

# *Sialia*

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Bluebird Society



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*Sialia* means bluebirds. Hence the title of this journal. Technically, *sialia* is the Latinized, neuter plural version of the Greek word *sialia*, a noun meaning a "kind of bird." Since the Eastern Bluebird was the first bluebird classified by Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778), he gave it the species name *sialis*, though he placed it in the genus *Motacilla* which is now reserved for the wagtails. It was William Swainson (1789-1855), who, in 1827, decided that the bluebirds needed a genus of their own within the thrush family (*Turdidae*). He selected the generic name *Sialia* which he simply adapted from the species name *sialis* which Linnaeus had used. Therefore, the scientific name for the Eastern Bluebird is *Sialia sialis* (pronounced see-ahl'-ee-ah see'-ahl-iss). Similarly, the Western Bluebird and Mountain Bluebird, the two other species within the genus, were named *Sialia mexicana* and *Sialia currucoides* (coo-roo-coy-dees) respectively. All three bluebird species are native only to the North American continent, although each inhabits different regions generally separated by the Rocky Mountains and by altitudinal preferences.

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

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# Sialia

The Quarterly Journal  
About Bluebirds

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## CONTENTS

Presidential Points . . . . .	42
Charlotte Jernigan	
Between-Year Nest Site Fidelity in Eastern Bluebirds in Ohio . . . . .	43
Danny J. Ingold	
Success with Hanging Boxes . . . . .	48
Dick Purvis	
Two Female Eastern Bluebirds with One Male Fledge Eight . . . . .	49
Mark Oakley	
Obituary: Earl Gillis . . . . .	50
Bluebird Exchange . . . . .	51
Mothering . . . . .	58
Helen M. Johnson	
Cavity Nester License Plates . . . . .	60
1996 NABS Research Awards . . . . .	62
Up, Up and Away: The Elevator Post . . . . .	63
Paul Chance	
In Memoriam . . . . .	65
Bluebirds: A Tennessee Tradition . . . . .	66
T. David Pitts	
Vultures Across New York . . . . .	68
Ohio Bluebird Society Logo . . . . .	69
Weikert's Nest Box Sparrow Trap . . . . .	70
Bluebird Express . . . . .	72
Bluebird Tales . . . . .	74
Mary D. Janetas	
Weaver Elementary School Flag . . . . .	76
Index to Volume 17 (1995) . . . . .	77
Poetry: Jennings, Kallai . . . . .	80

## COVER

A male Eastern Bluebird warbles from a post. Art Editor M. Suzanne Probst based her drawing on a photograph by Hubert Brandenburg.

*Sialia* welcomes original articles, art and photographs for publication. Although this journal is named for the bluebird, material relating to all native cavity nesting species will be considered. Manuscripts should be typed neatly and double-spaced. All material submitted is subject to editing or rewriting. Submit the original manuscript plus a duplicate copy if you wish to proof the material before publication. If the article has been submitted elsewhere (or previously published) that fact must be stated at the time of submission. All manuscripts will be acknowledged. Black and white glossy photographs are preferred. Print the subject, names of individuals pictured, photographer and return address on the back of each photograph. Art is welcome and should be in black pen-and-ink. We do not assume responsibility for manuscripts, photographs or art submitted. The editor's address is 10617 Graeoch Road, Laurel, Maryland 20723.



# Presidential Points

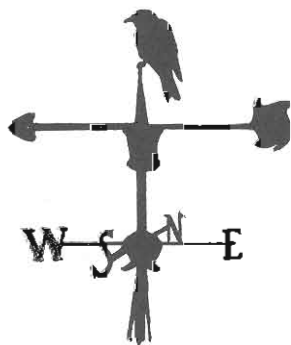
Charlotte Jernigan

During the nesting season bluebirders all over the country answer many interesting phone calls. My most interesting one this year came from New England. Hank Coleman, co-founder of the Tri-State Bluebird Society reported a pure albino bluebird! Albinos are very rare, and banding records indicate that only one-half of one percent of all birds are albinos.

Because albinistic birds have no protective coloration, they are easily spotted by predators and so have a much shorter life span than normal. Other problems include brittle feathers and poor eyesight which may cause trouble in detecting enemies, in flying, and in feeding. The eyes of true albinos are always pink and are especially sensitive to light.

The word albino comes from the Latin "albus" for white. Albinism is the result of a genetic mutation which prevents formation of the enzyme tyrosinase. For a mated pair to produce a true albino, they must both be carriers of the rare genetic trait that inhibits the production of pigment. This, plus the fact that few are able to survive to reproduce, explains why the condition is so uncommon. They are frequently shunned or driven off by normal-colored individuals of their own species. If they show only partial albinism, they have a much better chance of being healthier. Such individuals have a better survival rate than true albinos and are more commonly observed in the wild.

Albino birds will never be present in large numbers, but their rarity will continue to both mystify us and provide focus for research and study. If you should ever find one on your bluebird trail, be sure to inform your state wildlife agency in time to give them an opportunity to obtain research data. It might even be in a location where it might be shared so people could witness the diversity that contributes one more facet to the lure of nature.



In the fall of 1986 at NABS' annual meeting, which was held in Oklahoma, the state wildlife department brought a pure albino bluebird to share with our members. This was a unique opportunity for many people; most had never seen one before.

A thoughtful trail monitor had taken time to share an unusual event, and, as a result, the education of many had been enhanced. ■

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## STATE ORGANIZERS

If you are in the process of forming a new state or provincial bluebird organization, be sure to send details to NABS so that an announcement can be made in "Bluebird Exchange." We want to help you reach as many experienced and interested bluebirders as possible.

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## NEW RATE OPTIONS FOR INABS 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.

# Between-Year Nest-Site Fidelity in Eastern Bluebirds in Ohio

Danny J. Ingold

## Abstract

I color-banded 17 adult and 192 nestling Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) during five breeding seasons from 1990-1994 in Muskingum County, Ohio. Forty-one percent of adult birds and 8.8% of first-year birds returned to nest in the same box or general area where they were banded during the previous year. Eighty-six percent of the adult bluebirds that returned to previous breeding sites fledged at least some offspring at those locations during the previous year. Sixty-two percent of the first-year bluebirds that returned to nest in their natal area fledged young from at least one brood during their first year. These data support the idea that adult bluebirds are more likely to return to previous nest sites to nest than are first-year birds, and that previous reproductive success is a major factor which influences whether or not they return. Conversely, it is probable that not all reproductively successful bluebirds returned to nest at previous nest sites. This apparent lack of nest-site fidelity, as well as the reproductive success of returning adults and nestlings, is discussed.

## Introduction

The tendency for birds to return to a previous breeding site to nest during consecutive years has been well documented in both migratory (Kendeigh 1941, Werth 1948, Austin 1949, Darley *et al.* 1971, Hepp and Kennamer 1992, Jenkins and Jackman 1993) and non-migratory (Harvey *et al.* 1979, Schieck and Hannon 1989, Ingold 1991, Fischer *et al.* 1993) species. The potential benefits associated with nest-site fidelity include enhanced familiarity with the breeding grounds (Freer 1979, Gavin and Bollinger 1988) and increased access to the best breeding sites (Dow and Fredga 1983, Rowley 1983), both of which are likely influenced by age and should result in enhanced reproductive success (cf. Greenwood and Harvey 1992). Nest-site fidelity in Eastern Bluebirds using nest boxes has been reported in a number of studies (Laskey 1939, 1943; Chapman 1942, Pinkowski 1971, 1977; Tuttle 1991), but much of the information is anecdotal and relatively little information has been provided on return rates and distances moved by individuals within the same

breeding area during consecutive years. Pinkowski (1971) does provide a thorough account of the recovery rates of bluebirds banded at one location (presumably their natal grounds) and recovered at other, often distant, localities. In addition, not many studies have addressed the previous reproductive success of adult bluebirds returning to nest in the same box or general area. Pinkowski (1977) found that during a nine-year study in Michigan, all 47 adult bluebirds that returned to a previous breeding area for a second consecutive year were previously successful in fledging some young in the first year.

The purpose of this paper is to add to the information known about bluebird nest-site fidelity by providing data from 24-color-banded bluebirds during a five-year period. I will present results regarding return rates and inter-year distances both adult and yearling bluebirds moved within a breeding area. I will also briefly examine the current and previous reproductive success of adult and yearling birds.

## Study Area and Methods

From early April through early August

1990-1994, 1 color-banded adult and nestling Eastern Bluebirds on two small nest box trails in Muskingum County, Ohio. The Muskingum Campus Trail (MCT) located on the Muskingum College campus in New Concord, consists of 25 standard North American Bluebird Society (NABS) nest boxes on a 37-acre study site (15 hectares), and the White Farm Trail (WFT) located 2.5 miles (4 km) outside of New Concord consists of 14 NABS boxes on a 20-acre study site (8 hectares). Boxes on the MCT trail are surrounded by a variety of habitats including mowed lawns, forest edges and unkempt pastures; boxes on the WFT are situated along fence rows partitioning grazed pastures, ungrazed meadows, forest patches and strawberry fields. Boxes on both study sites are placed 75-110 yards apart (70-100 m) but not necessarily in a straight line. In a few instances boxes are paired about 10 feet apart (3 m) to help alleviate House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) and Tree Swallow (*Iridoprocne bicolor*) competition.

Nest boxes were examined weekly during five nesting seasons (1991-1995) to determine the extent to which bluebirds returned to previous nest sites, as well as to monitor their reproductive success. I categorized returning bluebirds banded as adults as after-second-year birds (ASY) and individuals banded as nestlings as second-year birds (SY).

## Results

Of 209 Eastern Bluebirds banded during this study, 17 were ASY birds and 192 were SY individuals. Of the 17 ASY birds, 7 (41%; all females) returned to nest in the same box or immediate area (Table 1). A two-by-two contingency table Chi-square test revealed that significantly more ASY bluebirds returned than would have been expected assuming that individuals were not nest-site tenacious ( $X^2 = 6.48$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ,  $df = 1$ ). In four instances ASY birds returned to the same box, and in three of these instances females returned to the same box for two consecutive years following banding (Table 1). In one

instance the ASY female was not found the year after it was banded, but returned to the box where it was banded two years later. Two additional ASY birds returned to the box within 100 m of the box where they were banded, and one of these individuals returned to boxes within 100 m of the box where it was banded for three consecutive years after it was banded (Table 1).

Two of the four ASY females that returned to the same box fledged young from two consecutive broods at that box during the previous year, while a third female was successfully single brooded. The fourth female failed to produce any young at the box where it was banded (its nest attempt was disrupted by House Wrens), but still returned to that box the following year and failed again at the incubation stage as a result of House Wren interference. Within a week it moved to another box about 330 yards away (300 m) where it fledged young from a single nest attempt. This same individual then returned the following year to the original box where it was banded and fledged young from its initial brood before being disrupted by wrens during a second nest attempt. The two ASY birds that returned to boxes within 100 m of the nest box where they were banded produced at least some young at that box during the previous year. In one instance, the banded female produced young from two broods in 1993 but did not return to the same box in 1994; rather it fledged young in a box about 70 m away and failed in a second nest attempt at this box as the result of wren interference. In 1995 this individual returned to a third box situated about 75 yards (69 m) from the 1994 box and 130 yards (120 m) from its original box; it was successfully double brooded at this box.

Of the 192 SY bluebirds, 17 (8.8%) returned to the same area where they were banded as nestlings the previous year, to attempt nesting (Table 2). A two-by-two contingency table Chi-square test revealed that significantly more SY bluebirds returned than would have been

Table 1. Nest-box fidelity of seven female Eastern Bluebirds (A) banded as adults in 1990-1994.

Number of years returned	Same box	Box within 100 m	Box within 0.5 km
1	A	A	A <sup>c</sup>
2	A (3) <sup>a</sup>	---	---
3	---	A <sup>b</sup>	---

<sup>a</sup>One of these individuals returned to the same nest box the year after it was banded but after it failed in its first attempt it moved to a second box within 0.5 km, where it fledged young. This individual returned the following year to the original box where it was banded where it fledged young from a single brood.

<sup>b</sup>This individual returned to nest in the same box the year after it was banded; in the second year it returned to a box within 50 m of the original box and in the third year it returned to a box within 100 m of the original box.

<sup>c</sup>This individual undertook a nest effort that failed at the incubation stage at a box about 4 km from where it was banded the previous year. About one month later it initiated a second nest attempt in which young were fledged, at a nest-box within 0.5 km of where it was banded.

expected assuming that individuals were not nest-site tenacious ( $X^2 = 15.76$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ,  $DF = 1$ ). SY bluebirds returned to their natal box to attempt their first nest effort in only one instance. Most SY birds were discovered at boxes within 550 yards (503 m) of their natal box; however, four individuals were discovered at boxes up to 2.5 miles (4 km) from where they were hatched, on a different study site (Table 2). Only one SY bird returned to nest in the area where it was hatched for two consecutive years (Table 2).

