

# *Sialia*

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Pages 1-40

The Quarterly Journal  
Of  
The North American  
Bluebird Society



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*Sialia* means bluebirds. Hence the title of this journal. Technically, *sialia* is the Latinized, neuter plural version of the Greek word *sialia*, a noun meaning a "kind of bird." Since the Eastern Bluebird was the first bluebird classified by Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778), he gave it the species name *sialis*, though he placed it in the genus *Motacilia* which is now reserved for the wagtails. It was William Swainson (1789-1855), who, in 1827, decided that the bluebirds needed a genus of their own within the thrush family (*Turdidae*). He selected the generic name *Sialia* which he simply adapted from the species name *sialis* which Linnaeus had used. Therefore, the scientific name for the Eastern Bluebird is *Sialia sialis* (pronounced see-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 Juvenile bluebird for its logo. Since bluebirds almost always choose to raise their young in small enclosed cavities, a young bluebird sitting near a nesting box seemed to symbolize our mission. The hope of any species resides in its young. Because of bluebird nesting preferences, the survival of their young may depend on the nesting box, especially since natural cavities, for a variety of reasons, are disappearing rapidly. The theme of bluebird young nurtured in man-made structures will be a recurring one in our art and literature. We hope that this theme will remind all about the plight of the bluebird, and will stimulate action which will allow this beautiful creature to prosper.

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# Sialia

The Quarterly Journal  
About Bluebirds

Volume 18, Number 1  
Winter 1996  
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EDITOR  
Joanne K. Solem

ART EDITOR  
M. Suzanne Probst

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## COVER

Art Editor M. Suzanne Probst shows an Eastern Bluebird poised to eat the fruit of Flowering Dogwood, a valuable native planting.

*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 Graeoloch Road, Laurel, Maryland 20723.

# Presidential Points

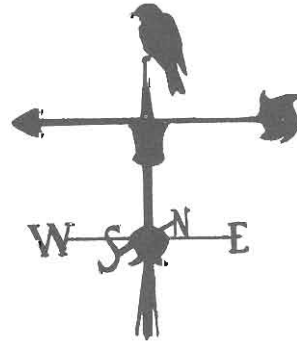
Charlotte Jernigan

The big day in April is not April Fool's Day. It's Earth Day! It should be a day to reflect on our planet and renew our commitment to do something for the sake of the environment. Actually, every day should be "earth day," and we should be constantly reminding ourselves that our environment is the only thing keeping you and me alive. This special day was created as a day of mindfulness about our connection to the earth; it emphasizes the need for all Americans to become actively involved with efforts to protect the planet and its inhabitants.

The North American Bluebird Society is an organization that can make the difference. Our individual efforts multiplied by those of several thousand members can have a positive impact. Since what we do is cumulative, we must learn to think as a community. Right where each of us lives, there are opportunities to restore or enhance wildlife habitats; in so doing, we help a world in trouble. I would like to encourage you to plant a tree or a shrub or other plant that would, in the future, benefit cavity nesters. In the long run, no doubt it would serve both man and the animal kingdom.

Trees and other plantings native to your area can provide habitat and food for many species. Native plants are more likely to grow well and resist disease; however, striving for a little diversity may bring you a pleasant surprise that is well worth the effort and space. Do a little research, decide what your contribution will be for your circumstances, and then share with the rest of us. Since we have members in all areas of the United States, this project could be a real education, pinpointing the diversity of what our members have to offer to help sustain our planet.

For our particular purpose here, it doesn't matter whether you choose spring



or fall. Let me know what you planted, the names of the cavity nesters you planned for, and whether it was for food or nest sites. Just as we don't all have the same trees, we don't all have the same cavity nesters. Tell me which cavity nesters could possibly accept your invitation to raise a family or eat in the tree or shrub that you chose. I will list the states and number of participants from that state

Remember, trees not only help the earth and provide shade for us, they also produce oxygen and cleanse the air. Our feathered friends are not the only families that need them. All of us need them, and we need them now.

There is an old proverb that says, "If you plan for a year, plant rice. If you plan for ten years, plant a tree. If you plan for a century, educate your men and women." And with that last thought, may I suggest that you take a youngster along when you plant and let him help while you explain what the benefits will be for the birds and for him. ■

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## NEW RATE OPTIONS FOR NABS MEMBERS

Effective 1 January 1996, individuals who choose the Student, Senior, or Regular category of membership in the North American Bluebird Society have the opportunity to renew for either a single year or for a three year period. See back cover for complete list.

# Cross-Beaked Western Bluebirds

Elsie Eltzroth

Two Western Bluebirds (*Sialia mexicana*) with beak deformities were removed from nest boxes on the Audubon Society of Corvallis Bluebird Trail in 1994. Nothing of this nature had been seen in the 19 years that boxes had been monitored. Three thousand Western Bluebirds were banded during this period and several other species of birds used some of the boxes.

When ranch owners north of Wren, Oregon, called to say that problems had developed at box 9026 where six young hatched on 30 April, they were asked to remove the three smallest weak, cold, and naked 6-day old nestlings to warm and feed them.

The nestlings were brought to me the following morning. One weighed 15.0 g., its eyes were open; the second 14.0 g., its eyes were still closed. The smallest, a male weighing 9.0 g., had a deformed beak with the upper mandible pointing to the left of the lower mandible. Its right eye was closed, the left eye was missing, and the cheek seemed deformed. There was no apparent injury, no bleeding, just a minute amount of fluid in the area of the eyeball which disappeared as the opening to the eye healed closed.

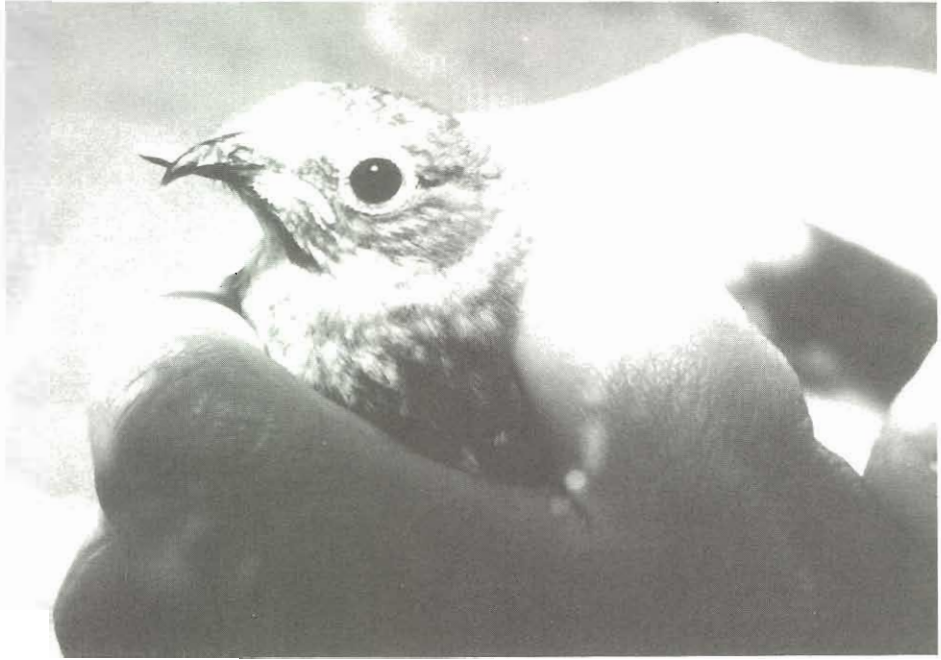
The one-eyed bluebird was unreleasable and kept for observation pending suggestions from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). He seemed to be in excellent physical condition except for having just the one eye. It was apparent that he had some problems adjusting to new situations. While waiting for instructions from the USFWS, I removed a second cross-beaked male Western Bluebird nestling on 4 August, 6 mi. (9.6 km.) SSE of the first box near Philomath, Oregon. The upper mandible of this nestling also crossed the lower, pointing to the left (see photograph). There was no facial distortion; it had both eyes. It was 12 days old and weighed 23.0 g. Weights of its four siblings varied

from 21.0 g. to 29.0 g. This brood had hatched 24 July. The general health of the cross-beaked bird was always in question. He seemed awkward in his motor development and may have had a vision problem. He was something of a klutz.

The nest in box 8030 was heavily infested with 104 blowfly larvae (*Protocalliphora* sp.). A clean grass nest was put in the box as a substitute. The parents were unbanded. We cannot rule out the possibility that this was the pair from box 9026 because that pair had not been identified with USFWS bands.

Blood from the two juveniles was sent to a special laboratory for diagnostic testing in September 1994, but the small samples led to inconclusive results. Samples of the size needed for analysis would have traumatized the birds and we were reluctant to sacrifice them at that time. The beaks of both birds were trimmed five times from September through February 1995.

Were these aberrations the result of a genetic anomaly, environmental factors, or just plain coincidence? Additional concern surfaced when we learned that Dave Siddon's "Wildlife Images," a well-known wildlife rehabilitation and education center in Grants Pass, had received eight birds from the Rogue Valley with deformed beaks and/or missing eyes: a Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*), an American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*), two Red-tailed Hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*), three American Kestrels (*Falco sparverius*) and an Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*). Four of the five carcasses were sent to the National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC) in Madison, Wisconsin. The two-eyed bluebird with crossed beak was euthanized on 3 May 1995 when his health did not improve following medication for severe seizures and progressive blindness, possibly caused by dietary calcium deficiency. It was



Photograph by M. S. Eitzroth

Cross-beaked Western Bluebird from Noble's Lone Star Ranch west of Philomath, Oregon, August 1994.

processed for examination and testing at the NWHC and was shipped under the direction of the USFWS. The one-eyed bird was euthanized on 3 June and was also sent to the NWHC

#### Postscript:

Three nestlings had been left in box 9026 on 6 May, with hope that the parent(s) would attend to them. Two died that night; the third was removed from the nest the next morning and brought to me. The three apparently normal bluebirds were successfully hand-raised, kept in an aviary until they were capable of strong flight and could forage for themselves. Each was banded with a unique set of colored plastic bands in addition to their numbered aluminum USFWS bands. They were released from their cage five miles (8 km) north of Corvallis, Oregon, in August 1994 when they were approximately 2-1/2 months old. After a week on their own, they left the area.

One, a female, was seen at a special

bluebird mealworm and currant feeder on 2 March 1995 seven miles (11.2 km) southwest of Corvallis, 12 miles (19.2 km) from its release site. It remained there with a banded mate defending a nest box until 20 April when both disappeared. A few days later the male returned to the site calling, singing, and sitting on the nest box. Late in July, I was called about a dead bluebird at another box site one mile (1.6 km) southwest of the first where I picked up a few desiccated feathers and the bands belonging to the missing female. ■

*The author is a licensed bander and rehabilitator.*

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The North Carolina Bluebird Society (NCBS) member who received a certificate of recognition for his work with bluebirds in Burke County (*Sialia* 17(4):146,150) was incorrectly identified. The recipient was Raymond Williams.

# Bluebird Bois Pour Trois

Jill Estock

Nine blue eggs! I couldn't believe my eyes when I checked the bluebird box designated "R1" on my trail on 5 May 1995. Last year was my first with a bluebird trail of 11 boxes to monitor. Even so, I knew this number of eggs was not a common occurrence for Eastern Bluebirds. On 27 April when I had counted seven eggs in box R1, I knew it to be an unusually large clutch, though not completely unheard of. The nine eggs, however, gave evidence that some "dumping" was going on I decided to spend time monitoring the box to verify this

While monitoring on 9 May I discovered that not only was there "dumping" but that two adult females, along with a male, were tending the box. On this date, I found that three eggs had hatched. As it turned out,

that was the final count. Immediately, questions arose. How many eggs were fertile? How many had each female laid. Had the male mated with both females? Would there be a staggered hatch? Would all three adults care for the nestlings. Would the box hold nine nestlings until fledging? Some questions remained unanswered, others were answered with continued monitoring.

