

Sialia

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The Quarterly Journal
Of
The North American
Bluebird Society

“Bluebird conservation is a task that cannot be accomplished by law, edict, oratory, or armchair philosophy. The cost is small but the reward is great. . . . The ‘bluebird of happiness’ may then come to you!”

Lawrence Zeleny
1904-1995



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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. All three bluebird species are native only to the North American continent, although each inhabits different regions generally separated by the Rocky Mountains and by altitudinal preferences.

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

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Sialia

The Quarterly Journal
About Bluebirds

Volume 17, Number 3
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COVER

The seal of the North American Bluebird Society with Founder Lawrence Zeleny's final statement from his book *The Bluebird: How You Can Help Its Fight for Survival*.

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.



NABS Founder Lawrence Zeleny at the 1986 annual meeting in Wagoner, Oklahoma.

Photograph by John Findlay, III.



Lawrence Zeleny 1904-1995

The bluebird world lost one of its brightest luminaries, Lawrence Zeleny, on May 27, 1995, when he succumbed to a heart attack. Larry had celebrated his 91st birthday on April 30, 1995, in his home at University Park, Maryland. For the last several years he had remained at his home in a second "retirement," while others had taken on the task of monitoring his 65-box bluebird trail at the USDA Beltsville Agricultural Research Center. This followed a retirement from a long career as a biochemist in the USDA. He had devoted that retirement time to promoting bluebird conservation throughout first the State of Maryland, and then continent-wide by writing articles for the then *Purple Martin News*. His book: *The Bluebird: How You Can Help Its Fight For Survival* published by Indiana University Press appeared in 1976. In 1977's June issue of *National Geographic Magazine* his article "Song Of Hope For The Bluebirds" stimulated such widespread interest that a group of colleagues gathered around Larry as Founder and the North American Bluebird Society was formed. Larry maintained a voluminous correspondence and telephone advisory system with bluebird enthusiasts everywhere. His gentle unassuming way endeared him to his many audiences when through his "bluebird talks" he could inspire his listeners, be they Lions Club members, garden club members, a youth group, or bird club members. Larry's beloved wife, Olive, preceded him in death by eight years. He is survived by a son, Bill, and a daughter, Nancy Zeleny Kuhn, and four grandchildren. He leaves behind him a legacy of love for nature and for caring for one of God's most beautiful creatures--the bluebird. His friends and followers in the bluebird conservation movement will miss a leader they loved, and we can rest assured that the Author of Creation is blessing Larry with the best of all consolations!

--Mary D. Janetatos



Presidential Points

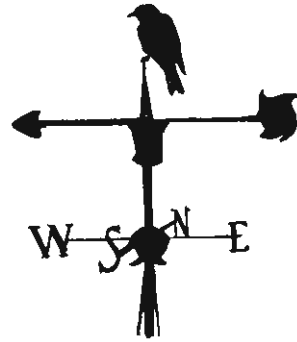
Charlotte Jernigan

Americans have long professed a love of the land and its wild creatures, and the appearance of several thousand people at the Bluebird Festival in Jackson, Michigan was proof that the previous ten years of success had opened the way for the eleventh year. This festival was also the site of the Eighteenth Annual Meeting of the North American Bluebird Society. We want to thank Tom Hodgson, Director of the Dahlem Environmental Education Center, Vera Barror, Diane Valen, and other volunteers who hosted our society and extended a warm welcome despite the snow and cold temperatures.

Friday, 3 March was the field trip day. There's always anticipation in the air as we wonder who will be there to board the bus. It reminds us again of our great fortune in being together and being a part of a "bluebird family" that aspires to impart the idea that the conservation of wildlife is as much about people as it is about our natural heritage.

At 9:00 a.m. we boarded a chartered bus (complete with "water closet") and were on our way to tour the Kellogg Bird Sanctuary about an hour away. We got lost briefly and arrived a little later than scheduled, but the guides and waterfowl quickly put us back on track. Some of us had never seen a black swan, and though it is an exotic species of waterfowl, the opportunity to enjoy it was appreciated. They have never become established in the wild.

An excursion to Kellogg Forest enabled us to watch maple syruping procedures; we were instructed in the techniques and then given a sample of the syrup. The raw sap is processed until all of the water is cooked out of it; absolutely nothing is added. The final product is pure maple syrup. I was surprised to learn that syrup can be made from any of the maple species, and that nothing is done to plug the hole when the bag or bucket is removed. The wound is allowed to seal itself. (Maybe I don't need to worry about



that Yellow-bellied Sapsucker whose beauty delights me in the fall but whose habit of drilling holes all around the trunk of my maple causes me to raise an eyebrow.)

The fact that our motel was, out of necessity, eight miles from the Jackson Community College where the Bluebird Festival was held made timing and traveling a bit difficult; however, once at the festival we never lacked for a choice of activities. The fieldhouse was filled with conservation exhibits, displays, and beautiful wildlife art for sale. In an adjoining building, programs with staggered starting times were in progress. On Saturday I managed to attend and enjoy four of them; though the lecture rooms were large, it was always "standing room only."

James R. Hill, III, founder of the Purple Martin Conservation Association, was a guest speaker who reminded us that martins are totally dependent upon man except for a very few in the West that nest in cactus cavities. Mr. Hill is to be commended for the dedication and quality of his contributions in promoting the conservation of these beautiful, beneficial birds.

If you missed this meeting, be assured that you were missed. Mark your calendar with the following dates and make it a New Year's resolution to be with us.

1996-Ontario, Canada-September 13, 14, 15

1997-Orange County, California (probably Anaheim)-Summer

1998-Indian Head, Saskatchewan, Canada-Summer

Details will be announced later. ■



DR. LAWRENCE ZELENY

An Odyssey of Love

Jon Boone

This article, by the first editor of Sialia, is reprinted from the Winter 1980 issue in memory of the founder of the North American Bluebird Society.

A few weeks after Muhammed Ali lost his heavyweight title in February, 1978, I spent a few days visiting with my brother, Bob, at his home in Hagerstown, Maryland. The snow and the extreme cold of this western Maryland city conspired with the spectre of an aging Ali to deepen a growing sense of my own mortality. Perhaps realizing this, my brother suggested we take in the sights of a rather magical land 12 miles west of the city known as Polecat Hollow.

Polecat Hollow and I have become good friends over the years. My brother Dan placed a number of bluebird trails there. On this particular day the ice and snow melded together the mountains, lakes, meadows and sky, creating a stained glass window into a more perfect

world. We saw a deer, then two, finally a half dozen moving slowly down the slope of a nearby mountain toward a partly frozen stream. I stopped the car engine so as not to startle the deer. Time slowed as the temperature inside the car rushed to mate with the arctic air outside. The steam from our breathing caused a mild haze to settle around us. As the vapors cleared, our eyes fixed upon movement along a fence row not ten feet away. The movement ceased, revealing five of the most exquisite bluebirds I have ever seen. The blue and russet colors shone like precious gems against the backdrop of white and silver and gray.

For nearly one-half hour we watched silently as the birds and the deer struggled successfully for survival in this harsh terrain. Then a passing automobile careened by and the bluebirds were gone. Bob and I left soon thereafter, our lives somehow different and renewed. It is a vision forever imprinted on my mind, a portent of good things to come. It was a good year. Ali regained his title. Then Larry Zeleny, who was undoubtedly responsible for those bluebirds in Polecat Hollow, founded the North American Bluebird Society.

This prologue seems a fitting introduction to Larry. For the past dozen years he has been the champion for the cause of bluebird conservation. His trail in Beltsville, Maryland is a living monument to that cause. The hundreds of articles he has written on the subject, culminating in

his book, *The Bluebird: How You Can Help Its Fight For Survival*, have motivated and counseled thousands of people across the continent. Perhaps he has lectured hundreds of times on his favorite subject, giving informed answers with patient enthusiasm. However, although he is indeed a forerunner, a leader in the field of bluebird preservation, his fondest wish is to have others become leaders. His book's subtitle gives him away. He wants us to find our own Polecat Hollows, to establish our own trails, to monitor those trails, to experiment with prudence and, he hopes, to appreciate the beauty of the bluebird and its struggle to endure in our own way.

Larry was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota on April 30, 1904. He was second of two sons born to Anthony and Mattie Zeleny. As a professor of physics with the University of Minnesota, Anthony was hardly wealthy. But he gave his family a fine home on a bank of the Mississippi River, a beautiful garden and a legacy of community service and intellectual curiosity, all of which has served Larry well for the last 75 years.

However, when 14 months old, a diet of raw milk almost claimed Larry's life. The family physician prescribed plenty of fresh air and sunshine as remedy. Consequently, Larry spent much of his second summer in the back yard, confined to his baby buggy, watching for movement anywhere. His interest in birds may well have been the result of this experience. On the other hand, his interest in raw milk disappeared.

Minnesota's moderate summers compensate for the very long, very cold winters. At that time Minneapolis was not a large industrial center and there were open spaces and fields aplenty along the river. The automobile was a rare sight; in fact, Larry decided that horses were better because "they didn't make as much noise." Larry tilled the soil along with his father, and in his early teens won a city-wide competition for cultivating the best garden. He enjoyed the out-of-doors as much as possible.

When he was nine years old, Larry's

Sunday school teacher announced a contest. The child who could identify the greatest number of birds would be awarded Chester A. Reed's classic pocket field guide. Characteristically Larry won easily, despite the fact he submitted two lists--one for the birds he saw in the city zoo, the other for those he saw in the field.

With his Reed field guide and his father's old Zeiss binoculars, Larry became more than passing fair as a young naturalist. And even as a child, Larry learned from his "mistakes." For example, in grade school, Larry crafted an immaculate nesting box for wrens and received a grade of A for his labors. A neighboring classmate threw together a few boards in loose fashion and received a "gentleman's D" for his nesting box. The next spring, both boys hoisted their boxes. Needless to say, the wrens chose the shanty house, while Larry's box went unoccupied. To this day, he recommends that nesting boxes need not be artfully constructed.

Like many other bluebird conservationists, Larry doesn't know what sparked his love for the species. During his youth, bluebirds were "always there," nourished by the Mississippi. Other people had bluebird boxes in the neighborhood, with bluebird tenants. By the time he entered high school, Larry, using a Department of Agriculture bulletin, was building his own bluebird houses. However, in one of his first boxes, Larry attracted the House Sparrow, which in turn was increasingly attracted to the area by Minnesota's ubiquitous granaries. Disturbed by this interloper, Larry wrote Joseph H. Dodson for a deluxe, six-dollar sparrow trap. He used the trap effectively for one year. He got bluebirds regularly afterward.

In high school, Larry's academic progress went as expected for the son of a physicist. He graduated in January, 1921, after being passed ahead several grades. He immediately entered the University of Minnesota's spring term, intent on majoring in mathematics. Before

his graduation in 1925, three events occurred which affected irrevocably the course of Larry's future.

First, at the start of his junior year, he survived another life-threatening ordeal--encephalitis. However, the illness took its toll. Larry soon discovered his brain had been robbed of the ability to understand all but the simplest arithmetic functions. He was completely lost in higher math. Although he relearned much of what he had forgotten, his ability to conceptualize mathematically was gone forever. He changed his major to chemistry, a compromise which allowed him to combine his respect for science with practical applications.

Secondly, Larry took a course in ornithology from Professor Thomas S. Roberts, author of the magnificent two-volume *Birds of Minnesota*. The administration of the University at first adamantly opposed having its curricular offerings tainted with the subject of ornithology. But Dr. Roberts, a wealthy retired physician, was determined to teach such a course. He presented the administration with an offer they couldn't refuse: he would teach the course for nothing.

The class was set. Larry enrolled. He felt right at home. He enjoyed the field trips, often to the best country clubs, trips which Dr. Roberts financed himself. But he especially enjoyed the long hours of consultation with Dr. Roberts.

