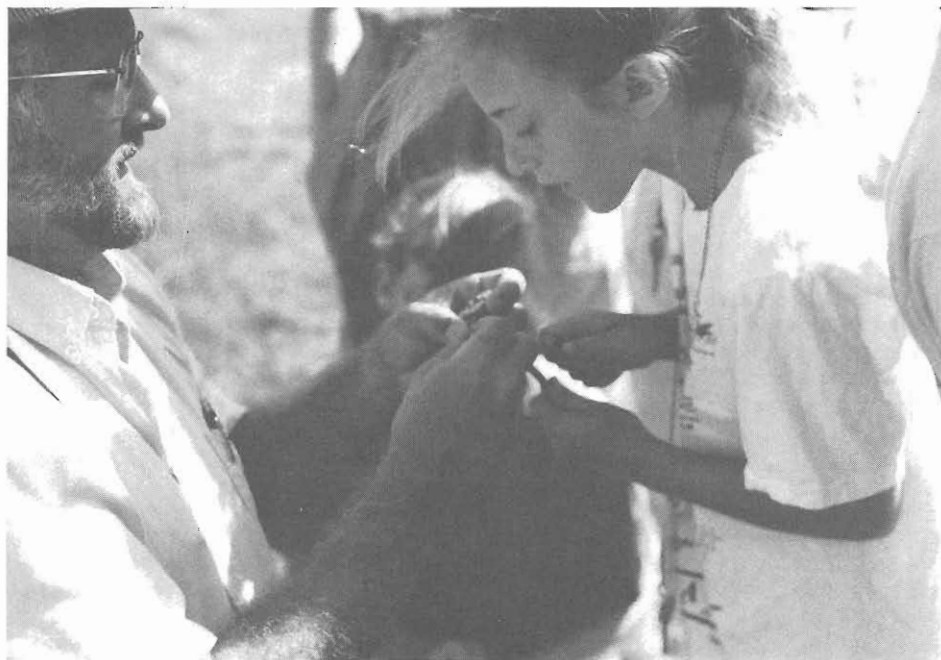
Feathered nestlings are warm-blooded. Before we band the birds, I ask, "How do the birds feel?" "Warm," is the expected answer; "hot," is even better. With a body temperature of 104°F (40°C), the birds definitely feel like they "have a temperature." Their high metabolism is responsible for rapid growth, rapid release of energy needed for flight, and their constant need for food. Conversations at this point can go in many directions but most focus on energy conversion since the campers are actually feeling the generated heat. Because birds have the highest metabolic rates in the animal kingdom, they are the best barometers of our ecological health; poisons in the environment will show their effects in birds long before similar

symptoms appear in us.

I band the first nestling, demonstrating the technique while explaining its scientific purpose and application, and the administration of the privilege by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Tuttle 1991b). I inform the students that they will band all other nestlings. The campers visibly sense the potential danger to the nestlings if a distracted bander makes a fast move while the jaws of the banding pliers surround a fragile leg. I use the pliers to open all bands before we use them one by one. Then, I place a band in the pliers' die and trade the pliers for a nestling. I hold the nestling's body in one hand, and its foot in the other, while I coach each camper during their approach to the bird's leg. As the pliers near, I guide the pliers' jaws into proper position with my index fingers. The campers are always highly focused, positively stressed with concern, and very empathetic as they close and open the pliers' jaws to complete the banding process. If we have enough birds needing bands, I allow students to band birds on their own, but only under my close watch. It usually takes all three field trips before all students have banded birds.

On the Tree Swallow field trip, concepts are reenforced when we repeat and compare much of what we experienced the day before. We relate the swallow's nest material to its habitat; the female gathers grass from open grasslands while the male retrieves white and gray waterfowl feathers from areas near water; both habitats spawn flying insects. Earlier in the season, male swallows can be enticed to swoop for feathers tossed into the air (from the nest). Since I haven't had much luck with feather tossing during my classes in late June, I no longer attempt it.

While looking at swallow nestlings, we inspect their wide mouths that will someday scoop insects from the air. I explain the formation of a bolus (ball of insects) by each adult which allows them more time for aerial food-gathering between feedings. We also notice the shorter legs of swallows compared to the legs of blue-



Photograph by Richard M. Tuttle

A highly focused and concerned OWJL camper bands her first nestling while being assisted by the author.

birds. Swallows use their legs less for landing than do bluebirds, but swallows spend more time hovering at the box entrance when feeding older nestlings.

Since 1980 I have captured nearly 200 female swallows annually as part of an ongoing study (Tuttle 1987a). If we fail to capture an incubating swallow on her nest, I set a trap designed by Stutchberry and Robertson (1986) in order to show a female's brood patch. The trap is a two inch square piece of masonite. It is taped to the inside of the front above the entrance and propped open with a dried goldenrod stem from the previous season. As the swallow enters the nest chamber, it bumps into the stem "trigger," and the flap falls over the entrance hole. As we set the trap, a student watches with binoculars as we examine another nest box. After the female is captured, I blow on its belly to part its feathers and reveal its bare pink brood patch. This is the female's heat exchanger that delivers life-giving energy from her

blood to her eggs or young. So far, we have not captured any male swallows during the course. Males will show down on their bellies and a cloacal protuberance, neither of which are found on females. Most captured females in the park wear leg bands, whereupon I report the bird's history to the campers the next day.

Campers enjoy observing gang swoops of swallows as they attempt to drive solitary intruders from their nest sites. Swallows are usually intimidated by, and fail to swoop at, large groups. At the first box visit, I ask an extroverted camper to remain behind as the rest of us return to the van. Youngsters enjoy the humility displayed by an otherwise outgoing peer as he or she is bombed by a gang of determined swallows. At this time, I introduce the observation that bluebirds do not submit to such dives, but wrens do. Swallows actually help bluebirds by acting like neighborhood police, diving toward intruders, including egg-pecking wrens, at all boxes, giving bluebirds two extra wren-free weeks during

their second egg laying period to hatch their eggs (Tuttle 1991a). Before we arrive at the next swallow nest, competition breaks out among the campers for the privilege of being the next practiced dummy for the swooping swallows.

On the last day of field trips, we visit a trail within the city before we travel to the park. Ten nest boxes are mounted *above* a chain-linked fence, six-tenths of a mile long, along an access road to a heavily traveled four lane highway. As we emerge from the van, I have to shout to be heard above the drone of traffic. Who would think that gentle birds would nest in such a noisy location? The stop demonstrates that bluebirds and swallows will nest successfully in noisy and irritating habitats. Nearby, a waste water treatment plant and landfill generate flying insects for the swallows, while large mowed fields with overhanging wires offer good hunting for bluebirds. We board the van and continue to the park to investigate House Wrens after I encourage campers to ignore habitat limitations at their homes, "...put your boxes up and let the birds decide!"

House Wrens usually occupy two stops on the tour: eggs and bandable young. Male wrens construct the bulky stick portion of the nest before the female lines its cup with softer materials, opposite the division of labor practiced among Tree Swallows. When I hand out wren nestlings for banding, I caution students not to drop them; young wrens seem to turn into mice when they land on the ground. Their long agile legs, adaptations for negotiating brush, help them make a run for it in weeds. Of course we examine their bills, adaptations for grabbing insects that become ice picks when they destroy the eggs of other birds. I urge students to avoid brush by 40 yards when locating nest boxes for bluebirds and swallows.

Other field trip techniques are worth mentioning. On the first field trip, we use a metric spring scale to measure the mass of the youngest brood of nestlings, usually less than

three days old. I first weigh the toe section of an old sock, then weigh it filled with the entire brood of fragile nestlings. After some fast mental calculating, the average mass of each nestling is ascertained. On the last day of field trips, we revisit the family and weigh them again. At this visit, campers enthusiastically assume the responsibility of handling and weighing the birds. In most cases, the family mass more than doubles, a rate of growth that astonishes the campers. Nature is imperfect, and, on one occasion, one of five nestlings was found dead in the nest, two looked underdeveloped and the weight gain for the live members of the family was near zero. This led to a very stimulating discussion about current (cold) weather conditions, predation of parent birds, and competition within the nest. I explained that competition among the nestlings will guarantee that some will survive even though most might die. The reality of the moment reaffirmed that trail managers interact with wild animals that are at the mercy of the elements.

Another important event is the inspection of overdue unhatched eggs. It is normal to discover one or two unhatched eggs during each set of field trips. We take the eggs to the road berm and gingerly break them with a screwdriver. Most rotten eggs show no embryonic development. Occasionally, some contain dead embryos that fail to develop properly, or fail to hatch. No matter what is found inside the egg, a wealth of questions, answers, and postulations emerge at its breaking. A "dead" egg always stimulates "life" in the campers.

A recently emptied Tree Swallow nest usually contains mites that are powerful props. Three respective roles in a macro-ecosystem are represented by mites in bluebird, swallow, and wren nests and are described by Chow, *et al.* (1983) and Burt, *et al.* (1991). They are parasitic mites (*Dermanyssus hirundinis*) that suck blood from the nestlings, scavenging mites (*Dermatophagoides evansi*) that feed on the discarded feather wrappings (detritus) and fecal debris, and predatory mites

(*Cheletomorpha lepidopterorum*) that feed on the other two types. Since swallow nests are the most "fecal" of nest box birds, large numbers of mites congregate on box fronts awaiting a ride on a new feathered host. I place my hand on the box front so mites can crawl up my arm. Most campers become squeamish until I reveal that the hitchhiking arachnids will quickly drop from me since I am five degrees Fahrenheit cooler than birds. Also, avian mites have adaptations for holding to feathers, not hair. Some students dare to try for their own mites in order to "feel" for themselves.

I like to save 10-15 minutes of the last field trip for a stop at the ice skating ponds where five boxes are mounted in the water (Tuttle 1991c). Not only do I point out that boxes mounted above water are free from mower collisions and unwanted inspections, but they raise many swallows and some bluebirds. As I develop the hypothesis that boxes mounted over water mimic nest cavities in trees above beaver ponds, I take the camp-

ers back to antiquity, the time before the continent was settled by our agrarian ancestors, and refer to beavers as "flat-tailed bluebirders" whose dams flooded riparian lands to produce nest sites for many swallows and some bluebirds. I conclude the field trips by proclaiming that when I wade among my boxes mounted above water on three of six trails in Delaware County, I frequently think of the natural world experienced by my ancestors, those discovered while working on my genealogy in the late 1970s. With a new respect for history, we rejoice in the modern world by boarding our van for our return trip to the campus.

DAY FIVE

On the last day of the course, we build bluebird nest boxes, take group photos, and fill out evaluation forms. Our work area is located in a courtyard between the administration and admissions buildings. I use a wheelbarrow to transport precut and predrilled



Photograph by Richard M. Tuttle

A concrete planter becomes an outdoor workbench as campers invest in the future while constructing their first bluebird nest boxes.

lumber, nails, glue, hammers, and demonstration props from my car to three raised plant beds that grow ornamental crabapple trees. Concrete slabs atop the plant bed walls function as seats for college students—an ideal height for workbenches.