Eight of 13 SY birds (62%) that returned to a nest box near their natal area during their first adult year fledged young from at least one brood and one individual (a female) successfully raised two broods. Three individuals did not attempt a second brood after successfully fledging young from their first nest attempt. Two individuals failed at their first nest attempt but fledged some young in a second attempt, and one individual fledged young in a first nest attempt but failed in the second. Finally, an additional SY bird likely raised two broods, but I was unable to confirm its presence at the nest box during the second nest attempt. Of the five individuals that failed to fledge any offspring during their first adult year, two were found dead and three failed to complete their nest attempts (one nest

failed at the incubation stage and two failed at the nestling state). Two of the four individuals that were not found the year after banding but were located two years later, also successfully raised two broods. The other two individuals successfully fledged young from a single brood.

## Discussion

My data on the nest-site fidelity of Eastern Bluebirds are similar to those of Laskey (1939, 1943), and Pinkowski (1971, 1977). My return rate for bluebirds banded as adults was 41%. Laskey (1939) reported an adult return rate of about 50%, while Pinkowski (1971) found that 28% of banded adults returned to his study site in subsequent years. Pinkowski (1977) and others (Shields 1984, Blanche and Robertson 1985, Gavin and Bollinger 1988, Greenwood and Harvey 1992) have suggested that previous nesting success is important in determining whether adult birds return to nest at a previous nest site. The majority (86%) of ASY bluebirds that returned to boxes on my study sites fledged some young at the same box or in the same immediate area during the previous year. In addition, most returning individuals (83%) successfully fledged single or double broods in the boxes

Table 2. Nest-box fidelity of 17 Eastern Bluebirds banded as nestlings in 1990-1994. A = females that returned to a natal-box site and B = males that returned to a natal-box site.

Number of years returned	Same box	Box within 100 m	Box within 0.5 km	Box within 4 km
1	B	A, B (2) <sup>a</sup>	A (4) <sup>b</sup> , B (4) <sup>c</sup>	A (3), <sup>b</sup> B
2	---	---	A <sup>d</sup>	---

<sup>a</sup>One of these individuals was found dead in a nest box about 50 m from its natal box in April of its first adult year. <sup>b</sup>One of these individuals was not found the year following banding but returned to a nearby nest-box two years later. <sup>c</sup>Two of these individuals were not found the year following banding but returned to a nearby nest box two years later. <sup>d</sup>This individual returned to a box within 0.5 km of its natal box for two consecutive years following banding.

where they previously nested or in other nearby boxes (usually within 100 m). These data are similar to those that Pinkowski (1977) reported, and support the notion that nest-site fidelity is selectively advantageous perhaps in terms of habitat familiarity and/or increased access to optimal breeding territories (cf. Freer 1979, Dow and Fredga 1983). In addition, it is possible that the availability of suitable nest cavities on my study sites was limited, thus making it beneficial for territorial bluebirds to return and defend previous nest sites. Interestingly, one adult female bluebird returned to nest in the same box in which its nest attempt failed the year before as a result of wren harassment. When the nest attempt during the second year also failed as a result of wren interference, it moved to another box about 300 m away and fledged young. It returned to its original box in the third year, however, and fledged offspring from an early brood before losing the box to wrens later in the season. This anecdote suggests that although previous reproductive success plays a major role, there are additional factors which influence whether or not breeding bluebirds return to previous nest sites.

Fifty-nine percent of ASY bluebirds did not return to previous nest sites even though many of them successfully fledged young the year before. This raises an interesting question about nest-site fidelity and a problem inherent in nest-site fidelity

studies (cf. Gavin and Bollinger 1988). How does an observer distinguish between winter bird mortality and an apparent lack of nest-site fidelity? Pinkowski (1971) found that the breeding season posed a greater threat to ASY bluebird survivorship than did migration or the limitations of winter. His data suggest that it is unlikely that all 59% of the ASY bluebirds I banded died during the winter months. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that some bluebirds, in spite of previous reproductive success, are not nest-site tenacious. This again begs the question of what factors other than previous reproductive success influence bluebird nest-site fidelity.

My return rate for bluebirds banded as nestlings was 8.8%. Laskey (1943) reported a SY bluebird return rate of about 6.5%, while Pinkowski (1971) found that 1.2% of banded nestlings returned to their natal sites. These findings suggest that young bluebirds are more likely to disperse to breeding sites at greater distances from their natal sites than are ASY birds to disperse from previous breeding grounds. This may be explained in part by the idea that ASY birds are more familiar with the breeding grounds than are SY birds, and are thus better able to exploit previous nest sites earlier in the season (cf. Pinkowski 1977). If this is the case, then younger bluebirds would often be forced to move to more distant breeding areas. My data support this hypothesis. Of the 17 SY bluebirds that I re-located in



subsequent years, four were found at about 4 km from their natal sites while nine were found up to 550 yards (0.5 km) from where they were banded. Perhaps more importantly, of the 192 nestlings that I banded, 175 were never seen again on my study sites or recovered in the general area in later years.

ASY bluebirds in this study were reproductively more successful than SY birds in large part because they were often able to raise two broods. About 57% of returning ASY birds successfully raised two broods during at least one season, while only 10% of returning SY birds were able to successfully complete two broods. Pinkowski (1977) found that ASY birds in Michigan were successful at early nesting attempts more often than SY birds and attempted second nesting efforts at least 70% of the time when they successfully fledged young from an early brood. In addition, I found that young bluebirds often seemed to lack the experience necessary to successfully raise young to fledging. At several nests with returning SY parents, eggs and nestlings simply seemed to have been abandoned. Most such nesting attempts were initiated later in the nesting season perhaps on inferior territories when temperatures were warmer and food was likely more scarce. ■

#### Acknowledgments

I am indebted to my wife, Robin Densmore, for helping me collect data and band bluebird nestlings over the years. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the late Carl Lagle as well as to Doug LeVasseur, both of whom provided me with quality bluebird boxes and helped me establish my bluebird trails. John White and the ground crew at Muskingum College allowed me to erect bluebird boxes on their properties. This study was funded in part by a grant from the Green Educational Foundation.

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(Continued on page 69)

## Success with Hanging Boxes

Roger Thompson, of Medford, Oregon, devised a system to hang nest boxes high by attaching a hook to the back of each box. An aluminum extension pole with a topless box to hold a nest box raised each box to its desired location (*Sialia* 14(2):69-70). Early this year he received the following letter from Dick Purvis of Anaheim, California.

Dear Mr. Thompson:

At the NABS conference in Boise, Idaho in 1994, I saw your presentation of the "Nest Box Mounting Pole" (I presume you were the presenter). I thought this technique would solve some of my problems so I tried it. I am pleased to report that it is a tremendous success! I had over 100 hanging nest boxes which were placed by this method and more than 50 of them had Western Bluebird nests. I have modified the mounting pole design so that the basket is swiveled on the pole so that the nest box remains upright during the whole process of lifting or lowering the box. This way I safely monitored the boxes each week during the nesting season. Oftentimes I lowered a box with a bird sitting on eggs, lifted her to count the eggs, replaced her, and lifted the box back up without causing the bird to fly. This box mounting method has allowed a significant increase in the safe fledging percentage for my bluebird trails as well as making life much easier for me. It has solved the following problems:

1. No more falling off a ladder (which has happened twice in the past).
2. Nests are safe from two-legged predators. In the past, I have lost as many as 70% of the tree-mounted boxes in the parks. I put the hanging boxes very high (as much as 22 feet) on unclimbable trees.
3. No more losses from drowning by high pressure industrial sprinklers which send firehouse-like pressure jets of water as high as 15 feet in the parks, golf courses and cemeteries where my boxes are.
4. Nests are much safer from predators such as raccoons than boxes nailed to trees 8 to 10 feet high. Since the hanging boxes are so high and so far out on small branches, raccoons are much less likely to find them. Also, it is so easy to move them between nestings so that a raccoon can't learn a bluebird trail route.
5. No more ants. An oil-soaked rag tied around the hanging wire stops them--likewise no more earwigs and no more mice.
6. Monitoring my boxes is much easier than lugging around a ladder and saves much time.
7. No nails in trees which are sometimes objected to. Boxes are easy to move versus nailed boxes which are often damaged when the nails are pulled from a tree. It's easy to replace or repair a damaged hanging box even with a nest in it.
8. The best protection against House Sparrows is just to move the box if they start nesting. It's easy to do with the hanging box.
9. It's easy to show groups like school classes and scouts what an active nest is like close up. They are thrilled. This is a great way to make children lifelong bird lovers.
10. Nest boxes last longer. Growing trees tear up nail-mounted boxes in a short time. This past winter I have built a large number of hanging boxes and put them up. I plan soon to have all my boxes replaced with the hanging ones. I think this technique should be publicized as much as possible for the sake of the bluebirds. I will be the host for the NABS annual convention in 1997 in Anaheim and this will be a field trip which will show these boxes in action.

I want to sincerely thank you for introducing me to this way of mounting bluebird boxes. It has been a godsend.

*Dick Purvis*

936 S. Siet Place  
Anaheim, CA 92806

# Two Female Eastern Bluebirds with One Male Fledge Eight

Mark Oakley

On 29 April 1995, I stopped at my father's house in Lawsonville, North Carolina. I checked the bird boxes he has near his house. The first one on the power pole was empty so I went on to the next pole. I opened the lid (all our boxes open from the top for easy viewing of eggs and nestlings) and there was a pile of little bluebirds. I began to count them all piled on one another until I got to eight. I dropped the lid and thought to myself, "Did I count right?" So I opened the lid and counted again. Sure enough, eight bluebirds in a four by four inch box. I went into the house and asked my father, Dexter Oakley, a retired postmaster, if he knew how many little bluebirds he had. He said he had looked on Thursday the 27th of April and had counted five.

He also noticed what he thought were blue shells remaining from the five that had already hatched, but, instead, what he was seeing were more eggs to be hatched on Friday.

In my seven years of dealing with bluebirds I have only raised six in a box; I had read of seven, but never eight. The next few days were wonderful for my Dad. Since he is retired, he was able to spend most of the day watching events at this nest box.

He kept telling me that there were two females and one male caring for the nest. I told him I didn't think this could be possible. I asked Brenda Martin, a science teacher at Patrick County High School, to go to my Dad's house and take pictures. I also asked her if she ever



Photograph by Mark Oakley

Eight nestling Eastern Bluebirds, Lawsonville, North Carolina, from an eight egg clutch laid by two females who appeared to be mated to a single male.

heard of two females and one male raising birds together. She said that nature just doesn't work that way.

Then on Tuesday, 16 May 1995 my father called to let me know that the eight bluebirds had fledged.

As Paul Harvey would say, now "the rest of the story." On Thursday, 15 June 1995 my father called and left a message at work. He said that the three birds had done it again. He had watched and counted each day until they had laid eight. Two eggs were laid each day. There had to have been two females using the same box.

I was back visiting Mom and Dad on Saturday, 24 June 1995 and as I walked toward the box on the pole one female came out and rested on the line. As I got closer, another female came out to rest

on the top of the box. I raised the lid to see eight beautiful bluebird eggs. Dad was right about two females using one box.

On Sunday, 25 June 1995, we got a call from Dad. He said that the eggs were gone and he saw just one female and the male. We guessed that a snake had passed by for lunch. We figured that one female bird was sitting on the eggs when this happened.

The two remaining birds built in another box and raised four more bluebirds, plus two from another box for a total of 14 bluebirds, but none as exciting as the eight that were raised by two females in one box and fledged on 16 May 1995. ■

Route 2, Box 126  
Westfield, NC 27053

### EARL GILLIS 1914-1995

The bluebird world lost another of its "greats" when Earl Gillis of Newberg, Oregon died on 11 November 1995, at age 81. Earl was a U.S. Navy veteran of World War II. After the war, he became a teacher, coach, principal, and supervisor of pupil personnel services. Earl was a Celtic historian, delighted in his Scottish ancestry, and was an accomplished bagpipe player. He was interested in all phases of nature. In the 1970's he assisted the late Hubert Prescott in his efforts to save the Western Bluebird in the Willamette Valley. After Hubert's death, Earl carried on the work and was instrumental in the founding of the *Hubert Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project*. As a result of this project, the Western Bluebird is making a comeback in western Oregon. Earl wrote many articles for the Portland Audubon *Warbler* and for *Sialia*. He was honored with the Mamie Campbell Award by the Portland Audubon Society for his work with the Western Bluebird. Earl also served as a Board Member for the North American Bluebird Society. His infectious sense of humor delighted all who met him. While he and his late wife Edna had no children of their own, "[they] are sorely missed by all the children, most now grown, but some still young, whom their lives touched over the years." May he rest in peace knowing that he helped one of God's most beautiful creatures--the bluebird!