Finally, there was a girl enrolled in that class, a science education major named Olive Lowen, and pretty Olive had an eye on Larry. She finally made the shy Zeleny kid notice her, and Olive and Larry became a team. They relaxed in each other's company, having many common interests in wildlife conservation. Today, Olive insists she endured some of those long field trips more because of her interest in Larry than for the birds she might have seen.

Both Larry and Olive received their bachelors degrees the same year. Olive began her career as a teacher and Larry started graduate school at the University.

He earned his M.S. in 1927 and his Ph.D. in biochemistry in 1930. Throughout these years the two stayed close. As soon as Larry completed his final degree, they married on June 19, 1930, six days after their engagement. For Larry, a veritable whirlwind courtship. For Olive, well, she claims Larry is a very practical man.

Larry had a fellowship with Northwest Paper Company and was an agent for the U.S. Forest Service, studying the chemistry of coniferous seeds. But the great depression had taken firm root and Larry went nine months without work. Finally, he returned to the University for post-doctoral work. In 1933, a biochemistry professor mentioned that Minnesota Valley Canning Co. (now Green Giant) needed a chemist for its operation in Le Seuer, a small town west of Minneapolis. Larry applied for and got the job. He and Olive and their daughter Nancy, born in 1931, left for Le Seuer. Minnesota Valley paid Larry a lofty 150 dollars a month, which allowed the Zelenys to live as royalty, renting a magnificent house and retaining a maid to help while Olive gave birth to their second child, Bill, in 1934.

The depression had a profound effect on Larry. He has many poignant stories to tell of suffering, of sacrifice, of people helping other people survive, one day at a time. Then came the New Deal, offering people new hope, and things did get better. At least fewer people starved or scavenged for a piece of coal. The imagery of the depression is a common thread in Larry's writings about the bluebird and perhaps explains his cautious optimism that people can come together with sufficient force enabling their common goals to triumph.

In any case, Larry carried on and in 1935 came to Washington, D.C. as an associate chemist to work for the Department of Agriculture. Starting salary: \$3,200 per year. The Zelenys drove their tightly packed 1929 Chrysler from Minneapolis, rented a house in Takoma Park, Maryland for a little over three years, then, in 1939, moved to their present address in University Park.

Larry held various scientific and administrative positions with the Department of Agriculture, culminating in the position of Branch Chief of the Grain Division from 1943 until his retirement in 1966. During that time he authored or coauthored 62 technical papers in the general field of agricultural biochemistry. He helped develop internationally recognized procedures for evaluating the quality of cereal grains and oil-bearing seeds. In 1960 he was one of six members of a United States cultural exchange team invited to the Soviet Union, travelling 6,000 miles of Russian territory in little more than a month. He is a past president of the American Association of Cereal Chemists (1956-1957). He has received numerous professional awards and rightly so. He led a most distinguished professional career.

Today, his children are successful members of the community. His son, Bill, is a university educator in Monterey, California; his daughter, Nancy Zeleny Kuhn, works for an insurance firm in Rockville, Maryland. They have given Larry and Olive four grandchildren. The Zelenys live modestly but graciously. At any given time, expect to find two or three prize-winning poodles guarding their front door. Expect to find numerous birds around his large backyard foliage, complete, yes, with garden. And, of course, expect to find reminders of bluebird activity throughout, from his basement workshop where he continually tinkers with building a better nesting box, to the Richard Sloan autographed print, "Eastern Bluebird," he received from the Griggsville Nature Society. To a bluebirder, Larry's home is the North Pole on Christmas Eve.

How did it all start? The clues abound. He came from a marvelous family; he met T.S. Roberts; he married the right girl (their golden anniversary is less than six months away); he survived the great depression; he saw triumph in adversity; he became a respected scientist; and, he is a very practical man. But probably the best answer is that he is doing just what he would have been doing had he been

independently wealthy. For this society has not chosen to subsidize heavily those working for bluebird conservation.

With the Department of Agriculture, Larry occupied an office for nearly 25 years on the grounds of the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center. There were quite a few bluebirds at the Center until 1950. But then came an invasion of starlings and the bluebirds disappeared. Larry was concerned, but the press of business precluded his personal intervention. In 1955 he did place a nesting box on a pole outside his office window and monitored it constantly. Bluebirds became permanent tenants. But they were exceedingly scarce elsewhere on the spacious grounds of the Center, graced with habitat which should have been full of bluebirds.

With his retirement, he inherited that most-precious of all commodities. Time. He asked the Center's director for permission to place 13 nesting boxes around the area for the 1967 nesting season. Permission granted. At the same time he personally bought 144 nesting boxes and asked that they be placed around the state's parks. Permission granted. From his correspondence with Dr. T.E. Musselman, among others, he developed what he thought was a good nesting box design, with attention given to cavity size, insulation, ventilation and drainage. That design, with little modification, endures to this day.

The parks project was aborted due to human vandalism. The Beltsville "trail," which had the official sanction of the Audubon Naturalist Society of the Central Atlantic States as a research project, successfully fledged 20 bluebirds in its first year. As a result, Larry increased the trail twofold the following year and fledged more than 80 young.

In this same year, 1968, Larry learned about a newly formed group, The National Association for the Protection and Propagation of the Purple Martins and Bluebirds of America. He joined the organization, then journeyed to Illinois for

(Continued on page 111)

1994 Nesting Box Report

Kevin L. Berner and Brian S. Smith

Introduction

Readers comment that it is always encouraging to read the annual nest box survey report. Even though one may have had a poor year for bluebirds, reading about other bluebird enthusiasts' success keeps their hopes up. This is the fourteenth annual survey of nest boxes conducted by the North American Bluebird Society. Although the survey form has varied somewhat over the years, the overall productivity data is probably the most thorough available for bluebirds in the United States and Canada. This year's data is the most complete since surveys were begun. Many large trails that could not report in time for previous deadlines were included in this compilation. We also obtained summaries from the newsletters of several large state or regional bluebird groups that had not been included before. Overall we documented 112,227 bluebirds fledging, by far our highest total ever. Much of this year's increase is due to more complete data, not necessarily a major increase in bluebird numbers.

East

Bluebird counts in 1994 were up more than 4,000 birds over last year in the eastern region. House Wren and chickadee numbers were also up this year, while Tree Swallows showed a decline over 1993. Selected fledging results in this region include 16,433 Eastern Bluebirds, 4,826 Tree Swallows, and 2,510 House Wrens (See Table 1).

Yvonne Shore of Winston-Salem, North Carolina had a male House Sparrow kill her bluebird chicks for the first time. She lost both the first and second broods for a total of 7 chicks.

Leslie DeSoto of Columbia, New Jersey found eggs on the ground under two different bird houses. This is typical of nest destruction by House Wrens. These eggs would usually show small holes from the wren puncturing the eggs and throwing them out.

Alice Saunders of Petersburg, Pennsylvania had serious predation problems due to wrens as well as snakes. She lost 57 young and 71 eggs to predation. She fledged 42 Eastern Bluebirds, 13 Black-capped Chickadees, 4 Tufted Titmice, 17 Tree Swallows, and 93 House Wrens.

Ken Smith of Stewartstown, Pennsylvania felt that he may have had

weather problems which contributed to his worst year in the last five years. He found at least 15 dead nestlings from first nestings all undisturbed in boxes with the parents being live and present. He felt that earwigs in his boxes in mid-summer prevented second or third nestings. Despite his problems he fledged 30 Eastern Bluebirds, 5 Black-capped Chickadees, and 27 House Wrens.

Raymond Marr Jr, of Pawtucket, reporting for the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, recommended not putting Noel wire predator guards on boxes until after bluebirds have established a nest. Before that point he feels they may be a deterrent. His survey form indicated that his 51 boxes produced 280 Eastern Bluebirds, 21 Tree Swallows, and 6 House Wrens.

Charter member Thomas Mulvey of Pine Beach, New Jersey fledged 164 bluebirds from his 20 standard boxes. He is a master bird bander and banded all these chicks on the Collier's Mill Wildlife Management Area.

Rich Wells of Springville, New York monitors 122 nest boxes from which he fledged 152 bluebirds, 277 Tree Swallows, and 12 Black-capped Chickadees. Of all the reports to the New York State Bluebird

Society, he had the second highest bluebird fledging rate for an individual.

Mark Oakley of Westfield, North Carolina had bluebirds use 56 of 100 nest boxes fledging 446 young along with 6 Carolina Chickadees. This year he had his highest fledging rate since he began in 1988.

The perennially productive Genesee Country Museum Nature Center in Memford, New York fledged 71 bluebirds,, 95 Tree Swallows, 118 House Wrens, 11 Great-crested Flycatchers, 11 American Kestrels, 483 Wood Ducks, and 54 Hooded Mergansers. Their bluebirds showed a strong preference for Peterson boxes. Bluebirds made 30 attempts in 106 standard boxes and 11 attempts in the 10 Peterson boxes.

Willard Cash of Goldsboro, North Carolina fledged an estimated 1,343 bluebirds from 399 boxes in two counties. He was not able to monitor one of his trails as extensively as the other due to health problems but feels his estimate for it is conservative.

Mildred Dixon of Jacksonville, Florida monitors 51 nest boxes in two counties. She fledged 230 bluebirds, 8 Carolina Chickadees, 23 Tufted Titmice, 6 Brown-headed Cowbirds, and 15 Great-crested Flycatchers.

Reporting for the Amity Lake Bluebird Trail in Allegheny County, New York, Vivian Mills Pitzrick documented fledging 162 bluebirds, 275 Tree Swallows, and 17 House Wrens. She reported that 39% of their bluebird nests were successful, 90% of the eggs hatched, while 10% did not hatch or disappeared. One nest out of 44 had white eggs. She counted 1,191 blowfly pupa or larvae in 28 nests (ave. 27.1/nest). This trail has produced 2,013 bluebirds since 1971.

Fred Sahl reporting for a group in Church Road, Virginia fledged 386 bluebirds. He has a problem with snake predation but feels he is controlling it somewhat using mothballs and sulphur.

Dr. Robert Hammond of Earlysville, Virginia reported fledging 764 bluebirds, 99 Black-capped Chickadees, 101 Tree

Swallows, 19 House Wrens, 4 Tufted Titmice, and 5 White-breasted Nuthatches.

I coordinate the surveys of the Schoharie County Bluebird Society in upstate New York. In 1994 we had our second highest bluebird and highest Tree Swallow fledging level since we began the society in 1985. A total of 1,682 bluebirds, 2,482 Tree Swallows, 714 House Wrens, 115 Black-capped Chickadees, 3 American Kestrels, and 46 Wood Ducks fledged from members' nest boxes. Twenty-eight percent of all bluebirds fledgings documented by the New York State Bluebird Society were from this group.

David Suber of Portersville, Pennsylvania reported that although raccoons are abundant in his area he had no nest losses. He mounts his boxes on 3/4 in. (19 cm) metal conduit covered with bearing grease. In his third year with a bluebird trail, he fledged 41 bluebirds, 22 Tree Swallows, and 12 House Wrens from 23 boxes.

Richard Hill of Poland, New York lost a bluebird the day it fledged when a neighbor's cat killed it. It is important for bluebird enthusiasts to keep their cats indoors or confined around the time you expect bluebird chicks to leave the nest. Even the adults are vulnerable to cats due to their ground feeding habits.

Melanie Platte of Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina had 15 day old bluebird chicks jump out of her box as a snake climbed up the metal mounting pole. She placed the chicks back into the box and the adults cared for them for five more days before they fledged. While the male appeared to want to nest again, there was no second nesting at the site.

Richard and Nancy Cole of Marietta, Georgia had Eastern Screech-Owls fledge two young from a flicker box and two Northern Flickers fledge from their owl box. They also had Tufted Titmice and Carolina Chickadees, but no bluebirds.

Julia Dugan of Marysville, Pennsylvania has had flying squirrels nest in 3 concrete bird houses for 10 years. Last year she added a fourth concrete box and it was



used by these squirrels also. She has also had problems with wasp and hornet nests in her boxes. They haven't been deterred by soap rubbed on the box ceilings.