Some campers arrive on foot from the dorms cheerful, while others are long-faced realizing that they will soon be leaving their new friends. The task at hand is good therapy for all. I greet them with the agenda, a serious safety talk, and a prediction that the course will continue once they mount their newly-made bluebird nest boxes in their neighborhoods—and their friendships will also continue and grow as they keep in touch with one another.

Before we start to construct the boxes, a few youngsters laugh when I ironically request that they “not be creative” during the construction of their nest box; only by following my instructions will they make the box that

was planned. I encourage them to be creative at home when they paint and locate their box. Campers form a line and each picks up six pieces of wood, glue, nails, and a hammer. I lead them through five steps that I have used since 1973 (Tuttle 1979). Once we have finished, I take my homemade post pounder and simulate how to safely drive a seven and one half foot pipe into the ground two and one half feet. I warn residential campers of the hazards of underground utility lines, gas pipes, etc. I then show them how to use a carriage bolt and wire (Tuttle 1976) to mount my demonstration box to a pipe stand. All information needed to prepare the box for occupancy and winter use (Tuttle 1987b) was given out on the first day. I reserve 20 minutes for filling out evaluation forms and taking photographs of the group surrounding a pyramid of new nest boxes. I am usually asked by class members to capture some memories with their cameras. The course ends as I return cameras to their owners.



Photograph by Richard M. Tuttle

OWJL students pose with their newly constructed nest boxes. The interpretation of “Bluebird Trail Management” will continue when their nest boxes entice nesting birds.

Reflections

Once goodbyes have been said and the young conservationists carry their new nest boxes to their next class, I sit down and read their evaluation forms. It doesn't take long to realize that the class was a success, not because of volumes of knowledge learned, but because everyone bonded with wild birds. During the course, I try to be professional and use words such as "parent," "nestling," and "fledgling," but students always answer the question, "What was the best thing about this course?" as "...holding *baby* birds." Furthermore, they do not say, "...baby *bluebirds*;" just, "...baby birds." I like it that way. The students bonded with birds in general, not a specific species; bluebird trail species were successful ambassadors for their biological class in the animal kingdom.

I plan Bluebird Trail Management to insure that each camper experiences the essence of a bluebird trail while encountering the professions of wildlife manager and field ornithologist. This objective is achieved due to techniques and philosophies practiced by interpreters, those professional naturalists and historians that practice their art throughout our planet's parks and museums, as defined by Freeman Tilden in his book, *Interpreting Our Heritage* (1957). Tilden listed and explained six principles of interpretation that remain the foundation for his profession. Tilden's principles of interpretation can easily enhance any classroom presentation or bluebird conservation talk. Interpreters deal with non-captive "classes," a very important distinction when comparing a park to a school setting. Course of study objectives for my classroom differ from the objectives planned for the field during Bluebird Trail Management. At each stop in the field, I use several facts to describe the nest situation, then I wait for the inquisitiveness of the campers to dictate the direction of the follow-up conversations and events. Using nestlings, swooping adults, nests, infertile eggs, fecal sacs,

nest parasites, etc. to tease the emotions and intellects of the campers to a higher level, is an interpretive technique. I quote Tilden: "...But the purpose of Interpretation is to stimulate the reader or hearer toward a desire to widen his horizon of interests and knowledge, and to gain an understanding of the greater truths that lie behind any statements of fact."

The pupils' zealous response to holding wild birds demonstrates that Tilden's fourth principle, "The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation," is most prominently active on the field trips. The campers experienced no assignments, but they were given reprints of articles and lists of reference materials to feed their intellectual appetites once they arrived home. They had limited time during the camp week to learn facts, but they had three field trips to develop a need and desire to seek more understanding of birds throughout their lives. Also, in addition to the pride acquired during their nest box building session, they carried under their arms the potential for interpretation to continue once they arrived home; their nest boxes were destined to entice nesting birds.

The techniques described herein will work with classes at any kind of camp, not just those designed for the talented and gifted. But the fact remains, if the OWJL youngsters continue to develop toward their potentials, there will be leaders and achievers within many professions that will blend an empathetic understanding of birds into their life's work and leisure. Birds and their ecological importance will grow into their ethical fiber. After all, when they attended summer academic camp during their early adolescent years, they actually held wild "baby birds" in their hands. ■

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank everyone associated with the OWJL Program, especially Patricia Blatter and Suzanne Sumner, past and present Program Directors, respectively, for the opportunity described herein. Thanks go to Professor Edward H. Burt, Jr, Curator of the Ohio Wesleyan Zoology Museum

for encouraging the use of specimens for the course, and the management of Delaware State Park for their support of the bluebird trail. Most of all, I would like to thank the OWJL campers for reminding me that our interest in birds begins in the heart, not the mind.

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* Reprints were presented to participants of Bluebird Trail Management on day one.

311 West Central Ave.
Delaware, OH 43015

Bluebird Song Available

The bluebird is often mentioned in songs, but a song has never been written exclusively about the bluebird.

At the request of the North American Bluebird Society, Douglas Wood of Sartell, Minnesota, has composed "Bluebird, Fly." The song explains the plight of the bluebird in a touching, beautiful way.

Doug has composed songs for the National Wildlife Federation, Minnesota Tourism and the Wildlife Rehabilitators Association. He is well-known at nature centers and outdoor education organizations for his nature oriented songs.

Cassette tapes are now available at NABS headquarters for \$5.00.

Tenth Anniversary Issue

Single copies are \$2.50. In larger multiples they are 4 for \$7.50, 10 for \$15.00, and, if a minimum of 25 are ordered, they are \$1.00 each. All prices are postpaid.

This one issue contains a wealth of bluebirding information in a concise form and is designed to compliment *The Bluebird* by Lawrence Zeleny. It is of particular value to individuals who present the NABS slide show or who organize a bluebird workshop.

Send orders to NABS, Box 6295,
Silver Spring, MD 20916-6295. ■



OK! Premature Fledging

Wayne H. Davis

My article in *Bluebird News* questioning premature fledging was reprinted in *Sialia*. The editor asked readers to respond with their experiences. There have been 14 responses published, three as letters in the Winter 1993 issue (15(1):36-37) and the rest incorporated into articles in the Spring 1993 issue (15(2):50-59). Ten of the respondents described premature fledging; one quotes the literature saying it occurs; two imply that it does not occur, based upon their extensive experience, and one says he has had one event that could be called premature fledging in some 30,000 monitorings of more than 600 boxes over a 10 year period.

Eight of the 10 cases of premature fledging involved the monitor removing the young from the nest: banding young, replacing a wet nest, or replacing a nest and removing one or more dead nestlings. One writer gave no details, and the final one describes a routine checking of the box causing the brood to jump out onto the ground.

Obviously banders are the ones most likely to encounter the problem, for they routinely remove and handle all the young after they are a couple of weeks old. The late Harry Krueger carried a hole restricter to put on the box temporarily when he had banded a jumpy brood. It let the parents feed the young but prevented them from leaving.

Unprovoked premature fledging (i.e., when the young have not been handled) may be influenced by box structure. Keith Kridler wrote in *Bluebird News* that his only two experiences with premature fledging were with top opening boxes where the young popped out the entrance when the top was removed. I suspect that a side opening box hinged near the top might have a similar result; when the side comes in on them they might flee out the entrance. My boxes are all slot

entrance, opening at the front with the hinge nails below the floor. In opening, the front flops down completely, exposing the young and the nest. There is no opening for the young to pop out through; they always scrunch down in fear of the big bad world out there, unless they are thoroughly ready to fledge. I monitor my boxes according to schedule with no concern about the ages of the young.

OK. What should we do? What should be the recommendations regarding monitoring bluebird boxes? Should we monitor for two-thirds of the young birds' box life and then quit? What is the purpose of monitoring a box? I suppose it is to look for problems such as wasps, dead young, starving young, wet nest, excessive parasites, etc. Are we to assume that these problems do not occur in the last third of a bird's box life? If you are monitoring a trail wouldn't it be better to look in on the little fellows to be sure they are all right?

So, suppose we monitor our boxes throughout the nesting cycle. If you simply open the box and look in on the young, it is extremely unlikely that they will flop out onto the ground. But suppose you find a problem such as a dead young covered with maggots in a wet messy nest, accompanied by three or four live young bluebirds. You can close the box and leave them alone, or you can clean it out and risk premature fledging. Probably most people would want to try to fix whatever problem they might find.

I do not band bluebirds and thus have not had nearly the experience of removing young from a box, as have Harry Krueger and Don Wilkins. On perhaps a dozen occasions, however, I have needed to remove young between the ages of 14 to 20 days, put them in a temporary nest on the ground while I

cleaned out a box, or even replaced the box, made a new nest of dry grass, and replaced the young birds. Never did I encounter premature fledging, so it must be unusual even when the young must be handled to correct a problem in their nest box. Thus it is probably best for the welfare of your bluebirds to monitor your boxes, and to correct any problem you might encounter. You might want to carry an entrance restricter in your bluebird tool kit.

Finally, let me describe my first experience with premature fledging which occurred in June 1993. I stopped along the highway to check a box. Both parents were at the box. When I went to the box they dived at me, the male actually hitting my hat with each pass. The box was one of my old style with a strip of wood across the front to make the slot entrance the right height. The front opens by hinging near the top, but the hinge must be down far enough that the strip does not interfere. The strip was missing on this box, thus making a larger entrance. I could see that there was a single young in the box. I thought it might be a cowbird.

We had had severe thunderstorms, and I suspected the nest would be wet and need changing. I lifted the front door and reached in through the entrance to lift out the bird. The nest was not in bad shape, so I simply replaced the young bird while the adult male kept hitting my hat. After I released the young bird into the box, he hopped out onto the ground. I replaced him, and he hopped up to perch in the entrance. I retreated slowly and the parents both came to the box. The young went back into the nest. If he had come out again, I would have put a restricter on the entrance.

This situation fits with most other described cases of premature fledging. Obviously something was wrong, and all three birds were agitated. Perhaps a predator had recently raided the nest, getting all but one young. Apparently the last one did not want to hang around, especially after being handled. ■

130 Jesselin Dr.
Lexington, KY 40503

YOU KNOW YOU'RE A BLUEBIRDER IF.....

Your favorite color is blue.....

Your heart skips a beat when you see a flash of blue fly by.....

You can hardly wait for February when they'll be back.....

Your laundry piles up while you watch them checking out your nesting boxes.....

You spend your grocery money on mealworms.....

The mockingbird that you once loved now becomes a nuisance when he chases your bluebirds.....

Your mind wanders to bluebirds when the family talks to you.....

You strike up conversations with perfect strangers—always about bluebirds.....

Every city park, cemetery, golf course, or expanse of green seems to cry out for nesting boxes.....

You can't wait to tell ANYONE about your five baby blue eggs.....

You'd never think of buying a new home without making bluebirds part of the contract.....

You remember bluebirds in your prayers every day.....