On 12 May, 1995 I confirmed that two females were sharing in the feeding of the nestlings. Each female entered the box separately with mealworms I had placed on the top of their box. The male at this time was not seen. When the male did return, one female greeted him with the "wing wave" while the other remained inside the box. The male also assisted in the feeding. At one point he also offered



Photographs by Jill Estock.

Nine egg clutch in Eastern Bluebird nest, Newcastle, Pennsylvania. Three eggs hatched.

a morsel to the female outside the box. After 10 or 15 minutes, the male left. I watched what followed in amazement.

The female on the fence joined the other female inside the box! They remained together in the box for about 14 minutes until the male returned. At that time, one female exited the box and greeted the male. I witnessed this a second time on the same day. Again the females remained together inside the box for about 14 minutes. This led me to believe that not only were they both feeding the hatchlings, but they were also sharing in the incubation of the remaining eggs.

All three adults got along wonderfully. The male did not seem to favor one female over the other. The females exhibited a particular friendliness with each other. They all exchanged the "wing wave" and the male often fed the females.

The problem of box size was solved when it became apparent that only three eggs were going to hatch. Whether the three were from the same female is

unknown. Why the rest of the clutch did not hatch is also a mystery; however, I would guess that the eggs were infertile. On 5 May, there were nine eggs. On 7 May, there were three hatchlings and four eggs; two eggs were gone. On 16 May, the box contained three nestlings, three whole eggs, and one broken egg. The latter was dried. On 26 May, the twentieth day, after seeing no activity, I cautiously checked the box finding that all three babies had fledged. I did not break the remaining eggs to see if they were fertile.

Overall, this fascinating nesting attempt created a great challenge. Though I have had larger broods at other boxes, this one was fun! As a bonus, I was able to produce photographic verification without intrusion on the nesting threesome.

I never saw the fledglings or the adults again. They did not re-nest at that location. The three babies were the only bluebirds to fledge from "R1" in 1995. ■

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An adult male Eastern Bluebird (left) with the two adult females who shared in feeding three nestlings hatched from the nine egg clutch.



# Protecting (and Other Climbing Predators)

Lance D. Wood

Since the 1960's, I have been building, erecting, and monitoring nest boxes for Eastern Bluebirds at various locations in Virginia. Over the years I have gained experience and learned a great deal from veteran bluebird trail operators, such as Ron Kingston of Charlottesville, Virginia. I now maintain about 50 nest boxes that provide safe nesting sites primarily for bluebirds and Tree Swallows (and also occasionally for Carolina Wrens, Carolina Chickadees, and other native cavity nesters). These trails are located on two farms, one in central Virginia near Charlottesville and one in Gloucester County in eastern Virginia.

Based on my experience, I have concluded that, at least in Virginia, a large percentage of active bluebird nest boxes are raided every nesting season by snakes (primarily the common black rat snake, *Elaphe obsoleta*) and by raccoons and other climbing predators. This is hardly surprising, considering the fact that most bluebird nest boxes are placed in open, conspicuous locations to reduce the threat from House Wren attacks. Thus they are easily found by a variety of predators. Some of those predators are intelligent animals (such as raccoons) that are likely to learn and remember that nest boxes sometimes contain readily available prey. A predator that has found a meal in one vulnerable nest box may investigate other boxes within his hunting territory. Because I do not want my nest boxes to serve as "feeding stations" for predators and "death traps" for native birds, and because I believe that practically all of the losses of birds' eggs, young, and incubating females by climbing predators can be prevented by installing effective predator guards, I urge the consistent use of predator guards.

I believe that even conscientious bluebird trail operators who monitor their nest boxes regularly are likely to underestimate the number of active nests that are destroyed by snakes. This is the case since a snake usually leaves little or no evidence of its visit; the eggs and/or birds in the nest are swallowed whole and disappear. A snake's visit usually does not disturb a bird's nest to any noticeable degree. A bluebird trail operator may visit a nest box and note that the young bluebirds inside are within a few days of fledging. The following week the monitor visits again, notes that the young birds are gone, and believes that they have all fledged successfully. In fact, they may have all been eaten by a black rat snake which left no sign of its visit.

The black rat snake is an abundant predator, even though they are infrequently seen, with a large geographic range. Black rat snakes do much of their hunting at night. They are extremely skillful climbers that can easily ascend any unprotected pipe or pole on which a nesting box has been mounted. If the surface of a mounting pipe is smooth and slick, the snake merely coils around the pipe, holding on with its powerful constrictor muscles "inching up" however far it needs to go to find birds or eggs to eat. No doubt all native predators have a place in the ecosystem, and I would never want to kill any snake or other native predator, but I prefer to keep predators on the ground eating rodents and away from the birds that have occupied my nesting boxes.

To foil the many predators and enemies of bluebirds and other native cavity nesting birds, I employ a number of non-lethal anti-predator devices that work very well in combination; so well in fact, that

my nest boxes virtually never lose an egg or a nestling to any predator. I attribute the success of my predation-control efforts primarily to the following techniques that I use every time I erect a nesting box. (All of the materials described below are readily available at any plumbing or electrical supply store.) First, I mount my nest boxes in open grassland, at least 50 feet from brush or trees, about five to six feet above ground level on 3/4 inch galvanized steel pipe (usually the sort of pipe used as "rigid" conduit for electrical wiring). I attach each nest box to the steel pipe with three 3/4 inch steel pipe straps attached to the back of the nest box with sheet-metal screws.

After I have driven the seven or eight-foot long steel mounting pipe a couple of feet into the earth at the desired location, I cut a section of white, plastic PVC pipe about the same length as that section of the steel mounting pipe that remains above ground after it has been driven into place, minus the length of the nesting box that must be strapped to the topmost part of that steel mounting pipe. (I use PVC pipe with an inside diameter of two inches or three inches; the bigger the better, but the larger diameter pipe is more expensive.) I then place the plastic PVC pipe over and around the steel pipe by dropping the PVC pipe into place, so that it forms a sheath or casing around the steel pipe. The PVC pipe serves a number of useful purposes, as explained below, but the empty gap or airspace between the outer surface of the steel mounting pipe and the inner wall of the PVC pipe provides an inviting place for ants to establish a colony. This could be disastrous for young nestlings, since ants will swarm over hatchlings and destroy them while the young birds are nest-bound and helpless. To prevent this, one should bury the bottom end of the PVC pipe an inch or more below ground level, where ants will rarely discover an opening for a new colony. As added insurance against ants, at the top opening of the PVC pipe, one should fill the gap between

the inner surface of the PVC pipe and the outer surface of the steel mounting pipe with two or three tablespoons of wheel bearing grease to form an impassable barrier that ants will not climb past to attack young nestlings.

At the top of the PVC pipe, I slide one or two large steel washers into place around the steel mounting pipe to "seal in" the grease ant barrier. The washers provide additional, although not essential, support for the most important part of the predator guard: a *four-foot square* piece of heavy-duty, 1/2 inch mesh, galvanized steel hardware cloth (also called "rat wire"). The four-foot square section of hardware cloth creates a very effective barrier that blocks the ascent of climbing snakes and other predators, keeping the nesting birds safe and secure in their nesting box, mounted just above the hardware cloth. Hardware cloth has several advantages for use as a predator barrier: it is readily available from hardware stores; it is inexpensive and easy to work with; and it is rarely damaged by wind, snow, sleet, or rain, since those elements pass through the mesh. I would not rely on a hardware cloth barrier smaller than four feet on each side, however, since I have seen large snakes get past three-foot square hardware cloth barriers.

For those concerned that a four-foot square hardware cloth barrier might make the monitoring, maintenance, and cleaning of a nest box excessively difficult, I can report that I have never found that to be a problem (although one must be careful not to get scratched by the cut wire edges of the hardware cloth). Although I use a light-weight, six foot aluminum step ladder to monitor my nest boxes mounted above eye level, the step ladder's paint can shelf easily pushes the flap of hardware cloth temporarily down, out of the way, until nest box monitoring is completed. In one way, a strong predator barrier system enhances nest box monitoring. Some bluebirders are understandably concerned that raccoons and other predators are likely to follow the

human scent trail from nest box to nest box, raiding the boxes. If one has a fairly "predator-proof" system in place, that legitimate concern can be lessened.

As a final measure of protection, I apply a band of wheel bearing grease around the outside circumference of the white PVC pipe about three or four feet above the ground level. So long as it is fresh and slippery, the grease makes it more difficult for a raccoon or other climbing mammal to ascend the smooth, slippery surface of the PVC pipe to raid the nest box, and few are expected to get past the grease to the top of the pipe where the nesting box is mounted. Unfortunately, neither the smooth PVC pipe nor the band of grease around the PVC pipe will stop a climbing snake; they plow right past and through the grease. Nevertheless, the band of wheel bearing grease is very useful in monitoring the effectiveness of any snake barrier system because, in its ascent, a snake coats its belly and sides with grease. Thereafter, the snake leaves an unmistakable "grease trail" behind. Wherever it goes in its attack on the nest box, it clearly reveals just how far and in just what manner it advanced toward its final goal, the birds or eggs inside the nest box.

I am aware that the use of wheel bearing grease presents the objectionable problem of water pollution. To deal with that problem, I use as little grease as possible to achieve my goals; moreover, I believe that the vast majority of the grease stays on the PVC pipe, and that relatively little is washed off by rain. Unfortunately,, I do not know of an appropriate substitute for grease. I would not want to use garden Tanglefoot<sup>®</sup> in place of grease, for fear that native birds and beneficial insects would be fatally ensnared in the sticky substance.

Over the years I have derived great satisfaction from "reading" the grease trail signs left behind by many snakes that have challenged my anti-predator barriers while attempting to raid my nest boxes. Thus far, not one snake has gotten past the final barrier of a four-foot square piece of hardware cloth. In contrast, a few large black rat snakes have occasionally gone over and past three-foot square pieces of hardware cloth. They have consumed whole families of House Sparrows inside the nest boxes attached above an experimental three-foot square barrier. Similarly, the tell-tale grease trail has clearly revealed that a number of large



Photograph by Lance D. Wood.

Author's method of protecting bluebird boxes from climbing predators.

black rat snakes have gone over the patented Top Guard Climbing Animal Barrier<sup>®</sup>, which is sold commercially as an allegedly adequate protection against snakes and other climbing predators. While the Top Guard Barrier has its virtues and its uses, I would never rely on one unless I had firmly wired a four-foot square piece of hardware cloth on top of the Top Guard Barrier as an added protection.

Of course, I recognize that some persons would object for aesthetic reasons to the anti-predator devices that I use and recommend. Some would say that a traditional bluebird nest box mounted at the top of a wooden fencepost is more aesthetically appealing than the rather odd-looking combination of PVC pipe, hardware cloth, and nest box that I advocate. Given the fact that I also paint all of my nest boxes white (to reflect heat and prevent overheating under the hot summer sun), I must admit that my nest box/predator guard combinations are

rather distinctive in appearance and rather eye-catching. Although I know that my approach is not for everyone, my response is simply that my primary concern is to protect the lives of "my" nesting native birds; I do not find my structures to be at all aesthetically objectionable.

Some of the other devices that are used to protect nest boxes from snakes (such as the soft, flexible, netting "snake traps" mounted on some nest box mounting pipes) are less noticeable, but are likely to kill the snakes that become enmeshed in them, unless the trapped snakes are released soon after they are ensnared. The barrier system that I use protects my nest boxes, but will not kill snakes or other predators, allowing them to continue to play their useful and necessary roles in the larger ecosystem. ■

2800 James Dr.  
Alexandria, VA 22303

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### *Morning Blue*

Blue of the morning  
Bringing blushes of dawn  
Brushing a soft cloud  
To an almost white.

In eons long past  
Hope welled with the dawn  
Banishing fear from  
The prison of night.

Ancient awareness  
To enigma of being  
Musing into thought  
The wonders beheld.

Bluebirds speak softly  
Soothing night terrors  
Waking dawn's memories  
As messengers of hope.

--Janet Reaves

# Update on Noel Guards

Tom A. Barber

Some bluebirders are not happy with the Noel guard for various reasons. Everything that can be of benefit to bluebirds needs to be tested and explored. Although I do not believe these guards can be used in all situations, I have found them to be valuable under certain conditions.