--Patricia Johnston and Mary Janetatos

# Bluebird Exchange

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

## **ALABAMA**--from Brenda Ginder, February 1996

Alabama bluebirders are in the process of forming *Bluebirds over Alabama, Inc.* and would like to hear from anyone interested in this statewide organization. They expect to publish a newsletter, *Blue Notes*. Annual dues of \$10.00 are planned. A brochure is available by writing to Secretary-Treasurer Jackie Workman, 1 Silver Lakes Blvd. East, Glencoe, AL 35905 or by telephoning (205) 892-4653.

The organizers are grateful to *Bluebirds Over Georgia* for their assistance.

--Brenda M. Ginder, President

## **ALBERTA**--*Calgary Area Trails*, 1995 Results

The spring was cold, wet, and late arriving which resulted in the lowest-ever second broods of bluebirds.

More than 5,400 Mountain Bluebirds were fledged from more than 3,100 boxes. Although that total compares favorably with 1992, the best year, 24% fewer boxes were monitored in 1992. The bluebird successful fledging rate (rate of young fledged to number of eggs laid) was 84.0%, the highest since 1991.

Tree Swallows had a highly successful year with fledgings topping 7,300. The fledging rate was 82.8%.

Grahame Booth had two interesting experiences. On 22 May he found a dead female bluebird on three eggs. He removed the bird but left the nest untouched. On 9 June a female bluebird left the box on approach. The nest in the box contained six bluebird eggs. Subsequently, six hatchlings were found with two unhatched eggs remaining. Grahame believes that at least one of the hatchlings was the offspring of the first female. On 11 June the same monitor caught a female swallow in a box; while banding her he noticed a growth on her left foot. Later, he realized he had forgotten to record the number of eggs so he went back to the box. To his surprise, he removed a female swallow from the box with no band and no growth on her foot.

Al Kimberley had a bluebird nest that fledged eight young, a first in his six years of monitoring; he had another nest that contained six white eggs. Mary Houston reported a pair of bluebirds nesting on top of a wren nest. Walt Gianville had a nest in a AGT canister which contained nine Tree Swallow eggs. Although quarters were cramped, all nine fledged. On one occasion, Walt observed two pairs of adults feeding the young. Len and Jan Marshall found a peacock feather in a Tree Swallow box.

In 1994 Gwen Simpson had 16 eggs disappear from her boxes. She found no signs of predators and believed people were probably responsible. She wrote a note explaining who she was, her purpose, and her problem and then requested cooperation. She delivered the note to all the houses on her trail. In 1995 she had no missing eggs and no vandalism.

In 1995, 54 trails reported a total of 3,125 boxes fledging 5,402 bluebirds and 7,324 Tree Swallows.

--*Calgary Area Bluebird Trails*

## ----*Ellis Bird Farm, Ltd.*, Fall 1995

Obituaries for Duncan Mackintosh and Larry Zeleny highlighted two pioneers of bluebird conservation. Winnie Ellis's 90th birthday was also noted.

Orville Embree of Brats and Bluebirds in Coronation reported a pair of Tree Swallows successfully raising a Mountain Bluebird in one of their boxes. On 13 June the box



contained one bluebird egg; on 22 June, it contained the bluebird egg and 6 Tree Swallow eggs. All seven hatched by 5 July; all fledged by 25 July.

Gus Yaki of Calgary observed a pair of Mountain Bluebirds nesting in 1995 in Cambridge Bay, 400 miles above treeline. The birds were nesting in an abandoned building; their entrance hole was a small hole in the wall. He has also seen this species in Churchill, Manitoba and in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory.

Glenn and Anne Finch of Mirror, Alberta, had a Common Goldeneye nest inside the chimney in their garden shed for the second year in a row. A day and a half after hatching, the ducklings climbed the vertical brick wall to the top of the chimney and jumped. Despite landing on rock walls, the roof, and flower beds, all eventually successfully joined the female on the ground. After a brief rest, the brood made the 1 km (1100 yd) trek across garden, field, and highway to the town reservoir in two hours.

Marijke Jalink-Wijbrans provided some tips for taking young children (in her case a three year old) along on a bluebird trail. She suggests going early in the season, making the outing a short one, and being prepared with toys, drinks, snacks, sunscreen, and a clean set of clothes. Check the box before showing it to a child. "At such a tender age, the child should encounter the wonder on it all, not yet the drama."

Don Stiles describes five features of a good nest box for Mountain Bluebirds emphasizing a 1 9/16 inch entrance and a 5 x 5 inch floor size.

The "World's Largest Nestbox Collection" continues to grow. Editor Myrna Pearman spotlights two innovative designs: Frank Zuern's Tree Branch Bluebird House and Ron Bittner's boxes with extra openings or concealed entrances (*Sialia* 17(4):137-139).

--Ellis Bird Farm, Ltd.

#### **COLORADO**--*Colorado Bluebird News*, Summer 1995 and Winter 1995

An article summarizes the results of Trail Location Forms returned the last two years as compiled by Jim Norton. A total of more than 100 trails have been reported with approximately 2,000 boxes. Although trails vary widely in number of boxes and length, they are located primarily in mountain valleys and along the Front Range. Elevations vary from 6,000 to almost 11,000 feet. Helmut Quiram's trail takes honors for most boxes by an individual. His 60 mile trail consists of 600 boxes south of Blue Mesa Reservoir.

Most unusual box resident was a pair of Lazuli Buntings in one of Joleen Graf's boxes in Castle Pines Village. Lee Thormahlen lost several clutches (and boxes) in Roxborough State Park to a female bear with two cubs. Janice Rumberger in Frisco reported that on 1 July a female bear with one cub tore down two of her boxes. Chet Parker and Earl Pursley in Estes Park had several boxes which suffered bear damage.

From Bluebird Nesting Report Forms received so far, 670 bluebirds were fledged in Colorado in 1995 with 496 of them Mountain Bluebirds, 174 Western Bluebirds.

Several boxes were erected on the Colorado Bluebird Trail near Conifer on Highway 74. They were placed in memory of Tina Woodruff and Dorothy Drumeller.

--*The Bluebird Project*

#### **FLORIDA**--*Letter*, 6 December 1995

I am a graduate student at the University of Miami and a member of NABS. My research is on host-parasite relationships between bluebirds and their blowfly parasites. I am interested in adding a new component to my research project which would require the assistance of bluebirders from across the country. I would like to survey blowfly numbers from bluebird nests across the country. In order to do this, I need to collect nests from bluebird boxes in many states.

If you are interested in helping with this project, please write to me at the following address: Department of Biology, P.O. Box 249118, University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL 33124-0421.

--*Kristina M. Hannam*

**GEORGIA--**Fall Meeting Information, Fall 1995

Bluebirds Over Georgia, Inc. planned a forum on 29 October 1995 at the Mountain Park Depot near Lilburn. This is a change from the usual Fall Festival and it was hoped it would attract wider participation from the public. Because bluebirds are coming back in Georgia, there is a need to double the number of nest boxes available. That is the primary goal of the meeting.

--*Bluebirds Over Georgia*

**INDIANA--**Letter, 16 January 1996

I am a member of a group of 10 people who have trails in Lake County, about 20 miles south of Gary, Indiana. We are an active group, have 18 trails, and are working with local schools and the county park system to increase our volunteers and trail numbers. I am interested in contacting other bluebirders who are maintaining trails in Indiana with the possibility of establishing a statewide bluebird society. I would welcome a listing from anyone in Indiana who is interested. Please supply your name, address, telephone number, county, trail location and size, and whether you are interested in joining a statewide society.

Information should be sent to me at 7613 W. 134th Place, Cedar Lake, IN 46303 or call 219-374-5039.

I would like to express my thanks to the Ohio Bluebird Society for answering my questions about starting an organization.

--*Chris Salberg*

**IOWA--**WINGS..., Fall 1995

This extra-large issue is devoted mostly to habitat and species preservation efforts through Partners in Flight (PIF). Efforts continue continentwide to improve habitat and develop an action plan for preservation of migratory birds.

--*Johnson County Songbird Project*

**MAINE--**DOWNEAST BLUEBIRD, Fall 1995

Dick Upham of Winslow describes an experience in which a female bluebird laid three clutches but no eggs hatched. The first two clutches were abandoned after incubation; examination showed no embryo development. Causes for infertility are speculative--usually puzzling and always disappointing.

The Bluebird Association of Maine has a lending library for its members. Furnishing the correct size envelope and adequate postage are all that is required to borrow items.

The 1995 census form is enclosed with the new request that bluebirders consult the enclosed map and identify the biophysical region in which their boxes are located.

--*Bluebird Association of Maine*

**MARYLAND--**Nest Box News, September 1995

Arlene Ripley produces an eye-catching newsletter for bluebird monitors in a southern Maryland county. Color graphics highlight the text and production graphs. Special events on 10 trails are described. The Twin Shields Trail made a comeback with lower predation rates in 1995 than in 1994. Fewer House Sparrows attempted nesting which was credited to better box location and diligent sparrow control. The Randie Cliffs Trail had a clutch of six blue eggs and one of five white eggs.

The Kings Landing Park Trail had the first confirmed Tree Swallow nesting in Calvert County. Tree Swallows have gradually been expanding their nesting range south and east in Maryland. The Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Power Plant Trail showed an increase in fledged young despite an ongoing predator problem. Arlene Dziedzic took advantage of ample suitable habitat by moving boxes to new locations. She had a total of nine white eggs in her bluebird clutches.

The Middleham Chapel Trail had 10 white eggs, five of which hatched.

The Cove Point Trail broke all its records and produced the highest number of fledged bluebirds of any Calvert County trail: 127. One brood of six fledged successfully and seven white eggs were laid in other nests. Monitor John Zyla banded 113 of the young. The four eggs laid in mid-August (last one 13 August) fledged the second week of September.

The Jefferson Patterson Park Trail had 140 eggs laid, but extreme predation, especially from feral cats, reduced early season fledging to a low 17% of eggs laid. Monitor Denise Milkovich tried moving boxes and finally confronted the cat problem. After mid-June, fledging improved dramatically. Along the Chesapeake Hills Country Club Trail, fewer of the 18 boxes were used in 1995, but monitor Jess Swain notices more bluebirds were being produced per box.

--Calvert County Bluebird Trail Monitors

#### **MASSACHUSETTS, RHODE ISLAND, CONNECTICUT--Bluebird Monitor, November 1995**

The Tri-State Bluebird Society has 125 members. Support has come from the media and local Audubon groups.

A golf course nesting program is underway. Bluebird boxes have been placed on 13 area golf courses. Some clubs have chosen corporate memberships. Strong support has been received from the Rhode Island Golf Association.

An agreement has been reached with the Rhode Island State Training School for Boys to construct nesting boxes and bluebird feeders. This provides good publicity for the training school and a nice arrangement for the bluebird society.

The Meshantucket Pequot Tribal Nation has taken a corporate membership. Plans for the winter include an educational program for tribal members and the establishment of bluebird trails on reservation land.

Hank Coleman credited three bluebird broods in 1995 in a box near his home, at least in part, to use of a mealworm box in the vicinity. Six one-inch mealworms were put out twice a day. A bell announced the filling of the box. After fledging occurred, use of mealworms by adults making feeding trips to the young allowed the fledged bluebirds to be located. For the most part, only adults used the mealworm box; the young were driven off by their parents.

--Tri-State Bluebird Society

#### **MINNESOTA--Bluebird News, October 1995**

A highly successful 1995 conference was held on 9 September. Carroll Henderson was a featured speaker. His newest book, *Wild About Birds*, is designed to cover all aspects of feeding birds and is designed for the Upper Midwest. He was named Conservationist of the Year by the Minneapolis Chapter of the National Audubon Society at their December 1995 meeting.

Darrel Stave of Baxter received the Bluebirder of the Year Award. Ryan Otterson of Wyoming received the Young Bluebirder of the Year Award.

The fifteenth Annual Conference is planned for 20 April 1996 in Faribault.

David Klatt and Richard Klatt of Faribault have constructed a "match-the-picture" electronic game. This puzzle will be changed from time to time, will be displayed at all future conferences, and has already been borrowed by several organizations.

Donna Rourick, Atlantic (Iowa) suggests that to thwart House Wrens, close the box for two to three weeks. If that doesn't work, close it permanently. If wrens control the box, bluebirds can't nest anyway. Ted Tempest of St. Paul found that when he trapped, banded, and relocated four House Wrens 35 to 40 miles away from his trail, they were back within two to three days! Marlin Eich of St. Joseph tried gray and black glass fronts in his Peterson boxes, but neither color dissuaded the wrens.