—Frances Sawyer

1994 NABS RESEARCH AWARDS

The North American Bluebird Society is pleased to announce the presentation of the eleventh annual research grant awards. The 1994 recipients are as follows:

BLUEBIRD GRANTS

Rachel F. Holt, University of British Columbia

Title: Population Regulation of Mountain Bluebirds Nesting in Clear Cuts: The Changing Roles of Nest Site Limitation, Predation and Vegetation Succession

Daniela S. Monk, Indiana University

Title: Differential Allocation of Parental Care in Mountain Bluebirds

Gary L. Slater, University of Florida

The James L. Williams Award

Title: Nest Site Limitation and Competition: Effects on Eastern Bluebird and Brown-headed Nuthatches in Southern Florida Threatened Pineland Ecosystem

STUDENT GRANTS

Jeffrey F. Kelly, Colorado State University

Title: The Effect of Food Availability on Behavior and Reproduction of Belted Kingfishers

Sheldon J. Cooper, Utah State University

Title: Physiological, Physical, and Behavioral Adaptations to Cold in the Mountain Chickadee and the Plain Titmouse

Colleen A. Barber, Queen's University

Title: Determinants of Extra-pair Paternity in Tree Swallows

GENERAL GRANTS

Drs. E. Dale Kennedy and **Douglas W. White**, Kansas State University

Title: Breeding Biology of Bewick's Wren: Conservation Implications

Dr. Charles R. Blem, Virginia Commonwealth University

The Betty H. McIlwain Award

Title: Clutch Size, Rate of Growth, and Reproductive Success of Prothonotary Warblers

NABS RESEARCH COMMITTEE

The North American Bluebird Society is most grateful to the Research Committee for their efforts in choosing the recipients of the annual research grant awards. Each committee member reads and evaluates each grant application. Awards are made after careful review and are a pooled consensus. The Research Committee consists of Chairman Kevin Berner, Dr. Jeffrey Brawn, Dr. George Hurst, and Dr.

Theodore Gutzke.

Individuals wishing to endow a named grant can do so as a one-time donation, on an annual basis, as a memorial to loved ones, or as a planned bequest. If you are interested in helping to further bluebird and other cavity nester research, please contact Treasurer Delos C. Dupree, NABS, Box 6295, Silver Spring, MD 20916-6295.

Bluebird Exchange

This feature extracts cavity nester news from the newsletters of bluebird organizations and periodic reports of groups with bluebird projects.

ALBERTA—*Ellis Bird Farm, Ltd., Fall/Winter 1993*

House Sparrows are major problems at feeders. An article suggests ways to outsmart them. Ideas include the following: offer non-preferred foods such as canola seed and suet, offer niger seed in tube feeders with tiny portals, offer sunflower seed in tube feeders with short perches, and (experimentally) string monofilament fishing line vertically on feeders. Walter Moytko reports great success with the last suggestion. Victor and Marilyn Hafichuk recommend placing dividers in tray feeders to reduce wind-blown seed loss. Dividers should be the same height as the edge of the tray and should form squares approximately 4 by 6 inches.

Trail news from the 1993 breeding season included Gerry and Peggy Kadey reporting a Tree Swallow nest containing 12 eggs of which all hatched, three fledged.

The Ellis Bird Farm plans to assemble the world's largest collection of functional nest boxes. A sample of each accepted design will be displayed in the new Interpretive Centre or around the yard. Each box submitted must be accompanied by the designer's name as well as a short description of its features. Contact Ellis Bird Farm, Box 2980, Lacombe, Alberta, Canada T0C 1S0.

Kimberley Poole of Blackfalds, Alberta was the winner of the 1993 Ellis Bird Farm Environmental Award.

—*Ellis Bird Farm, Ltd.*

----*Calgary Area Bluebird Trails Annual Report, 1993*

Jean Moore reports that the 2601 nest boxes on the Calgary trails fledged fewer bluebirds in 1993 than in 1991 or 1992 but produced substantially more Tree Swallows than in 1992. Some of the lower bluebird production was due to unfavorable weather, but there was an unusually low number of second broods.

Marney Armitage and Jean Moore reported finding three small snail shells in a Tree Swallow nest on the Pinebrook Golf Course. Marieke and Wim Jalink had five Tree Swallows fledge successfully from a topless box despite rainy weather. Another Tree Swallow nest they monitored had eight eggs which produced two dead young and five live young that varied greatly in size: one large, two medium, and two small. All were later found dead.

—*Calgary Field Naturalists Society Trails*

IOWA—*Wings, Late Fall 1993; Winter 1994*

This issue features habitat enhancement for wildlife. Some suggestions for temporary cover and feeders are illustrated, an essay about the gradual changes in an individual's attitudes and actions as he becomes a conservationist are described, and several books are reviewed. *Redesigning the American Lawn: A Search for Environmental Harmony* 1993 is a book that might interest many bluebirders. Unfortunately, according to reviewer Lon Drake, the book is long on reasons for giving up the mown expanse, but short on ecologically satisfying alternatives.

The winter issue reflects the varied interests of this group. Jim Walters reviews a 1993 book, *Audubon: Life and Art in the American Wilderness* by Shirley Streshinsky. The species spotlight is turned on waxwings by Bernie Knight. These birds are particularly numerous in Iowa City because the city is heavily planted with hawthorns, crabapples, and other fruit-bearing trees and shrubs.

For bluebirders, Jim Walters encourages trying a PVC box design in "Gilbertson Box Deserves Your Attention." Steve Gilbertson, of Andover, Minnesota, has designed a box (*Sialia* 13(3):93-97) which offers a "hint of House Sparrow resistance" and "is extremely easy to site and mount."

"Where Are the Savanna Birds?" by Lon Drake discusses the features of this habitat which has virtually disappeared from the Midwest. The author also examines the bird species that could be expected in these specialized areas.

A 1994 Winter Bird Feeder Survey form is enclosed and a page of results from previous years is printed in the issue. The two day survey during late January is sponsored by the Iowa Ornithologists Union and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Nongame Program.

—Johnson County Songbird Project

KANSAS—Clinton State Park, Summer 1993

In the sixteenth year of this bluebird project, 58 boxes fledged 223 bluebirds and 27 Tree Swallows. An additional 10 boxes on the campus of the University of Kansas fledged bluebirds, chickadees, and House Wrens. No eggs or nestlings were lost to raccoons thanks to predator control devices. All boxes were placed on metal poles and the majority were protected by cone-shaped metal guards, PVC sleeves, or wire around the entrances. Personnel continue to present slide programs about bluebirds to various groups including school children.

—Clinton State Park Bluebird Project

MAINE—Downeast Bluebird, Fall 1993

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (as reported in the *New York Times*), the number of bluebirds has been rising in the Northeast. The population is rebounding after severe declines in the 1950s.

Bluebirds will use almost any cavity so this newsletter continues to offer its readers a variety of box designs. Reprinted is a description of a cinder block box by a North Carolinian taken from a 1989 issue of *National Gardening* magazine. The Bauldry box received some negative feedback.

—Bluebird Association of Maine

MINNESOTA—Bluebird News, July; October 1993

Songbirds trapped at the bottom of plastic tubes placed over seedling trees continue to be a source of concern. Tubex routinely supplies mesh coverings to prevent this problem, but they are not always used.

BBRP's recommendation of Flys Away II® was questioned by a reader because it contains *piperonyl butoxide*. A check with entomologist David Noetzel indicated that the questioned ingredient not only is less toxic than the pyrethrin itself, but it boosts the effectiveness of pyrethrin 20 times. Flys Away II® continues to be recommended for use against blowflies, ants, and paper wasps. Any spray should be used sparingly since these products kill the *Nasonia* wasp which parasitizes blowflies.

The 11 September annual conference in Faribault was a success. Keith Radel was named the Bluebirder of the Year and Amanda Johnson the Young Bluebirder of the Year.

Dick Eide raises an interesting question in asking whether, by removing House Sparrows from bluebird trails, bluebirders may be altering the genetic selection process to favor the passive and defenseless bluebirds.

Marilyn Gericke of Archbold, Ohio, reported a successful double-fostering. A bluebird pair laid two eggs but abandoned the nest. After observing no activity for a week, Marilyn placed the two eggs in a nearby Tree Swallow nest with four newly laid eggs. The female swallow incubated all six eggs; eventually all four swallow eggs and one bluebird egg hatched. Since the bluebird was larger than the swallow nestlings, she removed it and placed it in another bluebird nest with three nestlings about its age. The twice-fostered bluebird fledged successfully!

To help bluebirds in northern areas where they seldom winter, suggestions are offered for those who feed birds. Not feeding House Sparrows during the winter is imperative. Starting a colony of mealworms is a useful winter activity. Mealworms

may be valuable in helping new bluebird arrivals during spring storms or during the first nesting.

The BBRP is planning to produce a 1995 bluebird wall calendar.

—*Bluebird Recovery Program*

NEBRASKA

The first Nebraska bluebird conference was held 30 October at Platte River State Park near Louisville and drew 116 people. It was organized by a few Omaha bluebirders to provide a forum for exchange of information and promotion of bluebirding. Several bluebirders from neighboring Iowa presented portions of the program. The conference was funded by a small registration fee and a raffle. Although no definite plans were made for a future conference, consideration is being given to perhaps holding one in October, possibly at a western location.

—*Bluebird Box Monitors of Nebraska*

NEW JERSEY—*Atlantic Currents*, November 1993

The Atlantic Audubon Society initiated a bluebird project three years ago. They began with six boxes and three monitors at Batsto; they now have 110 boxes, 13 monitors, one bander, and others who help erect boxes. In 1993, there were 62 Eastern Bluebird eggs laid, 46 young, and 41 banded. The project also fledged 97 Tree Swallows, 120 House Wrens, and 14 chickadees.

—*Atlantic Audubon Society*

OHIO—*Bluebird Monitor*, Winter 1993

Dick Tuttle was presented the 1993 "Blue Feather Award" at the annual meeting of the Ohio Bluebird Society on 16 October 1993 in recognition of his lifetime contributions to bluebirding in Ohio.

In his regular column Dean Sheldon features ways to discourage sparrow competition. He summarizes all suggestions with the statement that "CORRECT NEST BOX PLACEMENT IS THE ULTIMATE ANSWER TO THE HOUSE SPARROW PROBLEM."

Dr. Wayne Davis addresses ways to obtain free or modestly priced scrap lumber, metal poles, and mounting wire. He admits that sometimes available scrap wood will not last as long as redwood, cypress, or cedar might, but use of this waste wood aids landfills and forests. In another short article Davis also provides some construction tips for roofs and floors of bluebird boxes.

—*Ohio Bluebird Society*

OKLAHOMA—*Watchable Wildlife News*, Year-End Issue 1993

In response to demand, the Oklahoma Nongame Program will bring back workshops which will be conducted all over the state. The theme in 1994 will be "Oklahoma's Backyard Bats and Birds." Each workshop will consist of two segments. The first portion, which is free, will offer information and photographs of local birds and bats. The second, hands-on section, will provide a chance to build a bluebird box, bat house, or bird feeder for a fee.