My 60-box bluebird trail is located in four different areas. Only six boxes are fitted with Noel guards. The rest of the boxes are mounted on greased poles.

I have set up somewhat of a test area for the guards. There are four NABS top-opening boxes in isolation in a pasture following a fence line. In the past, I have called this area "raccoon alley" (Barber 1993). Since 1992, predation by raccoons has been a major problem.

Noel guards have been installed permanently on these four boxes. I have read that bluebirds don't like the Noel guards (Davis 1995). This I find to be very misleading and untrue.

Maybe my bluebirds are an exception and not the rule, but they have accepted the guards. All four boxes fledged bluebirds during the 1995 bluebird season. Twenty-three bluebirds fledged; one box had two broods even though raccoons were still in the area. In the spring, a raccoon could not get to the nestlings because of the guard and the deep box; instead, the animal was able to pull out the bottom of the box. The bottom was loose and should have been repaired in the early spring. That was the only predation by raccoons at this site. Snakes got two broods of young (also in the spring) or the fledging number in the four boxes would have been much higher.

The bluebirds seem to have accepted the guards as part of the boxes. Whether they like the guards or not, they are using them and, therefore, are being protected.

My experience after three breeding seasons using Noel guards is that the bluebirds are completely accustomed to them. How else can you explain the fact that this area had 100% box occupancy?

Yes, you do need to use deep boxes with the guard for best results. I have never put a Noel guard on a Peterson box. I like top-opening boxes that are deep because you can check on nestlings all the way up to fledging without worry of premature fledging. Top-opening boxes can be adapted to open from the side also for easy cleaning. A deep box with a Noel guard makes it almost impossible for a raccoon to reach in for its prey. Also, because the guard is made of hardware cloth, it allows bluebirds to see the cavity entrance without obstruction.

Bluebirds will use boxes with a Noel guard. Like so many aspects of bluebirding, this guard is not the answer to every predator problem in all locations. It can, however, be a valuable tool. New bluebirders need to know what works to help bluebirds, and they need to know the options. ■

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## Memorial Gifts

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

## Andrew Troyer Has Bluebirds Eating Out of His Hand



Photograph by Robert E. Orthwein.

Andrew Troyer is shown with a female bluebird perched on his hand taking mealworms for her young in a nearby nest box. Troyer's success in hand feeding bluebirds is only one indication of his role as a bluebird conservationist on his Pennsylvania farm. He has also designed an innovative and successful Purple Martin house. The Purple Martin Conservation Association has given him their Purple Martin Landlord of the Year award.

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### Getting to Know...Bluebirds!

See the enclosed picture catalogue for information concerning the 36 page educator's packet produced by the NABS Education Committee. Designed to be used in grades four through six, the material can be adjusted for use with younger or older students.

### Instructions to Authors

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

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

# Bluebird Exchange

To help our readers form connections with state and regional bluebird organizations, the NABS board has requested that annually the addresses of those groups supplying material to "Bluebird Exchange" be published. Names and addresses listed below are those groups which were included in the feature in 1995. If your bluebird organization publishes a newsletter and it is not included in "Bluebird Exchange," please make sure this editor or NABS is on the mailing list. For a complete list of all bluebird groups, consult *North America and Bermuda Bluebird Trail Directory*, a cooperative project of Ellis Bird Farm, Ltd. and the North American Bluebird Society published October 1993

## ALBERTA

Mountain Bluebird Trails Society  
1725 Lakeside Road South  
Lethbridge, Alberta  
Canada T1K 3G9

Calgary Area Bluebird Trails  
c/o Don Stiles  
20 Lake Wapta Rise SE  
Calgary, Alberta T2J 2M9

Ellis Bird Farm, Ltd.  
Box 2980  
Lacombe, Alberta T0C 1S0

## BERMUDA

Bermuda Bluebird and Longtail Society  
c/o Tommy Outerbridge  
Box 14S23, Harrington Sound  
Bermuda, HSBX

## CALIFORNIA

California Bluebird Recovery Program  
2021 Ptarmigan Drive #1  
Walnut Creek, CA 94595

## GEORGIA

Bluebirds Over Georgia, Inc  
P.O. Box 53344  
Atlanta, GA 30355

## IOWA

Johnson County Songbird Project  
2511 Hwy 1 SW  
Iowa City, IA 52240

Iowa Bluebird Recovery Program  
Jaclyn Hill  
2946 Ubben Ave.  
Ellsworth, IA 50075

## MAINE

Bluebird Association of Maine  
RFD 4, Box 7600  
Gardiner, ME 04345

## MASSACHUSETTS, RHODE ISLAND, CONNECTICUT

1460 Fall River Ave.  
P.O. Box 32  
Seekonk, MA 02771

## MINNESOTA

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

## MONTANA

Mountain Bluebird Trails  
Box 794  
Ronan, MT 59864

## NEBRASKA

Bluebirds Across Nebraska  
P.O. Box 67157  
Lincoln, NE 68506-7157

## NEW YORK

New York State Bluebird Society  
c/o Treasurer David Smith  
15 Bridle Lane  
Dryden, NY 13053

Broome County Nestbox Network  
c/o Joseph R Sedlacek  
28 Farr Ave.  
Johnson City, NY 13790

Schoharie County Bluebird Society  
c/o Kevin Berner  
SUNY  
Cobleskill, NY 12043

## NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina Bluebird Society  
Box 4191  
Greensboro, NC 27404

## NORTH DAKOTA

Bluebird Recovery Project  
North Dakota Nongame Wildlife Program  
100 North Bismarck Expressway  
Bismarck, ND 58501

## OHIO

Ohio Bluebird Society  
20680 Twp Rd 120  
Senecaville, OH 43780

## OKLAHOMA

Oklahoma Nongame Wildlife Program  
Oklahoma Dept. of Wildlife Conservation  
1801 N Lincoln  
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

## ONTARIO

Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society  
2-165 Green Valley Drive  
Kitchener, Ontario N2P 1K3

Willow Beach Field Naturalists  
c/o Hazel Bird  
Box 45  
Harwood, Ontario K0K 2H0

## OREGON

Hubert Prescott Western Bluebird  
Recovery Project  
c/o Patricia Johnson  
7717 S.W. 50th  
Portland, OR 97219

## VERMONT

Bluebirds Across Vermont  
c/o National Audubon Society  
Box 9, Fiddlers Green  
Waitsfield, VT 05673

## WISCONSIN

Bluebird Restoration Association  
of Wisconsin  
Rt. 1, Box 137, Akron Ave  
Plainfield, WI 54966

**ALBERTA--Ellis Bird Farm, Ltd., Summer 1995**

Ellis Bird Farm received matching funds support from the Buck for Wildlife Program and Environmental Partners Fund. This support will allow continued habitat enhancement programs and demonstration wildlife gardens.

--Ellis Bird Farm, Ltd.

-----Article in *Lethbridge Herald*, July 1995

An article features the late Duncan Mackintosh. It pictures him holding the 1995 Emerald Award given by a community group, celebrating environmental excellence by a community group in Alberta. The award recognizes the nearly 60 volunteers involved in the Mountain Bluebird Trail system and the leadership of Duncan Mackintosh. He has received 11 awards for his contributions to bluebird conservation. (See his obituary on page 32 of this issue.)

--Lethbridge Herald

**CALIFORNIA--California Bluebird Recovery Program Newsletter, September 1995**

Hatch Graham asks "Do the Bluebirds Need a Recovery Program?" He talked with Sam Droege and Bruce Peterjohn at the Patuxent Environmental Science Center in Laurel, Maryland. He learned that Breeding Bird Survey data show that from 1966 to 1994 California had a significant decline in bluebirds tallied: 36.4% in the last 28 years and 28.5% in the last 15. The conclusion is that California bluebirds most definitely need a recovery program.

Check with companies that install overhead garage doors as a possible source of used pipe for mounting nest boxes. This may be a way to recycle for the environment and help the bluebirds, too.

Don Yoder claims that initial use of black, round 1 1/2 inch spots painted on the sides of his nest boxes increased production 37%.

Fred Lesan, of Biggs, uses a piece of 1/4 inch hardware cloth with a square hole in the center on the front of his bluebird boxes to deter woodpeckers from enlarging the entrance.

California now has county coordinators for 21 of its 58 counties.

Thomas Hoffman, commercial wine-grape grower makes a case for "Creating Bluebird Habitat in California's Vineyards." Insects in the summer and mummified fruit in the winter offer ample food. He also actively promotes attracting Barn Owls for rodent control in vineyards and orchards.

--California Bluebird Recovery Program

**ILLINOIS--Letter in *Belleville News Democrat*, September 21, 1995**

Bluebird boxes will soon be placed along the new Greenway trail. Also 52 boxes will be added to the new 18 hole Governors Run golf course in Carlyle which matches a like number at the existing course.

The writer maintains more than 200 boxes in southern Illinois and estimates fledging more than 1,000 bluebirds in 1995. In order to help fund trail expenses, as well as to clean up roadsides and help the environment, he offers to pick up aluminum cans from individuals.

--H. Coy Winter

[Ed. Note: Winter's business card features a bluebird on a branch along with a notation that he is available to provide slide programs for clubs, scouts, and nursing homes. Many bluebirders have designed business cards with bluebird themes. Send one of yours and we'll try to print a sample of designs. Photographs of license plates continue to be welcome also. Mail to Sialia, 10617 Graeloch Rd., Laurel, MD 20723.]



#### IOWA--*Wings...*, Summer 1995

The Iowa Roadside Coalition is actively working to protect the 600,000 acres along Iowa's roadsides from frequent mowing and spraying. This is habitat enhancement which will benefit a wide variety of species.

Don and Lillian Stokes discuss "Bird Behavior and the Conservation Challenge" in an article reprinted from *Bird Watcher's Digest*.

Dr. Donna Andry in "The Cheep Seats" addresses easy ways to enhance backyard habitat.

"Sherman Tower Project: Update" by Barbara Boyle summarizes the latest activity of the Sherman Project committee. The group is seeking a small farm on which to erect the tower so that a caretaker could live on site to lead tours and protect against vandalism. A matching grant has been received for microfilming the collections of Althea Sherman's papers. The cooperation and support of many individuals has been essential in bringing the project this far. They are optimistic that, within the foreseeable future, the tower where Althea Sherman did her Chimney Swift research, along with her papers, will be available to scholars and the public.

Total donations in 1993 (last year available) to the "chickadee checkoff" in Iowa show a total of \$149,897 collected. This low figure could be considerably enhanced with the passage of an excise tax on recreational equipment and supplies--most effective if it could be enacted as a national tax.

Bob Orthwein's wren-resistant bluebird box as reported in Minnesota's Bluebird Recovery Program's *Bluebird News* (May 1995) is described.

--Johnson County Songbird Project

-----Letter, October 1995

The Iowa Bluebird Recovery Program has an annual meeting and, since 1988, I have edited the annual Iowa Bluebird Directory. We are in the process of organizing as a more active statewide organization. We hope to soon have additional information available. Questions can be directed to me at 2946 Ubben Ave., Ellsworth, IA 50075.

--Jaclyn Hill

#### MAINE--*Downeast Bluebird*, Summer 1995

The Bluebird Association of Maine's (BAM) annual meeting was held on 17 June 1995 at the Cooperative Extension office in Ellsworth. A plea for volunteers to create an informal board to help lead BAM was well received. A slate was elected. Sam Hopkins organized the annual meeting and served as its host.

An article about the type and use of pesticides in bluebird boxes was reprinted from Minnesota's Bluebird Recovery Program's *Bluebird News*.

In a birdbanding report, an out-of-state recovery was noted. Tom Morse of Brunswick banded a bluebird on 3 June 1992 in Pittston. It was found in Endicott (near Binghamton) New York in April 1995.

Newsletter editor and BAM coordinator Wendy Howes writes an informational article "It's Okay to Help Tree Swallows, Too!" to encourage bluebirders to appreciate the valuable, attractive, and protected Tree Swallows which may use nest boxes.

