

*Mealworms
getting away?
Not anymore!*
Story and plans
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to stretch across
the continent**
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to know about
wood ticks
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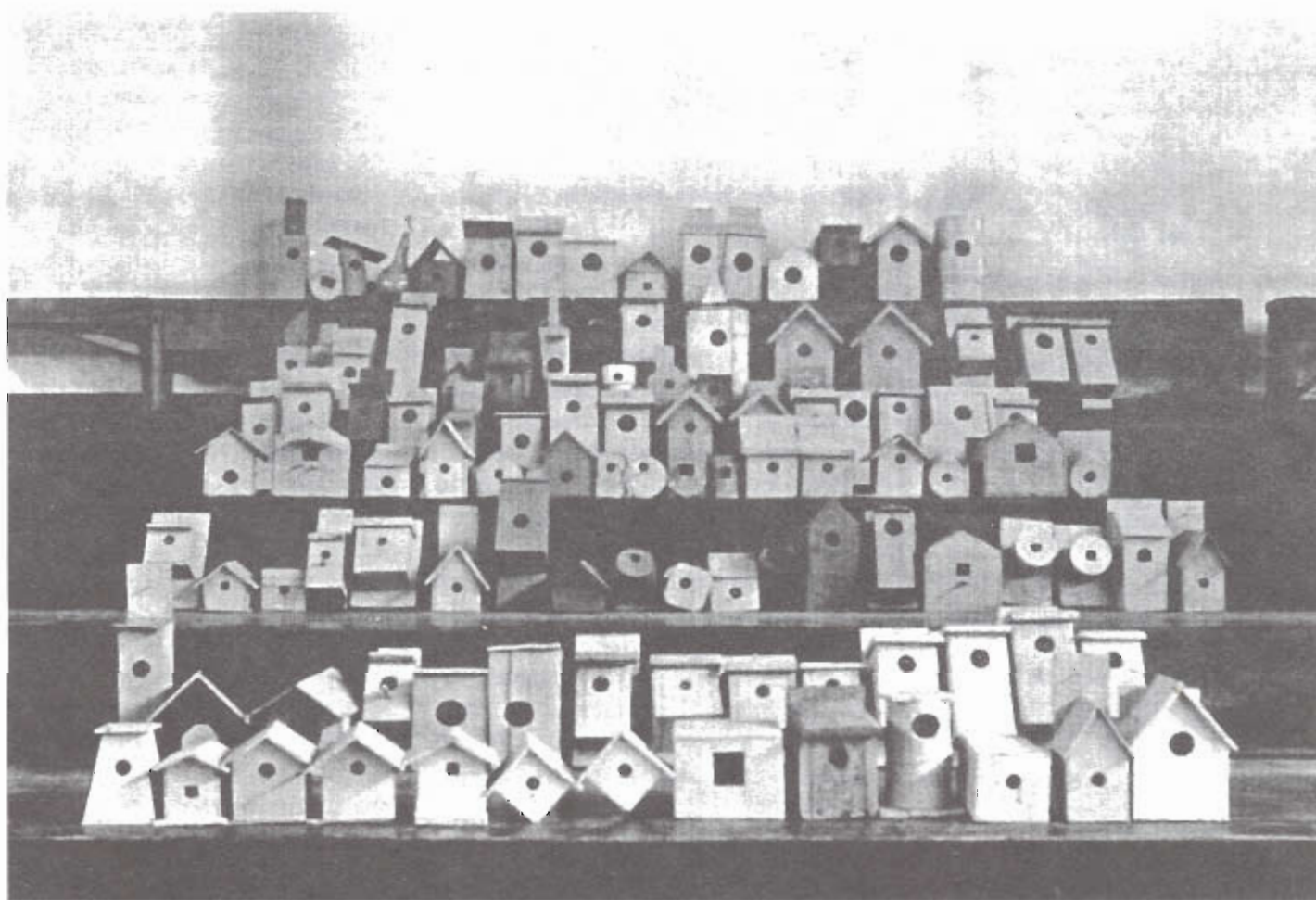
Bluebird

Journal of the North American Bluebird Society

Spring 1999

Formerly Stalia

Volume 21, Number 2



Experimental bluebird houses built by T. E. Musselman of Quincy, Illinois, in the early 1930s. See story on page 5.

Keeping cats indoors — a good idea discussed on page 11



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From the President

By Ray Harris

Committees of NABS are responsible for assisting the organization in particular areas of interest or necessity. Some committees are high profile at different times due to tasks they are assigned. There also are committees whose tasks are of equal importance but appear to have a lesser profile. However, these committees are vital to the operation of NABS.

Two committees which I will bring into focus at this time are the Nominating Committee and the Awards Committee.

The Nominating Committee is chaired by Myrna Pearman of Sylvan Lake, Alberta, Canada. Rounding out the committee are Art Aylesworth of Ronan, Montana, and Mary Ellen Vetter of Brooklyn Park, Minnesota.

The committee identifies candidates who bring bluebird experience and enthusiasm to the board. But the nominees also should come from areas which represent the wide geographical distribution of NABS members, as well as the three bluebird species — not an easy balance for the Nominating Committee to achieve! Nominations may be received by a mail-in ballot included in winter issue of *Bluebird*. The names are placed before the delegates at the annual convention, where nominations are accepted from the floor. If names are presented in addition to those put forth by the Nominating Committee, an election then is held.

Chairperson of the Awards Committee is Cheryl Eno, Raymond, Nebraska. The remaining committee members are Joan Harmet, Elizabeth Illinois, and myself.

The spring issue of *Bluebird* (formerly *Sialia*) lists the various

categories of awards and criteria for selection. Names with supporting letters can be submitted by friends or regional bluebird groups to the chairperson.

The committee then makes its choice of those bluebirders who will be recognized at the annual convention. In the event many names are submitted, some may be held over until the next year. Members of NABS are encouraged to submit the name of a worthy bluebirder.

The committee members are volunteers who willingly donate their time to committee tasks, and NABS owes them a vote of thanks for their contributions.

• • •

Thanks to two groups for adding my name to their mailing list: The Bluebird Recovery Program Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis for its newsletter, *Bluebird News*, and its 1998 directory, and The Calgary Field Naturalists' Society for its quarterly publication, *Pica*. One of the articles I would like to share appears in the Fall 1998 *Pica*, titled "Mountain Bluebirds in the High Arctic," by Aileen Pelzer. This verified sighting of a pair of bluebirds occurred at Cambridge Bay, Victoria Island, in Canada's Northwest Territories. It was a fascinating read. (See article reprinted in this issue of *Bluebird*.)

• • •

Every person who monitors *Bluebirds* has at sometime said, "You never know what you will find when you inspect a nestbox." In my region, usual finds are nests of mice, squirrels and chipmunks, food caches of some kind, and, this year, several boxes each containing a dozen or so

Continued on page 3

NABS treasurer's report for 1998

By Chuck Finley, treasurer,
and John Ivanko, co-executive
director

Fiscal year 1998 was an exciting though financially challenging year for NABS. A new headquarters was established, membership database moved in-house for better management, shipping contracts no longer needed were terminated, and every form of NABS bluebird information

— president

From page 2

dried field mushrooms. My trail, located in southern Alberta, is a long way from the nearest ocean, in cattle country, with a small creek occasionally bordering the trail and a few prairie sloughs or dugouts to catch spring snow melt water for cattle, but no lakes. The area is quite arid.

One box sheltered a nesting pair of Tree Swallows. Upon opening the nestbox, I found the usual wall-to-wall layer of excrement so typical of Tree Swallows. Something white, a bit of luster, partially submerged in the whitewash attracted me. It was three-quarters buried. After cleaning it I saw that it was a half shell of a mollusk, shaped like a miniature of the Shell Petroleum logo, about the size of my little finger nail. It surely must have been placed in the box when nestlings were present, or it would have rested on the surface. We have fresh water snails and shrimp in our area, but fresh water mollusks were new to me.

Tree Swallows are insect feeders and catch their prey in flight. So where did the shell come from? I am prepared for many replies saying, "What is all excitement about? This is a common occurrence where I have my trail."

So it goes with bluebirders.

and educational material was updated and/or revised.

With all these changes, we bore associated costs as reflected in the fiscal year-end 1997/1998 summary. Many of these expenses were met by the generous bequests from the late NABS founder, Lawrence Zeleny, and the late founding treasurer, Chuck Dupree. The annual income actually increased about \$8,000 over the previous fiscal year.

NABS continues to build upon the 20 years of effective conservation, strategically investing in the new conservation initiatives that reach new bluebirding audiences and ignite truly continent-wide collaboration to help bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting bird species. NABS affiliation initiative, the bluebird nestbox approval process, the new Bluebird magazine, and the launch of the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail reflect the vision of the board of directors to carry bluebird conservation well into the new millennium.

Your continued financial support is sorely needed, and will be very much appreciated. Consider NABS for a donation or as a bequest in your will. Adopt-A-Box for the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail on behalf of your local school, church group, garden club, etc. Give someone a gift from NABS' fund-raising catalog. Or, become a life member of one of North America's more successful conservation organizations.

On behalf of NABS, we thank you for your support.

• • •

NABS had gross receipts of \$93,234 in the fiscal year just concluded. Of that, \$31,183 came from contributions, gifts, and grants, and \$36,064 from membership dues. Salaries, compensation, and employee benefits totaled \$36,144.

Printing, publications, postage, and shipping cost \$21,949. Other expenses totaled \$33,094. Total expenses were \$102,428. Net assets at the end of the year were \$68,304, of which \$59,642 were in cash, savings, or investments.

Georgia spring festival

Bluebirds Over Georgia will hold its Spring Festival Saturday, April 10, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Eastminster Presbyterian Church, 5801 Hugh Howell Rd., Stone Mountain, Ga. Call 770/469-6672 or 921-9323 for information.