An ominous note is sounded on the decreasing effectiveness of tax return check-off funding in this state. The first year of Oklahoma's check-off brought in more than \$200,000. After five years the sum has dropped to \$85,000. This leaves the Nongame Wildlife Program scrambling for other ways to raise funds.

This issue contains a form to complete for the 1994 Winter Bird Feeder Survey conducted in late January. An article summarizes the seventh annual results for January 21-24, 1993.

Paul Wilson, an Owasso High School science teacher, reported that one of the six Barn Owl boxes he and his students erected had fledged four owlets. These structures were built with funds from the Nongame Wildlife Program. Barn Owl populations have been dropping in recent years so this success is good news.

—*Oklahoma Nongame Program*

The Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society's annual meeting was held on 26 March 1993 at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington.

Both 1992 and 1993 had weather-related problems which severely impacted the breeding success of Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows in this province. The editor describes migration routes used by Ontario bluebirds and the approximate timing of their movement based on their general location in the province and the weather.

—*Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society*

Bluebirds and Wrens Share a Box in Montana

E.J. Whalen

The nest box in which I observed a combined brood of House Wrens (*Troglodytes aedon*) and Mountain Bluebirds (*Sialia currucoides*) is one of a trail of 15 in the Belt Mountains near Craig, Montana. The box is mounted on a fir tree facing a dry creek bed in broken coulee—grassland terrain. The elevation is approximately 4000 feet. This box, like all my boxes, was constructed with a hinged side opening.

13 April—Box mounted on tree.

21 May—House Wren nest, no eggs. Cleaned out. Bluebirds seen nearby.

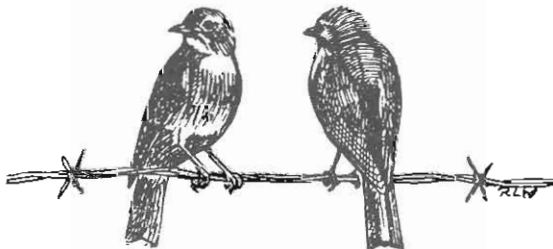
27 June—Found three baby bluebirds and four baby wrens in a well-defined bluebird nest. The nestlings were four to five days old. I suspect that after bluebirds built a nest and laid eggs, wrens chased the bluebirds from the nest, laid their own eggs, incubated the eggs of both species, and eventually hatched a mixed brood. There were no dead birds or infertile eggs in the vicinity. No adult bluebirds were seen. Two adult wrens were tending the young. I showed a nestling of each species to my wife, holding one in each hand. The difference in size was quite dramatic.

30 June—Vince Galli and I checked the box. The wrens were still feeding the nestlings. All were alive and active.

4 September—End of season survey of trail. Occupants of this box appeared to have fledged successfully. ■

Please Help!

Can you obtain one new member for NABS? Talk to a neighbor or a friend who may need just a bit of encouragement to become a bluebirder. Remember someone's birthday or friendship with a gift membership. A gift to a child may be the beginning of a lifelong interest. Help spread the bluebird word and aid the national organization at the same time.



T. David Pitts

Kaufman, Ken. 1992. The practiced eye: bluebirds. American Birds 46(1): 159-162.—Identification of the three species of bluebirds (Western, Mountain, and Eastern) is relatively straightforward and easy if an observer looks for one or two key characteristics. At least this is the message readers receive from the small amount of space most field guides devote to bluebirds. Realistically, bluebird identification is not always quite so simple. Like all other species of living organisms, each species of bluebird has individuals which show considerable variation. Field guides illustrate the "typical," not the extreme, forms. Kaufman's article should be read carefully by observers in areas where more than one species of bluebird occurs and by anyone who finds one of the species far outside of its normal range. Kaufman emphasizes the value of comparing numerous characteristics, not just one or two, when identifying problematic bluebirds. While identification of female bluebirds is usually more difficult than identification of males, the identification of some males may be tricky. For example, Western Bluebirds can occur east of the Mississippi River, but some male Eastern Bluebirds may have rufous color on the back, suggesting a Western Bluebird. The presence of some rufous on the back of a male bluebird should not be used as the sole characteristic for identifying a Western Bluebird. The sex of most adult bluebirds can be easily determined; however, some individuals may not be what they appear to be. I repeatedly mis-identified a pale colored male Eastern Bluebird on my study area. Only when his mate, who was even paler, was with him and comparisons could be made, was "his" identity apparent. After reading this article I felt better about my identification problems, but I also had questions about the identification of some of the bluebirds reported far out of their nor-

mal range, especially those individuals that were identified with the use of only one or two characteristics. ■

Since 1986 Dr. T. David Pitts has provided reviews of journal articles relating to bluebirds and other cavity nesters to *Sialia*. Personal and professional commitments are making it difficult for him to continue this feature. His contributions over this eight year period have been valuable, and the North American Bluebird Society thanks him for his dedication to cavity nesting birds and for sharing his professional expertise.

If you would like to volunteer to assume responsibility for the *Literature Review*, which appears twice a year, please correspond with Editor Joanne Solem, 10617 Græloch Rd., Laurel, MD 20723. Indicate your experience, interest, and background. Please enclose a sample review. Access to a wide variety of scientific journals is essential.

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.

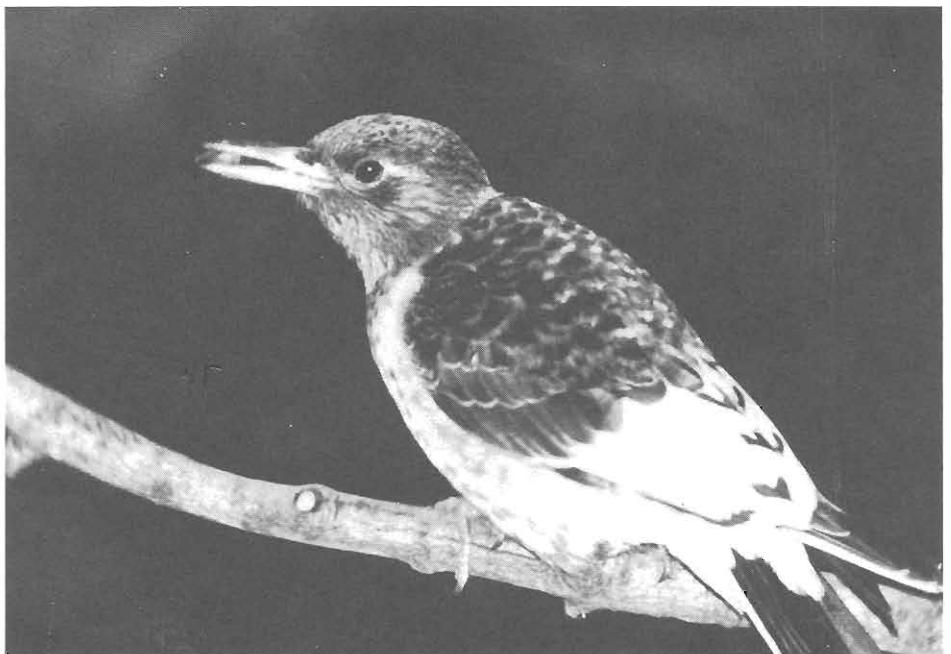
PORTRAITS

Hubert Brandenburg photographed these cavity nesting species in central Maryland.

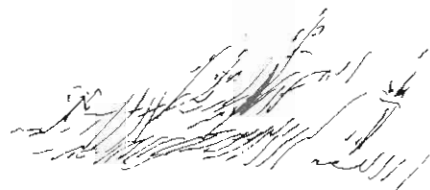
Two male Northern Flicker nestlings (top left) poke their heads out of the entrance to their nesting cavity. A male Wood Duck (below) was photographed in a seldom seen location resting on grass.

The male Eastern Bluebird (opposite top) carries food for his young. The immature Red-headed Woodpecker has a morsel in his bill.





IN MEMORIAM



Each year the spring issue of *Sialia* carries a list of memorial gifts which have been received by the North American Bluebird Society during the preceding year. Contributions can be made as general donations to the Society or can be specified for research, education, or gift memberships.

In memory of Mary Lowe Beard

Jim and Mary Opasik

In memory of Claude "Mac" Beltz

Trudy & J.R. Newton and Family

In memory of Edward Deuser

Virginia & Howard Gordon

Kay Mansfield and Jim Allen

In memory of William I. Galladay

Mr. & Mrs. Howard Cassidy

A.P.R. Lovell

Richard Rogers

In memory of John H. Heisy

Mr. & Mrs. Joseph McLaughlin

In memory of Roman J. Henkels

Gayle Craner

In memory of Frank M. Lyon

Marjorie K. Lyon

In memory of Furl E. Walden

Bob & Sally Dillier

Ray Elliott & Vanessa Faurie

Laurie Goeningloft

Clara Grossman

Jerry D. & Marilyn Kennedy

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Everett & Martha, Jane & Barbara Koubz

Mr. & Mrs. Dion Kirk

Jim & Diana Lemmon Family

Mr. & Mrs. Jerry Medsber

Harold R. Meeks

Robert & Ramona Miller

Patricia A. & Doren O. Mills

Gwen Morgan

Maxine & Eugene Richey

Dave & Betty Schuur

The Stephen Family

Nancy Stewart

Arnell & Norma Wisely

SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NORTH AMERICAN BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

The seventeenth annual meeting of the North American Bluebird Society will be held in Boise, Idaho, June 9-11, 1994, at the Red Lion Hotel/ Riverside.

The sponsor for the meeting will be the Golden Eagle Audubon Society, Inc. and the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program, Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

Questions concerning the meeting should be directed to the following address:

Al Larson
3015 Silver St.
Boise, ID 83703

Elizabeth B. Nichols

It was a beautiful day in June when I received the phone call from a very distressed bluebird box owner. My caller reported that she had not seen the female feeding her nestlings for several days and had just found the male dead near the birdbath. I immediately visited the scene and inspected the never-opened box to discover two dead nestlings and three half-starved noisy nestlings about ten days old. Assessment of the surrounding area revealed that a close neighbor was a heavy user of pesticides on his garden and livestock. I advised the owner to either destroy the inadequate box and abandon the desire for bluebirds in her yard or discuss the problem with her neighbor.

When my disheartened listener declined the responsibility of caring for the three remaining nestlings, I found I was again destined to play the foster-mother role. (See "Orphans at Antietam" *Sialia* 12(2):57-59).

Upon my return home I immediately began feeding them mealworms, high protein baby food, and small bits of hamburger. At that time two of the nestlings appeared somewhat lethargic; the next day, these two babies perished (perhaps due to pesticide poisoning as they were larger than the single remaining sibling).

During the interim, the telephone was put into action in an effort to locate box owners with hatchlings of the same age where bluebird foster-parents would resume care for the lone survivor. Two trips with the remaining bird to the Antietam National Battlefield in Sharpsburg, Maryland produced no siblings near the age of this 12 day old survivor. Mark Raabe, who manages the trail of over 100 boxes at Antietam offered little hope of finding same-age babies as most of the early nestlings had already fledged. Mark was right. I returned home with my little orphan chirping to be fed.