Michelle Toop of Arab, Alabama has been plagued by problems with flying squirrels preying upon her golf course bluebirds. In 1993, she found two boxes raided by flying squirrels and in 1994 they destroyed nine nests. She also reported that some of her friends observed bluebirds nesting in newspaper tubes next to mailboxes. She noted the similarity between the tubes and the Zuern's tree branch nest box design. Overall she fledged 126 bluebirds from her 35 box trail.

Central

In the Central Region bluebird numbers were up sharply in 1994 over 1993. Other species showing increases were Black-capped Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, and House Wrens, while Tree Swallow numbers declined. A total of 50,223 Eastern Bluebirds fledged in this region. In 1993, approximately 24,000 bluebirds were reported for this region (See Table 1 for complete fledging rates).

House Sparrow predation was observed on an adult female Carolina Chickadee by Sally Rager in Clarksville, Tennessee, and on bluebirds by Jim and Ann Auer of Leesburg, Indiana.

House Sparrows were a serious problem for Donald Hannis of Jamestown, Indiana. He removed 273 sparrow nests with eggs from his 56 nest boxes. No sparrows nested in his 10 open-topped Bauldry boxes, while they did attempt to use standard, Peterson, slot, and tree branch boxes.

Edwin Edlund of Muskegon, Michigan lost more eggs (23) to wrens than in any other year. His average loss to wrens has been 10-12 eggs. He also observed that raccoons climbed through grease on his nest box posts. Although his bluebird productivity was reduced by inclement weather conditions, he still fledged 201 bluebirds, 90 Tree Swallows, and 7 Tufted Titmice from his 150 boxes.

Joe Konefes of Libertyville, Illinois observed fewer wren problems early in the nesting season following a spring burn in his trail area which reduced cover. When taller vegetation returned in July, wrens did destroy one nest with five bluebird eggs.

The nesting peak was delayed by severe winter weather from June to July for Ed Barnett of Huntington, West Virginia. Compared to past seasons he observed fewer Carolina Chickadees and more House Sparrows.

Jim and Jean Piland of Waldo, Kansas fledged 117 Eastern Bluebirds from 145 standard boxes. This was down from the 307 bluebirds fledged in 1991. Temperatures dropped to 19° F (-7° C) during early nestings causing many nest failures. They also fledged 355 House Wrens.

Howard Malone of Marion, Mississippi fledged 508 bluebirds. Seventeen of his 145 boxes were made from 4 in. (10.2 cm) diameter painted cardboard carpet tubes. He also fledged 7 Carolina Chickadees, 37 Tufted Titmice, and 1 Carolina Wren.

Terry Glanzman of Mondovi, Wisconsin fledged 816 bluebirds, 250 Tree Swallows, and 100 House Wrens from 373 boxes. Bluebirds nested 354 times in 343 Olson boxes, and 32 times in 30 tree branch bird houses.

Steve Eno paired eight tree branch boxes with eight Peterson boxes. The Peterson boxes had 3 successful bluebird and 2 successful swallow nestings and 3 wren nestling attempts. The tree branch boxes only had 2 wren attempts.

Frank Zuern of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, is the originator of the tree branch box. He had 20 bluebird nesting attempts in his 67 standard boxes and 14 attempts in 46 tree branch boxes. Overall he fledged 115 Eastern Bluebirds, 255 Tree Swallows, 64 House Wrens, and 4 Prothonotary Warblers.

Mary Reed of Wildwood, Texas reported fledging 2,714 bluebirds over the seven year life of her trail. In 1994, she fledged 525 Eastern Bluebirds, 78 Tree Swallows, 36 Tufted Titmice, and 5 Carolina Wrens from 191 boxes.

Bob and Judy Peak of Henderson, Kentucky submitted a report for a large trail in Kentucky and Tennessee. They fledged 1,005 bluebirds, 85 Carolina

Wrens, 7 White-breasted Nuthatches, and 4 House Wrens from 210 nest boxes.

Peter Eifer of Kirtland, Ohio reported for the Holden Arboretum that 355 bluebirds, 253 Tree Swallows, 58 House Wrens, and 11 Black-capped Chickadees were fledged from 203 nest boxes. He observed 38 dead bluebird nestlings resulting from cold and wet weather. In addition, 40 eggs failed to hatch and 16 eggs disappeared from clutches where the other eggs did hatch.

The Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota's newsletter indicated that 16,724 bluebirds fledged from 4,184 successful broods. Of these reports, 9,459 bluebirds fledged within Minnesota.

Steve Eno reported for Bluebirds Across Nebraska that 3,015 bluebirds fledged in Nebraska. This was the highest fledging rate in Nebraska in the last six years of records. They reported fledging 1.1 chicks/nest box in 1994, which also was the highest rate in the six year period.

Edgar Bagley of Manhattan, Kansas lost seven or eight nests to raccoon predation. He also lost one or two nests to snakes. Overall he lost over 30 eggs or nestlings to predation. He also removed cowbird eggs from two bluebird nests.

Tom Barber of Cambridge, Ohio lost 35 Tree Swallows and five Eastern Bluebirds to raccoon predation. Once he started to grease nest box poles he eliminated raccoon predation. He also found the Noel guards to be successful. He lost five nestlings to a snake and four more to a cat. House Sparrows killed additional nestlings. Overall he fledged 162 bluebirds, 18 Tree Swallows, and 4 House Wrens.

In 1993, Catherine Croke of Wauwatosa, Wisconsin lost several nests to raccoon predation. In 1994 she installed Noel guards on her NABS and Peterson boxes and lost no eggs or nestlings. She fledged 20 Eastern Bluebirds, 10 Black-capped Chickadees, 9 House Wrens, and 5 Great-crested Flycatchers.

Raccoon predation had been a serious problem for James Masterson of Granville, Ohio. In 1994 he put all of his boxes on

heavily greased metal poles eliminating all raccoon predation.

Richard and Marlys Hjort of Chisago City, Minnesota reported that raccoons are their worst problem. They feel that the raccoons have figured out every predator guard and that grease must be applied in "big dollops" to be effective. They hypothesize that low frog populations are a part of the problem. Amphibian populations have been crashing throughout much of the world in recent decades. All 27 of the Hjort's bluebird nesting attempts came in their 120 Peterson boxes, while none were attempted in 11 standard boxes. They fledged 52 Eastern Bluebirds, 150 Tree Swallows, 44 House Wrens, and 5 Great-crested Flycatchers.

Kenneth Schar of Libertyville, Illinois feels that he has controlled his raccoon predation problems by mounting his slot boxes on electrical conduit and rebar treated with silicon spray, applied with a cloth, and then polished. He also noted fledging 7 bluebirds in one nesting.

Fire ants caused a female bluebird to stop incubating the eggs in a nest monitored by Richard Sims of Ellisville, Mississippi. He fledged 34 Eastern Bluebirds, 10 Tufted Titmice, and 203 Wood Ducks.

Judy Bland of Cecilia, Kentucky had her worst year ever for bluebirds. She suspects that the severe winter depleted bluebird populations. She did completely eliminate snake predation on her trail by adding the stovepipe snake guard. Overall she fledged 41 Eastern Bluebirds and 16 Carolina Wrens from her 12 boxes.

Mel Keerns of Danville, Illinois protected all his boxes with 3 in. (7.6 cm) PVC pipe or aluminum downspouts over box support posts and fledged 31 bluebirds from 31 eggs from his 11 boxes.

Black rat snakes consumed 33 eggs and 16 chicks on Harold Bullerman's trail in Windsor, Illinois. He fledged 86 bluebirds and 17 House Wrens, while his one Great-Crested Flycatcher nest was unsuccessful.

Dick Walker of Loogootee, Indiana felt

that hot and dry weather increased snake predation on his bluebird trail. In 1993 he lost only 26 chicks and eggs, while in 1994 he lost over 100. He has been experimenting with low vent PVC boxes. He makes saw kerfs on the bottom 2 in. (5.1 cm) of these boxes to let in light. These boxes appeared to discourage House Sparrows.

Edgar Bagley of Manhattan, Kansas observed cowbird eggs in two bluebird nests. John Findlay, III, of Birmingham, Alabama also found cowbird parasitism in his bluebird nests. He removed 4 cowbird eggs from bluebird nests. He also lost some nestings during a Palm Sunday tornado but still fledged 591 bluebirds. The bluebird community was greatly saddened upon learning about John's death in January 1995. He was a leader in bluebird conservation and an inspiration to many NABS members.

Carolyn Fessler of Wagoner, Oklahoma usually has Prothonotary Warblers nest in her boxes. In 1994 she observed a pair of these warblers, but they did not use her boxes.

West

With more complete data gathered from large western region trails in 1994 the overall bluebird tallies were greatly increased. Within the region 33,102 Mountain Bluebirds, 10,158 Western Bluebirds, and 1,311 Eastern Bluebirds fledged. Tree Swallow and House Wren numbers were up also with 9,950 and 1,055 reported, respectively. (See Table 1.)

Rich Layman and Lesley McGalliard of Yakima, Washington reported finding 18 dead Tree Swallows nestlings that were very close to fledging. This followed a week of almost continuous strong winds. They theorize that the winds prevented successful food gathering by the adults.

Duncan Mackintosh of Lethbridge, Alberta reported for the Mountain Bluebird Trails in Canada. They fledged 4,296 bluebirds in 1994 which was a decline over the last two years. The decline was

thought to be due to poor food supply for first broods. Second broods were far less common than usual, despite the seemingly good weather and food supply. The average brood size was four, instead of the usual 6-7. The group banded 2,523 nestling and 95 adult bluebirds. Mountain Bluebird Trails in Montana fledged 15,078 Mountain and 5,313 Western Bluebirds.

Don Stiles and Jean Moore summarized data for the Calgary Area Bluebird Trails. They reported that 4,168 bluebirds and 4,798 Tree Swallows fledged on these trails for the lowest bluebird total since 1988. Swallow fledgings were the record high they have documented.

Don Yoder of Walnut Creek, California lost Western Bluebird chicks to raccoon predation and weather problems. His 94 boxes produced 46 bluebirds, 75 Plain Titmice, 37 Tree Swallows, 10 Black-capped Chickadees, 7 House Wrens, and 2 Brown-headed Nuthatches.

William Anaka of Canora, Saskatchewan reported on his 310 nest box trail. He fledged 620 Mountain Bluebirds, 6 Eastern Bluebirds, 708 Tree Swallows and 46 House Wrens. His bluebird production was down 6% from last year while Tree Swallow production was up 86% from 1993.

Harold Harvey of Cheney, Washington noted that snakes, raccoons, wrens, weasels, and weather were his biggest

problems. He produced 778 Western Bluebirds, 128 Tree Swallows, 42 House Wrens, and 20 White-breasted Nuthatches from his 153 nest boxes.

Charlotte Corkran of Portland fledged 423 Western Bluebirds, 119 Mountain Bluebirds, and 194 bluebirds of unspecified species along with 45 House Wrens and 3 Ash-throated Flycatchers.

Art Gruenig of Cranbrook, British Columbia reported for the Rocky Mountain Naturalists group. Their 400 standard boxes produced 834 Mountain Bluebirds, 538 Western Bluebirds, 260 Tree Swallows, 58 Violet-green Swallows, 41 Mountain and 5 Black-capped Chickadees, 10 Red-breasted and 5 White-breasted Nuthatches, and 15 House Wrens.

Jack Bartley of Scottsdale, Arizona fledged Gila Woodpeckers from his nest boxes for the third year in a row in 1994. Western Screech-Owls nested in boxes in 1992 and 1993, but did not do so last year.

Comment

In order to obtain the most accurate data we need to obtain surveys from as many of our members as possible. We also request that coordinators of state/provincial surveys submit their results to us. Whenever possible it is useful for reports to be submitted on the NABS survey form for ease in tabulation. ■

Table 1. 1994 Nest Box Data by Geographic Region.