LeRoy Spielman of Boone County (Illinois) experimented with painting predator guards and traps various colors. He found that forest green on a cone predator guard was accepted readily by bluebirds. He painted a Noel guard "John Deere green" and bluebirds were not bothered. He also painted a House Sparrow trap a soft grass green and caught a female House Sparrow "right away." He speculates that perhaps green is a color birds feel comfortable with because it represents safety. Editor Dorene Scriven warns that nest boxes should not be painted dark green because they would absorb too much heat.

A House Finch used a Peterson box in New York. Three Minnesotans reported similar occupancy.

Barb Mulvaney on the Pope County Trail noted that the nest of a pair of bluebirds near a dead deer incorporated white hair from the buck's belly. Deer hair is an excellent insulator.

*Bluebird News* has inaugurated "The Kids Page." This is a means of appealing to young people who represent the future of bluebird conservation. Photographs, drawings, letters, poems, etc. are welcome. Send items for this feature to Richard Hjort, 9571 -270 St., North; Chisago City, MN 55013.

--*Bluebird Recovery Program*

#### **NEBRASKA--*Bluebirds Across Nebraska Newsletter*, Fall 1995**

President Steve Eno devotes his column to box mountings to deter predators, especially raccoons. His favorite deterrent methods of mounting include waxed rebar for PVC boxes and waxed metal pipe for all others. He notes that there are many other successful systems; if they work, continue to use them. On the other hand, losses of eggs or birds to raccoons should encourage anyone to try another mounting method.

Steve also reported on the Iowa and Minnesota conferences. Among the ideas mentioned were the following: Rita Efta (Iowa) suggested an alternative to using chemicals to fight ants in bluebird boxes: rub lemon on the inside of the box. It should be worth trying. Iowa is in the process of organizing a statewide bluebird organization. More on that in the coming year. Dorene Scriven's (Minnesota) talk "Bluebird Basics" was summarized. Among the points which may not yet be widely used were these two: To attract bluebirds in the early spring, carry a small tape recorder and play the song in the vicinity of the box. Her experience has been that, on several occasions, male bluebirds appeared "out of nowhere" and one time a male landed on the recorder. She also suggested placing "Bluebird Nesting" signs in areas accessible to curious individuals. Dick Peterson reported that he tried replacing the masonite sides of 10 of his boxes with plexiglas® to see if the extra light deterred House Wrens from nesting. Unfortunately, wrens nested in all 10 of the altered boxes and bluebirds used not a one. Richard Hjort trained Tree Swallows on his trail to take white feathers from his hand for use in their nests. He started by holding a stick with a glove on it. A feather was placed in the glove. After the swallows accepted that, he removed the stick and put the glove on *his* hand. Eventually the glove was removed and the swallows took the feathers from his fingers. It is important to release the feather when a swallow grabs it.

Nebraska has been divided into six regions to aid local bluebirders with questions and problems. Three of the regions have representatives while three are still in need of volunteers.

John Sullivan reported a gray treefrog in two different boxes in 1995.

--*Bluebirds Across Nebraska*

#### **NEW JERSEY--from Emily Lukasiewicz, February 1996**

Pass the word to New Jersey bluebirders. There is interest in establishing a statewide organization. If you would like more information, contact Emily Lukasiewicz, 16 N. Maple St. F5, Woodbury, NJ 08096.

--*Emily Lukasiewicz*

#### **NEW YORK--Bluebird News, Fall 1995**

The fall meeting 22 October 1995 was planned for a larger location than in the past. The expanded format included a covered dish luncheon and presentations from late morning through the afternoon. Cornell Professor André Dhondt was the featured speaker.

Kevin Berner warns that low population levels of raccoons in the wake of the rabies infestation of the last few years have begun to change. Populations are rebounding so monitors should be certain that boxes are mounted on poles with predator deterrents. Extra-long roof overhangs (five inches or more) also deter raccoons.

Jonathan Plissner and Patricia Gowaty compared bluebird use of sites with both single and paired boxes in South Carolina. Bluebirds preferred the paired box sites. Ray Arendt discusses bird migration and some factors in bluebird migration.

Rich Wells examines "Blowfly Control in Bluebird Nesting Boxes." He lists the three methods in common use for blowfly control as changing the nesting material, placing a raised wire screen platform beneath the nest, and dusting the nest or box with rotenone. After describing the life cycle of this insect, each control method is examined. The author's favorite measure is to change the nesting material. He does raise the question, however, as to the importance of blowfly control on nestling survival. Probably in warm, dry weather when ample food is available, their role is overemphasized.

--New York State Bluebird Society

#### **NORTH CAROLINA--BLUEBIRD NOTES, Sept-Oct 1995**

A story of stolen and damaged bluebird boxes which had been built and erected by the Myrtle Beach kindergarten class had a happy ending. The class decided to offer some rewards to the thieves--perhaps the most generous being "We will ask Evan's Grandad to make a bluebird box for you." The story was reported in the *Myrtle Beach Sun News*. The response was heart-warming. Dick Pockmire (NCBS) mailed the class two boxes. Other bluebirders mailed a total of five more boxes. One lady donated money to purchase ice cream for the entire class. What started as a sad event became a learning experience with the help of wise and sensitive teachers, Mrs. Bryan and Mrs. Maham.

Chuck Bliss is undertaking some local comparisons of Peterson and NABS boxes. He welcomes input from other North Carolina bluebirders.

Heindrick Smock describes in detail his method of raising mealworms. Raising your own provides an economical alternative to purchasing them.

--North Carolina Bluebird Society

#### **OHIO--Bluebird Monitor, Winter 1995**

Chris McQuillen summarized the Ohio Bluebird Society convention held at the Wilmot Wilderness Center 21 October 1995. Highlighting the day's events was the announcement of the Blue Feather Award which this year went to Andy Troyer (formerly of Ohio) of Conneautville, Pennsylvania. Retiring editor Jean Peters was recognized with a gift of art work. A brief Board of Trustees meeting included election of officers for 1996: President Doug LeVasseur, Vice-President Dean Sheldon, Recording Secretary Joan Davis, and Treasurer Chris McQuillen. Membership is over 400. The annual conference for 1996 will be held on 19 October in southeastern Ohio. State Representative Bill Davis announced that there are now county coordinators for 17 of the 18 counties.

Bob Orthwein has been experimenting with a raised roof bluebird box of improved design. Bluebirders are trying to find a design that not only discourages House Sparrows but is also unattractive to House Wrens. In some areas, the wrens are now bigger problem than sparrows, especially because they are a protected species.

Dean Sheldon's "Ohio Blue Tip" column is entitled "If You Feed Them...They Will Come! (A bluebird's guide to winter birdfeeding)." His tips to discourage House Sparrows are especially useful for bluebirders. Do not feed seed mixes, cracked corn, or baryard



grains. He also cautions against using old Christmas trees as shelters near a feeding area arguing that they will become communal roost sites for House Sparrows.

Bill Davis described the success he, his wife Joan, and other county coordinators have had in boosting OBS membership by attending county fairs. A table with displays, the chance to talk to individuals, and a one year free membership given away each day (announced on the public address system) were highly useful in obtaining new members--and names of potential members. Presence at half a dozen events gleaned a list of 400 names and addresses to whom solicitation letters were sent. A state map showing new members marked by red pins graphically depicts the clusters in each county where OBS was represented at fairs.

--Ohio Bluebird Society

#### OREGON--*Western Bluebird Newsletter*, October 1995

A high of 543 Western Bluebird nestlings were banded in 1995 which topped the 393 in 1994.

Earl Gillis was host to a pair of Barn Owls again. Of the clutch of seven, four owlets fledged. Earl also accompanied Dave Fouts as he monitored Purple Martin nests in July. Martins are now nesting from Hood River to the mouth of the Columbia River. (See Gillis obituary elsewhere in this issue.)

--Hubert Prescott *Western Bluebird Recovery Project*

#### VERMONT--*BLUEBIRDS ACROSS VERMONT Newsletter*, Fall 1995

In July, the Simpson Memorial Bluebird Trail was established in the vicinity of Rochester, Vermont in memory of Lena and Earl Simpson. Both individuals were enthusiastic bluebirders. Their family requested that donations be made to BAV in their memory. The first 11 boxes were erected with the help of family members, civic groups, and BAV members.

Editor Craig Scharf announced in his column that BAV is broadening its area of interest to other backyard wildlife besides bluebirds. He notes that other birds as well as various rodents use nest boxes. "Altering the backyard landscape to benefit bluebirds also improves conditions for many other types of wildlife. As a result, BAV will begin to discuss and provide information via its newsletter on other members of the backyard community."

--*Bluebirds Across Vermont*

#### WISCONSIN--*WISCONSIN BLUEBIRD*, Fall 1995

Joe O'Halloran and Carol McDaniel have discovered that Wisconsin consists of two bluebirding zones. Joe is chairman of BRAW's Data Collection and Analysis Committee and Carol is the county coordinator for Lafayette County and a member of BRAW's board of directors.

Analysis of nesting summary data for 1994 enabled identification of the two zones which split the state roughly in half from north to south, in general following the shape of the Mississippi River. The two zones are within 50 square miles of being equal in area. There are twice as many boxes in the East Zone as in the West Zone, but the number of bluebirds fledged in each zone is virtually identical (2,494 in the west versus 2,495 in the east). The number of bluebirds fledged per box in the West Zone (1.5) is *twice* that for the East Zone (0.7). All bluebird numbers are better in the west.

Tree Swallows predominate in the East Zone with the fledging rate a reverse of that of the bluebirds (0.9 West Zone; 1.8 East Zone).

Close to one out of five nest boxes were not used during 1994 in either zone. Analysis of occupancy by box type yielded some interesting preliminary data. The Bauldry (open-topped) box had a 67% Tree Swallow occupancy in the West Zone and 48% in the East Zone. The Hill Lake box had a 22% bluebird occupancy in the west; 11% in the east; 51% Tree Swallow occupancy in the east. PVC box numbers were 32% bluebird occupancy in the West Zone, 5% East Zone; Tree Swallow occupancy 48% west, 67% east. Peterson

occupancy favored bluebirds in both zones: 50% bluebird west, 45% east. Statewide, this box had only 27% swallow occupancy. The slot box had just 20% Tree Swallow occupancy; the Tuttle box an even lower 15%, but the latter box was a small sample size and was used only in the west.

Like many discoveries, the results raise as many questions as they appear to answer, but analysis of additional years' data will certainly be made.

In another article Joe O'Halloran posed the question, "Is the Very High Tree Swallow to Bluebird Ratio in East Wisconsin Natural or Manmade?" His question is based on an article by D. Daniel Boone which appeared in *Sialia* 4(1):10-11. Boone noted that placing too many boxes on a productive bluebird trail where swallows were present would work to the disadvantage of bluebirds. Examples from the two trails had the same effect: the more boxes, the more swallows. O'Halloran dubs this "Boone's Boomerang." Since the eastern zone in Wisconsin has more than four times as many nesting Tree Swallows as the western, is this the result of the East Zone having twice the number of boxes? He charts the use of Hill Lake and Bauldry boxes following the pattern of an increased number of boxes increasing the Tree Swallow population. Even within the East Zone there may not be too many boxes, but simply too many boxes in the limited areas of some individual trails. It will take time and experimentation to determine how far apart it is necessary to place boxes for a balance between the species.

In "Vent Pipes and Tubes are Deadly for Bats and Bluebirds," Frank Zuern warns of the dangers posed by any uncapped pipe or vent. Be aware of these possible traps on your own property and on public land.

--Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin

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## Mothing

Helen M. Johnson

*This is the second of two chapters of an unpublished book donated as a tribute to Lawrence Zeleny. Another chapter of Living with Mountain Bluebirds appeared in the Winter 1996 issue of Sialia.*

As I mentioned before, I had been watching, with growing interest, the comings and goings of the Mountain Bluebirds who occupied the nest boxes in my yard in the White Mountains. They fascinated me with their beauty and gentle ways, and I observed their activities more closely each summer.

At times I noted that they had difficulty in foraging for enough food for their young--and themselves! My nature is to "help," and I love to feed *anything*: humans, dogs, cats, raccoons, birds, etc. I had no trouble supplying food for the jays, siskins, hummers, nuthatches, squirrels, chipmunks, and the various other members of the forest family. But bluebirds puzzled me! I hadn't read much, at that time, about Mountain Bluebirds and was disappointed when they turned up their noses at the seeds and nuts I offered. I *had*, through observing, noted that they captured and ate grubs and grasshoppers, but I didn't have the expertise or inclination to collect these.