In a final effort I phoned a local radio station and was given the opportunity to broadcast a plea for local box owners to call me if their boxes contained siblings near 14 days of age. Time was growing ominously short and fledging approached. When my plea produced no results, I decided to accept the role of foster-parent and discard the "cowbird plan." At this point, I ignored the inevitable bonding in the offspring and surrendered my heart to this demanding tiny bundle of feathers and gave her a name. "Cheepers" seemed appropriate. I was hooked.

When she was able to perch, I placed her cage outdoors in a tree near my kitchen door. This cage was flanked by two tubular finch feeders. The gregarious finches provided lots of company for Cheepers, but they sang the wrong song! I remedied this problem by frequently playing the bluebird song tape by Douglas Wood so she would identify with bluebirds and not the finches.

It was rewarding to closely observe the behavior of this young bird as my past experience had only been through monitoring my trail and watching activities at a distance.

I placed spent rose blooms in her cage allowing her to seek out small insects as she was then able to occasionally feed from the floor of the cage. I was astounded to watch her glean dew from the insect-laden flowers and leaves. This was my clue to her need for water. A small lid filled with water was placed in her cage. She immediately drank and then partied by bathing. After living in an unattended box with dead siblings, she rather enjoyed and needed a bath. In addition to self-feeding from the floor of the cage, she readily accepted the proffered mealworms and crickets from the familiar tweezers. My goal was to offer a wide variety of food as if her natural parents were doing the job. Imagine a grandmother catching butterflies, spiders,

and caterpillars! Cheepers' excited chirps accompanied by wing shaking and her pounces on partially disabled insects were a gratifying reward for my efforts.

Cheepers was gaining fame in the neighborhood. She was visited and fed by many youngsters who also aided in finding insects. Connie Toops, a photo-journalist completing a book on the three species of bluebirds, photographed her.

Every evening near dusk I moved her cage indoors to avoid predation by resident cats and squirrels. I found her behavior at this time quite interesting. As dusk approached, she would fly to the highest perch in the cage attempting to exit from the top. I assumed this could denote a survival skill. From the time of fledging, bluebirds remain high in the trees and this was where she wanted to be. In order to calm her, I would gently stroke her feathers through the side of the cage and softly whistle the now familiar tune. She responded each time with a soft chirr-chirr until nightfall. This soothing treatment developed into a behavior I had never witnessed in bluebirds in the wild. Whenever I approached her cage outdoors, she would hippety-hop across the bark-covered twig perch to the outside bars waiting for me to feed her, softly whistle to her, and stroke her feathers. The bonding was obviously mutual.

In addition to dining on delivered delicacies, she continued to enjoy bathing. Cheepers was the cleanest bird in town, taking two or three baths a day. Since her cage was in the shade, I found it necessary to move it into the sunshine to allow her to dry and preen her feathers. She often stretched her wings which were developing blue flight feathers. Her diet remained varied. In addition to insects, she also enjoyed thistle seed and miracle meal (a lard-based concoction which is a favorite winter food for bluebirds).

The many trips to the local pet food stores terminated when I learned about Grubco of Hamilton, Ohio. The first shipment of 500 mealworms and crickets supplied the filet mignon of

dining for this tiny creature who stole my heart.

On 19 June at about 20 days of age, Cheepers visited her future permanent home. It is a large farm with a bluebird trail located near Camp David in the Catoctin Mountains near Thurmont, Maryland. The farm is an ideal habitat with a plentiful supply of wild berries and other natural foods, with pastures and wooded areas. There, too, she would find other bluebirds who appear to remain year-round. Her release at this location was the best place for survival rather than at our permanent home in Middletown, Maryland.

When first released, she flew upward to a walnut tree. As she flitted among the branches pecking at insects on the bark, she was attacked by a resident male bluebird who was guarding his box 200 feet away. She survived the wing-bashing as I stood on the ground watching in horror. Her plaintive cheeping for food lasted about four hours. Then Mother Nature intervened with a thunderstorm, high winds, and hail. After the storm was over, I heard her cheeps near the walnut tree. I followed the sound of her cries and located her just before my Labrador retriever reached her in the tall weeds. I dried the pathetic creature as best I could and placed her in the house in the warm sunshine away from drafts. She wolfed down several mealworms and crickets and was none the worse for two harrowing experiences that day. I realized my mistake and decided against her release. She returned to our home in Middletown for further nurturing.

After several visits to the farm house and lessons to fly to me for food while in the house, it became evident her rehabilitation was making progress. She was also learning to forage for food from a tray in the house.

On 27 June at about 28 days of age, I again tested her desire to fly from my hand at the farm, but she had no desire to leave. The temptation to keep her was great but would have defeated my sole purpose in raising her. In addition, the law does not permit such goings-on!



Photograph by Elizabeth B. Nichols

Cheepers at 28 days.

On 29 June at her home in Middletown she was moved to a larger cage which allowed additional freedom of movement and selection of food from a larger cage floor. She continued to enjoy the feather stroking and soft whistle. At 30 days of age she began losing some of the speckled breast feathers; the new feathers on her back were also changing to a slate blue.

On July 1 she travelled with me to Leesburg, Virginia to assist in a baby-sitting venture. While in her cage on the deck, she was again attacked by a resident bluebird couple. Even the finches joined the fray. Cheepers fought back even though caged. What a survivor!

By this time, Cheepers was well-travelled. She had made two trips to the Antietam trail, four trips to our vacation home, and a trip to Leesburg—a total of about 250 miles and she was only one month old.

She continued her daily bathing and enjoyed a great variety of food. The taped bluebird song convinced her she was a bluebird; she would often

tilt her head at the sound and listen intently. The finches continued to chatter about her cage in the tree; occasionally, Cheepers would chase them off by flying at them.

On 3 July at 34 days of age Cheepers was released at her permanent home at the farm. She enjoyed the early morning freedom of flying, but didn't venture away from the house. Her amateurish ground-feeding reminded one of a chicken pecking around for food which was a pretty risky business. She often returned to me for hand-feeding, bathing, and dining on disabled crickets and mealworms placed on the sidewalk. She returned to my shoulder frequently, cuddled at my neck, pecking at my earrings and hair.

Toward noon she began showing the independence I had hoped for—she left the immediate area for several hours. Later in the day she returned, flying at top speed with the resident male bluebird in hot pursuit. She flew directly to her open cage in the tree. While she was in the cage, I offered her

mealworms which she refused indicating she had found ample food independently. She eventually left the cage and returned to me at dusk, dined on a cricket from the feeding tray on the picnic table, then left to roost high in the trees. She was asserting her independence now, the weaning process was nearing completion.

Each time we returned to Middletown, we left a plentiful supply of mealworms and crickets on the outside table with her cage left open in the tree for emergency shelter. Of course, the local bluebirds found the supply as well as chickadees, titmice, and a family of juvenile flickers.

On 22 July at 53 days of age, I held Cheepers for the last time. She had flown to me to receive a cricket. I held her and she chirped in alarm. I immediately released her and knew she was now a creature of the skies and no longer bonded to me.

In addition to the supply of food left on the picnic table, Cheepers also had her own cache on an upstairs porch. Each time we returned during the next few weeks, we found the sup-

ply diminished. She continued to bathe at the picnic table, but returned for food only when I was not nearby. By this time, she had lost almost all her speckled breast feathers. Her breast appeared a muted rust color, much paler than the coloring of the male.

On 4 August, she was a little over three months old and was seen in the company of another juvenile on the utility wire. She occasionally fed at the picnic table but would then immediately rejoin an ever increasing group of juveniles.

On 15 September we returned to the farm, saw a pair of young bluebirds, definitely male and female on the utility wire near the house. I called the familiar whistle; the male flew away, the female proceeded to hippety-hop up the wire until she was close to the electrical box at the pole. Since this behavior was never witnessed in any other bluebird, I was certain it was Cheepers. This was a display of earlier cage behavior. She tilted her head from side to side as she watched and listened to my whistle as if to say, "I re-



Photograph by Elizabeth B. Nichols

Cheepers' permanent home on a 135 acre farm near Thurmont, Maryland.

member you, but now I am a wild bluebird."

On 10 October our visit to the farm again gave proof of successful rehabilitation of Cheepers who, at that time, was over four months old. There were eight bluebirds feeding on the lawn, flitting about the trees. When I approached and whistled, the others flew away from the tree, but one female remained, tilted her head in that familiar pose, dropped to the ground for a morsel, and returned to the tree. She then hopped across a limb to the trunk of the tree as I whistled to her. My Cheepers had survived! After about 15 minutes of this banter, she flew off to join

the other blues on the utility wire over the pasture.

This tiny, starving, disheveled mass of feathers rescued over four months ago had grown into a creature of the skies. I was simply a vehicle destined to serve in the game called survival. It was a labor of love, an experience of total dedication not unlike that of raising a child; the only difference is the rapidity of maturation and eventual complete separation.

It was, indeed, the summer of the bluebird. May there be more! ■

14 Linden Blvd.
Middletown, MD 21769

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.

Historian's Request

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

Harry Krueger 1917-1993

Harry Krueger, Ore City, Texas, developed an interest in bluebird conservation after retiring from a career as a pharmaceutical salesman. In order to prepare for a master banding permit, he took a graduate level course in ornithology at the University of Texas at Tyler. Besides monitoring his trails and conducting research, he gave bluebird talks and wrote for bird banding journals, the *Nature Society News*, *Bluebird News*, and other publications. Harry perfected a radio control device which helped him research adult pair bonding in bluebirds. He documented four nestings of a single pair of Eastern Bluebirds in one season. In 1986, he received a Certificate of Appreciation from the North American Bluebird Society for his efforts in bluebird conservation. He will long be remembered by those he inspired.

—Keith Kridler

Return of the Mountain Bluebird

Joyce Nelson

"There's a pair!" I exclaimed as we brought our 4x4 truck to a stop on the crest of the Porcupine Hills in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. On a fence post perched a bright male Mountain Bluebird and on a telephone wire overhead was the paler female.

"Looks like they're house hunting already," said my husband. "They will be all settled in before the swallows' return."

Just two fence posts away was one of the 50 bluebird boxes we cared for from late March to August each year. The boxes are placed well out of sight of one another along farmers' fields, but not close to farm buildings where House Sparrows could find them.

My husband and I began recording the bluebirds' progress. Peeking in one nesting box, we were surprised to find six newly-hatched babies.

"These will be ready to band by next week," said my husband, with an experienced eye. The babies were covered with a light fuzz, but were featherless. They were about the size of a peanut. Several other nests had pretty blue eggs, while other boxes had been occupied by swallows or still remained empty.