	East	Central	West	Total
No. surveys	176	170	41	386
No. standard boxes	4,440	7,747	13,516	25,703
No. Peterson boxes	131	1,911	16	2,058
No. slot boxes	33	369	40	442
No. PVC boxes	6	268	11	285
Other/unspecified boxes	<u>4,024</u>	<u>9,858</u>	<u>6,003</u>	<u>19,885</u>
Total no. boxes	8,634	20,153	19,586	48,373

No. fledged:

Eastern Bluebird	16,433	50,223	1,311	67,967
Western Bluebird	0	0	10,158	10,158
Mountain Bluebird	0	0	33,102	33,102
All bluebird species	16,433	50,233	44,571	111,227
Black-capped Chickadee	516	433	103	1,026
Carolina Chickadee	315	338	0	1,705
Mountain Chickadee	0	0	41	41
Chestnut-backed Chickadee	0	0	3	3
Tufted Titmouse	287	277	0	564
Plain Titmouse	0	0	119	119
White-breasted Nuthatch	14	37	91	142
Brown-headed Nuthatch	11	51	2	64
Red-breasted Nuthatch	9	5	14	28
Tree Swallow	4,826	10,893	9,950	25,669
Violet-green Swallow	0	0	287	287
House Wren	2,510	1,678	1,055	5,243
Carolina Wren	15	57	0	72
Bewick's Wren	0	20	0	20
Great-crested Flycatcher	26	10	0	36
Ash-throated Flycatcher	0	0	3	3
Prothonotary Warbler	0	4	0	4
House Finch	6	5	0	11

Geographic Regions According to States and Provinces

East: Bermuda, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Brunswick, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Nova Scotia, Pennsylvania, Quebec, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, D.C.

Central: Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, Ontario, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia, Wisconsin.

West: Alaska, Alberta, Arizona, British Columbia, California, Colorado, Idaho, Manitoba, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Saskatchewan, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wyoming.

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reproduction in *Sialia*. Black and white photographs do not need this statement because they are acceptable for use as received.

Fire Ant Predation on Blowfly Larvae in a Bluebird Nest Box

Richard A. Sims

I monitor nest boxes on a bluebird trail near my house in the southern half of Jones County, Mississippi. The trail is located near the edge of a 70 acre lake. On 7 July 1994 one box contained four Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) eggs that were being incubated by the female. During the next week, about five inches (12.25 cm) of rain fell in the area, which caused a rise in the level of water in the lake. The high water level forced the evacuation of imported fire ants (*Solenopsis saevissima*) from mounds in low elevations. On 12 July at least 1,000 ants made their way into the box containing the eggs. While the ants were not disturbing the eggs, they were preventing the female bluebird from incubating the eggs; she made several attempts to enter the box, but would not enter. Upon investigation of the nest, I discovered a number (70+) of first instar blowfly (*Protophthora*) larvae being carried by worker ants. I also noticed some worker ants carrying blowfly larvae down the post upon which the box is mounted.

Reports of ants killing and eating Eastern Bluebird, Carolina Chickadee (*Parus carolinensis*), and Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*) hatchlings indicate that the ants are attracted to the hatchlings themselves (Hurst 1980a, 1980b; Smith 1965). I believe that, in this case, the ants were attracted to the blowfly larvae, since there were no hatchlings in the nest. In searching for a higher and drier area, some worker ants probably found the blowfly larvae in the nest, and they led other ants to the larvae.

Roby, et al. (1992) reported that the prevalence of parasitized nests from blowflies increased as the breeding season progressed, and that parasite burden per nestling increased significantly with Julian hatch date. This was the

second brood for the breeding pair in this particular nest box. Blowfly larvae from the first brood of bluebirds probably pupated in the ground below the nest box because all the nesting material from the previous nest was discarded near the box. If hatchlings had been present in the nest at the time of the ant invasion, they almost certainly would have been killed and eaten. Because of the large number of fire ants in the nest, the adult bluebirds abandoned the nest on 13 July. ■

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Route 1, Box 165-H
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NEW NABS SLIDE SHOW

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

Nesting Persistence of House Sparrows

Wayne H. Davis and Beth A. Blankenship

House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) have the reputation of being persistent after claiming a nest box. The male is said to adopt a site and defend it throughout the breeding season. It has been reported that unless the male House Sparrow is destroyed or deported, the box will not be available for bluebirds or other cavity nesting species (Zeleny 1976; Grussing 1980).

It has been our observation, however, that many individual House Sparrows are not persistent. During several years of monitoring nest boxes in experiments on use of various box styles by Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*), we have systematically removed nests and completed clutches of House Sparrows but have not harmed the adults. We have noticed that, more frequently than not, the sparrows abandon their nesting attempts after such experiences.

We, therefore, decided to measure persistence of nesting behavior in House Sparrows. In September 1993, we erected 150 nest boxes at the University of Kentucky agricultural farms at Lexington. The boxes had a floor of 4 x 4 inches (10 cm x 10 cm), a depth of 5 inches (12.5 cm), and a slot entrance 4 inches (10 cm) wide and 1 1/8 inches (29 mm) high. Boxes were mounted on electrical conduit and placed about 4 to 8 feet (1.3 to 2.5 m) above ground.

Once a House Sparrow completed a clutch, we removed either the entire

clutch, leaving the nest, or we removed both nest and eggs. When sparrows completed another clutch in one of these boxes, we counted that as a repeat. We had 15 repeats after removing nest and eggs and 11 repeats after removing the eggs only. Since this difference was not significant (chi squared test: $P=0.4$), we combined these data. Results are shown in Table 1.

House Sparrows did not repeat clutches in nearly half of the instances. The repeats may have involved the same or different birds. These data indicate that removal or death of the male House Sparrow is not always necessary to deter the sparrow from the nest box. Bluebirds completed clutches in seven of the boxes after a clutch of sparrow eggs was removed, and in twelve of the boxes after the nest and eggs of the sparrow were removed. By removing the completed House Sparrow clutch, bluebirds often have opportunity to use the nest box. ■

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- School of Biological Sciences
University of Kentucky
Lexington, KY 40506

Table 1. Nesting Persistence by House Sparrows.

No repeats	One repeat	Two repeats	Three repeats	Four repeats	Seven repeats	Total
38	22	8	9	1	1	79

Do Peterson Nest Boxes "Readily Admit Starlings"?

Dorene H. Scriven

The Winter 1995 (17 [1]:18-19) issue of *Sialia* included an article by Wayne Davis and Paul Kalisz detailing tests of Peterson and Zuern boxes. We have long respected the research done by Dr. Davis, and have corresponded with him from time to time. We are, however, disturbed by his statement (page 19), "The entrance of the Peterson box readily admits starlings." This followed the finding of two bluebird clutches pecked and on the ground. The apparent absence of House Sparrows or House Wrens in the area led to the presumption that the culprits had to be European Starlings.

The question concerning use of the Peterson box by starlings is not new. We would like to review the past references that we are aware of. More important, we encourage definite *confirmation* of such occurrences in boxes that are truly the accurate Peterson design, with an oval entrance hole exactly 1 3/8 inches by 2 1/4 inches. Having said that, we will immediately substantiate such an occurrence!

Tests here in Minnesota were set up by repeatedly replacing the front of a nest box containing an active starling nest. The box chosen by the starlings had a 2-inch circular entrance hole. Both parents were actively feeding week-old starling nestlings. By changing fronts with an incrementally smaller (by 1/16th inch) entrance hole, the absolute minimum which allowed entrance to the nest box to feed the young and exit again was determined. The starling parents were able to get in through an entrance hole of 1 5/8 inches; they could not, despite many attempts, maneuver 1 9/16. With much difficulty and persistent attempts, they *were* able to squeeze into a 1 3/8 by 2 1/4 inch oval hole. They could not maneuver a 1 5/16 by 2 1/4 inch hole. Similar tests were also done with Eastern

Bluebirds, who will use a 1 5/16 by 2 1/4 inch hole and even have used a 1 1/4 by 2 1/4 inch hole, as well as the traditional 1 1/2 inch round hole.

Weights of the two species were taken: adult starlings in Minnesota weigh an average of 3 1/4 ounces. Steve Gilbertson (Minnesota) found some starlings in spring that weighed 3 1/10 ounces. Eastern Bluebirds weigh 1 1/10 ounce. House Sparrows are the same weight as Eastern Bluebirds.

But do starlings *readily* choose to nest in an accurately made Peterson box? Some years ago Keith Kridler found that in Texas, when he put Peterson fronts with the accurate hole size on boxes larger than the Peterson inner dimensions, starlings used the boxes.

There very well may be a size difference between northern starlings and southern starlings, as there also is in some other birds and mammals, notably raccoons. Southern species tend to be slightly smaller. Certainly individual birds in the same area may vary within the species, but in the northern half of the United States and Canada, we have not yet been able to confirm a starling using a Peterson box with an accurate entrance hole. Each year, one or two Bluebird Recovery Program reports out of 500 or more have mentioned starling use. The 1994 reports were typical of those we check each year by calling or writing the reporter. In Foley, Minnesota, starlings used two boxes and predated a third, all in Peterson boxes in which the entrance holes had been *enlarged by woodpeckers*. The 1994 report from Wyoming entailed boxes (not Peterson) which were made for Mountain Bluebirds. In 1993, the entrance hole a starling used had been made "approximate, but guess it was a bit large...wasn't real careful, didn't think it made much difference..." A

report of starling use was forwarded to us several years ago by Joanne Solem. We were not able to confirm the accuracy of the hole size.

In Alberta, Canada, Stan and Marie Palmer encountered starlings in 1994 using slot boxes with 1 1/4 inch openings. In Minnesota, starlings were *not* able to get into Steve Gilbertson's test PVC boxes with 1 1/4 x 2 inch slots, but bluebirds could. Bluebirds have even maneuvered a 1 3/16 inch slot.

After the Davis-Kalisz article appeared, an appeal was made to bluebirders across the United States, via AOL Internet, to please report any starling use in an accurately-made Peterson box. One report was received from Sterling, West Virginia. Starlings tried, but could not get into the Peterson box; they predated young in a standard (North America Bluebird Society) box. The bluebirds moved and re-nested successfully in a Peterson box; they re-nested for a third time, also successfully.

Conclusion: European Starlings may be able to squeeze into an authentic Peterson box. Southern individuals of this species may attempt it more frequently. We believe the true Peterson box *does not readily admit* starlings, nor has it proven to be more attractive to starlings than any other bluebird box design. We would appreciate confirmed reports. If bluebird trail monitors encounter starling attempts, a new front, with a hole size of 1 5/16 x 2 1/4 inches or even 1 5/16 x 2 inches, can be substituted and the box still be easily occupied by Eastern Bluebirds. It should be remembered that an avian predator somewhat larger than a bluebird may be able to get its head far enough into *any* bluebird box to reach young or eggs if the nest cup is too close to the entrance hole. ■

Bluebird Recovery Program Audubon Chapter
of Minneapolis
Box 3801
Minneapolis, MN 55403



Lillian Lund Files, a past president of the North American Bluebird Society, and Hank Coleman, co-founder with his wife Joyce, of the Tri-State Bluebird Society (Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut), March 1995, at opening of gallery and headquarters.

HOUSING CRISIS...HOW

Our thanks to Carrol and Leon Burkard for sharing this light-hearted, yet obviously effective, approach to dealing with the all-too-common problem of uniformed road construction crews.

Jo Carrol & Leon Burkard
General Delivery
Rosalind, AB
T0B 3Y0

Mr. Howard Bouck
Public Works
County of Camrose '22
5402 - 48A Avenue
Camrose, AB
T4V 0L3

Dear Mr. Bouck:

We are truly alarmed about our housing situation as the County Road Building Crew seems to have destroyed our summer home (east of Ross Herder's place) when the road was straightened and the hill changed. Our home, which was situated on a fence post at the bottom of the hill, was in a wonderful location and we raised many lovely babies in that home.

What will we do next summer? I hope you either have the house and will return it to Mr. Burkard to re-erect for us, or possibly will be able to replace it, or maybe give Mr. Burkard materials to build another (it was 3/4" plywood).