BAM member Brian Dalzell, a resident of New Brunswick, Canada, furnished the newsletter with the material on Eastern Bluebirds from the recently published *Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas*. The article notes that Eastern Bluebirds reach their northern limit in the Maritimes. "It was widely but sparsely scattered across New Brunswick and was no more general in most of Maine. " Breeding on Prince Edward Island was first verified in 1989.

--Bluebird Association of Maine

#### NEW YORK--*Bluebird News*, Summer '95

The spring meeting of the New York State Bluebird Society (NYSBS) was held on the

campus of the New York State Chiropractic College in Seneca Falls, New York. The fall meeting is planned for Sunday, 22 October 1995 at Arrowhead Lodge, Brewerton, New York.

The Route 20 Trail is expanding rapidly according to a summary by Ray Arendt. The pine boxes (stained gold) can now be seen in 12 counties. By the end of summer 1995, it is anticipated that 600 nest boxes will be in place. To date, members and friends have sponsored more than 300 boxes.

Arendt also details the successful return of the bluebird to Long Island. In another article, he provides a good summary of House Sparrow history, food habits, and control measures.

An article from the Ohio Bluebird Society's *Bluebird Monitor* (Summer 1995) is summarized. Bob Orthwein has been successful in saving bluebirds and Tree Swallows in his boxes from death or nest usurpation in sparrow-infested areas by erecting three nest boxes instead of two. He found that when there was a vacant box available, House Sparrows used that rather than evicting bluebirds or swallows from occupied boxes. This then offers an opportunity to trap the sparrows in the extra box.

Directions for building a Huber House Sparrow trap are given. Ohioan Joe Huber's in-box trap is an effective means of capturing House Sparrows.

--New York State Bluebird Society

-----Broome County Nestbox Network Newsletter, August 1995

The annual survey form is enclosed in this mailing. Joe and Tamara Sedlacek include some encouragement for those filling out the form. There are also some helpful hints for those who may be relatively inexperienced monitors.

A strong statement encourages the trapping of House Sparrows, particularly using the Huber live trap. PVC boxes may also be tried as a means of deterring sparrows.

--Broome County Nestbox Network

OHIO--*Bluebird Monitor*, Autumn 1995

Outgoing President Gil Trail thanks those who supported him during the three years of his presidency. He particularly cites Jean Peters for her work as newsletter editor. She is resigning from that position which will be assumed by the outgoing president beginning with the winter issue.

The annual convention of the Ohio Bluebird Society (OBS) is planned for 21 October 1995 at the Wilmot Nature Center.

Dean Sheldon's column addresses monitoring in "Keeping Tabs: An Arm's Length View of Monitoring." He emphasizes box location as the most important single thing a bluebird monitor can do to maximize bluebird occupation. His final piece of advice for beginning bluebirders is "find yourself a veteran bluebirder and ask him or her to take you on the trail...."

Dr. Wayne Davis says that, despite a promise to write something for each issue of the newsletter which seems a daunting task, he keeps turning up interesting items. This time his subjects include fruits eaten by bluebirds, occasional use of feathers in nest construction, frequency of mites on nestlings, use of a perch stick on boxes, and the lowest height at which a bluebird will nest. Though retired, Dr. Davis's trail research is ongoing. He will also continue to search the literature for bluebird-related material. Readers can look forward to many more "Notes from Kentucky."

Bob Orthwein describes the PVC baffle he uses on posts to prevent raccoon predation. The secret is that the baffle has to be free swinging so it wobbles when a raccoon tries to climb the post. He and Dick Tuttle have had no failures due to raccoons in the five years since beginning to install this type of predator guard which is a major improvement over grease. Orthwein also notes that he and Tuttle have been using a 1 9/16 inch

(Continued on page 19)

# 1994 SPEAKERS' BUREAU REPORT

Ron Kingston

In January 1995, 320 questionnaires were sent to members of the NABS Speakers' Bureau. One of the many questions asked was "What have you found works best in your programs and what didn't seem to work?" Some of the interesting comments are as follows.

Lionel Billard of Narrowsburg, NY, stated that the slides work well, but he would like to try the videos. Ted Morus of Greenville, PA, uses slides with question and answer sessions because he can answer viewers' questions immediately. Heather Shockey-Barrett says, "People enjoy the typical bluebird nesting timetable sheet and building the boxes." Elaine Sweitzer's workshops are usually family oriented in Sykesville, MD, where she shows slides and then each family builds a nest box. Herman Bressler of White Lake, NY, says he "constructs bluebird nest box kits and supplies all the necessary wood and hardware to put them together. All the children have to bring are their parents and a hammer. I could hand each child a completed bluebird nest box but it means a great deal more when they construct their own."

"Everything I use seems to work," says Lorna Beasley of Live Oak, FL, "where people really get enthused about bluebirds and I always have lots of questions after the program, plus a line of people come up and ask questions and tell me their experiences." Dave Heidenreich speaks to the group and then shows one of his many videos with displays and handout information in and around Colton, NY. In Stone Mountain, GA, Frances Sawyer gives a brief talk about the importance of helping the bluebirds, shows a video, followed by questions and answers.

Up in North Dakota, Chris Grandahl uses local experts talking about personal experiences. In Valparaiso, IN, Ken Jankowski likes to talk to small groups

and says that some videos get long sometimes unless it's a feed store and people can come and go and talk to him as they leave. John Holm of Gothenburg, NE, has a video made on his own trail and shows eggs, nests, and boxes. He then goes out on the trail and has lunch and discussions.

Richard Hjort, who is in charge of the Minnesota Bluebird Recovery Program's workshops and lives in Chisago City, says that one of his favorites was a lady from Georgia. "She spoke from the center aisle, not the stage, used all props (no slides), not even a script to work from. She wandered around holding up these things for an hour...telling her story. The audience loved it." As a reminder, he stated that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife law states that it is unlawful to possess any protected bird, eggs, or nest in any manner without a federal and/or state permit. He suggests making your own bluebird nest and displaying an old sparrow nest with sparrow eggs.

In Wildwood, TX, Mary Reed uses props and handouts and tells stories of happenings along their bluebird trail. Brenda McGowan of Sherwood, OR, says that it depends on the ages of the audience. She uses slides of Western Bluebirds that were taken over the years and gives out a small booklet written about that species by Elsie Eltzroth Jean Lister of Thunder Bay, Ontario, "wings it" with the use of selected slides. For children she presents slides one week and holds a nest box construction period the next week with opportunity for reinforcement during the second session. A similar scenario is practiced by Barbara Stinson of Warrenton, VA. She says that it is a two part program: a talk with slides and then a month or so later a field trip on her trail. In Church Road, VA, Fred Sahl has a 20 minute slide program and

a 15 minute demonstration of boxes with a lecture. He then answers questions and hands out brochures which include different inserts.

R.D. Williams of Markleville, IN, says, "I use a laser beam to pinpoint specific details on the slide while I lecture....Try as I can I can't shorten the program below 30 minutes as many request." In the Minneapolis area, Dorene Scriven states that a slide talk, then an open discussion works best for her; while in Mt. Airy, MD, Drue Gillis uses a question and answer session after the slide show and a general bird identification by the students to start off. Michelle Stripling says that generic programs don't seem to work as well as those specific to her area of Forsyth, GA.

Lorne Scott of Indian Head, Saskatchewan, has nest box building workshops for children with lumber precut and hole predrilled to make it easier for kids to nail a box together. In and around Monroe, MN, Melvin Stahl has question and answer programs and identifies local areas that have bluebirds and explains how to get them to nest in listener's areas. Another good example that works is what Eleanor Dunham does in New Salem, IL. She has a display of books, pictures, and different nest box types and explains the advantages of each. The audience participates by sharing information.

Lillian Files of Tyngsboro, MA, has given dozens of programs per year for many, many years. She speaks for five minutes behind an exhibit table; for 20 minutes she speaks on bluebird conservation using both NABS' and her own slides; and for 20 minutes invites the audience to visit her own trail through slides and tells stories with a great sense of humor. Jerry Newman of Rising Sun, MD, Larry Rohrbaugh of Spring Grove, PA, and Willard Cash of Goldboro, NC, each use a sectional display of nest boxes with plexiglas<sup>R</sup> fronts and covers to display different types of birds that nest in bluebird nest boxes. They say that it's a very effective tool to explain the different birds that are cavity nesters.

All these speakers have one thing in common in that they all do what is comfortable for them. Some videos may be too long, and some slide programs may not show the information needed in a particular area; however, a short visual program with questions and answers, some information to take along, and maybe a newly made nest box should be a very good start. I know the late Dr. Larry Zeleny showed a few slides (maybe ten), held a nest box while he talked, and had a few brochures to hand out. He was always well received.

A total of 546 programs were presented in 1994.

*The following individuals and organizations returned their 1994 questionnaires which helped us determine what works and what doesn't. I want to thank all the speakers for taking time to fill out and return the form and also for all they do for bluebird conservation.*

Paul Allen  
Diane Allison  
David Alpert  
Art Aylesworth  
Lorna Beasley  
Kevin Berner  
Lionel Billard  
Bob Bodine  
Rosemarie Borges  
Alan Boulton  
Herman Bressler  
Marion Briggan  
Scott Butterworth  
Willard Cash  
Elaine Crossley  
Mary Cutler

Lyle Droge  
Eleanor Dunham  
Ruth Dykstra  
Hobart Ellifritt  
Elsie Eltzroth  
Lillian Files  
Joan Finn  
Patricia Folley  
Warren Frey  
Michael Gillis  
Chris Grandahl  
Edward Gray  
Donna Hagerman  
Joan Harmet  
Dave Heidenreich  
Richard Hjort

Marcy Hoepfner  
Helen Hollis  
John Holm  
Marston Husmann  
Ken Jankowski  
Charlotte Jernigan  
Tami Johnson  
Patricia Johnston  
Kenneth Karnas  
Raymond Kiff  
Gord Kingsmill  
John Kiser  
Gary Knipling  
H.E. Koontz  
Keith Kridler  
Joby Lawson

Donna Legare  
Marion Liles  
Jean Lister  
Kevin McCurdy  
Oscar McDaniel  
Brenda McGowan  
Elmer Mellen  
Thomas Meyer  
David Miller  
Ted Morus  
Jerry Newman  
Elizabeth Nichols  
Wilbur Peachey  
Al Perry  
Deni Perry  
Sam Phelps  
Mary Reed  
John Rogers  
Larry Rohrbaugh  
Derrell Rush  
Jean Rutan  
William Ryan  
Fred Sahl  
Viola Sampert  
Frances Sawyer

Ken Schar  
C.H. Schlauderaff  
Marguerite Schutten  
Lorne Scott  
Dorene Scriven  
Joseph Sedlacek  
David Shiels  
Hazel Skuce  
Melvin Stahl  
Barbara Stinson  
Michelle Stripling  
Gary Susag

Wayne Svoboda  
Henderson Traylor  
Barbara Treiber  
Ed Tuthill  
Bernie Van Den Belt  
Richard Wells  
Richard Williams  
R.D. Williams  
Lloyd Wilson  
Donald Yoder  
Al Yuska

Eldorado National Forest, Placerville Ranger District, CA  
Linn County Conservation Department, IA  
Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary, MD  
Patuxent River Park, MD  
Piney Run Nature Center, MD  
Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge, NY  
Dow Chemical, OH  
Geauga Park District, OH  
Carbon County Environmental Ed. Center, PA  
Owl's Hill Nature Center, TN  
Ellanor C. Lawrence Park, VA  
Ellis Bird Farm, Alberta

*The following members of the NABS' Speakers' Bureau have died within the last few years. We remember them and are grateful for their devotion to bluebird conservation. The bluebird is a little more secure and our world a little brighter for the time and energy they devoted to speaking about one of our most beloved birds.*

Gerry Brown, Ottumwa, Iowa  
Milam Cater, Culpeper, Virginia  
Alvon Cox, Ashland, Ohio  
Joe Cronk, Aberdeen, South Dakota  
John Findlay, III, Birmingham, Alabama  
Laurance Sawyer, Ringgold, Georgia  
Glenn Sikes, Cobbtown, Georgia  
J.B. Thomas, Hartney, Manitoba

Dr. Lawrence Zeleny, University Park, Maryland

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(EXCHANGE--Continued from page 16)

entrance hole for more than 15 years. "As starlings can't enter the larger holes, and bluebirds prefer them, why not use them on all the boxes."