The following week we approached the box with six nestlings quietly. When we lifted the lid to peek in, six babies opened their mouths wide expecting their parents with a juicy worm. They had more than doubled in size and now had some wing feathers. Carefully, we lifted them out and placed them in a blanket-lined bucket, covering them to keep them warm. One by one we took them out and put a metal band with a number on it around one leg. We carefully recorded the numbers and snuggled them back into the box. Silently we watched as the hovering mother came to check on her brood. Along the rest of the trail we

checked to see how many eggs had hatched and what new nests had been started. There would be new babies to band next week.

Our next visit, ten days later, was delayed by rain.

"That first bunch will have fledged," I said.

"Let's take a look," said my husband, approaching the box. He lifted the lid to be met with an explosion of birds and feathers. Six young bluebirds landed on his head and shoulders and hovered around the box. They had blue-gray feathers and speckled breasts. Their feathers would become bluer as they grew older.

"We'll report these as fledged," I said with a laugh.

I felt a little sad when we approached the same box on our next trip. I wondered how the fledglings were doing on their own. To my surprise there was a new clutch of blue eggs and an anxious mother nearby. Could this be the same female bluebird I wondered?

This second brood progressed well. On one of our visits we watched as four different bluebirds came with food.

"Looks like mom and dad are putting their teenagers to work," said my husband. "They'll be ready for their own brood next year."

When we made our last trip in early August the nests were empty, but we saw flocks of bluebirds in the fields. They were enjoying themselves before their long trip south.

"I wonder how many will be back next year to use our boxes?" I asked.

"Well, several of the adults on our nests this year wore bands that had our numbers on them and several more were from nearby trails," said my husband.

"Have a safe journey south," I called to them as we drove out of the hills to the flat prairie. "See you next spring." ■

1411 Henderson Lake Blvd.
Lethbridge, Alberta
Canada, T1K 3B9



Photograph by Joyce Nelson

An adult male Mountain Bluebird with his bill full of insects for his nestlings in a box in southern Alberta.

Wildlife Plant Use

We welcome all reports of plant use by wildlife. Please be specific. Include such information as the name of the plant (botanical name, if possible) and the approximate time of the year when the observations were made. Send your reports to Karen Blackburn, 185 Mica Hill Road, Durham, CT 06422.

Instructions to Authors

Authors planning to submit articles for publication in *Stella* are encouraged to obtain "Instructions to Authors," a page which summarizes manuscript requirements.

Address requests to the editor at 10617 Graeloch Rd., Laurel, MD 20723.

ANYBODY HOME?

Dean Sheldon

Monitoring, of course, is the most rewarding part of the whole process which we call "bluebirding." When accurate monitoring records are kept, we can anticipate what will be in the next box on the trail as it is visited. But what if we don't keep records? And, even if we do, there are certain telltale signs which can be helpful to any bluebirder as he or she approaches a box in the field. Many of these tell the bluebirder what to expect when "the door opens."

- At a distance, the presence of bluebirds perched on overhead wires, fence wires, fence posts, or tree branches in the area of a nest box can indicate residency.
- Birds perched on the nest box or flying into it with nesting materials is a hopeful sign of nest building.
- Taking a closer look, wisps or stems of grass protruding from the bottom or sides of the nest box or seen through the entrance hole or slot are certain signs of nest making.
- The presence of "whitewash" at the entrance hole or slot would indicate that young birds have hatched and are being raised.
- Darkened or stained areas at the lower sides of entrance holes or at the bottom of the slot show where a combination of oil and dust have been "wiped off" the adult birds entering the nest box.
- A nest box where the nest grasses have been pulled out through the hole or slot might well indicate disturbance or predation by a raccoon or cat.
- The presence of houseflies in abundance (or a distinct smell) would be an almost certain sign of nesting failures within the box—one might expect to



find dead birds (adults, young, or both) inside.

- Almost any box (empty or where young birds have fledged) might be the site for wasp nests. At the end of the nesting season, it is important to watch for dangerous wasp infestations—especially in hot, dry weather. Wasp nests are easily visible in the rear upper corners of the nest box.

So, "knock before entering" and keep a watchful eye out for the welcome signs of bluebird nesting on your trail! ■

Special thanks to Thomas Sheldon for word processing and to Eric Mayer for graphics. *Ohio Blue Tips* is the brand name of matches produced by Universal Match, Diamond Brands, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

This article was reprinted with permission from Bluebird Monitor, the newsletter of the Ohio Bluebird Society 7(3):3.

4569 GRN-MLN TL Road
Greenwich, OH 44837



Tree Branch Bluebird Box Update

Frank A. Zuern

The Winter issue of Sialia (16(1):13-19) contained an article entitled "Tree Branch Bluebird Box" by Frank A. Zuern. Since the design was made public in early 1993, the author has answered a number of letters. Here he addresses the most frequently asked questions. Also detailed are modified box specifications for Western and Mountain Bluebirds produced after consultation with Art Aylesworth of Ronan, Montana.

The two most frequently asked questions are these: 1) What is the function of the predator baffle, and 2) Why does it tilt? The answers follow.

1. The predator baffle encourages the Eastern Bluebird (the species my data cover) to build behind it; it helps the female bluebird define the nest area; and it helps confine the nest material to the back 5 inches of the nest box. Keeping the nest material at the back of the box eliminates the possibility of portions being snagged by a predator's claws or paw. It has been said that an opossum can even use its tail to probe and grab for food, so the baffle would inhibit this method of predation also. The baffle provides a partial barrier behind which the female can crouch and "freeze" from probing paws. By not fluttering, the bird escapes, thus surviving any mammalian attempt at predation.

2. The baffle tilts to facilitate cleaning. That is necessary because field tests from 1988 through 1993 show that *all* House Wren and *all* House Sparrow nests have been built in *front* of the baffle. About 10% of all bluebird nests also occur in front of the baffle.

In addition to the answers to the above questions, I'd like to add a couple of general hints.

To enable the galvanized nails used as fasteners in the back door and the baffle to operate more easily, grind off the sharp point. Lubricate the nails and each drilled hole with wax from an old candle stub. The wax works wonders!

When erecting a brand new box, placing a *very small* amount of dry grass or pine needles in the nest "pocket" (area behind the baffle) may help acclimate bluebirds to the box.

Art Aylesworth, of Ronan, Montana, looked over the specifications of the tree branch box and had some thoughtful questions and useful suggestions. He noted the relatively small volume of the nest area behind the baffle which could pose problems for the two western bluebird species and their larger broods. He also thought that there was a possibility that nestlings, in the few days before fledging, would crowd toward the front of the box and then be plucked out of the entrance by magpies, Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks.

Although testing so far provides no evidence that nestlings move to the front of the box, there may be instances in which this would occur. Art has promised to test this box design in several Montana locations in 1994. Other individuals are cooperating from other states where Western and Mountain Bluebirds breed, so maybe this question will be answered soon.

Because the tree branch box is a dynamic design, following are dimensions changed to accommodate the larger bluebird species in the West. Art specifies that the boxes normally used have a minimum 5 inch by maximum 5 1/2 inch square floor area which amounts to 25 to 30 square inches. The dimensions below provide a floor space of 4 1/2 inches by 6 inches equaling 27 1/2 square inches which should be an adequate brood chamber. If you have already built tree branch boxes with the previously described dimensions for Eastern Bluebirds, do not panic. Consider building and installing an equal number built to the modified specifications which will create a control group within your own habitat. In either case, use a 1 9/16 inch entrance

(Continued on page 75)

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:

My husband John and I attended the annual meeting in Callaway Gardens last October. We enjoyed it immensely. It was informative, and it was great to meet old friends again.

We held our meeting of the "Friends of the Bluebirds" 7 November, so I gave a report on the conference. I had a display board of pictures we had taken, the program, book markers, and brochures. I hope it was an inspiration for some of our members to attend the meeting in Boise, Idaho next June.

Hazel Skuce
1261-13th St.
Brandon, Manitoba

Dear Editor:

Recently I had been curious about the bluebird's success rate. It delighted me to find a survey on this very subject (*Sialia* 15(3):83-90). Your efforts have also allowed me to get to know many other people through their equal love for bluebirds, similar experiences, and efforts in the field.

Sialia's ability to focus so intently on the bluebird, while maintaining input from the readers as a big part of it, is admirable. This is definitely my favorite publication. There's simply something special about it that separates it from the others.

Brian Miller
5528 Tallow St.
Fredericksburg, VA 22407

Dear Editor:

The WHF Ruritan Club of Church Road, Virginia had another successful bluebird year [1993]. The club made 530 boxes which were sold in four Ukrop grocery stores during the month of February. We can sell all the boxes we can make. Two years ago we sold 1,000 boxes. Our sale dates are always preceded by articles in our local newspaper about our projects and some information about the bluebirds and NABS. It's effective free advertising. The program is truly bringing back the bluebirds to this part of Virginia.

When we started five years ago, one could rarely find a bluebird. Now, in the early spring and fall, they line the wires along our roads and highways. One evening early this year my wife and I counted 23 bluebirds lined up taking turns at the birdbath. I have seven boxes and three baths on my land. I also have a winter shelter box that can comfortably roost about 30 to 40 birds.

We had a late and cool spring. Most of us only had two nestings instead of the usual three. Several boxes that were always good for three nests only had one. BUT the good news is that our rate of successful fledgings was very good. We lost only a few nests to snakes—our number one enemy around here. This breeding season I didn't even see a snake. I furnished our members with some homemade "snake dust" which I compounded out of sulphur and moth ball flakes. When boxes had eggs and chicks, we kept about a 12 inch wide area around the

base of the posts sprinkled with the mixture. The only problem is you have to attend the boxes after every rain. That was no problem because of the terribly dry season we experienced this year. With 72 boxes, we fledged 514 birds.

In February of 1994 we will hold a free bluebird evening at our club with refreshments, prizes, etc. We will have slides and I'll show the Audubon 50 minute video "Bluebirds Up Close." The whole affair is a 2 1/2 hour event geared to all ages.

Our bluebird project has been a boon for our club, a blessing for the bluebirds, and a social-civic topic for our community.

Fred Sahi
5815 Trinity Church Rd.
Church Road, VA 23833

Dear Editor:

I made one major change to Frank Zuern's tree branch box plans in *Sialia* 16(1):13-19. I used a piano hinge and a clip lock on the long sides of the roof so that I would be able to open the roof and show the interior box construction to people at my bluebird workshops. When I begin setting up this box on my trail, I will put piano hinges on those working boxes because I want to have clear access to the entire length of the nest box.

A 48 inch piano hinge costs about \$11.00 at a hardware store, so each of my tree branch boxes will have an added cost of about \$4.00 (using a 16 inch piece of the piano hinge plus two heavy screw eyes and a clip fastener).

Don Bragg
107 Sutliff Ave.
Rhinelander, WI 54501

Dear Editor:

We are quite new at bluebirding having only five boxes on about five acres for the past couple of years.

Our little bluebird trail is in Morgan County, Ohio. We are fortunate to have power lines, low cut grass, elderberries, and few predators for our birds.

We love your quarterly and would very much like to interest others in our area in preserving the bluebird.