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Transcontinental Bluebird Trail

Network to span North America

By John D. Ivanko

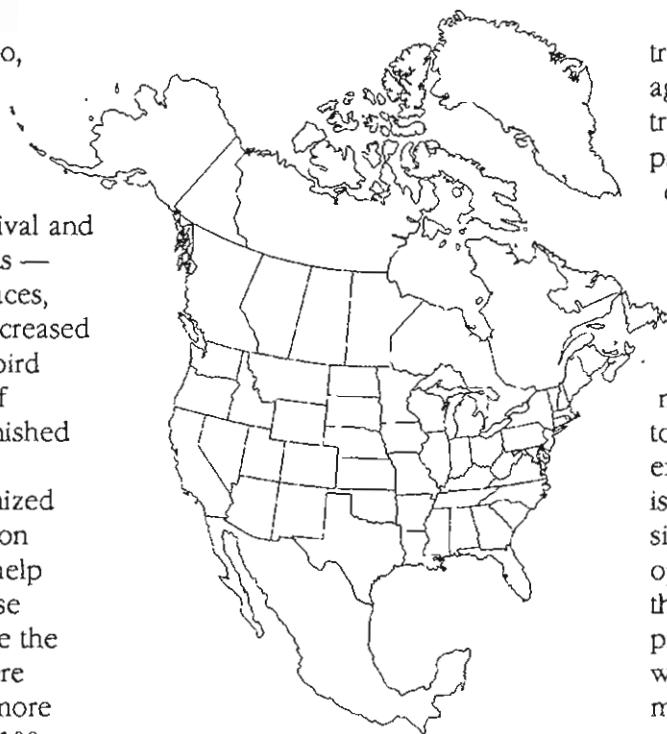
It all started many years ago, with people putting up nest boxes in their communities or backyards. Bluebirds needed human assistance to improve their chances of survival and to offset the detrimental effects — loss of habitat and nesting spaces, impact of extreme weather, increased competition from non-native bird species, and the application of pesticides — which had diminished their population.

By the late 1970s, an organized grassroots bluebird conservation movement was underway to help bring back the bluebirds whose populations had tumbled since the early 1900s. Bluebird trails were created, consisting of five or more nesting boxes spaced at least 100 yards apart and located where they easily and regularly could be checked by dedicated trail monitors. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of grassroots conservationists, the bluebirds are back!

But the struggle is not over. The cumulative effects of urban sprawl, habitat loss, competition from exotic species, and continued unwise human stewardship practices necessitates a comprehensive and coordinated continent-wide effort to meet the survival needs of these native secondary cavity nesters.

The mission

Initiated by the North American Bluebird Society (NABS), the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail (TBT) was established to guide the continuing bluebird trail development on the grassroots level and to plan, develop, establish, and manage new Adopt-A-Box bluebird trails. The mission of



the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail is to promote effective bluebird conservation, to provide environmental education opportunities for both K-12 and adults, to conduct continent-wide research, and to raise the awareness of bluebird conservation and conservation issues as a whole.

The coordination of the overall trail system of both privately managed bluebird trails and Adopt-A-Box trails will be provided by NABS in partnership with NABS-affiliated organizations.

By working with the direct involvement of local bluebirding or wildlife conservation organizations, NABS can more effectively guide the overall development of bluebird trails while looking to the local organizations for their expertise on specific geographic issues. The local groups are responsible for all trail planning and development for the newly created trails that result from the Adopt-A-Box program. In addition, these groups will be responsible for the establishment, management, and monitoring of the trails under their supervision. In many cases, these groups will have the assistance and support of local governments, nature centers, park districts, and other entities.

All trails listed on the TBT are managed by NABS members or members of NABS-affiliated organizations who have made a commitment to effective bluebird conservation. This includes locating well-made bluebird nesting boxes in appropriate bluebird habitat, monitoring the nest boxes on a regular basis, and submitting the nesting information collected for further use in helping better understand bluebird recovery and management.

A trail directory will be established on the world wide web.

Among the issues to be explored through information collected from the TBT are: Which nest boxes styles

Thank you!

We extend a big thank-you to TBT founding corporate sponsor Wild Birds Unlimited for generously providing a three-year startup grant for this continent-wide project. Wild Birds Unlimited's 260 stores, selling wild-bird food and supplies, are located from coast to coast. Call 800/326-4928 for location of the store nearest you.

Continued on page 5

— bluebird trail

From page 4

and hole shapes are most effective in attracting bluebirds and deterring competitors? What makes the most successful predator control? Do geographic differences exist for nest-box preferences? What relationship exists between bluebird productivity and pairing of nest boxes? What trends surface from data on clutch size and number of broods?

Pilot trails in Ohio

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed Feb. 1 by NABS, the Ohio Bluebird Society, and the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Ohio Chapter, in order to begin development of several pilot Adopt-A-Box bluebird trails along segments of Rails-to-Trails in Columbus, Ohio. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Ohio Chapter, is working to establish the Discover Ohio Trails System, a statewide interconnected trails network which includes The Ohio to Erie Trail. The bluebird trails established on these Rails-to-Trails will provide a wildlife management program maintained by the Ohio Bluebird Society, offer opportunity for conservation education programs, and enhance the recreational experience of Rails-to-Trails users. This partnership among conservation organizations will afford the opportunity to model future trail development based on the results of these trails. Adopt-A-Box sponsors are currently being sought for these trails.

To make the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail a reality takes financial resources, long-term commitment, and volunteer support. Help us build a trail for the future by adopting a box, joining one of NABS's affiliates to build a trail in your community, or adding your privately managed trail to the TBT.

Adopt-a-box TBT program

For those of you who know any individuals, companies, or organizations (such as garden clubs, church groups, or social clubs) that might be interested in participating in the Adopt-A-Box program of the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail, please contact NABS for a brochure about the TBT or visit the NABS website <<http://www.cobleskill.edu/nabs/>>. The Adopt-A-Box program was designed to offer an opportunity for those individuals unable to attract bluebirds to their area to directly participate in and contribute to this continent-wide conservation effort. The brochure and website will further explain the details of the Adopt-A-Box program.

Add your bluebird trail to the TBT

If you are a member of NABS and have a bluebird trail that you would like listed on the TBT, please send a note to NABS, P.O. Box 74, Darlington, WI 53530. Be sure that you include your mailing address, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail address, and include a description and detailed map of your trail route, number of boxes, species using your trail, and information that might help other trail managers. Also, let us know if you would be able to submit your records (bluebird fledglings, etc.) via the internet (website on the WWW).

On our cover: Musselman houses

The Musselman bluebird nest box was first built in the 1930s, when T. E. Musselman recognized Eastern Bluebirds were in decline.

Mr. Musselman found an excavation made by a Downy Woodpecker in an old willow stump, and the idea of duplicating this in box form set him to work. And so he built his first bluebird nest box.

The photo on our cover shows some of the nest boxes that Mr. Musselman designed in those first years of his interest. It was supplied to us by his daughter, Virginia Gullette of Kenney, Texas.

The first style of nest box he built was immediately attractive to

bluebirds when properly placed on a post bordering a field or pasture. He placed them three to four feet off the ground, facing south or east. He found that as many as 11 different species of birds were attracted to the boxes by selecting a place best fitting the nesting requirements of the individual bird.

Over the next few years, Mr. Musselman established bluebird routes along state highways fanning out from Quincy, Illinois, where the family lived. He interested Boy Scouts and garden clubs in his passion, and by 1943 over 600 nest boxes had been placed throughout the area.

Chain-link fences tried as nest-box sites

By Michael B. Jinks

Bluebird box building is nothing new to Morristown-Hamblen (Tenn.) High School-East. Every Art I student spends a week building a bluebird nesting box from scraps of wood, incorporating the techniques of American artists Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Nevelson. Students, especially from rural Hamblen County, regularly report nesting success to me.

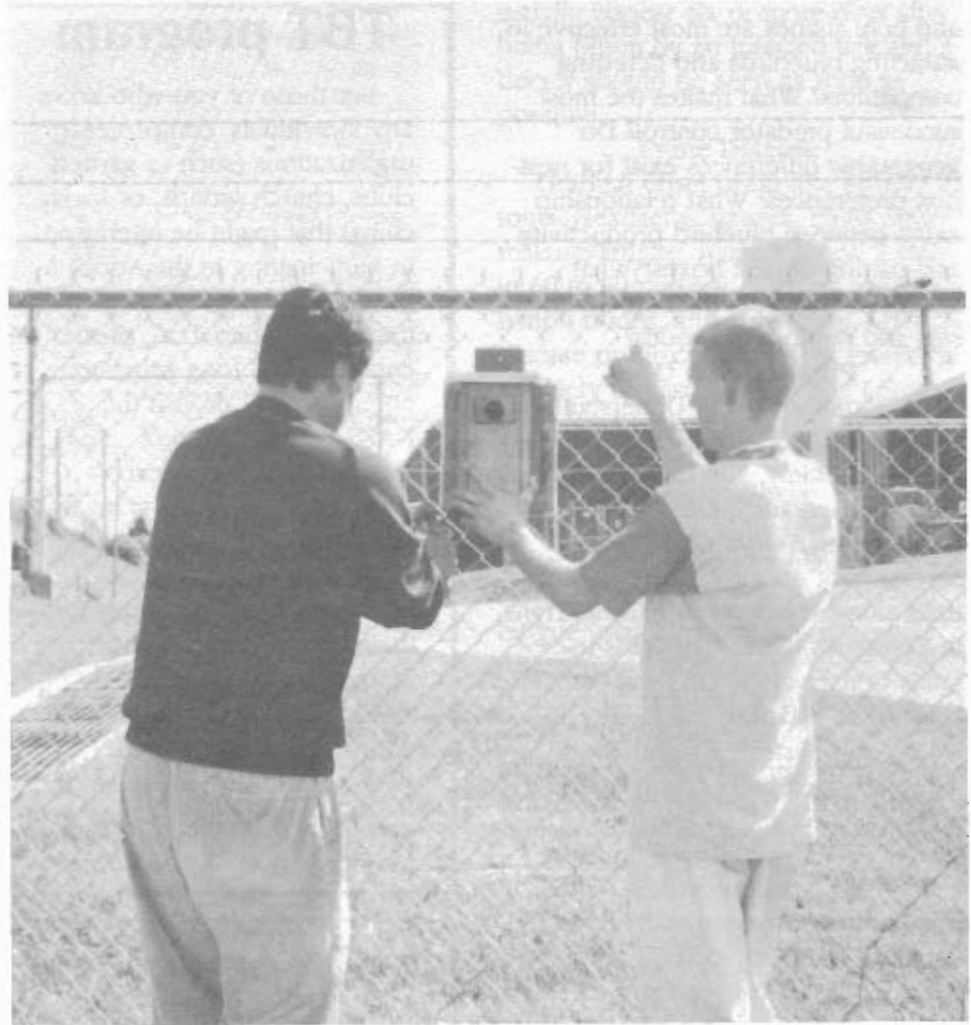
In response to the needs of bluebirds and other cavity nesters, an idea developed. Many fields around industrial sites are clear and well maintained (providing low-grass habitat) and bordered by fences. They could be used as alternative nesting areas for native songbirds.