One day, as the rain was dripping off the roof of the cabin, I noticed that the Blues would dare to dive up under the eaves for something and streak away with it. That "something" turned out to be miller moths that had been disturbed by the noise of the pelting rain and had taken flight from cracks and were circling under the eaves rather than venturing out into the downpour. The birds would grab one and come back again and

again, to snatch their prize and take it to some open-mouthed babe or happily eat the moth themselves.

After watching for most of the afternoon--until the moth supply dwindled and disappeared--I came to the conclusion that miller moths were a bluebird delicacy, and I could catch them and feed them to my friends! From that day forward, I became known at Hawley Lake as "The Moth Lady."

To begin with, I searched my cabin for any errant members of the moth clan that might live there, too. I found them behind pictures, inside drapes, and attracted to the lamps at night. What a marvelous time I had plucking them from the windows. (When I opened a window, several would be awakened from their cozy places in the grooves and come to life--only to be captured by my sometimes clumsy but desperate grasp.)

At first I shoved them into a glass jar as I used to do with the bees I caught as a youngster. Of course, I punched holes in the lid so they wouldn't perish overnight, but I found when I tried to free them that not just *one* escaped; sometimes all would flee before I could again cover the jar. So, I decided on margarine cups--with holes punched in the covers. These worked well--they were secure places for both pushing the creatures in and releasing them. And how did the bluebirds respond to the "woman-captured moths"? They were delighted--after they realized what this human was doing on the porch with her margarine cups shouting, "Bulllllooooo, Bulllooooo" at them as they sped by looking for food.

By this time they were used to my being near them on the porch, so they would pause occasionally and watch my antics. When I felt their little black, beady eyes on me, I responded immediately by giving my call and releasing a moth or two. It took only a few experimental tries before the Blues began to think of me, not as an "oddity," but as a "provider." I can still feel the goose bumps and the blood rush of excitement when the first Mountain Bluebird took out after a moth that I had released, caught it in mid-air, and then flew back to its perch with a "thank you" chirp. He pecked at the moth to stun it, took it to a nestling--and came back for more! What appreciation was in its soft song and gentle eyes. It reinforced me quickly to catch more moths.

And that I did. I hunted faithfully in every nook and cranny of the cabin. I visited neighbors and asked if they would like a human moth-exterminator to come to their house. Later, when pickings got slim, I would borrow keys from caretakers and take my cups to cabins that hadn't been occupied for some time--they were moth gold mines. I went so far as to beg my lake friends to catch moths when I had to leave for a few days.

One guest at my home for the weekend told another guest that I would invite her to dinner and then not let her in unless she produced *her* margarine cup containing a moth or two! The visitor with whom she shared this exaggerated information was the same person whom I had asked if she'd like to go "mothing" with me that morning. She replied, "NOTHING, what's that? You people up here in the mountains have a whole new vocabulary!" (When she discovered what it meant, she declined the invitation.)

It is really against my nature to kill anything, but to feed my bluebirds I would just put my mind in neutral and continue snatching the elusive moths. After all, the bluebirds liked them alive, so really I wasn't killing them--ah, rationalization.

So it was "moth menus" for two or three years before I found out about mealworms and bluebirds. Just in time, too, as I had done such a thorough job of cleaning out the moth population that they weren't nearly as plentiful as they had been in the beginning. Can you see now why I was known as "The Moth Lady"? Eventually, it was even a more unflattering name, but that comes later....

6011 E. Vernon Ave.  
Scottsdale, AZ 85257

## Cavity Nester License Plates



Mark Oakley, of Westfield, North Carolina, has BLUBIRDS on his license plate. For the past year it has been attached to a red 1986 Ford Escort.



Jaclyn Hill, of Ellsworth, Iowa, monitors between 100 and 140 bluebirds boxes weekly with her S-10 licensed with BLUBRDS1. She is founder and editor of the annual Iowa Bluebird Directory published since 1988.



Lil Files, of Tyngsboro, Massachusetts, uses an attached sign on the front of her vehicle and a magnetic sign on the rear to make sure people recognize her commitment to bluebird conservation.

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*Any other cavity nester boosters out there using vanity plates to advertise their enthusiasm? Send us a photo if you can or, if that isn't convenient, drop us a postcard indicating the state and the exact spelling of what appears on your license plate(s). We'll continue to print them from time to time. Send to Sialia, 10617 Graeoch Rd., Laurel, MD 20723.*



## 1996 NABS RESEARCH AWARDS

*The North American Bluebird Society is pleased to announce the presentation of the thirteenth annual research grant awards. The 1996 recipients are as follows:*

### BLUEBIRD GRANTS

**Kristina M. Hannam**, University of Miami

*The James L. Williams Memorial Award*

Title: Effects of Blowfly Ectoparasites on Eastern Bluebird Reproductive Success

### STUDENT GRANTS

**Karl E. Miller**, University of Florida

Title: Nest-site Selection and Reproductive Success on Secondary Cavity Nesting Birds in Thinned and Unthinned Slash Pine Forests in Florida

**Paul Doherty**, Ohio State University

*The Maybelle F. Vassbinder Memorial Award*

Title: Metapopulation Dynamics of a Permanent Resident Forest-dwelling Bird Species within a Fragmented Landscape: Empirical Data and Dynamic Programming Models

**Elena V. Pravosudova**, Ohio State University

Title: The Effect of Forest Fragmentation on Social Structure of the Tufted Titmouse

### GENERAL GRANTS

**Dr. Archibald McCallum**, College of Charleston

*The Betty H. McIlwain Award*

Title: Reproductive Performance of Flammulated Owls in the Jemez Mountains, New Mexico

## NABS RESEARCH COMMITTEE

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

Individuals wishing to endow a named grant can do so as a one-time donation, on an annual basis, as a memorial to loved ones, or as a planned bequest. If

you are interested in helping to further bluebird and other cavity nester research, please contact Treasurer Delos C. Dupree, NABS, Box 6295, Silver Spring, MD 20916-6295.

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### Bluebird Plant Use

Observations concerning bluebirds and plantings should be directed to Karen Blackburn, 185 Mica Hill Rd., Durham, CT 06422.

# Up Up and Away: The Elevator Post

Paul Chance

An important factor in bluebird propagation is loss to predators. Cats have been known to crouch beneath nesting boxes and pounce upon adult birds when they prepare to enter the box. Snakes and other predators climb posts to get at eggs or chicks.

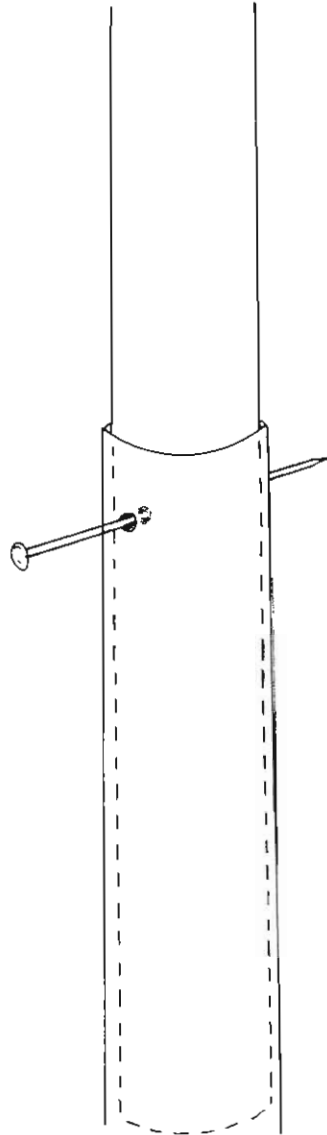
One way of reducing these losses might be to raise the height of the box. Zeleny reports that bluebirds will occupy boxes 15 feet (4.5 m) or more above the ground. Unfortunately, boxes more than 5 feet (1.5 m) high are difficult to monitor and maintain.

I have devised a simple method for putting boxes at heights of 7 feet (2.1 m) or more that nevertheless makes them easy to monitor and maintain. The system uses two 5-foot sections of PVC plumbing pipe [one 1.5 inches (3.8 cm) in diameter, the other 2 inches (5.1 cm)] and a 10-penny nail

To construct an elevator post, insert the narrower pipe (the post) into the wider one (the shaft) so that the bottom of the post is about 1 foot (0.3 m) below the top of the shaft. Now drill a 1/4 inch (0.66 cm) hole about 2 inches below the top of the shaft such that you can fit the nail through the center of both pipes (see Figure A). Remove the post from the shaft and attach the box near the top of the post. Wedge a bit of hardware cloth into the top of the post to prevent birds from exploring and becoming trapped in the pipe.

Put the shaft into a hole in the ground so that the bottom of the shaft is about 2 feet (0.6 m) below the surface. Now insert the post into the shaft. At this point the top of the box is about 4 feet (1.2 m) above the ground. The box may be raised by lifting the post 3 feet (0.9 m) and then sliding the nail through the 1/4 inch holes. The nail keeps the post from sliding down the shaft. The box is now about 7 feet above the ground (see Figure B).

Figure A.



To inspect or clean the box, remove the nail with one hand while holding the post with the other, then let the post slide slowly into the shaft. It is important not to let the post slide of its own accord, since any birds in the box might be injured when the post stops abruptly.

If vandalism is a problem, the nail may be replaced with a bolt and nut. If the nut is tightly secured, pliers are required for its removal and this should discourage miscreants.

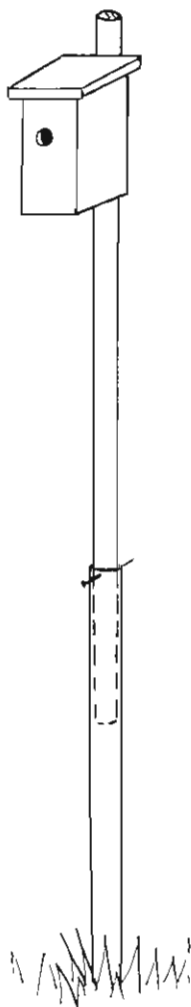
The only difficulty I have had in using the elevator post is in aligning the holes in the shaft and post when inserting the nail. This problem can be dealt with by aligning the holes and then marking the shaft and post with indelible ink or an exterior paint. A cross, drawn so that it overlaps shaft and post, will indicate both the vertical and horizontal positions of the holes. When the two pipes are arranged so that the cross is intact, the holes are aligned.

Five foot sections of pipe result in a maximum box height of about 7 feet. Greater height may be obtained with longer sections of pipe, but it should be kept in mind that this raises the center of gravity and the vulnerability of the box to wind. It seems likely that a 7 foot height is sufficient to put the box out of the reach of most four-footed predators.

I have used this system for about four years without problems, but my experience has been that bluebirds prefer boxes 4 to 5 feet above the ground. The elevator post is of little value if bluebirds do not use higher boxes. It may be possible, however, to "persuade" bluebirds to nest at safer elevations than is their want.

The idea (which I have not put to the test) is to place boxes at 5 feet using the elevator post described here and then, once the box is occupied by bluebirds, raise the box gradually. This can be done if holes are drilled through the post 6 inches (15.2 cm) apart. Every two or three days, remove the nail, raise the post 6 inches, and reinsert the nail. The box should soon be out of the reach of most

Figure B.



predators. The question of how rapidly the box may be raised without inducing the birds to abandon the nest remains to be answered, but in the absence of research evidence to the contrary, a slow "ride to the top" is recommended.

The elevator post is inexpensive, durable, and easy to build and use. I believe it may substantially reduce predation, and I hope some birder will test that hypothesis in a systematic way.