I hope you are able to take care of this urgent matter before our return next March.

Sincerely,



Mr. and Mrs. Bluebird
(currently residing in
our winter home)

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SOME BLUEBIRDS COPE

Mr. and Mrs. Bluebird
c/o Carrol and Leon Burkard
GD, Rosalind, AB T0B 3Y0

Re: Summer Home

Your inquiry was passed along to me for reply. I regret to inform you that "progress" does sometimes have a negative effect on one's lifestyle. However, that was only part of the reason your home was removed (to where I have no idea) or destroyed. It seems that non-payment of taxes resulted in the removal and sale of the property to assist the Municipality in recovery of some of the costs. Also, our Board of Education indicates that loss of school grants, due to your home schooling program, was also cutting into the budget. Personally, I have to think that in this case, your Educational Program is much more suitable than the Board of Education's.

To assist you in your needs, I have endeavored to find a bit of lumber to replace your house, and if I can find the time, you may be surprised to find a new home at the old location when you return in the spring (of course, anyone who can afford to winter in the southern states should be able to pay for a much more elaborate home than the one you may find upon your return).

I hope this meets with your approval. However, if you do not find the arrangement suitable, I would be most thrilled to see you in the spring, upon your return.

Sincerely,
Donald J Cox, Land Management
cc Howard Bouck

P.S. Howard has been severely reprimanded for the total lack of consideration for Nature.

Utility Pole Bluebirding

Dean E. Sheldon, Jr.

Introduction

Our family comes from a long line of birders and we've been birding for a long time. But Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) have been a part of that "long time" for only 13 years or since we moved to the farm. We first saw five birds on a dying black walnut tree in the pasture during a walk on a balmy Sunday afternoon in October 1981 and *that* changed our lives. We listened and read and talked to bluebirders. We went to workshops and joined bluebird groups and read almost everything relating to bluebirds that we could find. And, we put up our first boxes in the spring of 1982. From then on, we were committed--*really committed*--to bluebirding as an extraordinary conservation experience.

Scientific Studies

Dr. Wayne H. Davis is a faculty member of the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Kentucky and a member of the Ohio Bluebird Society. Dr. Davis is, perhaps, best known for his Kentucky slot-box and his research into anti-sparrow nest boxes for bluebirds. We have corresponded, informally, about utility pole locations for bluebird boxes since the fall of 1991.

In the course of our discussions, he cited the existence of two studies indicating that bluebirds do *not* take to nest box sites on or near utility poles or power lines. That proposition was of great interest to us.

Munro and Rounds, writing in the *Journal of Wildlife Management* in 1985, concluded, among other things, that nest box trails for Eastern Bluebirds should be placed in open wooded pastures away from roads and utility lines. "Data indicate a strong association between sites used by Eastern Bluebirds and the absence of utility lines." The authors suggested that bluebirds tend to avoid using nest boxes below utility lines because of the presence of American Kestrels (*Falco sparverius*) as predators in these locations. In 1991, Steve Parren of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, suggested in the *Wildlife Society Bulletin* that bluebirds seem to prefer nest box sites away from high perches (including utility lines) because of the use of these vantage points by kestrels.

While we have no quarrel with the research presented, our observations (as presented below) simply do not agree with the findings made. Our observations tend to be almost directly opposite from this published research. On the basis of our work, we believe that utility poles represent a *preferred* nest box site of the Eastern Bluebird.

Our Experience

Our bluebirding has been long in the practical and, admittedly, short in the scientific. We do no banding, but our record-keeping has been accurate, consistent, and complete from the outset.

In the spring of 1982 we first began placing boxes on the utility poles surrounding our farm fields. We subsequently placed boxes on the right-of-way fence along U.S. 30 near Hayesville in central Ashland County with extraordinary nesting results. From there, we began more utility pole box placements here in Ripley Township, Huron County--again, with amazing productivity. The Ripley trail has been expanded twice. We also have a trail in northern Richland County. Our third trail traverses parts of all three of the above-mentioned counties. A total of 109 utility pole-mounted boxes were monitored on these trails during 1994. The remaining 42 boxes are post-mounted in fields and meadows in various locations.

We have recently begun a fourth utility pole trail of 25-30 boxes near Havana and

Steuben in west central Huron County. We are also adding a few additional boxes to our other trails. When this work is completed, we will have 150 utility pole-mounted box sites in three counties covering more than 248 square miles (95.7 km²) in north central Ohio. This amounts to 1.65 box sites per square mile (64 box sites per km²) throughout the area.

Because of our interest in the nesting success at utility pole sites, we have summarized our data for the last four nesting seasons in Table 1.

Obviously, there are numerous mathematical and theoretical conclusions which could be developed from this data. Our interest, however, is of a more practical nature--we simply want to produce more bluebirds from the nest boxes on our trails. We believe that these simple statistics show, conclusively, that the best place to accomplish this is on utility poles.

Criteria for Selecting Locations

As Wayne Davis points out "...it is common knowledge among experienced bluebirders that power poles and power lines make excellent sites (for nest boxes) and are a big plus as a part of bluebird nesting territory" (pers. comm.). The transmission wires themselves, cross

arms, guy wires, bracing poles, and other appurtenances make excellent perches from which the birds conduct their predatorial flights. Road signs, sign posts, fences, fence posts and an almost endless variety of other fixtures found within road rights-of-way make for absolutely prime bluebird habitat. A closely-mowed berm is also a plus. But not just any old pole will do. Pole locations should be selected carefully. Generally speaking, the poles should be located in the following way:

- away from farm barns and outbuildings, abandoned sheds, lean-tos and corn cribs, silos, feedlots, old machinery, etc.;
 - along or near a fence or fence post for perching before entering the box and for preening;
 - near a large tree which provides cover and roosting for the male while his mate is occupied in the box;
 - as far as possible away from House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) territory;
 - near a watercourse, if possible;
 - near a neat, tidy home with tight, closed outbuildings and a big, well-mowed yard which provides excellent foraging opportunities;
 - near or adjacent to pastures/meadows with animals grazing on a regular basis (but *not* near feedlots);
 - on back country roads with little traffic.
- Some additional considerations:

Table 1. Eastern Bluebird Nest Box Locations in Relation to Fledging, 1991 through 1994

	<u>Number of Boxes and Box Locations</u>			
	<u>1991</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>1993</u>	<u>1994</u>
Utility Pole-Mounted	50 (43%)	72 (53%)	94 (67%)	109 (72%)
Post-Mounted Fields	<u>67</u> (57%)	<u>63</u> (47%)	<u>47</u> (33%)	<u>42</u> (28%)
Total Box Locations	117	135	141	151
	<u>Fledgings</u>			
From Utility Poles	129 (71%)	227 (78%)	312 (92%)	481 (95%)
From Post Mounts	<u>54</u> (29%)	<u>64</u> (22%)	<u>28</u> (8%)	<u>24</u> (5%)
Total Fledgings	183	291	340	505

- we have experienced very little vandalism over the years which may be due, in part, to box placement on low volume, rural roadways. The risk of vandalism can be reduced by not putting boxes at intersections;

- it is important to be alert to the workings of the power company in relation to the replacement of poles, either individually or the reconstruction of an entire section. Usually, the poles are marked for this purpose well in advance of the actual work allowing plenty of time for box relocation. Bluebird nest boxes do not interfere with the maintenance of power lines which is done from hydraulic "bucket" trucks;

- we mount boxes on the poles by using double-headed framing nails making withdrawal of the nails easy when relocation is required;

- collisions between birds and vehicles can best be avoided by mounting boxes so that the entrance hole does not face the roadway.

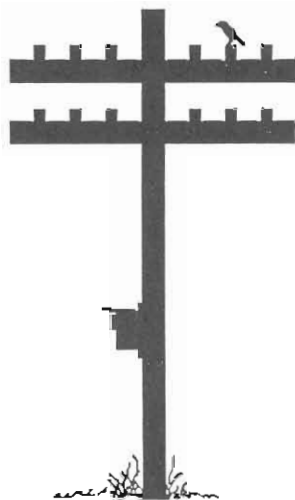
Bluebirds tend not to be attracted to nest box sites on poles which are next to large, unbroken expanses of cultivated land (i.e., corn, soybeans, wheat, etc.). Pole sites with trees, fences, signposts, streams, and other varied land forms seem to be preferred as nesting locations.

Advantages of Utility Pole Placement

There are any number of advantages to the placement of nest boxes on utility poles. They include the following:

- the opportunity for box placement in a wide variety of optimum habitats (see Criteria for Selecting Locations above) preferred by bluebirds;

- better control over nuisance predators, especially raccoons (*Procyon lotor*). Because boxes are located some considerable distance from one another, the animals simply do *not* have a scent trail to follow so as to be able to investigate all of the nest boxes in a given area. In 12 years, we've only had to place "coon guards" or grease poles three



times to prevent predation. During that time, we have had only five nest disturbances attributable to raccoons or cats. With proper habitat selection and by spreading the boxes out, we have dramatically reduced the House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) and House Wren problems on our trails;

- ease of box movement/relocation. When we encounter persistent sparrow/wren problems, we simply remove that box and place it in an entirely new location making appropriate changes on the trail map. We move boxes at the first sign of telltale scratch marks or muddy paw prints left by raccoons or cats. Occasionally, when conditions *change* at a box site (i.e., new building construction, heavier traffic volumes, traffic rerouting, vandalism, etc.), we simply move the box. In short, we are *not* committed to a box site on a particular post in a given field. Utility pole bluebirding has *lots* of flexibility built into it;

- exposing birds to a greater variety of food sources;

- boxes spread over a wider geographic area make more people aware of the presence of bluebirds and bluebirding;

- continuous search for new, prime nest box locations over a larger land area while keeping an inventory of potential box sites for later possible use;

- this kind of bluebirding is readily adaptable to the urban/suburban landscape;
- utility poles make excellent mounting sites for heavy nest boxes, especially the Peterson box;
- no posts to pound, pull, or grease; no nuts, bolts, washers, or wires needed for mounting;
- ease of monitoring. Our boxes are all placed where they are easily accessible from the roadside without walking long distances over rough terrain. We avoid pole sites with steep slopes, deep ditches, and heavy infestations of poison ivy.

Kestrels

Our experience and the statistics make it extremely hard to understand the findings made in the two academic studies cited above indicating some sort of adversarial relationship between bluebirds and kestrels at nest sites.

We have been putting up kestrel nest boxes for more than 40 years and when we moved here to the farm, we put up three kestrel boxes (one in a tree; two on utility poles) directly next to the fields where, in 1993, we fledged 111 Tree Swallows (*Iridoprocne bicolor*) from post-mounted boxes. We have had bluebirds nesting in post-mounted boxes less than 75 feet (22.86 m) from an active kestrel nest box. In neither case, has there been any evidence of kestrel predation.

One of our utility pole trails has four bluebird nest boxes mounted on poles on the north and east sides of a large field. During the years 1991 through 1994, these boxes produced 49 bluebirds and 14 Tree Swallows. While no kestrel nest box is present, the falcons hunt from this same pole line all day long but *always* from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Our observation of these kestrels has shown no bluebird predation at all over this four year period. In fact, the kestrels *hunt* from the very poles on which the bluebird nest boxes are mounted.

Based on our observations, there is *absolutely no* correlation between the

location of bluebird nest boxes on utility poles or adjacent to utility pole lines and the predation of bluebirds by kestrels.

Make no mistake about it--kestrels are superb aerial predators. We watch them feast on Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) and Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) nestlings which they take directly from the nest after having observed the dutiful parents carrying food to the nest for their young.

Beyond this, kestrels make great use of post-mounted nest boxes as hunting perches in their endless search for other nestling birds, mice, meadow voles (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*), crickets, grasshoppers, and other insects--but bluebirds as significant prey? No.