A grant of \$250 was obtained from the Hamblen County Board of Education in March 1998. Eighteen art students were recruited to place and monitor nesting boxes from March until the end of the school year in May.

The purpose of the project was to determine the feasibility of mounting bluebird nesting boxes to six- to eight-foot-high security fences around industrial and commercial sites in the county.

Low-grass fields and areas away from houses were given first consideration. (English Sparrows tend to raid boxes placed within 100 feet of residential housing.) Thirteen sites were chosen for the initial placement of boxes. Students obtained permission from property managers or owners before placing the boxes; all were in place by March 25.

The nesting boxes were attached to six- to eight-foot-high chain-link fences, using 12-gauge wire which was twisted around the links. The boxes received an additional back plate of 1/4-inch plywood to act as a



One of the nest boxes built by Morristown-Hamblen students is secured to fence.

combination mounting base and sun/wind deflector. All boxes had 1 1/2-inch-diameter entrance holes in wood 1/2-inch to 1-inch thick. Some boxes had double roofs to act as insulators. The roofs of all boxes were painted white to reflect heat.

The results

Of 13 sites chosen, five produced nests and eggs. Fledged were 14 bluebirds, five chickadees, and three cowbirds.

Conclusions

The quick occupancy of several boxes speaks to the lack of nesting space for cavity-nesting birds. Boxes not utilized were primarily located in

areas of considerable automobile and human traffic.

The immediate nesting success of the Jeffrey Chain site and the National Guard Armory encourages me to believe that this project would be of vital interest to employee action groups of companies located on large-tract properties surrounded by chain-link fencing. Monitoring of such sites or trails could be accomplished by interested employees; groundskeepers and security guards could be recruited. Large military or industrial sites could become significant contributors to improving the plight of our native birds.

Solving the mealworm-getaway problem

By Nola Aiken

For some people, birding has been a lifelong interest; for others, the interest comes later in life. My husband, Paul, and I discovered birding when we were in our 50s. It all started when we placed a feeder in our backyard, sometime in the summer of 1993. We found the different species coming to the yard interesting, but at that time we could only identify about five.

A year later, in reading bird books, I found I was particularly attracted to the Eastern Bluebird.

On a nature hike in April 1995, we saw our first bluebird. The park naturalist showed my husband and me the bluebird nest with four blue eggs, plus a beautiful male sitting in the tree watching us. From that moment, I was hooked and became a bluebirder. The following spring, Paul built four nest boxes, and we decided to establish a bluebird trail.

We found a place only five minutes from our home, and mounted four boxes. Our first four nestlings died because of a cold snap, and we novices figured the parents couldn't find enough food for their young. We soon had another four nestlings, but they too died in a second cold snap.

We were determined this would not happen again. We would provide mealworms for the bluebird families in our care. For the 1997 bluebird season, Paul built more nest boxes, but he also built a mealworm tray with sides raised about two

inches. Since we had erected nest boxes in pairs, Paul mounted the tray on top of the nest box that was close to the box holding the family. Each time we returned, the mealworms were gone. However, it didn't take a college degree for us to realize that many of the mealworms were crawling up the sides of the feeder and dropping to the ground. And, with many robins in the area, we wondered if maybe they weren't getting a large portion of the worms. Improvements had to be made.

Drawing his own plans from pictures he had seen of mealworm feeders in books and magazines, Paul constructed a wood feeder with

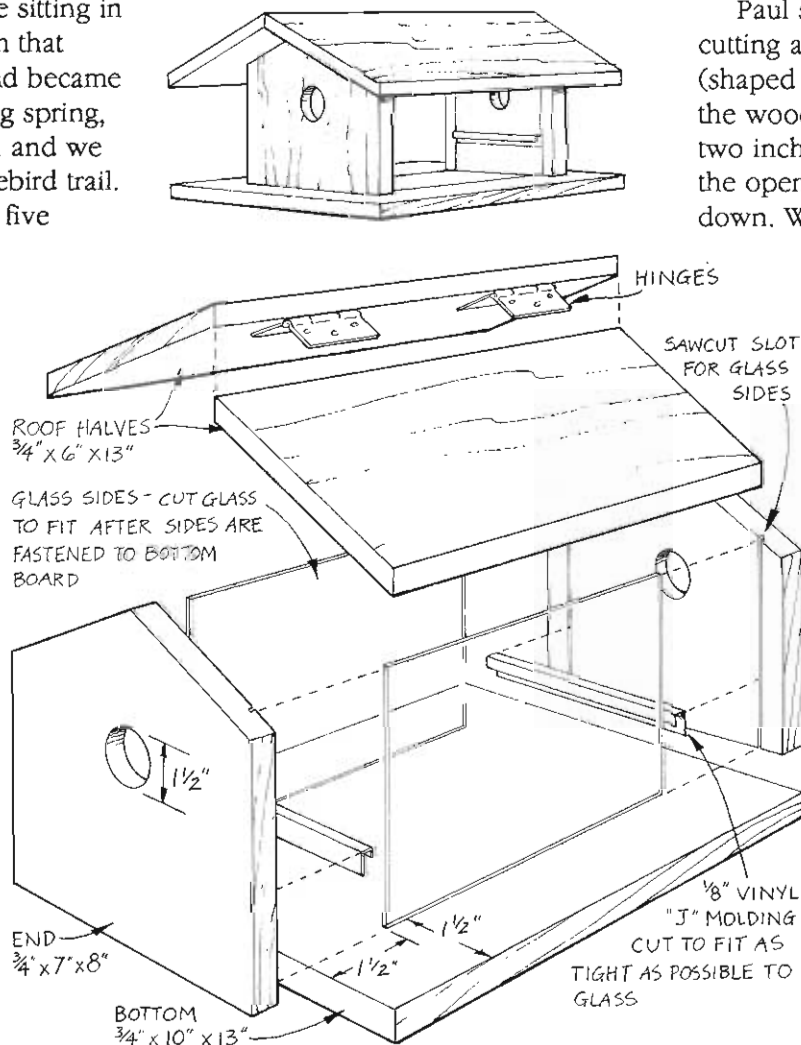
two glass sides. The two wood ends had the proper-size hole for the bluebirds to enter. One half of the roof was hinged to allow for filling. The feeder was mounted in another area of the trail, about halfway between a nest box that had held one bluebird family and (one that) was now holding another.

It didn't take long before we recognized another problem. As soon as the worms were placed in the feeder, they started crawling up the wooden ends of the feeder and right out of the hole. Of course, a bluebird would have no problem finding escaped worms, but other birds would have no problem either, and we were trying to feed bluebirds.

Paul solved the problem by cutting a piece of panel molding (shaped like a J) to fit the width of the wood end. He mounted it about two inches up from the floor with the open portion of the J pointed down. When the worms crawl up the

side and come to the open portion of the J, that is as far as they can go. We found it important to get the J molding cut to exact width, keeping it as close as possible to the glass sides. Some of the smaller worms can crawl through a very small crack. The larger worms — never!

(This article appeared in the January-February 1999 edition of Bird Watcher's Digest. It is used with permission. For information on subscribing to BWD, write to P.O. Box 110, Marietta, OH 45750 or call toll-free 800/879-2473.)



The great entrance-hole debate

**By Myrna Pearman,
Chairman, NABS Technical
Advisory Committee**

Controversy is nothing new to bluebirders. Not scandalous controversy, just good old-fashioned argument and animated but seldom acrimonious wrangling. We've had raging debates over the merits of different nestbox designs, about whether pairing increases or decreases bluebird productivity, about whether fence posts should be recommended for mounting boxes, and about which entrance hole size to use.

At the moment, we're arguing over whether bluebirds use "bird houses" or "nestboxes" and whether "nest boxes" is one word or two!

With the exception of box pairing, most contentious issues eventually get settled after they've been argued about at meetings, or after there's been a blizzard of letters, letters to editors and e-mails.

One of the longest-standing issues we've dealt with is in regards to bluebird house/blue bird birdhouse/bluebird nestbox/bluebird nest box entrance-hole sizes. In the beginning, all was well in this department. Bluebird conservation in North America focused on the Eastern Bluebird, and there was a dramatic surge in public interest following the publication of Dr. Larry Zeleny's book and his article in *National Geographic* magazine in the 1970s. Almost everyone followed the designs he recommended — a top-opening box with a 4-inch by 4-inch floor and a 1 1/2-inch entrance hole.

When Art Aylesworth of Montana and Duncan Mackintosh of Alberta began setting out Zeleny-style nest boxes in the late 1970s, they were surprised to find that occupancy rate of Mountain Bluebirds was relatively

low, compared with the very successful trails operated by Al Perry of Boise, Idaho, and the Brinkerhoffs in Washington. Art and Duncan also noticed that the feathers in the shoulder areas of several of the male Mountain Bluebirds occupying their boxes appeared broken or worn.

Upon questioning the Perrys and the Brinkerhoffs, Art and Duncan learned that 1 5/8-inch holes were being used exclusively on these trails. When Art and Duncan returned home, both proceeded to enlarge the holes in their boxes — Duncan to 1 5/8 inch, Art to 1 9/16 inch. The results were outstanding, with occupancy doubling and even tripling in some areas. By 1981, almost all the boxes in Montana, Alberta, and the panhandle of Idaho had the larger openings. Occupancy continued to increase. All was well.

Well, that is, until 1984, when starlings were first reported using the boxes with the 1 5/8-inch hole. Since there were no reports of them using the smaller 1 9/16-inch opening, Duncan and Art worked furiously that season, retrofitting boxes with 1 9/16-inch patches. Their efforts were rewarded with high bluebird occupancy and the total exclusion of starlings. Based on these observations, Art and Duncan summarized their findings in *Sialia* (1984). They stated in this article that nestbox occupancy by Mountain Bluebirds would increase if boxes had entrance holes larger than 1 1/2 inch, but that

starlings were able to enter 1 5/8-inch holes, so this larger size should not be used. They also concluded that, while Western Bluebirds did not appear to require the larger hole, they seemed to prefer it over the 1 1/2 inch.