I also hope birders who try the elevator post will let me know what results they obtain, and what problems they encounter. In addition to the address

(Continued on page 67)

## IN MEMORIAM

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



*In memory of Donald Bailey*  
Mrs. Donald Bailey

*In memory of Claude M. Beltz*  
J.R. Trudy  
Lee and Jerod Newton

*In memory of "Bud," dog of Dr. Vicki Kondik*  
David Alpert

*In memory of John Findlay, III*  
Barbara Munson  
The Trevor Family  
Donald Yoder

*In memory of Patsy T. Husman*  
Harriet Holcomb  
Jackie Wefler

*In memory of Elmer Juhl*  
Mr. & Mrs. J.E. Dunlap, Jr.  
Jo Ann Eddleman  
Steve and Roxana Martin

*In memory of Frank X. Krull*  
Frank Krull

*In memory of Lori Wagner Malpass*  
Mr. & Mrs. T.L. Lines

*In memory of Pat Pignetti*  
Alice V.H. Booth  
Chuck Dupree  
Mary D. Janetatos  
Doris Miller  
Marjorie Mountjoy

*In memory of Beresford Proctor*  
Mrs. Area Sidebotham

*In memory of Marie T. Schwennesen*  
Paul and Ann Blumhardt  
Steven L. Cheng  
Steve and Debra Phillips  
Karen and Joe Richard  
Patricia R. Schettino  
Jarvis L. Schwennesen

### *Lawrence Zeleny Memorial Fund*

Bella Vista Bluebird Society  
Bluebirds Over Georgia  
Ronald & Carol Beyna  
Bob Bodine  
Richard & Sarah Bourne  
Dr. Shirl Brunell  
Martha Chestem  
Norma C. Daniels  
Bill & Joan Davis  
Tina Dew  
Sadie Dorber  
Bette H. Duff  
Lillian Files  
Mr. & Mrs. Delos C. Dupree  
Harriett H. Findlay  
Donna Hagerman  
Miss Frances Hanes  
Marie R. Haney  
Joan Harmett for Jo Daviess Guardians  
Marston E. Hussman  
Mary D. Janetatos  
Ms. Charlotte Jernigan  
Ron & Priscilla Kingston  
Mr. & Mrs. Wallace B. Knapp  
Nancy E. MacClintock  
Mr. & Mrs. G.P. Morris  
Ohio Bluebird Society  
Jean Perkins  
Allen Prigge  
Carolyn Rimmer  
Harry & Anna A. Rimmer  
Vincent & Virginia Schneible  
Lorne Scott  
Mr. & Mrs. F.J. Shon  
Robert P. & Joanne K. Solem  
Anne T. Sturm  
Mrs. Margaret L. Swartz  
Mrs. Garnett T. Tunstall  
Richard M. Tuttle  
Lois Wickersham

# BLUEBIRDS

## *A Tennessee Tradition*

By T. D. Pitts



Tradition is defined as a custom or belief that is handed down from generation to generation. One belief that has become a tradition among Tennessee farmers is: "Bluebirds are nice critters to have around." The idea was begun by the Indians who hung empty gourds for purple martins and bluebirds. It was continued by settlers who created specially built bird houses. Tennessee has bluebirds now, but will our descendants also be able to enjoy this tradition?

T. D. Pitts





T. David Pitts wrote a four page brochure for the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency. It provides basic information about bluebird conservation and encourages residents to obtain the license plate shown. Dr. Pitts's cover photograph was the model used by artist Dan Robinson to design the special plate. The bluebird license plate is available from county clerks statewide during 1995-2000 for a cost of \$25.00, plus the regular cost of a Tennessee plate. Profits from the sale will be permanently deposited in the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency's *Watchable Wildlife Endowment Fund*. Earnings from this fund will be used to support nongame and rare wildlife. During the first year approximately 9,000 plates were sold.

(UP--Continued from page 64)

below, I can also be reached on the Internet: INTERNET:72134.1263 @CompuServe.com. ■

P.O. Box 248  
Laurel, DE 19956

### 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.

### Bluebird Boosters

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

*You, too, can become a Bluebird Booster. For a donation of \$25.00 per issue or \$75.00 per four issues, you can be designated as an Eastern, Western or Mountain Bluebird Booster (your choice); for \$15.00 per issue or \$50.00 per four issues, be a Fledgling Booster; while \$10.00 per issue or \$25.00 per four issues makes you a Nestling Booster.*

*All contributions are tax deductible. Mail your check to NABS Boosters, P.O. Box 6295, Silver Spring, MD 20916-6295.*



## Vultures Across New York

### NEWSLETTER

#### The President's Message

In this first newsletter describing the work of Vultures Across New York (VANY), I am happy to say that we are beginning to repopulate the New York City area with vultures. Over the years, too many dead pigeons have been left rotting in city streets, and vultures are just the creatures to take care of this problem. Some people think the vulture is an undesirable bird because it eats carrion and has drab gray feathers, but this misses the point. As we say in Vultures Across New York, hurray for the vulture and carry on with the carrion!

#### Vulture Trail Reports

In the past month, vulture trails have been laid all over the east side of New York City, and results have been promising. Some participants have strewn trails with dead rats and parakeets, as well as with the more common dead pigeons. The vultures have responded enthusiastically. New vulture boxes are resistant to tampering from muggers, so we expect a great success rate. Now vulture nesting season is upon us, and we can all enjoy watching the fledgling vultures devour the smaller animals that have been placed on the path.

#### Problems Encountered on the Trail

In my vulture trail walks, I have found that vultures are somewhat shy and it often helps to coax them softly toward the trail. It is a good idea to pay compliments to the vultures encountered, as they have received a bad press and may have self-esteem problems.

#### Confessions of a Vulture Lover

Oddly, I spent my childhood admiring swans and other traditionally "beautiful" birds. It was not until the age of 35 that I became aware of the fine nature of the vulture. I was alone on a road in the Mojave Desert when my car stalled and I did not know where to turn. A vulture wandered slowly into my range of vision, and for several hours I watched it walk about and capture small reptiles. The vulture seemed to have an inner peace that I had never possessed. Later I was rescued, and while the vulture had been no direct help to me, I remembered it always. Today I blaze vulture trails in New York City every weekend.

#### VANY Potluck Meeting and Sale

All VANY members are invited to attend a potluck dinner on Sunday at the home of Susan Eno, our president. Members are urged to bring food for themselves but not vulture food, which will be provided. The following sale items will be available:

- Vulture-shaped popsicles 75¢
- Pigeon-shaped toys for vultures \$5.00
- Reprint of an article denouncing the peregrine falcon, a competitor of the vulture 50¢
- Vulture notepads, portraying a vulture standing over a dead iguana \$5.00

(More on next page)

## A Look to the Future

Just think, if this year goes as well as the past one, we will soon be seeing flocks of vultures circling over Lincoln Center and Macy's and other points of interest. Our final word is: Get out and view those vultures!

*This item was submitted by Steve Eno, president of Bluebirds Across Nebraska (BAN) It was written by his sister, Susan, a New York City resident, after she had received BAN's newsletter for some time. Steve hopes bluebirders everywhere will see themselves, enjoy the satire, and manage a laugh or a smile.* ■



The Ohio Bluebird Society adopted this logo in February 1995. It was designed by Marc England, a student at Ohio State University.

### **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.

(FIDELITY--Continued from page 47)

Tuttle, R.M. 1991. An analysis of the interspecific competition of Eastern Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, and House Wrens in Delaware State Park, Delaware, Ohio, 1979-1986. *Sialia* 13:3-13.

Werth, I. 1948. The tendency of blackbirds and Song Thrushes to breed in their birthplaces. *Br. Birds* 40:328-330.

Biology Dept.  
Muskingum College  
New Concord, OH 43762

## Weikert's Nest Box Sparrow Trap

This trap is very effective for collecting House Sparrows and European Starlings either during the nesting season when they seek nest sites or during the winter when they seek shelter. In bad weather these species seek shelter in a shed or barn. Mount the trap on a shelf inside a building and fasten the shelf to the wall so the hole in the trap matches a hole in the wall at a height convenient to care for trapped birds. Close all other entrances.

Inside the entrance is a small aluminum box to receive birds. The long side room (Figure 1. Front View) containing the tilt arm with the box on one end and a lead weight on the other, is balanced so the weight of a sparrow will drop the box down to close the entrance and expose an exit. A window prevents escape so the bird drops into a holding box in the back with a door in the bottom for its removal into a plastic bag. Two plexiglas® windows show the type of bird that has been caught so non-target species can be released. Figure 2. Rear View shows the back of the trap with the holding box.

Albert Weikert has also designed an effective sparrow trap for Frank Zuern's Tree Branch Bluebird Box. The design of that box has been modified to accept a trap and make it easier to monitor and clean. --303 E. Fifth St., Villisca, IA 50864.

Figure 1. Front View

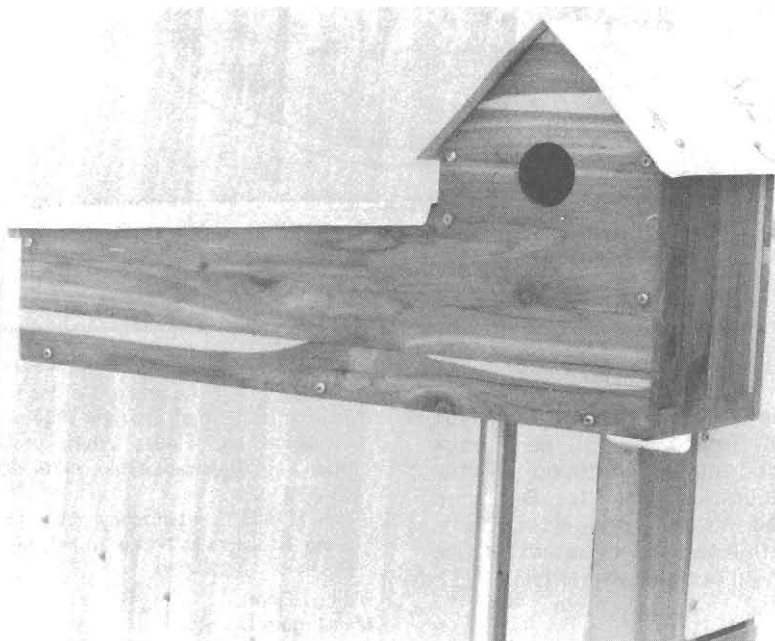
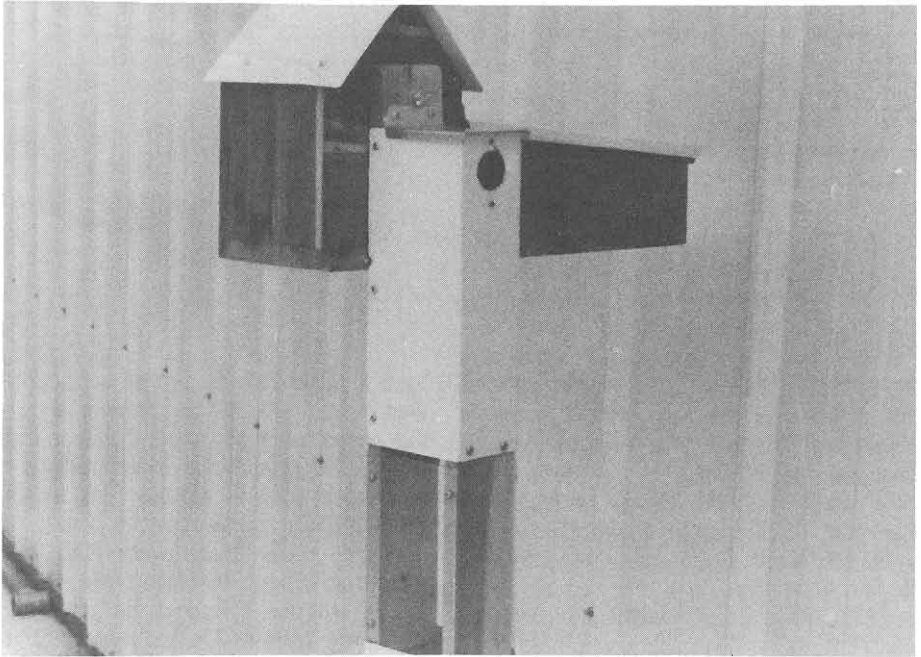


Figure 2. Rear View



A male Eastern Bluebird peeks into Tina Lombard's kitchen window in Fairfax Station, Virginia. She has nest boxes and puts out mealworms to assist the bluebirds. In 1993 and 1994, bluebirds fledged from her boxes, but in 1995 Northern Mockingbirds disrupted bluebird nesting.

# BLUEBIRD EXPRESS

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



Dear Editor:

I had an interesting experience with a Black-capped Chickadee in February 1995. As I came out of my house one afternoon, I found a chickadee lying next to my wife's car. Apparently, it had flown into a car window and stunned itself. I placed it in a small cardboard box to shield it from the wind until it was ready to fly again. I came back a few minutes later and found that the wind had blown the box over. The chickadee was sitting on the ground again. I went to pick it up and it flew to the edge of my car's windshield and landed precariously there. It was still a bit shaky and was slowly losing its grip on the windshield. I walked slowly over and extended my left index finger--and the chickadee climbed on! I walked it slowly out to a pine tree in my front yard and let it climb into the tree for shelter. About 10 minutes later it was gone. I assume it flew off to safety. I don't think I ever had a more satisfying birding experience, especially since the chickadee trusted me enough to climb onto my finger on its own!

Jim Kunz  
454 Ashley Road  
Maine, NY 13760

Dear Editor:

I would like to thank Richard Tuttle who helped me through a rather rough experience.