Donna & Paul Calderone
4636 Aruba Ct.
Gahanna, OH 43230

Dear Editor:

I couldn't believe it, but there it was —one after another, ten bluebirds shooting quickly out of a standard bluebird box—zip, zip, zip, after apparently spending the night there.

Late that afternoon as the frigid January temperature remained near zero, the chummy little group returned to their favorite house, one that sits on a post just outside our den. They flew in and out, almost colliding with one another. At one point, eight were in the house. Then they all left.

Later they must have returned to our hotel. For the next morning nine of them again came zipping out, like a row of jet planes taking off from an aircraft carrier. No sight of number ten.

Jane and Tom Ottenad
Quarter Branch Rd.
Lovettsville, VA 22080

Dear Editor:

I wanted to share a device I accidentally discovered to help control House Sparrows.

I found that sparrows enter a box from the top down whereas bluebirds come in from the bottom up. Using a thumb tack I fastened a plastic coffee can lid flush against the box just above the entrance hole. This boggled the sparrow's mind so he promptly left and I had no further trouble from them.

Mary P. Kassenbrock
10104 Secretariat Dr.
Goshen, KY 40026

We would like to acknowledge the generosity of an Illinois bluebirder who regularly sends us first class postage stamps, postcards, and notecards. This is Louis Kallai's continuing contribution to bluebird conservation. NABS is grateful!

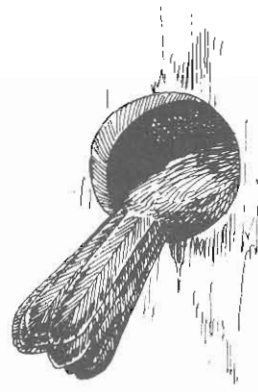
Bluebird Tales

Mary D. Janetatos

As NABS Founder **Larry Zeleny** and I were having dinner at a favorite restaurant, he reminisced about a favorite hobby: hand feeding wild birds. He described his process of conditioning the birds, mainly chickadees, titmice, and nuthatches. Around noon on a fall or spring day Larry placed sunflower seeds on a small platform. The birds soon realized the seed was there. As they came around, he would go out and stand some distance from the food. Each day he would stand closer as he placed a stick with seed on it on the board. Daily he would shorten the stick; soon the birds developed confidence and would take the seed from his hand. This process would take about a month. Larry loved to feed the titmice and chickadees, but got a big surprise once when a White-breasted Nuthatch landed on his leg and came up to his arm as if he were a tree. Circling Larry, the bird ascended to his sunflower seed reward.

I write while we are in the grip of the winter of '94. We are grounded by the ice covered with snow; thus, the main contact with the world is by telephone. **Frances Sawyer** of Stone Mountain, GA, brightened my day as she called with a compliment on the *Sialia* articles about the wonderful NABS annual meeting last fall at Callaway Gardens, GA. She also gave me a delightful account of the bluebird scene in her backyard. A family flock of bluebirds was feasting on the fruit of cotoneaster shrubs she had planted. One brilliantly blue male was balancing with his tail feathers propped on the nest box as he examined the cavity. What a wonderful stimulant for writing as the snow scene outside brings us cause for worry on behalf of the local bluebirds!

Joe and Gladys Fields of Troup, TX, reminisced about the Callaway NABS meeting. "We had a joyous time last week at the convention. I do not believe it could have been better. Although we are not members of NABS,



it is our wish to become new members." **Billy and Brenda Dunbar** of Watkinsville, GA, were also enthusiastic about the annual meeting. "It was a pleasure and privilege for me to lead one of the Sunday morning bird walks at the annual meeting at Callaway Gardens. Brenda and I met some very nice people and renewed old acquaintances. I especially enjoyed showing the Pileated Woodpecker to the gentleman from California. It flew up and landed in a snag right in front of us as if on command. I have been leading field trips in Georgia for more than 10 years and helping someone to see a new bird is almost as good as seeing one myself. Sorry that I didn't get to meet everybody, but maybe next time."

Life Member **Elizabeth Crispin** of Mount Shasta, CA (northern California near Oregon) wrote, "There are bluebirds in my area but only one year did I have a nesting pair. With help from your *Sialia* and books, I hope to have bluebirds. A bird house was knocked down and two bird feeders were bashed (then retired) by bears close to my front door."

Steve Eno of Raymond, NE, notified us of Nebraska's first bluebird conference in October of 1993. "I really enjoy your *Sialia* quarterly and it is always a treat when it comes....We are in the process of establishing a statewide bluebird program for Nebraska." Other Nebraska inquiries about NABS have come in, including one from **Julie Milata**, Papillion, NE, who also mentioned the fall conference.

Anna Makuch of Emlenton, PA, has devised an ingenious way of increasing her supply of nesting boxes to fill her retired farm of 200 acres. "Anyone asking permission to hunt on my land is asked to donate a bluebird box. Most hunters comply. Made several converts and this winter wish to make more. The bluebird book by Donald and Lillian Stokes is a treasure."

Nelson Kamuf of Colorado asked that NABS send literature to some bluebird friends who will help him monitor next year.

R.D. Williams, M.D., Markleville, IN, bills himself as "retired Doctor—Bluebird Expert and Lecturer." He says that "Since becoming a member of the Speakers Bureau for NABS in January 1993, I have spoken to groups consisting of a total of 1020 people. More speeches are upcoming in '94. It is my great joy and pleasure to be a spokesperson for bluebirds and NABS. The slides are a great help and present a focus for the audience whether young, old, or in between! Enclosed is my card. I also give out bird houses as prizes and hand out the brochure 'Where Have All the Bluebirds Gone?' One person can make a difference!"

Elsie and Jim Krecek of West Yarmouth, MA wrote that they were enclosing a check to re-establish their membership in the bluebird society. "We are delighted to report that there are bluebirds here on Cape Cod in Yarmouth. We have been hoping for bluebirds for 40 years; with no success we became discouraged and finally discontinued our membership in NABS. But, lo and behold, while golfing the past two summers, I thought I saw bluebirds and finally proved to myself and, incidentally to several of my golfing partners, that bluebirds they were. So, last May I built 20 houses and located them appropriately around the golf course (Bayberry Hills in Yarmouth).

The nesting report speaks for itself. However, as you can see, by starting in May, we only 'caught' the second families. Next spring we will start in February or March with the original 20 boxes and an additional 20 boxes for

coverage over the remainder of the golf course."

Rachel Shavor of Gretna, LA, pleaded for NABS instructions to build a "bluebird nest." She loves the trees and wants to save bluebirds. "Please send it as fast as you can! PLEASE DO NOT DELAY!!!!" Sometimes we need roller skates or wings around here, But we try!

Mrs. H. Mayfield of Vernon, British Columbia, reported that a Mountain Bluebird was seen on the Christmas Count in Vernon.

A final note came from **Joan E. Lane** of Vienna, VA, with a very generous Christmas donation and wishes "Bless you and your good work." And may the good Lord send any bluebird survivors of a record cold winter of 1994 straight into your waiting nest boxes so you will have a lovely spring.

FLASH! On a cold winter day, my hairdresser, **Voula**, reported that she saw the family flock of bluebirds *after* the severe ice storms of '94. So hope is high for a good bluebird spring. They're ready to knock on *your* bluebird box—is it ready? ■

(TREE BRANCH BOX—Continued from page 71)

in the West. If the bluebirds in your area are Easterns, use the original box measurements.

Add 1 inch to each of the following parts as shown:

1. Back Door—from 3 3/8 in. (W) to 4 3/8 in. (W)
2. Floor—from 3 1/2 in. (W) to 4 1/2 in. (W).
3. Front—from 3 1/2 in. (W) to 4 1/2 in. (W). Cut the revised front out of a 2 in. x 6 in. board.
4. Roof—from 7 1/2 in. (W) to 8 1/2 in. (W)
5. Predator Baffle—from 3 3/8 in. (W) to 4 3/8 in. (W)
6. Change the distance between the back door and the predator baffle line from 5 in. to 6 in.
7. The dimensions of the sides and mounting board do not change. ■

1040 Maricopa Dr.
Oshkosh, WI 54904

Sophomore Season

James R. Kunz

In 1992 I was able to attract a pair of bluebirds to my property (as well as Tree Swallows), and they finally fledged some young after two failed nesting attempts. I was looking forward to better success in 1993. As it turned out, my 1993 season was very similar to my first season.

Bluebirds were first spotted 30 March on my property; a pair nested. They hatched four out of five eggs, but a late cold snap killed all the nestlings. The birds eventually re-nested and laid four eggs, hatching three. They fledged two young. We spotted them feeding one of the fledglings on a power line across the road. My father-in-law and I were watching them when he remarked that he never knew that the "birdies" had such a hard time raising their young. Most people don't realize that birds have to compete with House Sparrows, avoid weather extremes, as well as survive parasites and possible predation attempts. This year I did manage to fledge 17 Tree Swallows along with the bluebirds.

I received two pieces of mail in response to my "Rookie Season" article (*Sialia* 15(3):111-112). The first was a nice postcard with bluebirds on it from an elderly woman who could relate to my troubles in my first season. She wrote that the problem she had was with too many Tree Swallows crowding out the bluebirds. Since she lived nearby, I called her to discuss the situation. She had already tried moving the nest boxes closer to each other, but the swallows still nested in all of them. I suggested that she mount them back-to-back to see if that would help. The second piece of mail came from a woman who had read that I trapped European Starlings. She wondered where I got my trap. I wrote to inform her that my trap came from the Purple Martin Conservation Association.

At my parents' cottage at Lake Wallenpaupack in Pennsylvania, my father had erected a bluebird box a

couple of seasons ago, but because it was close to the edge of the woods House Wrens filled it with twigs. This year I moved it to an open place in the front yard and cleaned it out. I also gave my father a Peterson box I obtained from the New York State Bluebird Society. I believe he has a good chance of attracting bluebirds since there is a bluebird box up the road about a mile that has had bluebirds in it the last two seasons. In the same neck of the woods, my brother's father-in-law also erected a bluebird box and successfully fledged bluebirds, despite some problems with wrens.

Last year, late in the summer, we visited our grandmother in Hobbie, Pennsylvania and I noticed some bluebirds. We quickly built a bluebird box and put it up. This year a pair of bluebirds *did* nest, but not in the box. Instead, a pair of Tree Swallows nested in the bluebird box and the bluebirds nested in a nearby tree cavity! The nicest thing was that when we visited grandmother on Labor Day weekend, there were at least a dozen bluebirds flying around. They were feeding on berries from a nearby shrub and on insects from the mown lawn. We found a couple of bluebird feathers on the ground, maybe from a bluebird that had encountered a predator. I'd never seen so many bluebirds in one place.