Art and Duncan then began to lobby to have this larger hole size officially recognized and accepted. Its adoption was swift and virtually unanimous among Mountain Bluebird trail operators, but NABS was

slow to accept the change. Part of the resistance was because of Dr. Zeleny's very valid concern that Bergmann's rule (species and races of birds which live in colder climates tend to have larger bodies than their warmer-climate relatives) may apply in this situation. If it did, starlings in the southern parts of the continent might be small enough to enter

though this entrance hole size. He also was concerned that natural selection might eventually favor smaller starlings. If smaller starlings were able to exploit these hitherto unavailable nesting sites, bluebird conservation efforts could be seriously compromised (personal communication.)

Despite this initial resistance, the 1 9/16-inch hole recommendation soon appeared as the official hole size for Mountain Bluebirds. Although there was never any official endorsement by a Western Bluebird organization, the 1 9/16-inch size soon became the recommended size for Western Bluebirds as well. *Continued on page 9*

Art and Duncan also noticed that the feathers in the shoulder areas of several of the male Mountain Bluebirds occupying their boxes appeared to be broken or worn.

— debate

From page 8

ready acceptance of the larger-hole recommendation for Western Bluebirds was partly because of the wide range overlap of Mountains and Westerns, and partly because it was/was widely believed that Western Bluebirds, like Mountain Bluebirds, are slightly larger than their eastern cousins. But this may not be accurate, as Dorene Scriven pointed out in a 1997 e-mail to several NABS board and committee members. She checked with three major field guides, and found that they disagree about the lengths of the three species, and none discuss width!

For most of the 1990s, all remained calm on the entrance hole front. Then, in November 1998, an e-mail from the Hubert Prescott Western Bluebird Recovery Group (HPWBRG) in Oregon was sent to NABS requesting that it change the 1 9/16-inch entrance hole recommendation on their web site to 1 1/2 inch. Starlings, the e-mail read, could utilize a box with a 1 9/16-inch entrance hole.

As chair of the Technical Advisory Committee, I was disconcerted by the mention of starlings using 1 9/16-inch hole. If it was true, we could be in trouble. Big trouble. I contacted HPWBRG, requesting both clarification on the entrance hole size and confirmation about starling use of the larger hole. Their reply confirmed that they indeed had experienced no problems with Western Bluebirds accessing the 1 1/2-inch entrance holes. They argued, understandably, that "if it ain't broken, don't fix it." They did acknowledge, however, that their documentation of starling use did not include an inspection of the exact hole size on the offending boxes.

Art Aylesworth states that Montana Bluebird Trails has no — not

Simple plan for a predator baffle

I use a simple, inexpensive, yet very effective pole predator guard that is a modification of the predator baffle described on page 20 of the book, "Enjoying Bluebirds More," by Julie Zickefoose.

From an empty one gallon paint can cut off the bottom and three to four inches of the side. This will act as a stovepipe plug or cap. Insert it into the crimped end of a 7-inch-wide by 24-inch-long section of stovepipe; secure it with sheet metal screws. Cut a hole at the center of the plug/cap the same diameter as the nest box pole. Place a hose clamp on the pole a couple of inches below the bottom of the nest box. Slide the open end of the stovepipe over the top of the pole until the pole comes through the hole in the plug/cap and the plug/cap is sitting on the hose clamp. Then mount the nest box on the post. Total cost is around \$3.50.

—Dan Sparks, Brown County Bluebird Society

one — documented case of starlings using the 1 9/16-inch hole (personal communication). And one can't argue with their sample size of some 15,000 boxes. In the few cases where starlings have used their nest boxes, the entrance holes had been enlarged by squirrels or flickers. As further proof that the 1 9/16-inch hole works, Art and his monitors have documented cases of finding starlings stuck, dead, in the entrance hole.

There have been other studies conducted on this subject by using captive starlings. In the Lehmann (1997) study, 10 starlings were placed in boxes with 1 9/16-inch holes. Two escaped. The limiting factor with these experiments, of course, is that while they do show that some (panicked, desperate and perhaps gaunt) starlings can squeeze out of a 1 9/16-inch hole, they don't prove that plump, well-adjusted starlings can enter.

So what is the answer? On the one hand, we can't refute the evidence that the 1 1/2-inch hole works just fine for Western Bluebirds. Not only has it worked well for the HPWBRP, it has worked well for Elsie Eltzroth of Corvallis, Oregon, for the past 22 years (personal communica-

tion). On the other hand, if the 1 9/16-inch hole also works — i.e. excludes ALL starlings EVERYWHERE — wouldn't it be logical for us to advocate one size for all? If, however, Dr. Zeleny's concern about the potential for evolutionary forces to eventually favor smaller starlings, should we first consult evolutionary biologists to comment on the potential for future problems?

Based on the extensive experience of Mountain Bluebird trail operators, NABS recommends that the larger hole should be used wherever there are Mountain Bluebirds, or wherever the range of the Mountain overlaps with the other two (keeping in mind that ranges are dynamic and usually change over time). The decision about which entrance hole to use outside these areas is ultimately up the individual trail operator.

Literature cited:

Aylesworth, A. 1984. Large box openings can be curse or blessing. *Sialia*. Vol. 6, No. 4
Lehmann, D. 1997. Control tests to determine if European starlings can pass through various hole sizes. *Sialia* Vol. 19, No. 4.

(Ms. Pearman can be reached at Site 2, Comp 2, RR 1, Sylvan Lake, AB, Canada T4S 1X6.)

Barn Owls in nest boxes

By Kevin Putman

In late December (1998), I had been out doing some routine maintenance on my wood duck boxes and hanging a few new ones near Yuba, California. I had built six kestrel boxes and one large Barn Owl box. I decided to put the kestrel boxes up next to duck boxes where there has been duck/kestrel competition (fighting).

Also, I thought I'd try out a Barn Owl-box design; it is 16x16x16 inches with a six-inch entrance hole. I have one stretch of four duck boxes where Barn Owls have been nesting. I put an unusually large hole (five inches) in these duck boxes just so owls might use them, and owls have been using them for the past couple of years.

The duck-box dimensions make for pretty cramped quarters for the owls, so I decided to put up an owl box close to the existing boxes.

I didn't clean out one of the owl boxes last summer (the owls make such a smelly mess that I prefer to wait to clean them out later), so I thought I'd clean it now. I fully expected that an owl might fly out as they commonly use these boxes for shelter.

However, to my astonishment, I found two 25-day-old Barn Owl young in the box. It was the usual macabre owl-nest scenario: the two surviving chicks, in good health, were standing on top of their less fortunate nest-mates, as well as four whole rat carcasses, all of this on top of the old nest that I had come to clean out. A mess, to say the least, but, unlike summer, there was no smell, thankfully.

I wondered how extraordinary it is to find owlets at this date.

The incubation period is about 34 days, so that means that incubation

began somewhere around the end of October. It is perhaps somewhat remarkable that the owlets managed to survive (two of them, anyway) the extremely cold weather we were having at that time. I assume that the hen must have been brooding them, although they were very large and perhaps could get along on their own.

I also checked in the next box down the line, and two adult Barn Owls fled as I positioned the ladder. These were the parents, no doubt. I put the new box near by.

(In Vancouver, B.C., at the northern limit of Barn Owls' range, eggs have been recorded for every month of the year. The American Ornithologists' Union species review by Carl Marti also mentions that year-round breeding occurs (although the majority of clutches are initiated in spring and summer). This information came via CavNet, the cavity-nesting bird scientific discussion e-mail network.)

(Editor's Note: Another CavNet post said that Barn Owl nesting dates in this part of California range from February through September. This information comes from Alameda County bird atlas field work. Later dates were not detected, perhaps because people tended to stop their atlasing efforts by mid-summer. There was evidence of triple brooding among Barn Owls.)

(Mr. Putman, a bird bander, lives in Sutter County, California. His e-mail address is <dputman@syix.com>.)



Barn Owl

NABS grants

The North American Bluebird Society announces the results of its 15th annual research grants program. The following individuals are recipients of the 1999 research awards.

Student Grants

Wallace Rendell, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario — Egg Mass Variation in Eastern Bluebirds: Causes and Significance.

Jeffrey Hoover, Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, Illinois — An Investigation of Between-year Breeding-site Fidelity and Local Dispersal in Prothonotary Warblers.

Eric Walters, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida — Non-trophic Interactions in a Community of Cavity Occupants.

Bluebird Grants

Stephen Germaine, Arizona Game and Fish Dept., Phoenix, Arizona — Effects of Ponderosa Pine Forest Ecosystem Restoration on Reproductive Success of Western Bluebirds and Other Cavity Nesting Species.

168 bird species have the color blue in their name

We all can name at least three species of birds whose names contain the word blue. Considering the entire world, though, can you guess how many bird names begin with that word? Blue Jay, certainly, and 164 more (not to be listed here).

This comes from the OmniList of World Birds as captured and counted by Diane Porter of Fairfield, Iowa. She did her homework, then posted the results on BirdChat, the national e-mail exchange group for birdwatchers.