County coordinators have been obtained for 17 counties according to Bill Davis. More are needed, but this is a fine start.

--Ohio Bluebird Society

OKLAHOMA--*Watchable Wildlife NEWS*, Summer 1995

Last year the Nongame Wildlife Program received 83 trail reports from 33 counties representing 1,401 nest boxes. Results included the first reported nesting attempt of a House Finch in a box in Oklahoma. At least 620 bluebirds fledged from 1,043 clutches.

Although House Sparrows were listed as one of the top four species in nesting *attempts* (the other three were Eastern Bluebirds, Carolina Chickadees, and Tufted Titmice), only four *fledged*, a testament to careful monitoring.

--Oklahoma Nongame Program

## Cavity Nester Feeder Birds

Hubert Brandenburg of Hagerstown, Maryland, photographed three cavity nesters that can be enticed to feeders: White-breasted Nuthatch (below), Downy Woodpecker (facing page, above), and Tufted Titmouse.





## Nest Identification Console

As a volunteer in Brandywine Creek State Park, I have built a nest identification console. It is on display in the nature center and has been used at several public expos and workshops. The dimensions are as follows: L-32 1/3 in., W-7 in., H-8 3/4 in. Cavities are 5 in. wide and 6 in. high. All slots for plexiglas® are 1/4 in. deep. The viewing lid slides in and out along slots in the ends; the back is also slotted to receive this lid. Materials needed are 3/4 in. pine, 1/4 in. plexiglas®, 2-1 in. brass hasps, a 3 in. handle, a 1 1/4 in. piano hinge 24 inches long and 1/2 in. dowel pins (lid supports).

--Don Macbeth, 814 Shavertown Rd., Boothwyn, PA 19061





# Third Family 4 - August 28, 1990

Helen M. Johnson

*This material is a chapter from the unpublished book Living With Mountain Bluebirds. It is based on 20 years of observation. A second chapter will appear in a future issue of Sialia. The publication of these chapters is the author's tribute to Lawrence Zeleny who wrote the forward to her book.*

Early the next morning I heard a sweeter-than-usual melodic reveille by Mr. Blue. What a special way to be awakened each day. Mrs. didn't come to the feeder for breakfast--strange. Mr. ate a few worms and then flew to the branch near the nest and hopped nervously up and down--not his usual calm pattern of perching and guarding. He seemed agitated and looked into the nest box often.

Mrs. DID finally appear at the opening and raced over to the feeder for a quick snack. Then, immediately went back to her nest. Mr. climbed into the house while she was gone and checked. Much excitement! It HAD been 13 days since incubation started; maybe today was HATCHING DAY!

Sure enough, Mrs. came out with a piece of shell which she carried out of the territory. Mr. was busy foraging and returned with a soft grub for the new babies. How excited we all were! They flew FAST! I tried to help out with mealworms and wax worms. The adults ate one or two but were too busy gathering the right food for their new hatchlings to eat.

As soon as hatchlings poke their heads through the eggshell, a whole world of excitement descends upon them. They hear the calls of the birds, feel the warmth of the sunshine, hear the wind in the trees, and feel their mother's comforting body protecting them. They immediately respond to these stimuli by moving about and making vocal sounds of their own. Thus begins the pattern they will follow through their lifetime--stimulus and response.

This scene brought to mind a poem by Grahame entitled "Birds of Scotland," 1883

"The young have chipped  
Have burst the brittle cage,  
And gaping bills claim all the  
Labor of the parent bird."

How true. As soon as the naked blue baby frees itself from its shell, it can call and gape for food. The bluebird is an altricial bird. The parents supply all the food until the young are nearly adult in size. The hatchlings remain confined to the nest for 22 to 23 days, therefore, they are called nidicoles or nest dwellers. An altricial bird normally uses up its yolk before hatching, and therefore has less reserve food to sustain its first days of life. Accordingly, the altricial nidicole is more dependent on parental brooding and feeding. Consequently, this brood kept the mother and father bluebird hopping. They were fed foods rich in protein; the adult birds had an awareness of the appropriateness of the food needed for the growing young. Hence, the Blues choose not to carry "my" worms to the newly hatched brood.

I tried to imagine the bluebird hatchlings; they were naked except for scattered gray down feathers which appeared on the head, wings, and along the spine. Their naked skin was pink and wrinkled. How such beautiful creatures could develop from these downy lumps of flesh was remarkable!

The parents responded to the cries from their babies and fed them constantly. The gaping mouths were excellent "feeding targets" for the adults as the linings of their mouths were yellowish-orange. Because the parents had good color vision and were sensitive to the yellow range of the color spectrum, they had no trouble directing their foraging finds into their children's mouths. Good thing, too, since the bluebird hatchlings body weight increased rapidly at this time. It averaged a 40% increase in a single day. That meant that

the adult Blues were constantly on the go. Mrs. had to take some time out to brood the fragile nestlings, Mr. continued non-stop to forage and feed. He didn't sing his usual morning song the next day; he must have been exhausted--too tired to sing.

The second day Mrs. came to the feeder and ate two mealworms on the fly. She did stay long enough to grab a wax worm. She took it to the road and poked it several times with her beak and then delivered it to the gaping group in the nest. How smart she was; the wax worms were soft and a healthy addition to the hatchlings' diet. She returned two more times for wax worms, which she prepared for her brood, and then she polished off the rest of the feeder worms herself. After her meal, she wiped her beak painstakingly on a branch. Those wax worms were gooey!

Mr. was never still a moment. Between visits to the nest, he chased squirrels out of the territory. He gathered twice as much food for the young as Mrs. Sometimes the pair would arrive at the nest with an insect at the same time. He would always defer to her and would wait on a branch until she came out. Also, he insisted on gathering all the food for the nestlings from his own foraging. He never took worms from the feeder for them. He would eat from the feeder, but got the babies' food from the ground, so that they would get a varied diet.

Mrs. still spent much of her time warming the hatchlings as the temperature was 32° F at night and it didn't warm up much during the day.

As the days passed, the young developed on schedule. During the first week the greatest change in the nestlings was an overall increase in size. Body weight was about nine times the hatching weight by the seventh day. Feather growth was rapid, and their eyes opened for the first time on the seventh day. They were getting plenty of nourishment, and they were depositing larger and larger fecal sacs which were dutifully carried out by their parents.

As the nestlings grew, Mr. and Mrs. were in such a hurry to get food to their young that they would fly directly into the nest box without hesitating at the entrance! Even Mr. was condescendingly plucking a worm from the feeder to take to his family. And, as evening approached, the pair increased the speed of feeding their young. I clocked them between 6:30 and 7:45 p.m. one night and found they fed their young on the average of every two minutes; that's fast foraging and flying! Never had I watched a better "team" pair!

Mornings were again full of the notes of Mr. Blue. He just missed singing his wake-up tune that one morning. The pair was taking time in the late evening to sit for a minute or two to talk over the day and to groom themselves before going to bed. Birds spend a lot of time in the care of their bodies. Feathers require more care than skin and must be oiled. The Blues also did a lot of scratching to dislodge any insects. Many times I had seen them bathing in the water dish on the porch or in the dust in the road. There hadn't been time for baths lately, however. ■

6011 E. Vernon Ave.  
Scottsdale, AZ 85257

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

Albert A. Drollett  
Dr. Dennis Dukes Family  
Tyran & Kathy Early  
Douglas Flood  
T.J. Freeman Family  
Great Salt Lake Audubon Society  
Andrea Hebert Family  
Mr. & Mrs. Marvin Iwerks  
Robert & Mary Keedy  
Mr. & Mrs. Wallace Knapp  
Dr. Vicki Kondik

Lyle D. LeBere  
Dr. & Mrs. Cameron Lewis Family  
Richard Lyman Family  
Michael C. McCracken Family  
Carol & John McDaniel  
Doris Mucha  
Stephan W. Orrell  
Tim Pickle, III  
Giselheid Regner  
Charles T. Ressler  
Dr. William K. Roth, Jr.

R. David Shiels Family  
Lory & Jeff Sigler  
Craig Singleton  
J. Kingsbury Smith  
Mr. & Mrs. Ralph Smith  
Mary Clark Stambaugh Family  
Mrs. Garnett T. Tunstall, Sr.  
Jack C. Turner  
Peter D. VanDuser Family  
Lorraine D. Watkins  
Don & Joanie Wolff

# Bluebird Rescue

Pam Gonterman

Our son Neil is 12 years old and in the seventh grade. He became involved with 4-H last year because we own a farm that we visit on weekends. The 4-H program has a competition that involves speeches including a demonstration. Neil began looking for a suitable demonstration.

About that time we brought several bluebird boxes home from the farm to repair. Neil helped with the repairs and decided to make some boxes for Christmas for great-aunts and his grandmother. Box construction seemed to be the perfect item for a demonstration. Little did we know how good it would be.

Prior to a 4-H demonstration, Neil's father cuts the wood. During the speech, Neil takes a pre-cut box, gives the measurements, and completely assembles it. He has a completed painted box with him to show at the end of his demonstration. In the allotted 15 minutes he has to talk while working (unless he is making too much noise while hammering).

He talks about the different bluebird species, their nesting habits, predator problems, and where to place a box. At the end of the demonstration, he gives the judges a copy of his blueprint and a fact sheet; he also answers questions.

I am proud that "Bluebird Rescue" has won at club, zone, and county level. He participated in the state competition and did an excellent job. The County Extension Agent, Kelly Woods, had a big hand in his success due to her encouragement.

Neil plans to enter a completed bluebird box in the Jefferson County 4-H Fair in July. He will also do his "Bluebird Rescue" demonstration at the Kentucky State Fair in August for the County Homemakers. Just think of all the people he can educate there! ■

1013 Minors Lane  
Louisville, KY 40219

*(This was written in May 1995.)*



Christine Ammons, Union Mills, North Carolina, presented a bluebird program at the Mt. Creek Baptist Church's summer bible school. After her instruction, students built 44 nest boxes. Mary Koone, front right, holds her completed box.

# Outdoor Youth Orchestra Concert



The last concert of the Lowell Philharmonic Youth Orchestra season was held outdoors at my home, Windswept Acres, Tyngsboro, Massachusetts on Saturday, 20 May 1995. The audience could hear birds (including bluebirds) singing around them while seated in view of the Mt. Monadnock range. Appropriately, among the selections played was "Blue Bird, Bring Back My Happiness" published in 1917 with words by George Graff, Jr. and music by Bert Grant. (See sheet music cover on page 28.)

After the concert I took a group of people on a tour of my trail. They saw nesting Eastern Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, Black-capped Chickadees, White-breasted Nuthatches, and, of course, those pesky House Wrens. I think I made a lot of bluebird converts!

--Lillian Lund Files

106 Scribner Hill  
Tyngsboro, MA 01879

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## 1995 Nesting Box Report

Research Chairman Kevin L. Berner is compiling cavity nester results of the 1995 breeding season for publication in the Summer 1996 issue of *Sialia*. In order to provide as accurate a summary as possible, he needs the totals in a timely fashion. He understands that where larger numbers of boxes and monitors are involved it is a complicated and often lengthy process. Try to submit totals, even

if they are incomplete. If your report involves more than 500 boxes or an entire county, state, or region, you may submit results as late as 20 March 1996. Any summaries after 1 March should be sent directly to Kevin Berner, SUNY-Cobleskill, College of Agriculture and Technology, Cobleskill, NY 12043-9986. Do not depend on summaries sent bulk mail to reach him in time for publication. ■

# *Blends Music and Bluebirds*



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## The Story of Bluebird Box 38

Laura Meeds

I've been a birdwatcher for many years. Birdwatching has been a learning experience and a source of joy to me. When I realized that the bluebird trail on Fort McClellan (Alabama) was not being monitored, I started asking questions. Before I knew it I was monitoring the trail. All of the boxes are nailed to trees and sometimes they fall or are pulled off.