In summary, my 1993 season was about as successful as my 1992 season. I had fewer problems with sparrows (only one trapped), but the weather killed some nestling bluebirds instead. I'm looking forward to next year, since I will then be living on the property where I have the nest boxes mounted so that I can better monitor the bluebirds. I hope to get two broods out of a single pair next year so I can observe the fledglings better. ■

454 Ashley Rd.
Maine, NY 13760

Index to Volume 15 (1993) of *Sialia*

- Abbey, Charles W., article on NC trail, 26
- Adams, Shirley: article on bluebird monitoring, 137-139; license plate, 155
- ant proofing of boxes, 93-95
- awards: NABS Conservation, 148; NABS Research, 60, 142; presentation at Annual Meeting, photos, 29-34
- Bagley, Edgar S., article on predator problems, photo, 65
- Barber, Tom A., article on raccoon guard, 136
- bear, conclusion of attack-on-feeders saga, 25
- Berner, Kevin L.: article on field tests of nest boxes, 3-11; nest box report, 43-48
- Bird in Bush column, 61
- bird houses. *See* nest boxes
- birds: insectivorous, and pest management, 123-125; photos of 3 species, 100-101; *see also* bluebirds
- Blackburn, Karen, Bird in Bush column, 61
- Blair, Lynda, article on netting as snake guard, 22
- blowflies: and parasitic wasps as affecting bluebirds, 13-16; removal from nestlings, 152
- Bluebird Express, 35-37, 72-73, 114-115, 156-157
- bluebirds: in a blizzard, photo, 142; blowflies' effect on, 13-16; blowflies' removal from, 152; on computer wrist band, photo, 139; extricated from shell by human, photo, 137; feeding young, removing fecal sac, photo, 100-101; fledged from House Sparrow nest, 23; killed by snowstorm, photo, 140-141; myths about, readers' responses to, 50-55, 105-106; premature fledging, 50-59; on rebound in MS, 71; survival probability studies, 83-90; young female attempts late-season nest building, 76
- Bluebird Tales, 38-39, 74-75, 116-118, 158-159
- bluebird trails. *See* nest box trails
- Blue Jays, predation by, 59
- Brandenburg, Hubert, bird portraits, 100-101
- Brown-headed Nuthatches, nestlings rescued, placed in substitute nest, 64
- Bullerman, Harold, nest box correction, 107
- Campbell, Alicia, article on building for the future, 108-109
- Canadian trails, 1992, 106-107
- Darling, Christopher, article on blowflies and parasitic wasps, 13-16
- Davis, Wayne H., articles on: deterring raccoons, 49-50; effects of not monitoring, 93-95; sparrow-inhibiting box, 127-130
- Davis, William R., article on overcoming one brood's problems, 66-67
- Donovan, Mike, article on warbler nesting inside DC Beltway, 20
- Dorber, Sadie, at Annual Meeting, presents awards, photos, 28, 31-34
- Dupree, Delos C., Treasurer's Report, 40
- Early, Robert, article on PVC nest box, 146
- Eastern Bluebirds. *See* bluebirds
- Eltzroth, Elsie K., article on premature fledging, 55-59
- feeder, transparent, with mealworms, photo, 138
- Findlay, John, III, article on snowstorm deaths, 140-141
- fledging: premature, readers' experiences with, 50-59; of Tree Swallows, 147
- flicker. *See* Northern Flicker
- Ford's Colony, VA sanctuary, 152
- Franklin, Frances, article on substitute nest for nuthatches, 64
- Freeman, Ann, article on young female's nest building, 76
- Gilbertson, Steven L., articles on: House Sparrow trap, 96-98; PVC nest box, 131-135
- golf courses as bird sanctuaries, 152
- grasshoppers controlled by bluebirds, 76

- guards: raccoon, 49-50, 136; snake, 22
 Gutzke, Theodore, award to, photo, 29, 32
- Harris, William C., article on monitoring boxes, 104
- Hoepfner, Marcy, article on own trail, 109-110
- House Sparrows: foiled on NC trail, 26; as foster parents for Tree Swallow nestling, 151-152; nest box designed to inhibit, 127-130; nest as replacement for bluebird nest, 23; trap for, 96-98
- Huber, Joe, award to, 29-30
- index to Volume 14 (1992) of *Sialia*, 77-80
- insect control by birds, 123-125
- IPM (integrated pest management), 123-125
- Janetatos, Mary D.: Bluebird Tales, 38-39, 74-75, 116-118, 158-159; report on 15th Annual NABS Meeting, 27-29
- Jernigan, Charlotte: at Annual Meeting, photo, 28; Presidential Points, 2, 42, 82, 122
- Jones, Jennifer, award to, photo, 30, 32
- Kidder, Alicia, with nest box, photo, 67
- Kingston, Ron: photo of bluebird in snow, 142; Speakers' Bureau reports, 99, 112, 143-146
- Kujanik, Joseph A., article on promoting IN bluebirds, 110
- Kunz, James R., articles on: Blue Jay predation, 59; own rookie season, 111-112
- Letters to the Editor, 36-37, 72-73, 114-115, 156-157
- license plate "Sialia," photo, 155
- Literature Review, 63, 126
- Macbeth, Don, article on seasonal conversion of boxes, 91-92
- Malette, Amy S., nest box report, 43-48
- Martin, Chuck, article on ME school project, 149-150
- Maxson, Marion, poem, 160
- Mayfield prediction method, 83-90
- McCarty, John P., article on birds controlling insect pests, 123-125
- McFaul, John, article on fledging swallows, 147
- mealworm feeder, photos, 138
- Miller, Brian, article on monitoring boxes, 105-106
- Mississippi, bluebirds on rebound, 71
- monitoring of boxes, 50-59, 93-95, 104-106, 137-139
- Mountain Bluebird trail reports, 107
- Murray, Wilson, Jr., article on MS trails, 71
- Mussmo, Debbie, poem, 35
- myths about bluebirds, readers' responses to, 50-55, 105-106
- nest boxes: ant proofing, 93-95; field tests of several styles, 3-11; flickers use after bluebirds, photo, 34; ME school-community project, photo, 149-150; monitoring of, 50-55, 93-95, 104-106, 137-139; netting as snake guard for, 22; 1992 report, 43-48; NC sales aid charity, plexiglass and aluminum sides, photos, 69-70; Prothonotary Warblers use, photos, 17-19, 20-21; PVC, slot and round entrances, mounting tips, photos, 131-135, 146; raccoon deterrents, 49-50, 136; rescued nuthatches placed in substitute nest, 64; seasonal conversion, 91-92; slot, 102-103, 131-135; sparrow-inhibiting, 127-130; see also nest box trails
- nest box trails: Canadian reports, 106-107; on Dow Corning center, as building for the future, 108-109; Mississippi successes, 71; 1992 report, 43-48; pairing boxes to deter Tree Swallows, 62; productivity despite not monitoring, 93-95; reestablished NC trail foils House Sparrows, 25; students help Public Service Co. of OK establish trail, photo, 113; unexpected creatures inhabiting TX boxes, 154; see also nest boxes
- nesting survival rates, 83-90
- nestlings: blowfly removal, 153; Blue Jay predation on, 59; "midwife" extricates from shell, photo, 137-139; netting protects from snake, 22; survival probability studies, 83-90
- nests: sparrow's used as replacement for bluebird's, 23; stub for Prothonotary Warbler, photos, 17-19
- netting as snake guard, 22
- Nielsen, Tami, article on sparrows as foster parents, 151-152
- Noel raccoon guard, 136

North American Bluebird Society: Conservation awards, 148; 15th Annual Meeting, photos, 29-34; research awards, 60, 142; Research Committee, 60; Treasurer's Report, 40
Northern Flicker: portrait photo, 101; uses bluebird nest box, photo, 101
North Salem, NY school project, 150
nuthatch. See Brown-headed Nuthatch

Palermo, Kristopher, poem, 80
parasitic wasps, interaction with bluebirds and blowflies, 13-16
Parks, Sara Beth, 4-H champion, 24
Pearman, Myrna D., award to, photo, 68
Perry, Al, award to, 30
pest management by integrated means including birds, 123-125
Peterson, Dick, award to, photo, 30
Peterson, Roger Tory, presents award, photo, 68
Phillips, Michael, article on blowflies, 153
Pitts, T. David, Literature Review, 63, 126
plants, various bird species' feeding habits, 61
Pleines, Veronica A., article on tests of nest box styles, 3-11
Pockmire, Dick, nest boxes aid charity, 69-70
poetry by: Marion Maxson, 160; Debbie Musmon, 35; Kristopher Palermo, 80; Robert A. Stevenson, 119; Edna B. Willis, 120
population survival studies, 83-90
predation problems, various solutions, photos, 65-66
premature fledging, 50-59
Presidential Points, 2, 42, 82, 122
Prothonotary Warblers: nest stub for, photo, 17-19; use box inside DC Beltway, photos, 20-21
Public Service Co. of OK trail, 113
PVC nest boxes, photos, 131-135, 146

Question Corner, 12

raccoons: deterrence methods, 49-50; Noel guard, 136
Reed, Peggy, article on TX trail, 154
Rogers, John, award to, photo, 30, 31
Roost, Craig, slot box, 102-103

Sawyer, Laurance: article on Prothonotary Warbler nest stub, 17-19; GA award to, 68

Schmidt, Therese, article on survival probability, 83-90
schools: ME interdisciplinary unit aids community, photo, 149-150; NY ongoing nest box project, photo, 150
Scriven, Dorene, article on pairing nest boxes, 62
Sialia: index to volume 14 (1992), 77-80; tenth anniversary issue available, 153
snake entangled by netting, photo, 22
snowstorm kills bluebirds, 140-141
sparrows. See House Sparrows
Speakers' Bureau reports, 99, 112, 143-146
Stevenson, Robert A.: conclusion of articles on bear attacking feeders, 25; poem, 119
survival prediction studies, 83-90
swallows. See Tree Swallows

Thompson-Delaney, Julie, article on bluebirds, blowflies, and wasps, 13-16
trails. See nest box trails
trap for sparrows, 96-98
Tree Swallows: Blue Jay predation on, 59; fledging of hand-reared, 147; House Sparrows as foster parents for, 151-152
Twiname, B. Gayle, article on TX trail, 154

wasps, parasitic, and blowflies and bluebirds, 13-16
Wendt, Delores and Ernie, accept award, photo, 34
Willis, Edna B., poem, 120
Wood Duck, photo, 100
wrist band of bluebirds, photo, 139

Zeleny, Lawrence, Question Corner, 12
Zyla, John, article on warbler nesting inside DC Beltway, 20

Prepared for *Sialia* by
Nancy E. MacClintock-Indexes



A Welcome to Spring

*The day was bright and clear,
Not a sound was heard at all.
It was the special time of year
to hear a bluebird call.*

*The winter white had gone away.
Brown sod had turned to green.
The cedar house was on display
for bluebirds to be seen.*

*Toward the sky my eyes did see
a flash of brilliant blue.
That very moment it would be
my special dream come true.*

*The liquid sound in flight
made music to my ear.
A melody of such delight
I knew that Spring was here.*

*Soon upon the house did perch
a lady bird so true.
Her job? The grass to search
of soft and special hue.*

*Quickly in the box was made
a finely woven nest.
Next, six pale blue eggs were laid.
Now you surmise the rest.*

— Jean Perkins

(BOOSTERS — Continued from inside back cover)

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(Continued on page 80)

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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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