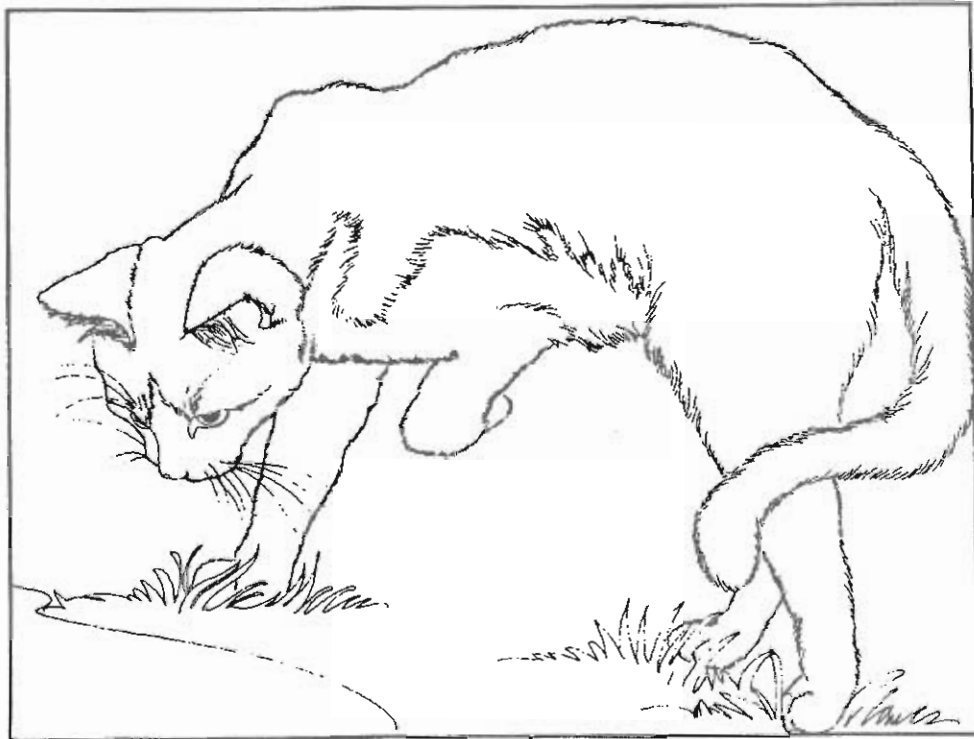
Colors begin names for many species of birds, white being the most commonly used (570 species). Black is close behind with 537, and then, in order, come red, yellow, gray, rufous, blue, brown, chestnut, gold/golden, and green.

There are seven species whose names begin with turquoise, seven more for sapphire, six for emerald, five for ruby, three for lazuli, and a pair for diamonds.

And if colors are common in bird names, so is the word common. World-wide, 66 species are Common this or Common that. Only one is scarce, the Scarce Swift.

Fifty-two begin with the word spotted, 49 with spot. There is one unspotted and two spotless (Spic and Span, perhaps?)

There also is one bird with the word marvelous in its name, one with mysterious, and one with monotonous.



Cats indoors: A good idea

Domestic cats are a major threat to our bluebirds as well as to other native songbirds. The issue of what do about house cats that are allowed to roam at will and feral cats has been a delicate one for some time.

When the North American Bluebird Society met in Saskatchewan, Canada, for its annual meeting last summer, Art Aylesworth spoke to us about cats. He challenged the society to take a stand on what can be done to help solve the problem of cats killing songbirds. As we looked into what we could do, we discovered that the American Birding Conservancy (ABC) had already done the work for us.

The ABC has developed a comprehensive packet of information titled "Cats Indoors! The Campaign for Safer Birds and Cats." The information is intended to educate bird lovers and cat lovers alike on the urgency of the threat imposed on the safety of birds and cats by allowing cats to roam freely.

The ABC points out, "Each year millions of cats are run over by cars, mauled by dogs, poisoned, and lost. Hundreds of millions of birds and small mammals are killed annually by free-roaming cats. The suffering of both cats and birds is all the more tragic because it is so unnecessary".

The packet includes fact sheets dealing with specific topics, including how to create a local cats-indoors campaign, ABC's view of "managed" cat colonies, human attitudes and behavior regarding cats, how to make an outdoor cat a happy indoor cat, cat licensing, and local cat ordinances.

The North American Bluebird Society strongly urges both bird lovers and cat lovers to obtain the "Cats Indoors" packet. Write to the American Birding Conservancy, 1250 24th St. NW, Suite 400, Washington, D.C. 20037.

We owe our action not only to birds but also to cats.

— Carol McDaniel

Mountain Bluebirds found nesting beyond tree line

By Aileen Pelzer

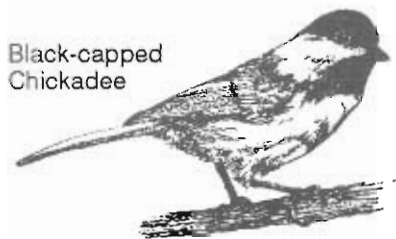
In 1995, a pair of Mountain Bluebirds (*Sialia currucoides*) nested at Cambridge Bay, Victoria Island, Northwest Territories, north of the Northwest Passage — at least 372 miles (600 km) beyond the tree line.

The initial sighting was of a lone male by Mark and Marcia Wilson of Dunstable, MA, USA, on June 23. Their next encounter was of the female carrying food on July 5. The male appeared shortly after, also with a beak full of insects. Both went to a hole in the wall of an abandoned Hudson's Bay Company storage building, providing firm evidence that they were nesting.

We arrived on July 8. Next day, we met the Wilsons who told us of their discovery. On visiting the site that evening, both birds were seen carrying food. On July 11, when near the building, the young could be heard making a buzzing sound. We left July 13. Subsequently, we learned that at least two young had fledged.

Amazingly, a Mountain Bluebird had been seen near Cambridge Bay at least once before. On June 28, 1983, a sky-blue male was seen hovering near a rocky outcrop at the very top of Mt. Pelly (elevation 215 m/705 feet) about 10 miles (16 km) east of the town site.

(This article appeared in PICA, Vol. 18, No. 4, published quarterly by the Calgary Field Naturalists' Society.)



Black-capped Chickadee

Q: I have read in various bluebird literature that bluebirds imprint on the style of nest box from which they fledge. During the approximate 18-21 days the nestling is inside the box, it spends a great deal of time looking at the entrance hole waiting to be fed by one of its parents. The nestling has no visual contact with the outside of the box until it fledges, and then that contact would be minimal since they do not return to the box once fledged. Is it possible that the entrance hole whether it is round, oval, or slot has more of an imprinting factor on first-year birds than the design of the box?

A: Is it the box? Is it the type of entrance (slot vs. round hole vs. vertical oval)? The answer is, of course, that it is both of these working in concert with the total new-life experience coming out of that nesting cavity. It seems to me that it is impossible to separate out the several factors which form this lasting neo-natal experience called imprinting. Once the fledgling is out of the nest box, it then becomes a matter of imprinting on the micro-environment surrounding the box site (convenience of hunting perches, ready availability of food/water, relative absence of competitors/predators, attentiveness of parents/older siblings). The experience of the nestling in the box and the new fledgling out of the box combine together to form a frame of reference which, if good, may cause that bird (or those birds) to return to that nest-box site for the following nesting season. There are, of course, many reasons why that bird (or those birds) might not return. But, all things taken into

account, the nest-box experience coupled with the conditions surrounding the newly-fledged bird make for a powerful attractant force in the realm of bluebird biology.

— Dean Sheldon Jr., 4569 Grn-Mtn TL Road, Greenwich, OH 44837.

Q: Bluebirds are in my area but do not come to my yard in the winter. What plants could I put in my yard to make it more attractive to wintering bluebirds?

A: Most berry-bearing trees, shrubs, and vines that hold their fruit through the winter will provide food for bluebirds and other fruit-eating birds. Among the best are American Holly (*Ilex opaca*), Red Chokecherry (*Aronia arbutifolia*), Fire-thorn (*Pyracantha* sp.), Washington Hawthorn (*Crataegus phaenopyrum*), Staghorn Sumac (*Rhus typhina*), and Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*). Also ask your local nurseryman about the varieties of such plants best suited for your local climate.

Q: Would the treated pine used for decks and patios (green treated) be suitable for bluebird houses or is it toxic?

A: Nesting boxes build of so-called treated lumber have the advantage of being resistant to decay, but the lumber does contain toxic substances potentially harmful to birds. Boxes made of such lumber have been used successfully, but we do not recommend them. Boxes made of untreated cedar, cypress, or redwood will last for many years. Boxes made of less decay-resistant lumber should be painted on the outside with light-colored exterior-grade latex or aluminum paint.

Bent offers good bluebird information

The set of books known as "Bent's Life Histories of Birds" long has been a standard source of information on North American species. It was published by the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D. C. The author was Arthur Cleveland Bent, who lived from 1866 to 1954. His first volume in this massive work, on North American diving birds, was published in 1919. The 17th book of the series, in which bluebirds are treated, appeared 30 years later.

Mr. Bent lived to publish two

more volumes before he died, the manuscript for the next-to-the-last book of the series complete at death and published thereafter. The final volume, on finches, was completed by a number of other ornithologists.

This 21-volume set remains available today. You can find the original paper-wrapped Smithsonian books in used-book stores, if you are fortunate. Or, you can ask your book dealer for the Dover reprints.

Your birding library will be the better for the addition of these wonderful books.

Bluebirds are treated in 54 pages of text in the volume entitled "Life Histories of North American Thrushes, Kinglets, and Their Allies." This also is known as "Bulletin 196 of the United States National Museum."

Mr. Bent spent many years gathering data for his work. He also enlisted the help of birders across the country. The species accounts are filled with quotations from letters; anecdotes abound. Reading Mr. Bent on bluebirds is like having a good long lunch with friends who share your interest, a lunch with more talk than food.

Interesting is that Mr. Bent divides his discourse into sections on these species and sub-species: Eastern Bluebird, Azure Bluebird, Tamaulipus Bluebird, Florida Bluebird, Chestnut-backed Bluebird, Western Bluebird, San Pedro Bluebird, and Mountain Bluebird.

There are sections for each species or sub-species covering habits, courtship, nesting (including a story about a pair of bluebirds nesting in the mouth of the ROTC cannon at the University of Minnesota), eggs, incubation, young birds, plumages, food, behavior, voice, enemies, and distribution.

— Jim Williams

(If you have a favorite book about bluebirds or other cavity-nesting species, share your comments with us.)

Tree falls, nesting chickadee trapped

By Andrew Clausen

We were walking through Eau Claire's (Wisconsin) Rod and Gun Club, doing a bit of (spring) birding, and came across an amazing scene. The sharp "tok tok tok" of a beak on a hollow tree alerted us to the presence of something, but careful scanning of trees revealed nothing. But, we soon traced the sound to an area in front of us at ground level.

Except there wasn't anything in front of us but a small pond. And, oh yes, a couple of rotting logs near the edge of the pond. The knocking sound came again, clearly from one of the logs. They were both about six inches in diameter and maybe four feet long. From where we stood, we couldn't see anything pecking at them.

Then we saw it: a small hole in the side of one log, too small for even a wren. The tapping sound (was heard again) and the beak of a bird appeared in the hole. A chickadee was knocking its way through from the inside, and it was having a heck of a time opening the hole.