Special Equipment

"Safety first" must be the guideline for this special kind of bluebirding, all of which is done from a vehicle along traveled roadways. Some suggestions based on our experience:

- we work out of a pickup truck which is equipped with a yellow strobe light and a slow-moving vehicle emblem. Both of these safety items are available at auto supply or farm stores. We use the four way flashers at every monitoring stop. A neon orange bicycle flag is also helpful--anything to attract motorists' attention to your stopped position on the roadway;
- we keep a complete set of county highway maps showing (in pencil) each of the box locations on our trails;
- our gear is stored in a large, waterproof tacklebox which is kept in the bed of the truck all season. We carry an extra nest box for emergency replacements. A plastic bag in the cab contains abandoned nests and dry grass for nest replacements or re-building;
- a milk crate makes a handy container for recyclables picked up along the trail.

Conclusion

None of this would be possible without the thoughtful cooperation which we have

had from the utility companies and their workers in the field.

This is obviously *not* a scholarly treatise--nor is it meant to be anything other than a collection of informal statistics and observations on one method of bluebirding which has worked for us and which appears to be effective. ■

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Wayne Davis for his insistent encouragement. Thanks, also, to John Blakeman for his input on kestrels. Thanks to

Carol and Bert for listening and to Thomas for his patient help in the preparation of the text.

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Parren, S.G. 1991. Evaluation of nest-box sites selected by Eastern Bluebirds, Tree Swallows and House Wrens. *Wildl. Soc. Bull.* 19:277-286.

4569 Greenwich-Milan Townline Rd.
Greenwich, OH 44837



Photograph used with permission of The Home Habitat Society, Taneytown, MD

Although there are instances in which American Kestrels have preyed on bluebirds, usually bluebirds and kestrels can coexist in the same area. Here a kestrel is using a bluebird box as a hunting perch.

Bluebird Exchange

This feature extracts items from the newsletters of bluebird organizations and the periodic reports of groups with bluebird or cavity nester projects. Please be sure this editor or NABS is on your mailing list. We want to include your material!

ALBERTA--*Ellis Bird Farm, Ltd.* Newsletter, Spring 1995

Walter Motyka of Edmonton, Alberta reported having great success using monofilament line to deter House Sparrows from using his feeders. He wondered whether the lines might have a deterrent effect when used on bluebird boxes. Ellis Bird Farm will be experimenting with this idea during the next breeding season.

Danny Waldner reported a Tree Swallow nest with 11 eggs on his trail in the Castor Hutterite Colony. All fledged successfully. The nestlings varied slightly in age so fledging took place over several days.

Joel Nicholson, working for Ducks Unlimited last summer, discovered a pair of Purple Martins nesting in a Bufflehead box. The box was directly over water in a large slough near Camrose.

The next Mountain Trails Conference will be held 5, 6, and 7 July 1996 in Lethbridge. Ray Harris heads the conference organizing committee.

If you have designed and built a nest box that you think is unique or has been successful for you, send a box of that design to the Ellis Bird Farm. They are putting together the "world's largest collection of nest boxes." Include your name, address, and a few notes about the merits of the box.

--Ellis Bird Farm, Ltd.

IOWA--*WINGS...*, Winter 1995

An article, "The Owls Around Us!!!" describes the eight resident and non-resident Iowa owls. Several of them are cavity nesters.

Jim Walters, in his President's column, examines the safety of limited herbicide use along county roadsides. Long-term effects on humans are still unknown. The destruction of wildlife habitat as a result of spraying is equally important.

Results from the 11 year Iowa Birdfeeder Survey are summarized by DNR coordinator Rick Hollis. Half a dozen species are highly stable. The 1994 results suggest that House Finch growth may finally be leveling off after six years of steady increase. Red-breasted Nuthatches were up in one of their cyclical invasion years. An associated paragraph reminds feeder watchers to keep feeders and feeding areas clean. Eye infections in House Finches have been widely reported in the East in the last year. The Winter Feeder Survey can be used as the basis for science and math activities in local schools. A lesson plan for upper elementary school classes is presented by David Quegg.

The Iowa Bluebird Directory for 1994 showed that bluebird fledging was up in 1994: 8,232 fledged from 4,469 boxes. Although this was 700 shy of the 1991 record, it was a dramatic improvement over the 4,968 fledged from 3,671 boxes in 1993.

--Johnson County Songbird Project

MAINE--*DOWNEAST BLUEBIRD*, Winter 1995

At least one family of bluebirds was reported to be wintering.

"A Reversible Catastrophe" by Rich Stallcup concerns the toll on songbirds by cats. Between pets that spend time outside and the feral population, the toll on wildlife is staggering. Although this article is reprinted from the Point Reyes Bird Observatory's journal, the problem is, by no means, localized.

A page is devoted to a chart of the dimensions of boxes for cavity nesters. The chart includes box dimensions for the Northern Saw-whet Owl, a species of limited range and

specialized habitat. It is useful to remember that anyone building or placing any box for cavity nesters should check the species' range and habitat requirements carefully.

--Bluebird Association of Maine

MINNESOTA--BLUEBIRD NEWS, February 1995

The 1994 Bluebird Directory reported that Minnesota fledged 9,459 bluebirds. Special recognition was given to the 42 people who had reported to the Bluebird Recovery Program (BBRP) for 10 years or more.

BBRP's 14th Annual Bluebird Conference will be held 9 September 1995 at the Convent of the Visitation School in Mendota Heights, just south of St. Paul.

The 1995 report form is enclosed. Note that more information about House Wrens is requested this year.

The 1995 Research Grants include a special Eno Wren Research Grant established by Steve and Cheryl Eno of Nebraska.

Included is a listing of almost two dozen bluebird workshops held throughout the state in February, March, and April. This impressive annual effort is organized by Dick Hjort.

Carroll Henderson was given the Thomas Sadler Roberts Award at the Minnesota Ornithological Union's December annual meeting. It was made "for lifetime contributions to Minnesota bird conservation." His contributions to cavity nester conservation have been especially important through two of his books: *Woodworking for Wildlife* and *Landscaping for Wildlife*.

An illness recently identified by Dr. Johan Bakken of the Duluth [MN] clinic is one of which bluebirders should be aware. So far, *Granulocytic Ehrlichiosis* has been identified only in Minnesota and Wisconsin, but it has taken the lives of two of the 27 people diagnosed with the disease. Most victims had recent tick bites. The specific tick carrier has not yet been identified. Symptoms are influenza-like with serious aches. Preventive measures are the same as for Lyme disease.

Bluebirds were reported to have wintered over in Minnesota.

--Bluebird Recovery Program

NEBRASKA--Bluebirds Across Nebraska Newsletter, Winter 1994-1995

Bluebirds Across Nebraska's (BAN) First Annual Conference will be held Saturday, 1 April 1995 at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park.

A new bimonthly Nebraska publication entitled *Acreage Advisor* will donate space for a regular bluebird feature. The publisher will also feature habitat improvement, environmental issues, humor, and an acreage tour in each issue.

Mary Zimmerman summarizes the research paper by Davis, Kalisz and Wells entitled "Eastern Bluebirds prefer boxes containing old nests." The results of this research are obtaining wide distribution which may change bluebird monitors' box cleaning habits--especially where there have been blowfly infestations.

BAN will test the effectiveness against raccoon predation of box mounting poles: 2 inch PVC, 1 inch metal pipe, or 1/2 inch metal electrical conduit compared to a standard steel post with and without surface coating. A pen with poles and food boxes will be established. Two raccoons, furnished by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, will be videotaped in action.

BAN received an environmental lottery grant to aid in the establishment of bluebird trails in Nebraska. In order to receive two to ten free bluebird boxes, an individual must pledge to monitor weekly, learn monitoring techniques, and keep records.

BAN is choosing a name for its newsletter and offers 15 options plus space for original ideas.

Trail reports by three members include interesting experiences on the Rowe Sanctuary Bluebird Trail by John Holm, the Firethorn Golf Course Trail by Bud Hitz, and the Mahoney

State Park Bluebird Trail by Sanford Downs.

BAN published the 1994 Bluebird Directory for Nebraska. A total of 3,015 bluebirds were reported fledged in 1994 compared to 1,606 in 1993.

--*Bluebirds Across Nebraska*

NEW YORK--*Bluebird News*, Winter '95

The spring meeting of the New York State Bluebird Society (NYSBS) will be held on Saturday, 6 May 1995 at the New York State Chiropractic College in Seneca Falls, New York.

NYSBS membership has soared to a new high of more than 950 as a result of the efforts of Jeanne Wigen Ayers who chairs membership.

Donations of mounting pipe (used 3/4 or 1 inch steel water pipe) is needed for expansion of the Route 20 Bluebird Research Trail. In order to help finance this trail, which will eventually consist of about 3,500 nest boxes, NYSBS has begun an adopt-a-box program. For \$10.00, a contributor can designate the county in which a box will be placed and the name on the tag to be attached to the box.

The 1994 nesting results indicate a reversal of two years decline with 6,035 bluebirds reported fledged. That was in addition to more than 6,000 Tree Swallows, 1,700 House Wrens, and 300 Black-capped Chickadees.

--*New York State Bluebird Society*

B.C.N. NEWS, Spring 1995

The Broome County Nestbox Network survey had 29 respondents. The group plans to participate in the following events: Earth Fest at Grippen Park in Endicott, Critter Fair in Boscov, and Broome County Fair at Whitney Point Fairgrounds. Included in the mailing is a simple poster advertising B.C.N.N. for recipients to place in a high traffic area. Tear-off address labels invite contact.

--*Broome County Nestbox Network*

NORTH CAROLINA--*BLUEBIRD NOTES*, March 1995

The Tenth Annual Meeting was held on 29 April at Weymouth Woods in Southern Pines.

Newsletter editor Larry Long notes that he has several bluebird boxes at the speedways at Fayetteville and Lake View. He says that seeing a bluebird on the fence around the track before race time adds to the personal enjoyment of the event.

Wild Animal Famous Winter Pudding by Evelyn Hill is featured. Mix the following in a large saucepan: 3 quarts of water, 1 cup of margarine, 4 cups of grits. Cook on low heat to allow mixture to thicken, then stir in 1 cup of peanut butter. Serve in log feeders or clay saucers.

This issue included the 1994 state bluebird summary. From 777 successful nests, 2,871 young fledged from 3,393 eggs.

--*North Carolina Bluebird Society*

OHIO--*Bluebird Monitor*, Spring 1995

The ninth annual fall meeting of the Ohio Bluebird Society (OBS) is planned for Saturday, 21 October 1995 at The Wilderness Center near Wilmot.

Dean Sheldon's column describes what every well-equipped monitor should have available when checking trails. Sheldon carries everything in a large tackle box, which holds the essentials. His truck also contains an assortment of tools, used nests, wood pieces, etc. Almost any bluebird box repair could be made or an emergency met with his suggestions.

Jim Coffman notes that a female bluebird banded near Tiffin, Ohio was captured and its band read by Bill Read, Kitchener, Ontario. She raised two broods of four in 1994.

Andrew M. Troyer's new book *Bring Back the Bluebirds* was published recently. It includes stories of his hand feeding of mealworms to bluebirds.

--Ohio Bluebird Society

OKLAHOMA--*Watchable Wildlife News*, Winter 1994-1995

Chimney Swifts have adapted to the use of chimneys as substitutes for large hollow trees. Homeowners are encouraged not to cap their chimneys. If that is necessary, then possibly construct a box that simulates a chimney and attach it to the chimney or elsewhere around the house.

The results of the 1994 winter bird survey (January 20-23) are included.

Residents of Oklahoma may certify their property as "Oklahoma Wildscapes" for a nominal fee. Directions are included, certain items of food, water and shelter must be present before certification.

The nongame tax check-off revenue underwrote the 1993 Bluebird Nestbox Summary. Red-cockaded Woodpecker management and monitoring continues in the McCurtain County Wilderness Area.

--Oklahoma Nongame Program

VERMONT--*Bluebirds Across Vermont* Newsletter, Spring 1995

A letter introduces the editor and new director (same individual) of Bluebirds Across Vermont (BAV). Nowhere in the issue does a name appear, but a previous newsletter mentioned that Craig Scharf had accepted the position.