In the spring of 1995, a small boy found box number 38 at the base of a tree with a baby Eastern Bluebird in it. The boy was upset and crying when he took it to a lady nearby and asked for her help. The lady was my neighbor. She brought the box and the baby bird to me. The bluebird was only two or three days old so had no feathers. One look and I knew the bird would die if I tried to raise it. Its best chance was to put it back where its parents could find it. But it was

already dark. Would the parent birds find it in time? I didn't know, but I thought a slim chance was better than none. With a friend and a flashlight, I put the box back up. In the dark we put it on a tree about 20 feet from the one it fell from. Three days later the baby bluebird was well and covered with feathers! Eight days later three bluebirds watched from a nearby power line as I cleaned the used nesting material out of the box.

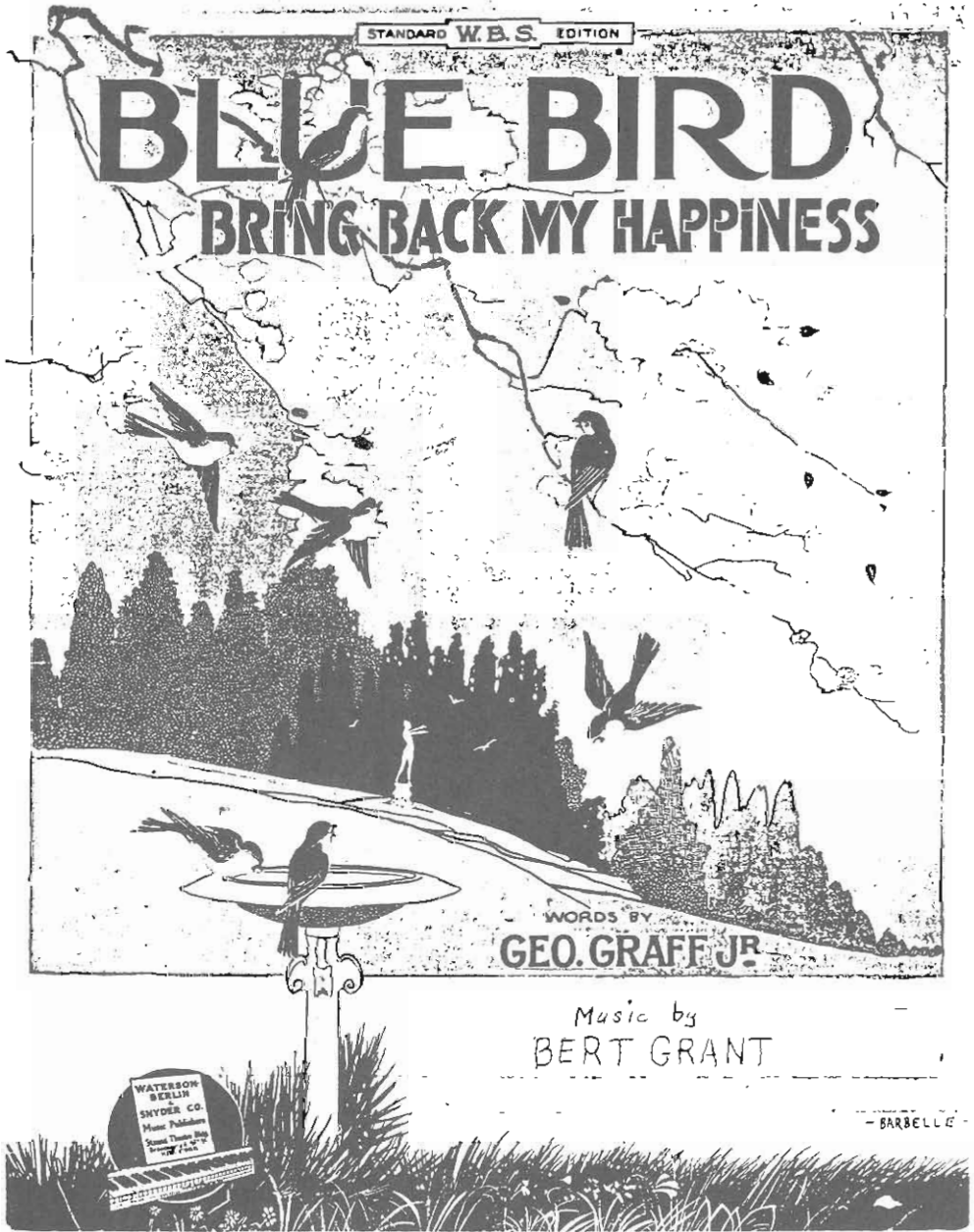
The pair laid two more clutches of five eggs each. They defended the nest whenever I went by. I found the female sitting on the eggs on two occasions, but none of them hatched. The baby bird we rescued was the only bluebird that fledged from box number 38 last year. ■

26 Pelham Hts.  
Anniston, AL 36206

STANDARD W.B.S. EDITION

# BLUE BIRD

## BRING BACK MY HAPPINESS



WORDS BY  
**GEO. GRAFF JR.**

Music by  
**BERT GRANT**

- BARBELLE -

WATERSON  
BERLIN  
SHYDER CO.  
Music Publishers  
3200 Broadway, New York, N.Y.  
10013

# Tweetie, the Bluebird

Ruth Gilchrist

In the spring of 1989, the male bluebird which was nesting in my neighbor's (George and Mary Ann Strawhecker) box flew to their bedroom window early each morning and pecked on the window.

The following spring, in order to discourage this early morning alarm clock, George put a mirror against some logs in his woodpile. It didn't take long for the male bluebird to discover it. He spent a lot of time looking in the mirror. He would fly at his image and peck at it, or he'd perch on top of the mirror and lean down to look at himself.

That autumn, instead of migrating with the rest of the bluebirds, he and his mate stayed.

In order to help the pair during the cold weather, I gave Mary Ann some Miracle Meal to put on the bedroom window ledge where the male frequently perched. Soon he was eating this supplement. Because he sometimes perched on the kitchen window ledge, Mary Ann also put Miracle Meal for him at that site.

Eventually George constructed a little tray to fit on top of the hummingbird feeder support which extended out from that window ledge. The bluebird liked this arrangement and took to it readily.

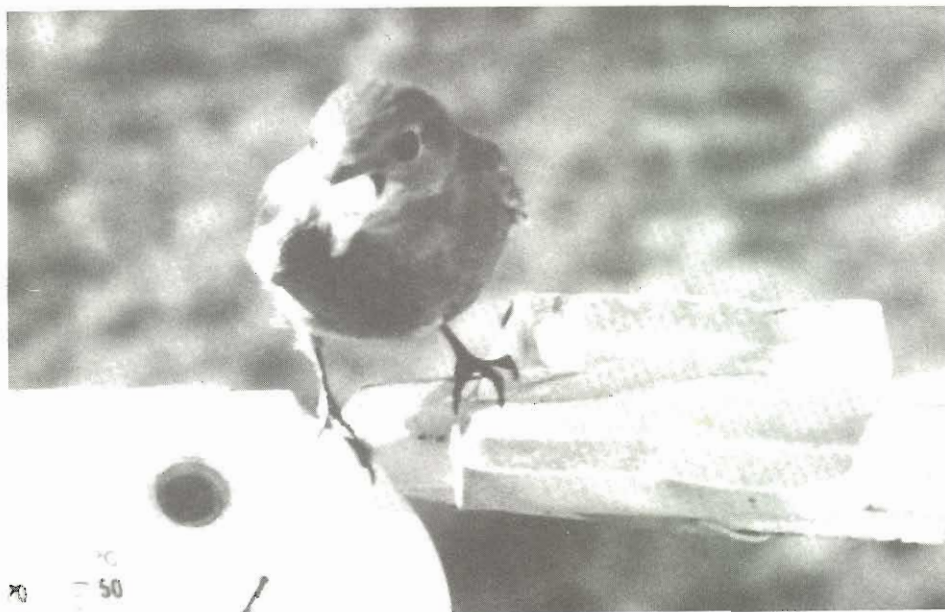
A good supply of pea-sized pellets of Miracle Meal had to be put in the tray early every morning to prevent pecking on the bedroom window. The male ate as many as 25 pellets each day and carried two or three at a time to his mate.

By this time he had acquired the name Tweetie.

Come spring, Tweetie kept Mary Ann busy making Miracle Meal while his mate was incubating their first brood. He again pecked on the bedroom window after which he sat on the window ledge singing softly while preening.

After the first brood fledged, he brought one of them to the feeder. After the second brood hatched, as many as 130 pellets a day were carried to the nest.

(Continued on page 30)



Photograph by Ruth Gilchrist

Tweetie at Miracle Meal feeder in Strawhecker's yard, New Castle, Pennsylvania.

# A Teachable Moment

Judy Kettle

Bird studies in my first grade classroom have led to some extraordinary events over the past few years. A very special "teachable moment" occurred that warrants the time to record and pass it along.

In August 1994, during the opening week of school, one of my former students rushed breathlessly into my classroom to inform me that there was a bluebird "hanging from a nesting box." I calmly questioned the student, sure that there was obvious confusion or misinterpretation. The student was not to be calmed or dissuaded; in fact, more children followed with the same story. My students are quite knowledgeable about bluebirds thanks to our eight box bluebird trail at Wakarusa Valley Elementary School. The more we talked, the more it became apparent that there was merit to this tale. Without further delay, I followed the children to the box in question.

The children were absolutely right. There, dangling from the outside of the box was a juvenile bluebird. Upon close inspection, we unraveled the mystery, as well as the bird. The box was located near a horse pasture. Somehow a length of horsehair had become wrapped around one of the bird's feathers. The other end of the hair had lodged tightly in a splinter of the rough cedar on the exterior of the box. When the bird attempted to fledge, the horsehair held taut between the wing of the bird and the outside of the box, holding it captive.

I broke the hair and held the tiny bird in my hand. The temperature was more than 100°F. that day and the bird was clearly traumatized. We took the fledgling into the air-conditioned school and placed it in a lined box with a capful of water. You can only imagine the looks of awe and concern on the faces of the children.

I promptly called Wes Seyler, an area bluebird expert. After weighing the facts,

we decided the best plan was to wait and see if the bird recovered. If that were the case, we would place the bluebird back into the nest box and allow it to fledge again when it was ready.

By the time I returned from the telephone, our blue friend was quite lively and seemed to have recovered. The children were overjoyed. I shared the plan and we all walked quite reverently to the box. We carefully replaced the bird and walked away, promising to return the next day to check the results.

The following morning there would be nothing accomplished in class until the box was checked. Off we all tromped with great hopes that we would find an empty box indicating our friend had successfully recovered and had flown off. We all gathered at the site, held our breath, and opened the door. Hurray! The nest was empty. Our hearts were full of the wonder of it all. ■

1104 East 1000 Rd.  
Lawrence, KS 66047

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(TWEETIE--Continued from page 29)

The following winter three bluebirds came to the feeder but never Tweetie's mate. He would always carry some pellets to her after he had eaten several.

The following summer, after raising two broods, Tweetie disappeared.

The recipe Mary Ann used was as follows: 3 cups yellow cornmeal, 1 cup flour, 1/2 lb. lard (not shortening). Mix to form a firm ball, then make into pea-sized pellets. Store in refrigerator.