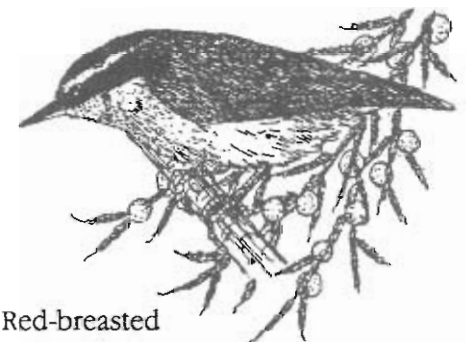
We could see no way that the bird could have gotten in; no other holes

were evident. But here was a clue: The log had recently fallen. What was left of the rotting stump was right there.

One of our group slowly turned the log over, and the entrance was revealed. The chickadee, however, was still intent on trying to get out of the hole it was making, and didn't realize it now had another exit, so we tore off bits of the side of the log until the chickadee noticed, escaped, and flew away.

Inside the fallen log was a small nest with what looked like eight eggs. The chickadee had apparently been on the nest when the log toppled over onto the entrance hole, trapping it inside. We leaned the log up against a nearby tree, hoping she might find her way back again and try to salvage her nest and eggs. The nest might have been a goner, but the chickadee was free to start a new nest.

(This article was forwarded via MnBirdNet and appeared in Bluebird News, newsletter of The Bluebird Recovery Program, Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis, Minn., in July 1998. It is used with permission.)



Red-breasted Nuthatch

Letters to the editor

Dear Editor,

This is in reply to the Q & A, page 5, Winter 1999, Bluebird, about bluebird fledglings being unable to take flight from the ground.

Last summer, my wife, Eleanor, and I monitored 107 boxes, fledging 273 Eastern Bluebirds, 48 Tree Swallows, 52 House Wrens, seven Carolina Chickadees, and throwing out an abundance of House Sparrow nests.

We have often heard and read that just-fledged bluebirds cannot take flight from the ground. We had not checked one box for almost two weeks, and, when I opened it slightly, there were well-feathered young birds within. I wanted to make a count, and left the door open a bit too long.

Two of the four took off through the opening, both flying about 100 feet and alighting on the ground where the grass was about 10 inches tall. Suspecting that they may have fledged too early, I tried to catch and return them to the box. I went after the first one; when I reached for it, it took off from the grass, flying about 50 feet. I pursued, and it flew again from the grass but only about 10 feet. This time it was too tired to fly more, and I took it back to the box and put it in through the hole. It stayed.

I went after the other young bird that my wife had watched. Before I could get anywhere near close enough to catch it, it took off from the grass, flew across the road and up at least 20 feet into a Honey Locust, and perched. The adults were with it all the time, scolding me.

We always had doubts about the "no fly from the ground" theory, but, in case it was correct, we used to place boxes near trees or woods. All we got were more wrens. We have

had to move our nest boxes ever farther from brush or briar patches to try to minimize House Wren predation. Wrens have raided our boxes as far as 300 feet from cover.

We have had good success placing boxes in hay fields and along crop field borders and pasture fences. Crop fields, if not too far from trees, have proved to be good locations, but when corn reaches full height in late July and August, wrens apparently find it as good a habitat as a briar patch. But, by then, we have probably fledged two broods of bluebirds or one of Tree Swallows.

— James O. Smith, Homer, Illinois

Dear Editor,

Congratulations on an outstanding beginning!

I had a great bluebird year in 1998. In just my third year, I fledged 214 bluebirds, 27 chickadees, and 24 Tufted Titmice from 52 bluebird houses. I plan to increase my trail to more than 75 houses this spring.

One factor in this success is an idea that I tried for the first time in 1998 that increases the visibility of the bluebird houses. Using a black Magic Marker, I ink a 1.5-inch circle on each side of the bluebird house so that the birds can see what looks like a cavity from almost every direction. I had bluebirds in 1998 in areas where I did not have them in previous years. This year I am also going to try hanging some houses, an idea covered in an earlier issue of *Sialia* (forerunner to *Bluebird*).

I have had some problems early in the season with House Sparrows, but I find that if they are trapped and disposed of quickly the bluebirds will move in behind them. Snakes were a minor problem, but I feel that my time is better spent

getting more houses up rather than trying to guard 75-plus units, although the protective gardening netting makes a trap that is effective and easy to install.

Charlotte Jernigan has done a fantastic job getting our Oklahoma Bluebird Society off to an excellent start, and we have more than 200 members in less than two years, and the organization is continuing to grow. She is a classy lady.

— Bob Walshaw, Coweta, Okla.

To the Editor:

I am a recent enthusiast to the world of bluebirding, after having a pair nest successfully on my property this past spring. After realizing the joy of seeing bluebirds fledge, I decided I wanted to do more than just hang one nest box in my yard. I went to the local state and county parks and spoke to the naturalists in charge, asking for permission to hang bluebird boxes. The reception I encountered was fantastic. They showed me four different locations to start out with and others (for possible use) in the future. I estimate a total of 50 nest boxes to start.

My wife had the suggestion of including my son's Cub Scout Pack No. 46. After consulting with the den leader and headmaster, they thought it was a great idea and it would be a good long-term project for the scouts and the environment.

I am pre-cutting and drilling the wood and PVC pipe — the kids are too young, six and eight year olds. We will be building the boxes this winter and placing them in the field by March 1 (1999).

— Philip Scala, Brick, New Jersey

Letters to the editor

To the Editor:

Last year I described plans to test a deep nest box made with a temporary shallow floor. I planned to give the bluebirds what they wanted with the convenience of the shallow floor and then lower the nest to give them what they needed (i.e., safety). Lowering the nests easily damaged them. Providing a box for building the nest on the temporary floor would probably work better. The entire box with the nest could then be lowered without disturbing the nest.

Once mice were found to be more of a concern that larger predators, the shallow floors were left in place and predator guards (eight-inch diameter by two-and-a-half-foot long air duct pipe) were placed on all nest box posts. Two clutches of eggs were lost to House Wrens, but none to climbing predators. Gilbertson PVC boxes also were used with success. Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, Black-capped Chickadees, and House Wrens used the PVC boxes. Friends and family members living in Illinois and Wisconsin all have had bluebirds fledged from the PVC boxes I have given to them.

Removing the rebar that supports the conduit used with PVC boxes is very difficult during hot dry weather because the soil shrinks against the rebar. Relocating the boxes was easier when a pipe wrench was used to remove the rebar with an upward twisting motion. Initially the predator guards were allowed to sway at the bottom but they would hit the post on windy days. The resulting noise may have caused my first nest for the season to be abandoned. All guards are secured to the post with duct tape now, but since the adhesive on the tape only lasts for one season,

alternate methods such as securing the guard with wire will be tried in 1999.

— *Mike Swanson, North Aurora, Illinois*

To the Editor,

I feel compelled to question one of the recommendations in the article "Starlings and oval-holed nest boxes," by Kevin Berner (Bluebird, Winter 1999, page 6).

Mr. Berner says that starlings can and do enter bluebird nest boxes provided with 1 3/8-inch by 2-inch oval entrance holes, even though few starlings actually nest in Peterson boxes with such oval entrances. Notwithstanding this, Mr. Berner concludes: "At this point, I would still recommend oval-holed standard nest boxes, as long as the boxes are monitored regularly to ensure that starlings are not allowed to use the boxes."

In my opinion, that conclusion is ill-advised, for the following reasons. First, for some months during the spring nesting season, starlings investigate and enter many cavities, including practically any nesting box they can squeeze into. Second, a starling that has managed to enter a nesting box frequently destroys the eggs and young of native birds, and often kills incubating females. I know this to be true from my years of experience with a large colony of Purple Martins and from my experience with a large number of nesting boxes for Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows.

Given the facts that Eastern Bluebirds readily accept and nest successfully in boxes with 1 1/2-inch diameter round entrance holes, and that Mountain Bluebirds readily use boxes with 1 9/16-inch diameter

round holes, and that starlings cannot enter either of those sizes of round holes, common sense tells me that those sizes of round entrance holes are clearly the best to use.

Moreover, I not only use 1 1/2-inch round holes exclusively to prevent starlings from entering my nest boxes, but also affix a second block of wood with an identical round hole fitted on top of the entrance hole, carefully aligning the two round holes (this is sometimes called a raccoon guard), so that a starling cannot stick its head and long beak into the box to attack native birds, eggs, and young.

I understand that bluebirds and other native birds readily nest in boxes with oval entrances, or with round entrances larger than the minimum needed for their entry; they might even prefer such large entrances. We can hardly expect our native birds to think ahead and anticipate starling attacks, but we can and should.

I have been a member of the NABS for many years, and I want to congratulate you on a very good new format and look for the society's publication.

— *Lance D. Wood, Alexandria, Virginia*

We welcome your letters. Please include your name and address. Send letters to Jim Williams, Editor, Bluebird Magazine, 5239 Cranberry Lane, Webster, WI 54893.

Nest-box network launched

The Cornell Nest Box Network (CNBN), a continent-wide data-collection effort, has been launched by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

Single researchers on limited budgets long have been frustrated in gathering large quantities of data to study scientific questions on a large geographic scale. The CNBN was born partly out of that frustration and partly out of the desire to teach the

Follow bluebirds on the internet

Birdhouse Online, a new, interactive web site from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Nest Box Network (CNBN) and the North American Bluebird Society (NABS) allows you to log on and follow the wave of breeding bluebirds from Florida and Texas to Ontario and Alberta.

Birdhouse Online lets you help answer questions about bluebirds and other cavity-nesters in your nest boxes from the convenience of your home computer. Enter data when you see birds, nesting material, eggs, nestlings, or fledglings. Compare what's happening on your bluebird trail to trails in other regions of North America. Best of all, it's free!

Maps showing the progress of the breeding season will be updated weekly on the web site. You help create these maps by entering information about your nest boxes. Join us in this first-ever online monitoring of nest boxes. You decide how much time you spend online, submitting your data as often as you like. Put your house on the map! Visit <http://birds.cornell.edu>, and click on Birdhouse Online.

general public more about science and the scientific process.

It has started with four areas of study spelled out clearly in a research kit which also contains a wealth of information on cavity-nesting birds.