I had a box with five nestlings in it. I changed the nest material at 10 days and

took a top layer out at 13 days because it was fouled with feces. When I checked the nest on the seventeenth day, I found two dead in the nest, two on the ground, and one chick on the ground still alive but with its feathers all stuck together. The feathers on the dead were also in the same condition. In calling Mr. Tuttle, I found out that I had come up against problems due to the chicks being fed earthworms which were the most available food during a week of wet, cold weather. I took the one chick home, cleaned it, and kept it overnight. In the morning, I took it back to the box. It chirped a couple of times and that was enough to alert the parents that they had a live nestling. The nestling was gone when I came back to check it in the afternoon, so I have hopes that it survived.

I have maintained trails for three years and never experienced or read about this problem before. I am not sure if I could have prevented the deaths of the other nestlings and would welcome any suggestions on the best way to handle a similar problem.

Chris Salbert  
7613 W. 134th Place  
Cedar Lake, IN 46303

Dear Editor:

Any bluebirder planning a trip through Metamora, Illinois this summer is welcome to stop and chat. Call Marcy Hoepfner at (309) 367-2765 to set up a convenient time.

Dear Editor:

I'd like to comment on a statement in your NABS order form: "The bluebird is often mentioned in songs, but a song has never been written exclusively about the bluebird."

Many years ago, tooling around Greenwich, CT, I rummaged around the yard of a deserted house and found sheet music entitled "The Bluebird of Happiness." I took it home and picked it out on my piano. By today's standards this song is "sappy," but I thought it then, and think it still, to be sweet, innocent, and charming. I can't remember some of the words, but here's what I recall:

Somewhere the bluebird is singing,  
And somewhere the skies are blue.

(unfortunate hiatus)

So lift up your head to the skies  
And be happy  
For this is true:

Somewhere the bluebird is singing  
And winging his way to you.

I'm not sure that this is a song exclusively written about the bluebird, but I hope it is.

Helen Real  
24306 County Road T  
Dolores, CO 81323

female. I have observed that many of these unmated but territorial male House Sparrows actually abandon nest building behavior, but nevertheless stick with a house through much of the breeding season, or at least long enough to make the house unavailable to native species.

Thus, it is common to have persistence in terms of making a house unavailable while not having any measurable nesting activity to observe.

Another factor to consider, which is more important in the northern states where the nesting season is shorter, is the time involved in repeat nesting attempts. A male House Sparrow which stays with a house through three repeated attempts (approximately one-quarter of the repeats in your study) makes that house unavailable for a considerable period of time, depending of course on the time it takes him to attract another mate, build a nest, and lay a clutch of eggs. Three repeats could account for five weeks duration, causing the house to be unavailable during an important segment of the breeding season.

Don Grussing  
15404 Lake St., Ext.  
Minnetonka, MN 55345

---

Dear W.H. Davis/B.A. Blankenship

I have a point that you did not consider in your study [Nesting persistence of House Sparrows 17(3):97], which I found very interesting. It has been my observation that not all male House Sparrows are persistent in their attachment to a house, as you have seen; however, those which are persistently attached to a house, don't necessarily make nests--thus a study evaluating only nesting material and eggs is not an accurate determinate of behavior.

Indeed some of the most vexing "problem" male House Sparrows are those which have lost a mate or two (caused by destruction of the nest or nest and eggs) but who stay with the house, unable to attract another mate, but which still defend the house and stay with it incessantly chirping in their attempt to attract a

---

Dear Editor:

It was with a tinge of sadness that I read of the passing of Dr. Zeleny. [It was] because of his book, *The Bluebird: How You Can Help Its Fight for Survival*, which I read soon after it came out, that I started my own efforts in bringing back the bluebird.

Although I never met Dr. Zeleny, it seems as though I knew him quite well through the bluebirds that I know and care for. I have in my possession a letter dated November 21, 1989 that he wrote to me and which I treasure.

We can all truly say that Dr. Zeleny left the world a better place to live in than it was at one time because of his conservation efforts concerning the bluebird.

Merlin J. Lehman  
59980 CR35, R1  
Middlebury, IN 46540



# Bluebird Tales

Mary D. Janetatos



Ah-h SPRING! Isn't it wonderful? Of course, I'm speaking from *memory* as I sit watching the Blizzard of '96 blanketing the backyard with powdery white stuff. It appears that the bushes and trees with berries are available to the birds, and I carefully checked the water supply with its melting heater so they'll probably be able to get a drink. The local bluebird flock was warbling softly from the treetops recently, *before* the snowstorm. **Mary Margaret Freeburne** just up the street from here in Silver Spring, MD, had carefully monitored the trail in our park, and reported 13 bluebirds fledged from the five nest boxes. She and I had delighted in showing these to our young bluebird-artist, **Jessica Tarpley**, of Olney, MD whose mother **Pam** brought her over to view the latest nesting pair. The artistic youngster has drawn and sculpted *many* bluebirds, including an original bluebird Christmas card! Since the NABS office is in my home, I was in touch by telephone with bluebirders across the continent as the snow fell, and in the following days when we were snowed in. **Eleanor Dunham** of New Salem, IL told me via telephone of her NABS Speakers Bureau activities, saying that her bluebird trails are mainly in cemeteries, where "the people around don't bother you." She also spoke of her acquaintance with **Mary Margaret Musselman Schultz**, daughter of the legendary bluebird giant, **T.E. Musselman** credited with originating the concept of the "bluebird trail" (*Sialia* 1(3):99-101).

**Terrie Newkirk**, of Three Oaks, MI, recently told a great spring story. "This spring [1995] we put a small bird house in our tree and sparrows built a nest in it. The next day, as we watched out our window, two male bluebirds fought with the sparrows, threw their nest out of the bird house, and the female bluebird built a new nest in there. The bird house is only 10 feet from our house, but it is a

very quiet area as we built in my father's calf pasture."

**Marie Jackson** of Jonesborough, TN sent along a snapshot of ready-to-fledge nestlings. Near the nest box, she said, "There's a grape arbor and volleyball net for the parents and babies to 'hang out' on... They are a joy!" **Karen Peterson** wrote: "I though you might be interested in my first sighting of bluebirds. It was so exciting. I live in Elmer, New Jersey, which is out in the woods in southern New Jersey, in the county of Salem. I was doing my dishes one Saturday morning in November, I cannot recall the exact date. I'm sorry I did not write it down. I have a big bird feeder outside my kitchen window. I saw blue fly by. Thinking it was a Blue Jay (one of my very common feeders), I didn't pay much attention. Then I looked out again and about six bluebirds perched on the clothesline across my deck."

Veteran bluebirder **Ruth Dykstra**, whose bluebird license plate (**BLUBURD**) appeared in *Sialia* 17(4):140, told me in a phone conversation how she dresses up like a bluebird and gives her "bluebird talk" to nursing homes and other groups. The retired school teacher says she has "much fun" with her 160-nest box trail near Bussey, IA which fledged 567 bluebirds last season!

Citing some of the hazards of bluebirding, **Wesley Logsdon**, of Rushville, IL wrote that his wife had to take over the weekly monitoring of the bluebird trail after he broke his hip. "She said 'OK,' unless she saw a snake which

she didn't, but late in the season she got into chiggers which were worse!" **Thomas & Pamela Rhoads**, of Downingtown, PA related that they "live in an area where there are plenty of bluebirds. We have bluebirds in a tree in our backyard, and are interested in learning as much as possible so we can be good neighbors."

The recent death of **Marie T. Schwennesen** of Germantown, MD triggered an outpouring of sympathy in the form of donations to NABS. Mrs. Schwennesen was a charter member of NABS and I'm sure her bluebirding efforts resulted in a legacy of bluebirds in Montgomery County, MD, home county of the NABS headquarters.

NABS member **Linda Sumpter** of Gaithersburg, MD visited her mother outside of Roanoke, VA where in December of 1995 she observed bluebirds eating sunflower pieces at a standard bird feeder! Those bluebirds were far less "choosy" than the ones NABS President **Charlotte Jernigan** of Wagoner, OK was feeding this past winter. Charlotte described her bluebird feeding setup. First, during the nesting season she sets out the **Jack Finch** type of bluebird feeder: a small wire basket placed on top of his nest box filled with mealworms and dogwood berries. Charlotte sees as many as five bluebirds come as she rings her little brass bell!

**Andrea Staley** of Clarksville, MD found a dead banded male bluebird in one of the boxes in her yard. She reported it to NABS, and to the National Biological Survey Bird Banding Laboratory (which turned out to be a furloughed federal agency!). Then I suggested we contact a prodigious bluebirder, **Mark Wallace** of Laurel, MD (Mark is a recipient of a NABS award plaque). Sure enough, Mark was able to pinpoint the place of banding by checking his records and those of his colleague, **Hank Stanton**, Ellicott City, MD. Mark said he has a fairly high rate of recovering banded bluebirds.

**Patricia Johnston** of Portland, OR, in December 1995 sent the sad news that

we had lost another veteran bluebirder in November: **Earl Gillis** of Newberg, OR (see obituary elsewhere in *Sialia*), an avid practitioner of bluebird conservation for the Western Bluebird and a former NABS board member.

FLASH!

For any and all of you "online" enthusiasts, especially **Paul Chance** of Laurel, DE who urged us in this direction, NABS is "on the Internet"! The address of our page is <http://wsd.com/nabluebird>.

This came about through the good offices of **Edie Bierly** wife of nature artist **Edward Bierly**, of Gunston Hall, VA. (See the latest NABS picture catalog for Ed's pictures which we are now offering.) Edie put us in touch with **Dawn Shepherd** whose computer company completed the details of designing a "page" for NABS. Stay tuned to see how much use it gets! It turns out that Dawn's father, **Mark Shepherd**, is a long-time bluebirder in the Richmond, VA area. Dawn gave him a Christmas gift of membership in NABS!

As dark as January can be, the days are getting longer, and we can delight in thoughts of *April!* **Sally Tuyls Ledford** of Ridgeland, SC wrote last summer: "My oldest sister has cancer and many days she thinks she just can't go on. Then there will be a bluebird at her kitchen window just watching over her to make sure she does go on. I do believe Daddy [who died six years ago] is always watching over us and will always be with us. We are all very special, we knew that we are deeply loved and have a guardian angel." And so I hope it is with you, dear reader, may your guardian angel send bluebirds to you! ■

#### Art Credits

Jon E. Boone: 42, 72  
Suzanne Pennell: 65, 74



Aimee Lutz (left front), a student at Bettie Woodson Weaver Elementary School, Midlothian, Virginia, with the school flag which she designed--pale blue taffeta with a male bluebird perched on a pencil. The flag was unveiled at the school's dedication 13 November 1994. Aimee is pictured with Bettie Weaver (right front) and Helen and Thomas Perkins.

Mrs. Weaver taught social studies in the Chesterfield County Public Schools for 28 1/2 years. She incorporated the conservation of natural resources into her daily lesson plans. Bluebird trails were erected at each school at which she taught; in addition, students learned much about the identification and feeding of birds. They also gained an understanding of many other aspects of conservation. The school board voted to name a new elementary school for Mrs. Weaver. The pupils chose the bluebird as the school mascot. A bluebird trail has been erected and bird feeders placed in the courtyard.