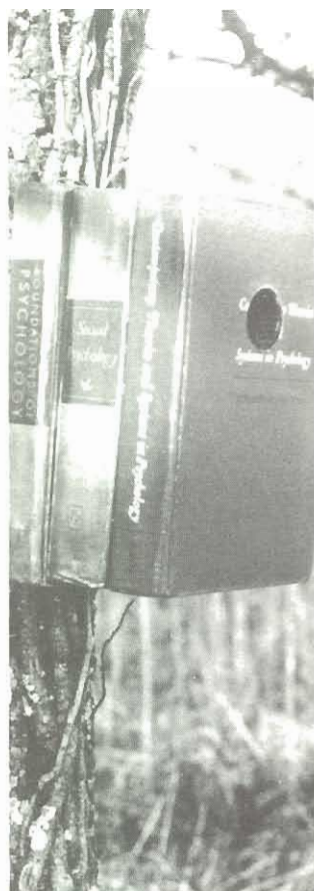
Often peanut butter or peanut hearts are listed for this recipe, but Mary Ann did not add either of those ingredients. ■

1233 Mt. Jackson Rd.  
New Castle, PA 16102



## "The Bluebird"

Artist Charles S. McQuillen was the 1993-94 Visiting Artist at Weir Farm in Wilton, Connecticut. His first installation in that position was "The Bluebird," also installed at The Connemara Conservancy in Plano, Texas. His works at that time were site-specific environmental installations, integrating materials at hand with natural processes to explore cycles, patterns, and interactions within the environment. As an elementary school social studies textbook salesman, he recycled 20 out-of-date social science textbooks at each site. They were glued together with non-toxic sealants to create six blocks which were then hollowed out to duplicate the inner dimensions of a bluebird box. Each of the houses was mounted and accompanied by a podium on which was laminated a poem celebrating the bluebird as the harbinger of spring. The roofed houses were installed at the Connecticut site, roofless at the Texas site. One example of each is shown below.



Photographs by Charles S. McQuillen

## DUNCAN MACKINTOSH 1926-1995

Duncan Mackintosh of Lethbridge, Alberta succumbed to cancer 19 September 1995. Duncan became interested in bluebirds when he saw his first one in the Waterton National Park in Alberta in 1974. By his widow Isabel's account, Duncan was so taken with the color of the bird that he looked up information about the Mountain Bluebird and found that they were rarely seen. Upon learning that the birds would utilize nest boxes, he began to build the boxes. He gathered a few friends, and they built more and more. In 1981 he met Art Aylesworth, then of Great Falls; together they founded Mountain Bluebird Trails. The first conference was held in Lethbridge in 1983. The bluebird population greatly benefited from the success enjoyed by Mountain Bluebird Trails, as the numbers of collaborators grew by leaps and bounds. At the Eighth Annual Meeting of the North American Bluebird Society in Red Deer, Alberta, Duncan was given the NABS Award for an outstanding contribution to bluebird conservation. Before his death, Duncan accepted the Emerald Award given by a consortium of Alberta industry and civic groups to citizens who have made a difference in the Alberta environment. He and Isabel made one last visit to his native Scotland--Inverness for him, Perth for Isabel. They enjoyed "a really happy holiday." The battle against cancer was finally lost in September, but not before the "bluebird man of southwestern Alberta" had inspired dozens of volunteers to take up his labor of love. Another giant in the world of bluebirding goes to his reward. May he rest in bluebird heavenly peace!

--Mary D. Janetatos

## Bluebird Success in Massachusetts

Hank and Joyce Coleman

Our birding experience began seven years ago with a gift of a bird feeder from my brother. Because we lived in the country on a lake and were surrounded by pastures, the single feeder was hardly sufficient to support the voracious avian population. By the following spring, in addition to numerous feeders, I had both purchased and begun constructing nest boxes. The wait began; we were hooked.

With the passing of another year, we witnessed the first interest in our boxes, by Tree Swallows. Several broods fledged and our box construction program accelerated.

With 30 boxes built to bluebird specification, we waited impatiently for bluebirds' arrival. We both swore we observed flashes of blue, but nothing materialized. Four years of hopes and

disappointments followed. Then, on a Saturday morning in early April, while Hank was running errands, Joyce left a note for him in the barn: "Incredible news, come in immediately!" A pair of bluebirds had arrived.

Now we were really hooked. That spring, three bluebirds fledged. To our delight, we observed the young leave the nest and, for the next several hours, take flying lessons from the parents. Everything we had read about these beautiful thrushes--their song, dignity, and grace--was true. When discussing this event with anyone who would listen, we learned from neighboring farmers that bluebirds had not been seen in the area for 25 years.

We joined the North American Bluebird Society. Their publication contained articles about Steve Gilbertson and his

success attracting bluebirds with his PVC box. Because the box was not readily accepted by House Sparrows which are major bluebird competitors, I ordered five boxes immediately

A pair of bluebirds arrived in mid-March. They constructed nests in my wooden boxes; however, competition was keen from swallows and House Sparrows. The bluebirds disappeared; our hearts sank. Then, in early May, a pair was seen checking the PVC box. Without delay, a nest was built and on 22 May five baby

bluebirds were born.

What does the future hold? We have approached several neighbors who have agreed enthusiastically to the placement of bluebird boxes on their property. As an avid golfer, I will be talking with several area golf course superintendents regarding development of bluebird trails. And, as for the Gilbertson PVC box, thank you, Steve; we are going to promote your box whenever possible. ■

183 Wheeler St.  
Rehoboth, MA 02769

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## HOUSE SPARROW SOLUTION

(An Imaginative Look)

William R. Davis

Imagination is a wonderful thing; anyone who knows me well knows that I have an active imagination. For example, the other day I visited a farm where I have a bluebird trail. The farmer and his family were engaged in killing and dressing organically grown, range-fed chickens. I eventually ended up with some undressed chickens which were delicious.

While watching the farm family work, I spotted some grackles, and an old nursery rhyme ran through my mind:

Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie,  
When the pie was opened the birds began to sing.  
Now, wasn't that a tasty dish to set before the king?

Well, now, my bluebird friends! Enough of this weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth about the pesky House Sparrow. I have the solution. All we have to do is to change the image of the House Sparrow as a pest to one of being a gourmet item fit to feed a king!

Yes, I am convinced that making the House Sparrow a commercially viable product is the answer to all our (and the bluebird's) troubles. *Imagine* (there's that word again) a price tag of \$5.00 (or even \$1.00) on each of their little carcasses! Why, every farmer's barnyard would immediately be turned into a source of income. *Imagine* people collecting House Sparrows instead of aluminum cans for spare change. *Imagine* every gourmet chef in the country searching for a source of supply for range-fed sparrows! *Imagine* thousands of beady-eyed hunters and militia-types stalking House Sparrows and inventing ever more efficient ways to hasten their demise! *Imagine* YOUR NAME in my Bluebirders Hall of Fame (location and visiting hours not yet determined; finances are a problem.)

Now, don't tell me it wouldn't work! People eat all kinds of things--snails, rattlesnakes, grasshoppers, squid, chicken's feet and heads, squab. Why, I even read recently of a gourmet club in New York that got into trouble because they imported a finch from southern France for a special feast. The diners at this meal ate this fabulous dish with bags over their heads to prevent distractions from interfering with their enjoyment of the exquisite taste and texture of these tiny birds. They are eaten whole--these French finches. And the House Sparrow is a finch! FROM EUROPE!!

So I am challenging all of you gourmet cooks and inventors out there to put your shoulders to the wheel, your nose to the grindstone, and to settle this sparrow problem

once and for all. We need recipes to make the House Sparrow a gourmet's delight and a gourmet name for it as well. After all, no one will want something called "Fricasseed House Sparrows" (except many bluebirders). We will also need ever more efficient traps to supply the demand that is certain to develop. Onward and upward, bluebirders! ■

1642 Humphrey Ave.  
Dayton, OH 45410

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(TALES--Continued from page 39)

completely out of my yard only to have them move next door and still count my yard as part of their territory." He recounts his bad luck in detail and concludes by saying: "I sincerely wish this had a different ending as I have enjoyed watching them and reading about the good fortune that others have enjoyed. Maybe I'll go back to woodworking and make bird houses for others." Maybe *this* spring, Marvin?

A real surprise greeted **Haf Schaeffer**, wildlife biologist at the Delaware County campus of Penn State University, Media, PA. "The bluebird trail at White Clay Creek Preserve (PA state park), Landenberg, PA, includes a box mounted in the rear of park officer **Ed Leid's** residence. Calling me over to inspect the box, we found four bluebird nestlings and one Tree Swallow. Seems one of the park employees found the Tree Swallow on the ground and, since it was three feet from the bluebird box, he opened the box and inserted the young swallow. After my check and identification of the Tree Swallow in the bluebird nest, we checked every day until fledging. Guess what? We saw all bluebirds and the swallow fly out safe and sound."

**Adelaide Sawyer**, of Ringgold, GA, is carrying forth with her late husband's Bluebird Housing. Their son, Marvin, builds the custom made houses and feeders. Adelaide wrote that she enjoyed the musical taped medley of bluebird songs by **Kay Christian Hindsley**, soprano soloist from North Carolina. "On the Wings of a Song" was also enjoyed by **Lillian Lund Files** of Tyngsboro, MA, a past-president of NABS who was instrumental in helping form the new Tri-

State Bluebird Society. Check NABS' catalogue for the tape.

**Esther T. Garrity** of Upperco, MD, wrote, "Bluebirds are nesting in a big old limb in a large tree in back of my nephew's home, and a bluebird house on the side of their barn is also being used." Somehow that reminds me to wish all of you, "Sweet winter bluebird dreams!" ■

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### 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.

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### NEW NABS SLIDE SHOW

The new NABS slide show is available for rental at \$10.00 or purchase at \$75.00 + \$7.50 shipping and handling. The show consists of 110 collated, plastic framed 35 mm slides and a printed script (no slide tray). If a cassette narration is desired, add \$10.00 + \$1.50 shipping and handling to the purchase price.

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.

**NINETEENTH  
ANNUAL MEETING OF THE  
NORTH AMERICAN BLUEBIRD SOCIETY**

The Nineteenth Annual Meeting of the North American Bluebird Society will be held in Ontario, Canada, September 13-15, 1996.

*The sponsor of the meeting will be the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society.*

Registration material will appear in the Spring 1996 issue of *Sialia*. Prior to that time, direct questions to Art and Margaret Rusnell, R R 1, Kleinburg, Ontario, Canada L0J 1C0. Tel. (905) 893-1538

### Successful Trap for Feral Cats



Al Weikert of Villisca, Iowa, reports success in catching feral cats with this trap of his own design. As bluebird monitors and other birders are aware, feral cats are major bird predators. This trap is 21 inches long, 8 inches wide, and 10 inches high with end frames of cypress. The top and sides are covered with hardware cloth. The top rails are tubing used for television antennas. A treadle at the rear is the trigger causing the plexiglas® door to drop. A convenient handle on top has a plexiglas® guard to protect one's hand.--303 E. Fifth St., Villisca, IA 50864

# BLUEBIRD EXPRESS

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



Dear Editor:

Tree Swallows are uncommon in the area where I have my bluebird trail, so I was especially pleased to have a nesting pair in the spring of 1994. I also found a dead Tree Swallow on the bare floor of one of the boxes. It showed no signs of injury and the cause of its death was a mystery.

Last spring (1995) I found dead Tree Swallows in two different boxes under identical circumstances. I discussed the mysterious deaths with several people including Larry Zeleny shortly before his death, but got no clues until I spoke to Dr. Donald Messersmith, an ornithologist at the University of Maryland. He suggested that when the swallows entered the boxes to investigate them, they dropped to the bottom and couldn't fly back up to the opening because the narrow dimensions of the box didn't allow them to spread their long wings to get airborne. Nor could they climb up the smooth sides of the interior. Trapped, they died of starvation or dehydration.

At that stage, I still had several unoccupied boxes, and I could see each of them as a possible trap for a Tree Swallow. I could conceive no way to roughen the interiors without disassembling the boxes. What the swallows needed was some kind of emergency escape. A twig about six inches long lying on the ground gave me an idea. I put it in the box, slanting it diagonally from the floor to the corner near the entrance hole, reasoning that a

bird could climb up it and get out very easily.

I repeated this tactic at every unoccupied box, and I found no more dead swallows. Further, I found that the stick in the box did not deter either swallows or bluebirds from building nests. This spring I plan to put these emergency escapes in all the boxes at the beginning of the season before the Tree Swallows arrive.

Lola Oberman  
6606 Melody Lane  
Bethesda, MD 20817

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Dear Editor:

At long last we have raised bluebirds—three of them early and the female is nesting again (1995). This is the first year we have been able to do it. Something always happened.