Software is supplied with each kit to help participants keep track of nest boxes as well as nesting attempts in each box. Computer-scannable data forms are supplied for those who prefer them.

The Lab seeks data on:

- Latitudinal variation in clutch size.
- Nest box volume and clutch size.
- Feather use by Tree Swallows and Violet-green Swallows: Do birds at higher latitudes use more feathers to line their nests?
- Do certain species of birds prefer to nest in a nest box containing an old nest? If so, does this preference vary regionally?

CNBN fees are \$20 for the first year, which includes the research kit, and \$15 for renewal years. For more information or to sign up for this North American effort, call toll free 800/843-2473, or write The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, NY 14850. The lab can be contacted by e-mail at cornellbirds@cornell.edu.



This nest contains five Eastern Bluebird eggs and five Tufted Titmouse eggs. Lorna Beasley of the Andy Beasley Bluebird Farm in Live Oak, Florida, explained that a bluebird built a nest in box No. 1 along the country road trail they maintain; a titmouse built a nest 1,000 feet away in box No. 2. Then both birds laid their eggs in box No. 1. The bluebird incubated all 10 eggs; the titmouse sat on an empty nest for two weeks before abandoning it. Apparently because of the number of eggs and their distribution in the nest, only three titmouse eggs hatched; two chicks died, one fledged. The box then was cleaned out, and a new bluebird nest was built, from which five young were fledged.

Flicker houses from hollow logs

I make flicker houses out of pieces of hollowed log with natural openings (usually where a branch rotted out). Just cut them to about two-foot sections (hole to bottom, 15 to 18 inches), add a floor and a roof, and mount them

on fence posts or poles. I fill the cavities with fresh sawdust from a neighboring sawmill so the flickers can re-excavate the cavity to their needs.

— Jim Walters, Johnson County Songbird Project, Iowa City, Iowa

Nominate Zeleny for Audubon honor

NABS member Robert Peak, reviewing a list of notable environmentalists included in the 100th anniversary edition of Audubon Magazine last year, noticed that Dr. Lawrence Zeleny, one of the founders of NABS, was not included. That is an oversight which should be corrected, Mr. Peak believes.

"Dr. Zeleny exemplified the best in all true environmentalists," he said in a letter to the magazine's editor. "Since the National Audubon Society's mission statement indicates that the Society is focusing on birds, it seems only fitting and proper for Dr. Lawrence Zeleny to be on your list."

Nominations for an annual honor roll to be published by Audubon in the future are welcome. Mr. Peak suggests that NABS members write to urge inclusion of Dr. Zeleny. Write Audubon via its web site at <<http://magazine.audubon.org>>, or by writing to T. H. Watkins, Audubon Magazine, 700 Broadway, New York, NY 10003.

Pennsylvania bluebird meeting

The fledgling Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania will hold its first annual conference at Messiah Village in Mechanicsburg, Pa., (just east of Harrisburg) Saturday, May 1. Registration begins at 9 a.m.; the conference, open to all, will run from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Cost is \$5 for the conference and \$5 for the luncheon (reservations required). Registration deadline is April 10. Send your check to Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania, P.O. Box 267, Enola, PA 17025-0267.



NABS member Joseph Critchley drops a length of PVC pipe, with a Tee at the top, over a metal pipe to which he mounts his bluebird box. The PVC pipe has a dual purpose: You can push a dead tree branch through its Tee to provide a perch from which birds can survey their surroundings for food, and it allows the box to act as a weather vane, so the entrance hole is always facing away from the wind. The latter is achieved by mounting the box to the PVC pipe using short, self-tapping screws (and a washer), short is the operative word about screws, so the PVC pipe can freely turn on the metal pipe. Inside the box, Mr. Critchley places hardware cloth one-half inch off the bottom. Under the hardware cloth he inserts a piece of flea paper cut to fit the bottom of the box. The result? No blow fly larvae. The sticky flea paper, available at farm stores and perhaps other outlets, comes in a large sheet which can be cut to provide pieces for six bluebird boxes. Mr. Critchley lives in Union Grove, N.C.

Bluebird News from Shore to Shore

Over the last four years pipes have been collected from two overhead garage-door companies in **Lincoln, Nebraska**, and given away for use as mounting poles for bluebird houses. Collection and distribution is done by **Bluebirds Across Nebraska**, the state organization. In seven months last year, **George Wenzl**, who single-handedly works the project, collected 525 such pipes. BAN finds that the pipes help provide superior places for bluebirds to nest. The efforts of Mr. Wenzl were reported in a recent issue of the BAN newsletter.

Dick Tuttle, a member of the **Ohio Bluebird Society**, was profiled recently in The Indiana Bluebird Flyer, newsletter of the **Indiana Bluebird Society**. Mr. Tuttle has maintained bluebird trails in the **Delaware, Ohio**, area for 30 years. His fledgling production figures are 5,821 Eastern Bluebirds, 10,460 Tree Swallows, 253 Black-capped Chickadees, 30 Tufted Titmice, 28 American Kestrels, and nine Wood Ducks. He began in 1968 with five pairs of bluebirds nesting and 37 young fledging. His latest projects include three nesting platforms for Osprey and nesting boxes for Prothonotary Warblers. He also is placing kestrel nesting boxes on the back side of highway signs in his area (eight feet off the ground, 15 feet from the side of the road).

How do you get three pairs of bluebirds to nest within 100 feet of each other? **Merlin Lehman** of **Middlebury, Indiana**, has figured it out. He not only got first nestings from three pairs, but they all raised second broods in the same houses. His nest boxes were set in a triangle (see sketch at right). Each pair's

territory was to the outside of the boxes, in different directions. His idea appeared in the **Indiana Bluebird Flyer**.

Small raptors can present problems for bluebirds in nest boxes. **Colleen Wyland** of **Molalla, Oregon**, watched a Merlin land on the front of a box, reach its head inside, and pull out a Violet-green Swallow nestling. **Dennis Wiley**, park manager at **Champoeg State Heritage Area** in **Oregon**, saw an American Kestrel fly to the front of a nest box, hang from the hole and reach its head inside. It was unsuccessful in its attempt to take a nestling, probably because the nest was low enough below the entry hole to be out of reach. Another nest box in the area, holding a second next built atop the first and thus much closer to the entry hole, did suffer predation, the kestrel the likely suspect. This news comes from the newsletter of the **Prescott, Oregon, Western Bluebird Recovery Project**.

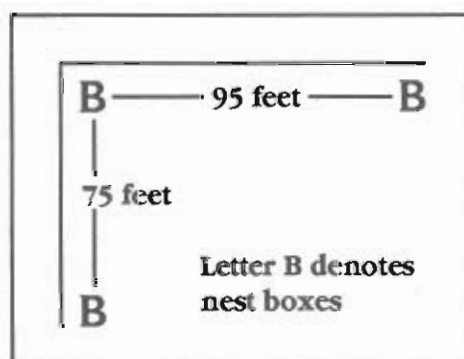
Bill Singley of **Rescue, California**, had problems with Acorn Woodpeckers. They were enlarging the entry holes in his bluebird houses, seeking access to store acorns and for night roosting. He solved the problem by placing three-inch squares of polycarbonate plastic, drilled with a matching entry

hole, over the nest-box entry hole, attaching the plastic with small screws. That put an end to the woodpecker damage. His idea was described in **Bluebirds Fly**, the newsletter of the **California Bluebird Recovery Program**.

The Bluebird Recovery Program of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis celebrated its 20th anniversary in 1998. It has provided information on bluebirds to over 11,000 persons in that time.

What do you feed abandoned bluebird chicks until a rehabilitator can be located? **Darrell Stave**, who is a rehabber, feeds small bits of mealworm along with Hills Prescription Diet Feline CD, a moist canned food. **Rosemary Collett**, another wildlife rehabilitation expert, mixes one-half cup medicated turkey starter, one drop Zymadrops vitamin supplement, and one 25-mg. crushed tablet of vitamin B1. Gatorade (a brand name) is used for severely dehydrated birds. Be aware that trying to raise young birds yourself is illegal (federal laws prohibit possession of migratory birds) and usually unsuccessful. Find an active nest or a licensed rehabber for the orphans. This information came from **Bluebird News**, the newsletter of the Bluebird Recovery Program (Minneapolis).

"If each one of us could reach one child or one teenager who would maintain a bluebird trail for the next 10 to 25 years, just think of the effect we could have," said **Helen S. Munro**, president of the **North Carolina Bluebird Society**, in a recent newsletter message to her members. "The role of education is paramount in this activity (bluebirding)."



NABS October directors' meeting

(Editor's note: This is a highlight version of the minutes from the Oct. 25, 1998, meeting of the North American Bluebird Society (NABS) board of directors. It has been edited for use here. The full set of minutes was prepared by Arlene Ripley, NABS secretary.)

• • •

Two new affiliates were added: Bella Vista Bluebird Society, Bella Vista, Ark., and the Brown County Bluebird Society, Nashville, Ind.

The board decided that NABS would exchange state/provincial lists of NABS members once the affiliation has been formed. The list will not be used for enhancing membership growth.

Bob Niebhur pointed out that NABS now accepts major credit cards for purchase of items the organization offers for sale.

The board eliminated the position of corresponding secretary. Arlene Ripley, recording secretary, made a motion that the duties of the two secretaries be combined into one position to be called Secretary.

Lisa Kivist, co-executive director, reported that NABS membership has increased about 14 percent from one year ago, reversing the 10 percent annual decline since 1991. The list of inactive members also has been decreased by 50 percent.

Ron Kingston reported that the Speaker's Bureau had a successful year. Seventeen sets of the NABS slide program have been sold. Twenty-six new speakers have been added since fall of 1997. A complete list of speakers is kept at headquarters so that requests can be answered.

Steve Eno, a member of the NABS development committee, reported on plans to again have a presence at trade shows in 1999. Plans are to

follow-up with manufacturers and distributors on the NABS nest-box approval program. A comprehensive packet of reference materials, including NABS membership information, will be assembled and made available to retailers.

Mr. Eno also presented ideas on NABS attending conventions for golf course owners and managers. NABS could offer presentations at these events. Mr. Eno is exploring ways to find corporate funding to offset the expense of such attendance. "Golf Course Management" magazine, with a circulation of 45,000, is interested in doing an article on bluebirds on golf courses, he said.