## 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.*

## Index to *Sialia*, Volume 17 (1995)

- Adams, Shirley, named NABS historian, 22  
albinism in bluebirds, photos, 16-17  
American Birders Exchange, 42  
American Kestrels, interaction with bluebirds, photo, 102-106  
America Online, birding forum, 42  
Annual Meeting Report, photos, 112-113  
awards: conservation, 114-115; information on, 142, 145; research, 62
- Bakko, Eugene B., article on nesting activity on box-paired trail, 3-6  
Berner, Kevin L.: article on comparing several nest box designs, 127-135; at annual meeting, photo, 113; 1994 nest box report, 89-95  
bird houses. See nest boxes  
Bird in Bush column, 59  
Bittner, Ronald A., article on unusual nest box designs, 137-139  
Blackburn, Karen, Bird in Bush column, 59  
Black-capped Chickadees, young raised by bluebirds, 43-48  
Black Vultures, nest in barn, photos, 70-71  
Blankenship, Beth, articles on: nesting persistence of House Sparrows, 97; streamers not deterring House Sparrows, 50  
Bliss, Chuck, NCBS president, photo, 146  
blowflies, fire ants' predation of, 96  
Bluebird Blues Festival, Largo, MD, 22  
bluebirder contacts, 32-34  
Bluebird Exchange, 13-15, 17, 51-58, 107-110, 147-152  
Bluebird Express, 38-39, 74-75, 116-117, 156-157  
bluebirds: food recipe for, 19; mealworm box for feeding, 67; 1994 nest box report, 89-95; see also Eastern Bluebirds; Mountain Bluebirds; Western Bluebirds  
Bluebird Tales, 76-77, 118-119, 158-159  
bluebird trails. See nest box trails  
Bluebird Trouble Shooters, 32-34  
Boone, Jon E.: art by, 84, 85, 116; article on Lawrence Zeleny, 85-88, 111  
Bower, Allen, article on flicker nest box, 7-11  
Broman, Jerry H., article on bluebird's broken neck, x-ray, 27-28  
Brown, W. Brian, poem, 120  
Burkard, Carrol and Leon, and road crew's destruction of bluebird house, 100-101  
Callan, James, leads birding forum on Prodigy, 126  
cavity nesters, eggs and clutch sizes of, 63-64  
chickadees. See Black-capped Chickadees  
Cliff Swallows, bluebirds reuse old nests, 123-125  
Coleman, Hank: article on mealworm box for feeding, 67; at Tri-State Bluebird Society opening, photo, 99  
Dahlem Environmental Center, Jackson, MI, award to, 114-115  
Davis, Wayne H., articles on: nest box tests, 18-19, 135-136; nesting persistence of House Sparrows, 97; Peterson nest box design, 135-136; streamers not deterring House Sparrows, 50  
Ditman, Henry M., article on cavity nesters on his property, photo, 70-71  
Dolesh, Richard J., article on Lawrence Zeleny, 154-155  
ducks, wood. See Wood Ducks  
Dupree, Delos C., Financial Statement, 40  
Eastern Bluebirds: albinism in, photos, 16-17; box preferences, 3-6, 18-19, 127-135; female attacks starling, photo, 12; garden hazards cause broken neck, x-ray, 27-28; kestrel interaction with, photo, 102-106; mockingbird interaction with, 59; nesting activity on box-paired trail, 3-6; pair raises young chickadees, 43-48; pairs use Cliff Swallow nests, 123-125; see also bluebirds; nest boxes, nest box trails  
eggs and clutch sizes of cavity nesters, 63-64  
Eltzroth, Elsie K., article on unusual clutches and eggs of cavity nesters, 63-64  
European Starlings, possible predation of Peterson nest boxes, 98-99  
feathers, used by swallows in nesting, 35-36  
Files, Lillian Lund: New England Trouble Shooter column, 31; at Tri-State Bluebird Society opening, photo, 99

- Findlay, John III: article on albinism in bluebirds, 16-17; note on bluebirds and PGA Senior's Golf Classic, 58; obituary of, 58
- fire ants, predation on blowflies, 96
- Fitzgerald, James E., article on cat and 'coon guard, 66
- flickers. *See* Northern Flickers
- food for bluebirds, recipe, 19
- Gaylord, Stacy, article on bluebird eating a lizard, 65
- Glendening, Parris N., salute to Lawrence Zeleny, 153
- Graham, Taylor, poem, 80
- guards, cat and 'coon, 66
- Hall, Dorothy, poem, 37
- Harmet, Joan, at annual meeting, photo, 113
- Hille, James R., at annual meeting, photo, 112
- Hodgson, Tom, award to, photo, 114
- Hoepfner, Marcy, photos of winter feeding, 20-21
- House Sparrows: box preferences of, 127-135, 135-136; nesting persistence of, 97, streamers do not deter, 50
- House Wrens: box preferences of, 127-135; nesting activity on box-paired trail, 3-6
- index to Volume 16 (1994) of *Sialia*, 78-79
- Janetatos, Mary D.: Annual Meeting Report, 112-113; Bluebird Tales, 76-77, 118-119, 158-159; obituary of Lawrence Zeleny, 82-83
- Janilla, Linda, bluebird food recipe, 19
- Jansma, Gloria, article on bluebird experiences, 72-73
- Jernigan, Charlotte: at annual meeting, photo, 112; with NCBS, 122, photo, 146; presents conservation awards, photos, 114-115; Presidential Points, 2, 26, 42, 84, 122, 152
- Kalisz, Paul J., article on nest box tests, 18-19
- kestrels, *See* American Kestrels
- Kingston, Ron: award to, photo, 114-115; Speakers Bureau Report, 29-30
- Kujanik, Joe, donates 80 nest boxes to Lake County, IN, photo, 71
- Letters to the Editor, 38-39, 74-75, 116-117, 156-157
- license plates, photos, 60-61, 140-141
- Mansfield, Bea, at NCBS tenth anniversary, photo, 146
- Mayer, Eric P., art by, 104
- McCurdy, Kevin: article on Fort Sill, OK, nest box trail, 143-145; award to, photo, 114-115
- McDaniel, Carol, at annual meeting, photo, 113
- McLochlin, Jim, leads birding forum on America Online, 22
- mealworm feeding box, 67
- Mizell, Judy, art by, 30
- mockingbirds. *See* Northern Mockingbirds
- Mountain Bluebirds, Montana nests, 72-73
- Murphy, Kathleen, article on bluebirds raising young chickadees, 43-48
- Murray, John, article on golf course trail and founding of NCBS, 73
- NABS. *See* North American Bluebird Society
- Nachtrieb, Shirley, art by, 82, 83
- NCBS. *See* North Carolina Bluebird Society
- nest boxes: bluebird-swallow-wren preferences, 3-6, 18-19, 127-135; cat and 'coon guard update, 66; comparison of several designs, photos, 127-135; fire ants' predation on blowflies in, 96; for flickers, photos, 7-11; hole cutter for, photo, 126; Joe Kujanik donates 80 to Lake County, IN, photo, 71; NABS design vs. others, 127-135; 1994 report, 89-95; performance of Zuern's Tree Branch, 23-26; Peterson design and starling predation, 98-99; Peterson vs. Zuern's Tree Branch, 18-19, 127-135; raccoon predation of, 18-19; removing House Sparrow nests, 97; unusual designs for, 137-139; on utility poles, 102-106; for Wood Ducks, 49

- nest box trails: Bryan Park, NC, golf courses, 73; Fort Sill, OK, military installation, 143-145; pairing boxes on, 3-6
- New England Trouble Shooter column, 31
- North American Bluebird Society (NABS): Shirley Adams named historian, 22; Conservation awards, photos, 114-115, 142; Eighteenth Annual Meeting, photos, 112-113; Financial Statement, 40; memorial gifts to, 48; research awards, 62, 145; research committee, 62; slide program updated, 22
- North Carolina Bluebird Society (NCBS): Christmas card, 30; golf course trail leads to founding, 73; Tenth Anniversary, photos, 122, 146
- Northern Flickers, nest box for, photos, 7-11
- Northern Mockingbirds, interference with bluebird nesting, 59
- online birding forums, 42, 126
- Palahniuk, Daniel P., article on nesting activity on box-paired trail, 3-6
- Pearman, Myrna: article on swallows' use of feathers in nesting, 35-36; updates NABS slide program, 22
- Penneil, Suzanne, art by, 118
- Perrone, Tony, photo of bluebird attacking starling, 12
- Peterson nest box, 18-19, 98-99, 127-135, 135-136
- Phillips, Linda, at NCBS tenth anniversary, photo, 146
- poetry by: W. Brian Brown, 120; Taylor Graham, 80; Dorothy Hall, 37, Lucille Peeler Roberts, 160
- Presidential Points, 2, 26, 42, 84, 122, 152
- Proctor, Beresford, obituary of, 36
- Prodigy Online, birding forum, 126
- PVC nest box, 127-135, 143-145
- raccoons, box designs to foil predation by, 18-19
- Roberts, Lucille Peeler, poem, 160
- Rosgen, David, article on bluebirds raising young chickadees, 43-48
- Sawyer, Laurence, art by, 91
- Scriven, Dorene H., article on Peterson nest boxes and starlings, 98-99
- Seneca nest box, 127-135
- Sheldon, Dean E., Jr., articles on: bird-bath waterproofing, 69, utility poles as nest box sites, 102-106
- Sialia*: index to Volume 16 (1994), 78-79
- Sims, Richard A., articles on: fire ant predation on blowflies in nest box, 96; Wood Duck boxes, 49
- Smith, Brian S., 1994 nest box report, 89-95
- sparrows, See House Sparrows
- Speakers Bureau Report, 29-30
- starlings. See European Starlings
- Stillman, Gertrude and Glenn, article on Fort Sill, OK, nest box trail, 143-145
- Stinson, Barbara, at annual meeting, photo, 113
- swallows. See Cliff Swallows; Tree Swallows; Violet-green Swallows
- Tree Swallows: box preferences of, 127-135, 135-136; nesting activity on box-paired trail, 3-6; unusual clutches and eggs, photo, 63-64; use of feathers in nests, photos, 35-36
- Tri-State Bluebird Society, 99
- trouble shooters, 31, 32-34
- Violet-green Swallows, unusual clutches and eggs, 63-64
- Weeks, Harmon P., article on bluebirds using Cliff Swallow nests, 123-125
- Western Bluebirds: one eats lizard, 65; unusual clutches and eggs, 63-64
- Williams, Raymond, award to, photo, 146
- Wood Ducks, nest box for, 49
- wrens. See House Wrens
- Yoder, Don, articles on: nest box hole cutter, 126; golf course nestlings, 68-69
- Zeleny, Lawrence: obituary of, photo, 82-83; profiles of, 85-88, 111, 154-155; saluted by Governor of MD, 153
- Zingo, James M., article on bluebirds raising young chickadees, 43-48
- Zuern, Frank A., article on Tree Branch Bluebird House performance, 23-26
- Zuern's Tree Branch nest box, 18-19, 23-26, 127-135

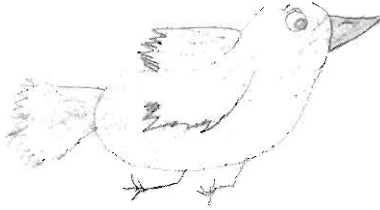
## My Good Fortune

*Bluebirds are packing, so I heard  
Won't leave a feather,  
Come my way  
Love our weather.*

*I'm April waiting! Meanwhile,  
I'll stretch and yawn,  
Give bluebirds my smile,  
As feathers flutter my lawn.*

—Louis Jernberg Kallai

## Blue Birds



*Beautiful;  
Like lightning, you see;  
Unusual to see in woods,  
Eats bugs and worms*

*But is not a Blue Jay.  
Interesting bird,  
Red belly, blue back.  
Do you agree with me?*

--Jacqueline Jennings  
9 years old

(BOOSTERS--Continued from inside back cover)

### Nestling

Jim & Lee Amigh  
Raymond Arendt  
Dr. James M. Barr  
Charlene Bofinger  
Jane H. Brown  
Travis & Anita Brown  
Mr. & Mrs. James E. Crowell  
Alan & Janet Curry Family  
Jack E. Davis  
Jeanne Duffie  
Sally Eller  
Steve & Cheryl Eno  
J.E. Goforth Family  
Jim & JoAnn Hathaway  
Mr. & Mrs. Bob Hentges  
Zita Holman  
Gordon J. Houghtby

Art Houston  
Don E. Howard  
Christine Howe  
Robert & Grace Kocher  
Leland Krape  
Thomas Landauer  
Doug & Ethel Marie LeVasseur  
Sherm & Karen Levin  
Mr. & Mrs. Howard Malone  
Mike Maurer  
Fran Maynard Family  
Wesley McClung  
Matt & Julie McKelvy Family  
David McMurtrie  
Richard E. Modesitt  
Mr. & Mrs. Raymond Mueller  
Donald Ney  
Carol Norman  
Robert E. Orthwein

Jackson W. Osborne  
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James H. Patton  
William Quigley Family  
Robert Rose  
Joe & Tamra Sedlacek  
J. Kingsbury Smith  
Mr. & Mrs. Ralph Smith  
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Don Studdard  
Mr. & Mrs. M.P. Swingle  
Nelson W. Taylor  
David Thomas  
Wade H. Tysinger  
Ms. Marcia VanHorn  
Ms. Dannie Wall  
George F. Walter  
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# BLUEBIRD BOOSTERS

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Kevin Joseph McCarthy  
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The Wilds

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Kevin Montgomery  
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Cynthia Schonberg  
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Nelson W. Taylor  
Dawn Todd  
James P. Walters  
Sue Wells  
Susan F.C. Weil  
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Terry Andrews  
Mrs. Constance Benson  
Howard C. Black  
Robert P. Bodine  
Coburn Britton  
Mr. & Mrs. Trevor Bronson, Jr.  
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Mr. & Mrs. Malcolm Dorber  
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Forest Garden Club  
Dee & Odell Friar  
Ms. Vivian Glenn  
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Stephen M. Wimmingham  
Woodbury Woman's Club  
S.K. Young  
Carl & Phyllis Zenger  
(Continued on page 80)



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:**  
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Silver Spring, MD 20916-6295