BAV is sponsoring a bluebird art contest with a deadline of 1 September 1995. Entries may be used to illustrate future newsletters.

Tables and graphs of bluebird success 1987-1994 are included. The 1994 results show 698 bluebirds fledged from 805 eggs. The eight year results show a relative consistency. The 1995 survey form is attached.

--*Bluebirds Across Vermont*

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.

Historian's Request

Please send newspaper and magazine articles about bluebirds to Historian Shirley Adams, 3484 Torch Club Rd., Alton, IL 62002. Be sure name and address of publication, volume and date are included. Photographs of members engaged in publicizing bluebirds are always welcome. These items will be added to scrapbooks kept as a permanent record of activity on behalf of bluebirds and other native cavity nesting birds.

Art Credits

Jon E. Boone 84, 85, 116
Eric P. Mayer 104
Shirley Nachtrieb 82, 83
Suzanne Pennell 118
M. Suzanne Probst--cover design
Laurence Sawyer 91 (chickadees)

(ZELENY--Continued from page 88)

a meeting with the group. The folks there put him in charge of bluebird protection. Whereupon Larry proposed to write a booklet about the subject. Again, he secured approval and the result was a beautifully rendered handbook, which Olive entitled *Bluebirds for Posterity*. It sold thousands of copies and is now out of print. It should be brought back.

With *Bluebirds for Posterity*, Larry established his potential. Later in 1969, Larry took over Dr. Musselman's popular column in the *Purple Martin News* (now the *Nature Society News*.) He has since written 124 columns for that publication, in the process developing a correspondence with thousands of people. Col. B.J. Walrath exemplifies the response: "Your writings were solely responsible for awakening my own interest in bluebird conservation."

One step after another followed rapid fire. He was elected President of the Maryland Ornithological Society. He became a member of the board of directors of the Audubon Naturalist Society. He serves as a consultant for Camp Fire Girls, Inc., etc. All of these positions demonstrated his popularity. More importantly, they gave him a forum to reach larger numbers of people. He became convinced that bluebirds could be helped only by many people, tens of thousands, working in small groups or as individuals, each informed as to the nature of the bluebirds' problems, and armed with a general plan for coping with them. When he writes or talks about bluebirds, he does so in the simplest language possible, making sure that everyone understands his message, cutting through age and class distinctions.

People received his message on local radio and television programs. They picked it up in newspaper articles, in magazines ranging from *Living Wilderness* to *Exxon, U.S.A.* They have it from his book, published in 1976. Then in June 1977, *National Geographic* featured his article "Song of Hope for the Bluebird,"

punctuating it with the stunning bluebird photographs taken by his good friend Michael L. Smith. The volume of mail he received attendant to that article was overwhelming, even for Larry.

He called in a few friends to discuss the situation and--the North American Bluebird Society came about.

There is much to say about this remarkable man, and not nearly enough space. In *Who's Who in America*, he lists himself as "wildlife conservationist and writer." He is that. But so much more. He has awards for his conservation work from numerous organizations, most notably from the Patuxent Group of the Sierra Club and the Audubon Naturalist Society. He has his family and legions of genuine friends. A few miles up the road he can visit his beloved bluebirds just about any day of the year. He takes no money for his conservation work and donates receipts from the sale of his book to the Society.

Those of us who have personal knowledge of Little Brother and Little Sister--even those who have read his account of these hand-raised bluebirds--know that his love for bluebirds is real. He uses the word love a lot. It is not a word that comes easily from men in this culture. When asked about his courtship with Olive, he responds with a simple explanation: "We fell in love." He dedicated his book to Olive, hearkening back to their ornithology class in Minnesota, "where we fell in love with birds and with each other."

When Larry and I discussed the text for the Society's color brochure, "Where Have All the Bluebirds Gone?," Larry wished the first sentence to read, "We celebrate the beautiful bluebird as a symbol of love, hope and happiness." Because I thought the sentiment a bit maudlin, I deleted the word "love." It was a mistake.

From the beginning, it was the reason this decent and learned man is involved

Individuals wishing to honor Larry may make a donation to the Lawrence Zeleny Memorial Fund, c/o NABS, Box 6295, Silver Spring, MD 20916-6295.

Eighteenth Annual Meeting Report

Mary D. Janetatos

The Eighteenth Annual Meeting of the North American Bluebird Society was held March 3-5, 1995 in conjunction with the Eleventh Annual Bluebird Festival and Wildlife Art Show in Jackson, Michigan. There were 68 conference attendees from a number of states and provinces. Thousands of people attended the festival.

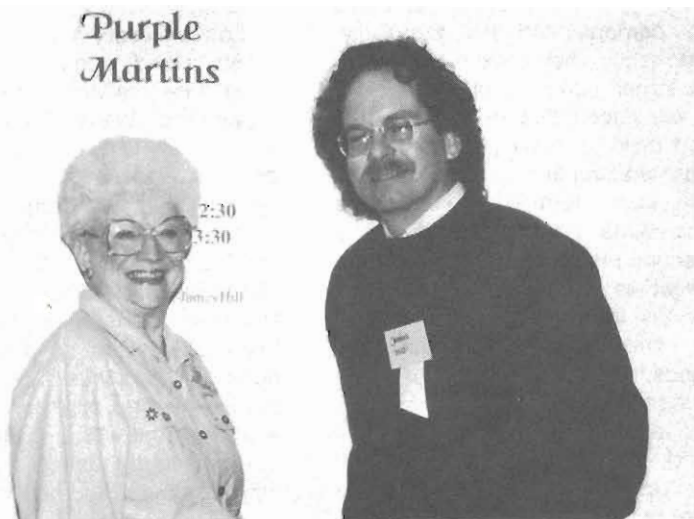
There were a number of activities. For early arrivers there was a self-guided auto tour through the 20,000 acre Waterloo Recreation Area to see Sandhill Cranes and to visit the Gerald E. Eddy Geology Center. On Friday there was an all day field trip to the Kellogg Bird Sanctuary and the Michigan State Experimental Farm to watch a demonstration of maple syrup making.

In the evening the annual business meeting included the election of officers. The following slate was elected: President Charlotte Jernigan, Vice-President Robert Bodine, Treasurer Delos C. Dupree, Recording Secretary Doug LeVasseur, and

Corresponding Secretary Joseph Tait. The four individuals elected to three year terms on the Board of Directors were William R. Davis, Richard Hjort, Carol McDaniel, and Barbara Stinson.

The program "Bluebird Trails Across America" by Connie Toops revealed many insights not in her book *Bluebirds Forever*. Connie showed a slide of herself and Larry Zeleny during a late December 1994 visit. She related that Larry enjoys having her book read to him by Executive Director Mary Janetatos. Larry's near-blindness due to macular degeneration prevents him from reading as he once did.

There were many popular talks at the festival given to standing room only audiences, thanks to the crowds in attendance. Getting rave reviews were Connie Toops' "The Joy of Bluebirds," Steve Muller's talk on "Butterflies," Thomas



NABS President Charlotte Jernigan (left) with James R. Hill, III, of Edinboro, Pennsylvania, founder of the Purple Martin Conservation Association. He presented a talk about the species and their need for support.



Photograph by Myrna Fearman

New director Barbara Stinson, Virginia chats with director Joan Harmet, Illinois.

Smith's presentation on wildflowers, and James R. Hill, III's talk about Purple Martins. Two other presentations were a hit: the Music for Mother Earth concerts by former NABS board member and host for the annual meeting, Tom Hodgson and "Dr. Loonacy," cleverly and amusingly played by naturalist Danny Olson.

At 7:00 p.m. Saturday, the NABS annual banquet was served at Jackson Community College. At that time NABS awards were presented to individuals for their outstanding contributions to bluebird conservation (see related article). The Bluebird Festival and Wildlife Art Show continued on Sunday from noon to 5:00 p.m. ■



Photograph by Myrna Fearman

New director Carol McDaniel (left), Wisconsin, and her family with NABS Research Chairman Kevin Berner.

Awards Presented

The North American Bluebird Society annually recognizes individuals and groups who have made major contributions to bluebird conservation. The following award plaques were presented on 4 March 1995 at the Eighteenth Annual Meeting in Jackson, Michigan.

Tom Hodgson
Ron Kingston
Dahlem Environmental Center

A Certificate of Appreciation was given to **Kevin McCurdy**.

Tom Hodgson, Jackson, Michigan--Individual Award

Tom Hodgson graduated from Michigan State University with a B.S. degree in Wildlife Management. He worked as a naturalist for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for 14 years, and in 1980 went to the Dahlem Center as its director. (At that time the center was housed in a two car garage with no parking and no entryway.) He not only changed all of that, but he has also developed many programs in environmental education. He created a series for schools and youth groups that are grade level specific and based on the curriculum of the Michigan school system. He started a "Bring Back the Bluebird Project" in 1984; in 1985 (with the help of many volunteers) he launched the first Bluebird Festival as a fund raiser. Last year more than 5,000 people attended the festival. Tom has served on the Board of Directors of the North American Bluebird Society.



Award winners for outstanding contributions to bluebird conservation were the Dahlem Environmental Center, Jackson, Michigan (Dian Valen accepted the award); Tom Hodgson, Jackson, Michigan; NABS President Charlotte Jernigan; and Ron Kingston, Charlottesville, Virginia.

Ron Kingston, Charlottesville, Virginia--Individual Award

Ron Kingston has been an avid bluebirder for many years.

He served on the NABS Board of Directors for five years, and has been Chairman of the Speakers' Bureau for six years. He has written numerous articles for *Sialia*, and has established five trails. He also has put out special boxes for Great Crested Flycatchers.

Lending a hand to others in the cause of bluebird conservation has been an on-going form of dedication. Ron has worked with a Boy Scout on his Eagle Award; he has also given programs to garden clubs, retirement homes, nature centers, 4-H clubs, and in state parks. He has done research on predator-proofing boxes (snake and raccoon) and has shared results in published form. He has enjoyed giving programs to follow workers in the Suitland Maryland Federal Complex, and he had the first successful bluebird nesting recorded inside the Washington, D.C. area beltway.

The Dahlem Environmental Center, Jackson, Michigan--Group Award

The Dahlem Environmental Center is a satellite facility of Jackson Community College, Jackson, Michigan. It operates under an independent budget which now exceeds \$250,000, and has more than 900 memberships. Although there are more than 2,000 participating members, the Center has only two full-time employees. The Center annually serves over 30,000 people. In its first year of managing a bluebird trail, 150 bluebirds were fledged from its 600 boxes which were put out by groups such as Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, Cub Scouts and 4-Hers who were looking for a conservation project. Today, as a result of a "nest box network" set up in the county by bluebirders at Dahlem, 800 to 900 bluebirds are fledged each year.

Kevin McCurdy, Fort Sill, Oklahoma--Certificate of Appreciation

Kevin McCurdy is in the Natural Resources Division at the army base in Fort Sill, Oklahoma. As a trained wildlife biologist he takes advantage of opportunities to raise awareness about bluebirds, as well as wildlife in general.

He has enjoyed working with Girl Scouts and students in elementary schools in helping them to establish bluebird trails and to learn monitoring techniques. He expands on the cavity nester theme by taking a Wood Duck box to his programs; he also inspires children by telling them about the native plants and animals in that part of Oklahoma. Kevin is a member of NABS Speakers' Bureau. ■



Photograph by Myrna Pearman.

A Certificate of Appreciation held by President Charlotte Jernigan was given to Kevin McCurdy, Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

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 Mrs. Mary D. Janetatos:

I would like to thank the North American Bluebird Society for their generous student research grant for my project investigating cavity nesting bird abundance in salvage-logged and uncut burns. This is an issue that desperately needs further investigation. As you may know, the federal government is working on a bill that would mandate higher levels of salvage-logging on all national forest land. Here in Montana, our own legislature has recently passed a bill which would exempt all salvage-logging operations from environmental assessments.