Anne Graf  
Rt. 1, Box 550  
Roan Mountain, TN 37687

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Dear Editor:

Dean Sheldon's article, "Utility Pole Bluebirding" in the Summer 1995 issue was right on the button. I was considering writing on the subject myself, but Sheldon has so thoroughly covered the matter that all I can add is, Amen!

Our W.H.F. Ruritan bluebirders are located in the southeastern part of Virginia, near Petersburg. Our first consideration in selecting new nesting sites is utility poles. We have learned the

do's and don'ts from experience as so well covered by Sheldon; in fact, our most productive sites are on utility poles with overhead wires. When the power company relocated their lines to underground, we coordinated with them and they left 6 foot poles where we asked. If you drive through Dinwiddie and wonder why so many short poles--that's the reason--bluebirds. We also noticed our production decreased when the lines came down.

We do have kestrels, but the bluebirds pay little attention to them. In 1995 I had three boxes that were always within sight of a kestrel, but I suffered no losses. We do place an aluminum sleeve with a 6 inch flange bottom beneath each box. This seems to be effective against snakes (our number one enemy), possums, and raccoons. We get our aluminum as scraps from our local roofers.

Fred Sahl  
5815 Trinity Church Rd  
Church Road, VA 23833

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Dear Editor:

I was a Kansas state naturalist in 1990, and one of my jobs was to monitor the 12 Eastern Bluebird nesting boxes in Lovewell State Park. I received so much pleasure in checking and recording the information that I started my own bluebird trail on my family's farm in April 1995. The trail is a memorial for my four year old nephew who died 6 April 1995. I will send my 1995 Circle of Life Eastern Bluebird Trail nesting results to you soon.

Shane Hesting  
RR 1  
Burr Oak, KS 66936

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Dear Editor:

I have developed some computer software which allows bluebird monitors to record seasonal data and produce a report. I have checked with Kevin Berner and NABS and it was judged suitable for yearly summaries. NestBox (C) Version 1.0 runs on computers that support Windows (C) applications such as

Windows 3.1, Windows NT, Windows 95, and OS/2 Warp.

For further information or to obtain a demonstration version for a small fee, contact me at the address below.

James R. Kunz  
454 Ashley Rd.  
Maine, NY 13802

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Dear Editor:

A bluebird box that I had given to my sister and brother-in-law was placed on a piece of wooden 2x4 extending outward from a storage shed located next to a meadow.

Next day my sister and brother-in-law observed a pair of Tree Swallows fighting with two bluebirds over the rights to the box. Eventually the Tree Swallows won out and the bluebirds left.

My brother-in-law decided to put up another box in hope of attracting the bluebirds back again. He mounted the second box on the opposite side of the same storage shed; next morning some bluebirds were trying to inspect the box. The Tree Swallows were not willing to relinquish *their* territory, however. After a very brief skirmish the bluebirds were victorious and both pairs then settled down to nest building. They remained quite tolerant of each other during the entire nesting period.

My sister witnessed the Tree Swallows defend both of the bird houses against some invading House Wrens during the absence of the bluebirds.

Walter F. Carpenter  
1135 State Rd.  
Duncannon, PA 17020

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Dear Editor:

While on a birding trip I talked to a friend that gets your journal about bluebirds. I found it very informative. I have been successful in getting bluebirds in the boxes I built. And I have found mistakes that I have been making thanks to your journal.

Floyd G. Kudla  
7435 Banks St.  
Justice, IL 60458

# Bluebird Tales

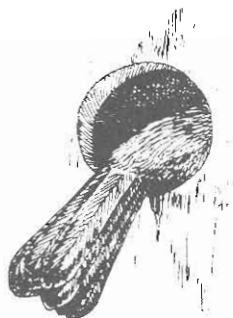
Mary D. Janetatos

Hey, man, like far out! This dude races cars and, like, his nickname is Bobby Bluebird! When I hear this, I, like, go WOW! Yes, dear bluebirders, NABS has heard from the stock car racing team for driver **Bobby Senneker**, a leader in career wins with the American Speed Association. **Joe Ruch, II**, of Grand Rapids, MI., wrote recently to inform us of the unique story of stock car racing by a champion driver who always drives blue cars. Bob Senneker's team mascot is a bluebird named Bobby, who is very popular with his fans. He entertains them, signs autographs, and distributes coupons at stock car events. It remains to be seen whether Bluebird Bobby will use the bluebird information he received from NABS and becomes the first bluebirder to monitor his bluebird trail by stock car!

He'll really have to go some to catch up with **David Sheils**, the Texas bluebirder from Dallas, who dropped in at NABS headquarters recently. David and his wife, **Carol**, described the Wills Point Bluebird Festival, which approximately 10,000 people attended. Thanks largely to David, attendees were able to learn of NABS, as he distributed the Society's brochure and personally urged the interested ones to join. David has also connected with that prodigious bluebirder from Mt. Pleasant, TX--**Keith Kridler**.

In Turners Falls, MA, **Dan Leahy** of the U.S. Department of Fisheries and Wildlife worked with Sheffield Elementary School children as they spent a day last spring making bluebird boxes. According to the article in *The Recorder* (Greenfield, MA), Leahy is like "an avian Johnny Appleseed planting birdhouses instead of apple trees. Leahy hopes to build thousands of bluebird houses in his lifetime, and pass the interest on to younger generations." He is succeeding with help from co-worker **Rick Jorgensen**.

NABS and New York State Bluebird Society member **Carl Zenger**, of Lockport, NY, have taken the bluebird



message to many places including the Lockport Chapter of the Buffalo Audubon Society and the Hartland Historical Society. Carl uses a nest box display with seven different box designs. He also hands out free literature.

We learned of the death last year of **Raymond Monroe Fleisher**, of Detroit Lakes, MN. According to his daughter, **Diane Preiser** of West Chester, PA, Raymond was known as the "bluebird man" at the nursing home which was his final residence. There were several articles enclosed including a laudatory letter from then-Governor **Robert P. Casey** of Pennsylvania.

**Mary Giordano** of Ridgewood, NJ, wrote, "I never knew that there was a bluebird society in our country till a friend of mine at work brought in her *Birds & Blooms* magazine for me to browse through. As I was looking through the magazine I came across the article an Iowa teenager [NABS member **Jennifer Jones**] wrote about bluebirds; it touched me deeply.

"About nine years ago I lost my daughter **Maryann**, who was 21, to cancer, and her last words to me as she looked out our den window were, 'Bluebirds are a necessity'. Because we don't have bluebirds in [my part of] New Jersey, every time I see a Blue Jay, I feel it's her so I say, 'Hello, Maryann,' cause they are a tough bird and my daughter was very tough, strong, and had a positive attitude toward her illness. I have four birdhouses in my backyard, hoping



that someday a bluebird will come and make a nest there; so far only sparrows have come. Maybe I need to buy a special birdhouse for them?" And, thanks to a subsequent article in *Birds & Blooms*, we've heard from hundreds of people. Articles like this *really* spread the bluebird message.

We heard from Sherry Chapman of the Volunteer Office, Division of Wildlife from Colorado. "I'm hoping that you will supply me with information that I can pass along to new bluebirders in the state. I presently coordinate a project here in Colorado dealing with our wonderful bluebirds. Am enclosing our statement of purpose with my letter. We have started a quarterly newsletter that goes out to anyone who has reported their trail location, purchased a nest box, kit, or plans from the project or shown interest in the project in any way. I would like to urge these people to join NABS with an article in the next edition of this newsletter." We sent Sherry the 10th anniversary issue of *Sialia*.

Delmar Loheider of Bicknell, IN, told of his bluebirding: "I have a trail of 70 bluebird houses that I check every seven or 10 days during the summer months. I also sell and give away several houses." Edward R. Croft, of Ellicott City, MD, and Paul R. Chance, of Laurel, DE, both asked if we were on the Internet. NABS may be on the Internet, but only through the efforts of a NABS member out there in cyberspace. The benefit of such communications are not clear to me at this time, as I have not had time to do any "surfing." Maybe someone can enlighten me on this matter? Ed Croft also wrote, "Please send information regarding sparrow traps. We have several bluebirders trying to establish nests on our property and need to 'relocate' the English culprits as soon as possible. . . I also hope to begin a neighborhood newsletter to inform residents about these beautiful creatures in an effort to create as much of a hospitable environment as possible without the stress caused by sparrows."

Susan Rudy, of Fairfax Station, VA, also used the community newsletter

approach "I recently put a short plea in our community newsletter to other neighbors in my development to also put up nesting boxes and perhaps plant fruit-bearing trees. I am worried that these efforts may not be enough to provide for the bluebirds in our area."

Dr. Royal Montgomery, of Silver Spring, MD, is what I call a "double" bluebirder. He maintains a bluebird trail at Rossmore Leisure World, and he volunteers at the NABS office "stuffing *Sialia*." Harriett Shapiro and Helen Tunstall, both of Leisure World, also are double-involved. What would we do without our wonderful retirees? We'll be running pictures of them in *Sialia* sometime in the future.

Wayne Adcock, of Branson, MO, mentioned the *Parade Magazine* article of Nov. 29, 1979 written by Joan Rattner Heilman, "The Bluebirds Will Return If You Help." NABS' address was included and the response [80,000 letters] was explosive, netting close to 1,000 new members for the Society. Wayne's letter concluded by saying, "I have written this letter knowing that you may not get it because of a change of address or your organization may no longer exist, but if you do get it, please send me an update on the status of the bluebird and some literature about your organization."

Sam Hardesty of Kingwood, WV, told a good bluebird story. "My first experience with bluebirds was in 1994. March of that year I put up a martin house, 12 apartments, hopefully, to attract the martins. A bluebird family moved into a lower level north side apartment, and, during the course of the summer, had three broods, all very successfully."

How many bluebirders can identify with Marvin Kemp, of Aiachua, FL? "This is my second letter to you telling of my bad luck (?) with bluebirds. In the 12 years I've lived at this location, I have yet to see one bluebird fledge. I've built boxes, bought boxes, moved them to different locations, gone to the extreme and bought an air rifle to chase mockingbirds and sparrows

(Continued on page 34)

North American Bluebird Society, Inc.  
 Statement of Cash Receipts and Disbursements  
 November 1, 1994 through October 31, 1995

Cash Balance November 1, 1994		\$19,226 58
Add		
Cash Received		
Sale of <i>Sialia</i> journal	20,976.00	
Sale of boxes, books, stationery, etc	31,642.87	
Contributions	19,631.89	
Membership dues	23,200.76	
Sales tax collected	264.00	
		95,715 52
	Total	114,942 10
Less:		
Cash Disbursements		
<i>Sialia</i> journal	24,230.55	
Boxes, books, stationery, etc.	26,230.85	
Educational material	11,082.21	
Membership fulfillment	9,462 57	
Research	6,647.02	
Salaries	12,642.94	
Expense accounts	982 37	
Office supplies and new copier	1,086.70	
Sales tax remitted	267.87	
Rent	6000.00	
Federal withholding tax	715.69	
State withholding tax	806.89	
FICA	3,031.98	
Unemployment tax	265.20	
Bank charges	170.72	
Charitable organization tax	110.00	
		103,733 56
Cash Balance October 31, 1995		11,208 54
Assets		
Checking account (Citizens Bank & Trust)	11,208.54	
Savings account (Maryland National Bank)	1,834.12	
Value of Inventory	20,581.89	
Investments-Dean Witter Reynolds	26,095 85	
Market value 9-30-95		
Net Worth		69,720 40

Respectfully submitted,

*Delos C. Dupree*

Delos C Dupree, Treasurer NABS

**Art Credits**

Jon E. Boone 2, 36  
 Suzanne Pennell 38

Observations concerning bluebirds and plantings should be directed to Karen Blackburn. Her new address is 185 Wicca Hill Rd., Durham, CT 06422.

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Opal J. Daffron  
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Pat DeForno  
Edward & Helen DePaoli  
Matthew & Elizabeth Dorcik  
(Continued on page 24)

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. Three year rates: Student and Senior \$28.50; Regular \$42.00. Add \$2.00 per year for Canada and Mexico and \$3.00 per year for other countries (surface mail). U.S. funds only, please. Amounts over \$6.00 are tax deductible.

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