Almost nothing is known about the potential impact of salvage-logging on cavity nesting birds. I hope my project will shed some light on this much needed area of research. Thank you again for your generous support.

Susan M. Hitchcox
The University of Montana
Division of Biological Sciences
Missoula, MT 59812

Dear Editor:

I have built approximately 200 houses over the last few years. You may be interested in some features of my houses:

1. I notch the bottom and lower the front for air circulation.
2. I hinge the front on nails and hold it in place with double-headed nails.
3. I use 3/4 inch galvanized conduit for mounting and, if necessary, add one

gallon milk jugs to restrict squirrels from climbing to the house.

In our area we are blessed with many birds but too few houses in desirable locations.

Don Adams
116 SE 20th St.
Long Beach, NC 28465

Dear Editor:

I've read with considerable interest the various comparisons between nest box use in the East, especially with the box that has been developed by Frank Zuern, as it compared to the Peterson nest box. Several people who have visited my area from Minnesota and Wisconsin have brought Peterson nest boxes out here for us to try. They immediately filled with starlings and in two cases at the expense of a dead female Western Bluebird. We replaced the front of those Peterson boxes with a drilled 1 9/16 inch opening. This eliminated the starlings but also eliminated the attempts by bluebirds to use them.

Tests in Alberta, Montana, and Nevada with large numbers of nest boxes have found that both Mountain and Western Bluebirds prefer large nest box openings. Nest boxes drilled at 1 5/8 inch were very quickly occupied by bluebirds. However, these had to be cut back to 1 9/16 inch in order to eliminate starlings. My thought would be that if you compare Peterson nest boxes with any of the standard boxes and a 1 9/16 inch opening, you will see

little if any difference in the usage of the boxes. I think the difference in occupancy rates that you're seeing with the Peterson nest box is simply that there is more room in that opening for them to get in which the birds really desire.

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

Dear Editor:

In the fall of 1994 when cleaning my bluebird boxes, I collected a dozen blowfly larvae and kept them in a sealed jar. They hatched into flies later in the fall and these laid eggs in circular clusters on the sides of the jar. The eggs did not hatch.

It occurred to me that blowflies might lay eggs on the sides of the nest boxes rather than in the nesting material. This spring, 1995, I checked my boxes on a cold day in March before the birds had begun nest building and found that blowflies (now I could identify them) clustered in the corners of the nesting boxes, on the ceilings and floors.

I'm against using pesticides and hit on the idea of using a small Bernzomatic blow torch available at any hardware store.

On another cold day when the flies were semi-paralyzed, I was able to quickly and cleanly turn them to ash and also to scorch the inside, top, and bottom of the box where they might have laid eggs. This summer I will see if the number of larvae have been reduced.

Having written this, I see that it sounds quite gruesome and heartless, particularly if one cares about blowflies, but I assure you it was quick, seemingly painless and left the boxes cleansed. I recommend it to others, just don't catch the box on fire.

Dave Brooks
Poverty Hollow Road
Redding, CT 06896

Dear Editor:

By now you probably know what has been happening out here regarding the California Bluebird Recovery Program.

I have volunteered to be a county coordinator for Kern County, one of the largest in California. I hope I can fulfill the mission.

I will be doing a field trip for our local historical society, the same people I did a slide program for at their monthly meeting. The field trip will be at The Nature Conservancy here in the Kern River Valley, where I have one of my bluebird trails.

John Boice
P.O. Box 126
Badfish, CA 93205

The Summer 1994 issue of Wisconsin Bluebird contained letters from Dorene Scriven (Minnesota Bluebird Recovery Program) and Del Parkinson (Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin-BRAW) both highly supportive of Steve Gilbertson's PVC box as having advantages and bluebird receptivity equal to that of the Peterson box. Its waxed mounting post of electrical conduit is especially effective against raccoon predation. A copy of those letters was received with a letter from which the following is extracted:

I am very pleased to see the PVC bluebird houses finally getting some much deserved recognition. I tried to promote them several years ago with no success at all. Some BRAW members said they were too cold or too hot or House Sparrows were too smart to use them!

I have been using several PVC bluebird houses and plastic jugs with good results on my bluebird trails and House Sparrows rarely use them, so the bluebirds and Tree Swallows don't have to fight for a nesting box, and sparrows don't kill the nesting females for the houses. Mounted on a waxed 1 inch conduit pipe we do not have any raccoon problems.

Box builders at the Beaver Dam Senior Citizens Center are also trying out putting a plastic front on the Peterson, Hill Lake, and Frank Zuern wooden houses to possibly deter the House Sparrow from using them. We will let you know how they turn out.

Don Kopff
N7426 Edgewater Dr.
Beaver Dam, WI 53916

Bluebird Tales

Mary D. Janetatos

"After all these years of trying to get bluebirds to nest in my nest box, why do I have to have *Peyton Place* when they do? I think these bluebirds need a divorce or something!" Linda Allshouse of Mt. Airy, MD, was calling NABS with her sad story.

It seems that early in the spring a rather large female bluebird appeared to accept the nest box on the deck outside Linda's kitchen. The female built a large nest; the male was not seen for many days. The female waited...and waited. Then the male came back with a *new* female, who was markedly smaller than the other one. The first female divebombed the pair, and then, after a day or two, she left. Linda's question to me: "What should I do?" This scenario was one I had never encountered. I suggested she just observe what went on--and let me know the latest episode in "The Bluebirds of Peyton Place."

Janet Miller of Castro Valley, CA, wrote to say: "Had a joyous beginning to this year. On January 1st and 2nd had a flock of Western Bluebirds visit for the first time. They ate pyracantha & feasted, as did a visiting flock of robins."

Things really look good for Western Bluebirds, as we also heard from Pleasonton, CA, when nine students from Polly Wolfe's second grade class from Carden West School each wrote a note asking for "blueprints" for the bluebird nest boxes. "Although we all wrote letters," said the teacher, "We need just one set of plans." Another teacher, Bill Watkins of Bourbon, MO, told of his fourth grade class's efforts on behalf of the Missouri state bird: *Sialia sialis*. "My fourth grade classes have made 30 nesting boxes for the past five years. Each student gets to take a box home. We give the rest away. We estimate that we've helped increase the bluebird population in our area by 700-1,200 birds in the last five years." Great work, Bill--and thanks for joining NABS!



Ever since the *Ranger Rick Magazine's* February 1995 article, "Wow! More Bluebirds" we have heard from many children. Among these was Megan Pollack of Seldovia, AK, who drew a flock of bluebirds on one sheet of paper accompanying her note: "Please send me your plans for a bird house."

Wesley and Ruth Logsdon of Rushville, IL, described checking their bluebird trail boxes together for about eight years. When Wesley broke his hip in January 1994, Ruth offered to take over unless "she saw a snake which she didn't but late in the nesting season she got into chiggers which were worse!" That's real bluebird devotion, Ruth. Here's hoping bluebird success blesses your heroic efforts!

From Jewett, IL, came a letter from Evelyn Clark. "A friend loaned me a couple of your quarterly journals. I enjoyed reading them so much, I would like to subscribe and receive them myself. We are trying to establish bluebirds near our country home."

Sarah Hughston, of Cataula, GA, was grateful for the reminder about her "dues" being due. "I got so excited this morning when I looked out the window and saw about six pairs of bluebirds in the yard."

Bluebirds Over Georgia surely keeps tabs on the Georgia bluebirds. Tip and Betty Goza of Lilburn, GA, sent a photo of themselves at the opening day at Tribble Mill Park in Grayson, GA. Yes, Betty, we did like your [bluebird theme] sweatshirts and caps.

From Dover, NH, Jim Veinote wrote asking for our "blueprint" for a house on a

pole. "Neither my wife nor I have ever knowingly seen a live bluebird. For many years we've been quite successful at attracting songbirds. Now we're ready to put up, on city property, six houses which we can easily maintain." You certainly have the right idea, Jim--be sure to maintain the boxes you put out.

Edward MacDowell, of Old Greenwich, CT, wrote as he sent for a membership: "For years my wife and I have eagerly watched bluebirds nest at our Berkshire summer house. Our children and grandchildren share the life cycles of our favorite bird also. In the mid '80's, one of our sons built and installed bluebird houses in lower Fairfield County (CT) as his Eagle Scout project. This especially pleased his grandmother (my mother) who started us in bluebirding in the '60's, and who still monitors the two bluebird houses she has at her Pawling, NY home."

Wendy Beaver of Middlebury Center, PA, wrote of her son Jonathan, 8, who took over the care and maintenance of 94 nest boxes. Quite a lot for a youngster--he will also be giving a bluebird presentation as part of an enrichment program for gifted children. He'll be the bluebird's youngest hero!

It was a trip to the breathtakingly beautiful Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, PA, which sparked the interest of **Mr. and Mrs. Charles Homovich** of Catonsville, MD. They hope to attract bluebirds by putting out a nesting box. You just might do so, Charles, because **Sister Barbara Ann** of All Saints Convent, also in Catonsville, has befriended bluebirds in that area for many a year.

Credit for being a bluebird supporter also is due to veteran bluebirder **Fred Sahl**, retired colonel of the U.S. Air Force, now of Church Road, VA. Fred has spearheaded bluebird conservation through his Ruritan Club, and recently reported, "We sold 600 boxes in February like nothing! Couldn't keep the boxes in stock in only a total of four Ukrop Supermarkets. I can sell all the boxes our club can make. I'm going to try to

increase our production capacity by bringing more Ruritan Clubs into our program. The sale of bluebird boxes has also been a financial bonanza for our club." Could Fred's Ruritan Club be the one referred to by **Silas Young** of Stafford, VA, who reported that his club built 500 nest boxes mainly from lumber "off of old buildings." We hope it isn't Silas's last year as he claims he'll be 87 on July 1. Happy birthday, Silas, and many happy returns!

On a nearby U.S. government property, the home of Harry Diamond Laboratories, **Bob Wardwell**, grounds supervisor, gave a bluebird talk on the 25th anniversary of Earth Day. Bob has worked with a local Girl Scout troop and a Boy Scout troop, and accepted the boxes those groups made for installation on his trail.

As bluebirds are busy nesting, a noteworthy veteran bluebirder will surely be missed. **Florence Germond** of Millbrook, NY, passed away in the fall of 1994. Described by her granddaughter **Merrilee** in a joyful way, Florence's loving nature and love of nature shine through. "Before it was popular to be a naturalist and conservationist she was. Almost single-handedly, she brought the bluebirds [here] back for all to enjoy. Identifying, counting and caring for all birds was a large part of her life. She taught many many others her love and caring of all living things. A walk in the woods, a stroll on the seashore was an adventure, with her along to point out the wonder and joy she felt."

"Rejoice, rejoice, and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven."

We were saddened to learn of the severe injuries sustained by **Marlys Hjort**, wife of board member **Dick Hjort** (Minnesota) at the Michigan Bluebird Festival in early March. We join in wishing her a speedy recovery so that she will be helping bluebirds again soon. If NABS members would like to drop her a line, write to 9571-270th St., N; Chisago City, MN 55013. ■

Summer Blues

To those who seem always to be blue
They come so brightly just to cheer you.

Who are these happy and fine feathered friends,
Who hang around the fencerow and pause at the ends?
Some often venture to the telephone wire,
Their bright orange necks shining like fire.

Because of conservation they are coming back,
Sad is this nation when their numbers lack.

When the marigolds and salvia start blooming,
On the clothesline post the mockingbird is looming.
But not to worry for there are also bluebirds,
Their beauty and charm is too much for words.

Of course, there is not one kind to say the least,
Our Bluebird is found mostly in the East.

When summertime comes and sticks to you,
Remember not to worry,
For with it comes a sweet flight of blue,
Which will cheer you in a hurry.

For all who love Bluebirds like Dr. Zeleny,
This song brings with it an encouraging meaning.

--W. Brian Brown

(BOOSTERS--Continued from inside back cover)

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(Continued on page 120)

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

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

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

**Address:
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Box 6295
Silver Spring, MD 20916-6295**