The nominating committee of Myrna Pearman, Art Aylesworth and Mary Ellen Vetter succeeded in finding our new treasurer, Chuck Finley. Darlene Sillick was recommended by the committee to be the new Education Committee chair, and the board made the appointment.

John Ivanco stated that a significant increase in income is projected for the coming fiscal year based on projected sales and increases in membership.

The present NABS headquarters has been made available to NABS by the community of Darlington, Wis., with a 10-year lease at the cost of \$1 per year. However, the building is old and has no heating system. It was the opinion of the board that the building is not viable as a permanent headquarters. Carol McDaniels made a motion that we look for funding to support a move to a permanent location. The motion was approved.

Mr. Ivanko read a letter from a former member who did not renew membership because she felt we advocate and encourage the killing of House Sparrows. It was decided we must continue with the education of the dangers of House Sparrows.

Dave Eastman suggested that we mail complimentary copies of our newsletters to environmental groups, university libraries and foundations with the hope that they will want to subscribe. Mr. Ivanko suggested that we amend the budget to cover the cost of the extra printing and mailing charges. A motion was made to refer the matter to the Education Committee for further study.

NABS 1999 Convention

June 17-20, Great Falls, Montana

Headquarters — Heritage Inn

Field trips, speakers, panel discussions

Room reservations — 800/528-1234

Convention registration — 406/453-5143

Visit web site: www.cobleskill.edu/nabs/

Complete convention information can be found in Bluebird, Vol. 21, No. 1

Watch out for ticks and the diseases they carry

By Thomas H. Nicholls

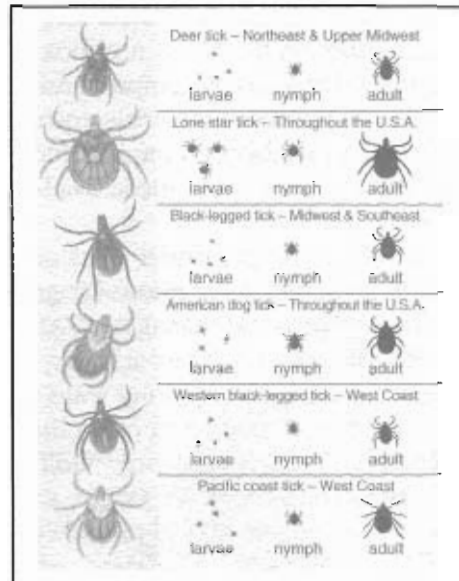
A recently discovered and sometimes fatal illness carried by ticks can be difficult to distinguish from Lyme disease. This illness, called human granulocytic ehrlichiosis, is spread by the deer tick, the same tick that carries Lyme disease. I have compiled the following information from various sources. These key facts are designed to provide field workers with important information needed to protect themselves.

1. The chief vector of both diseases is the deer tick, *Ixodes scapularis* (*I. dammini*).
2. Both diseases are caused by bacteria. The white-footed mouse is the principal reservoir host for these bacteria in nature.
3. Early detection, disease identification, and treatment are critical to prevent long-term complications caused by these diseases.
4. Laboratory diagnostic tests are not 100 percent reliable, especially during the first three weeks after infection. The most reliable readily available test is the Western blot, and patients should be sure to ask for this to be performed. A more sophisticated test (PCR) can be done in specific instances.

5. Antibiotic treatment of choice is doxycycline or tetracycline for three weeks for persons older than eight years. There are other antibiotics for those allergic to these medications.

6. Humans apparently are not immune following natural infection and can become infected again, after being cured and bitten by another infected tick.

7. The deer tick can transmit both diseases simultaneously. This coinfection can complicate disease diagnosis. To complicate matters further, a third, rarer tick-vectoring parasitic disease, babesiosis, causes



Identifying Lyme disease carriers
similar symptoms.

8. Infected nymphal deer ticks cause 80 percent of the infections from May to August.

9. There is now a human vaccine available to help prevent Lyme. A Lyme vaccine is also available for dogs.

PREVENTION

Wear proper clothing such as light colors to see ticks, long pants tucked into socks or boots (tape around socks), long-sleeved shirts with collar and cuffs buttoned, and a cap. Also use tick repellents (DEET on skin and/or clothes or Permanone on clothes only). After field work, brush off clothing, launder clothes, and check entire body for ticks. A deer tick has to be attached at least 24 hours, in most cases, for the tick to transmit disease, so a daily shower or swim followed by a thorough towel-drying before a tick becomes firmly attached should prevent most infections.

Remove attached ticks properly and promptly and save these ticks for identification and disease evaluation by medical personnel. Symptoms

usually appear six or more days after being bitten by an infected tick and a doctor should be seen as soon as possible.

Lyme Disease

Gradual onset of flu-like symptoms: Headache, nausea, chills, fever, malaise/fatigue, muscle aches, a rash in 60 to 80 percent of cases, swollen lymph nodes, and sore joints. The disease progresses in stages involving a variety of tissues, including joints, heart, and nervous system. It usually is not fatal.

Ehrlichiosis

Sudden onset of flu-like symptoms: Severe headache, nausea, chills, high fever (100+ F), malaise/fatigue, major muscle aches, usually no rash, and drenching sweats. The fatality rate is about five percent.

If you experience any of these symptoms after being bitten by a tick or after having visited a deer tick-infested area, you should see your doctor as soon as possible.

Tick-removal procedure

Early safe and effective removal of ticks attached to the skin is extremely important as it may take 24 to 36 hours for infected ticks to transmit disease(s). Here is how to remove a tick.

1. Use a fine-tipped tweezers to grasp the head of the tick as close to your skin as possible without squeezing or crushing the body of the tick. If you squeeze the body of the tick, you can inject yourself, possibly with bacterial disease(s) carried by the tick. The tick will often be difficult to remove because of its barbed mouth parts "going against the grain." If an adult tick is deeply embedded, you may not be able to remove all mouth parts from your skin, but you don't have to worry about those parts in

Continued on page 21

— ticks and the diseases they carry

From page 20

disease transmission after the rest of the tick's body is removed.

2. Pull tick outward (perpendicular to skin) with a slow steady pressure and avoid twisting and jerking. You may want to save the tick in a small glass bottle or vial with a bit of moist paper inside, so you can show it to your doctor, if needed. I usually store my ticks in a small petri dish (with moistened filter paper) placed in a refrigerator until they can be examined in the lab.

3. Apply topical antiseptic to the bite area, after tick removal.

4. Dress the bite area with a bandage, and wash your hands well in soap and water.

5. KEEP A TICK-BITE LOG

containing the following information: Date and time of bite; bite location and field location where you may have picked up tick; distinguishing features of tick; specimen saved, Yes or no; date physician contacted; date of onset of symptoms; and treatment, if any.

There is a very useful tick removal device called PRO-TICK REMEDY that simply lifts ticks off the skin. Its key feature is its precision fingers which form a comb slot that captures the tick by its mouth parts as you slip it under the tick's body applying a gentle upward pressure from five to 15 seconds until the tick releases. I carry this tick removal device in all of my first aid kits, and use it in my bird/tick research. This device can be purchased for nominal cost from: SCS Ltd., P.O. Box 573, Stony Point, NY 10980. Phone 800/749-8425. E-mail <scs@mne.net>. SCS carries a variety of tick-related protection products.

Tick-borne diseases can be serious, but don't let them keep you from enjoying the outdoors. With proper precautions and awareness,

you can safely continue bird-watching or other outdoor activities, in the field. I do!

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER: The information presented is designed to be educational. Under no circumstance should it replace the expert care and advice of a qualified physician.

(Dr. Nicholls is a retired research wildlife biologist. His address is 2160 Draper Ave., Roseville, MN 55113)

Eyegive address

Eyegive, the online retail service that allows consumers to donate a portion of their purchases to non-profit groups like the North American Bluebird Society, has changed its website to <<http://www.igive.com>>. The iGive.com service offers free registration for shoppers, who can select the North American Bluebird Society to receive donations. NABS' website is <<http://www.cobleskill.edu/nabs/>>.



Wisconsin bluebirder Curt Sommer and wife Marilyn visited Florida friends in February 1998. They saw ideal bluebird habitat, several bluebirds, but no bluebird houses. Mr. Sommer builds bluebird houses from recycled materials. Back home he got busy, with the intent to return to Florida to install the houses. A trucker volunteered to haul the houses to Ocala, Florida, where Mr. Sommer's friend, Clarence Roloff, stored them until he arrived Dec. 8. The two, pictured here, received permission to put houses along cattle ranch fence lines and at an airport. When Mr. Sommer installs houses on someone else's land, he gives the property owner his card, with the request that he be called when they see their first bluebird. While bluebirds had not migrated south yet when he was in Florida, he was home just six days when he received the call. Mr. Sommer asks that bluebirders in the Ocala area contact him; he would like to learn more about bluebird habitat in southern states. He may be reached at E9682 Mankse Road, New London, WI 54961 or evenings call (920) 982-5675.

North American Bluebird Society

Affiliate Organizations

The North American Bluebird Society serves as a clearinghouse for ideas, research, management, and education on behalf of bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting species. NABS invites all state, provincial, and regional bluebird organizations to become NABS affiliates in "a confederation of equals all working together toward a common goal ... a partnership in international bluebird conservation." No cost is associated with affiliating with NABS.

CANADA

Alberta

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

Ellis Bird Farm, Ltd.
Box 5090
LaCombe Alberta T4L 1W7

British Columbia

Southern Interior Bluebird Trail Society
P.O. Box 494, Oliver BC V0H 1T0 Canada

UNITED STATES

California

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

Colorado

The Bluebird Project: The Denver Audubon Society and The Colorado Division of Wildlife
6060 Broadway
Denver CO 80216

Georgia

Bluebirds Over Georgia
5858 Silver Ridge Dr.
Stone Mountain GA 30087

Illinois

JoDaviess County Bluebird Recovery Program
15 Cedar Rim Trail
Galena, IL 61036

Indiana

Indiana Bluebird Society
P.O. Box 356
Leesburg IN 46538

Brown County Bluebird Society
P.O. Box 660
Nashville, IN 47448

Iowa

Johnson County Songbird Project
2511 Highway 1 SW
Iowa City IA 52240

Maine

Bluebird Association of Maine
c/o Lisa Paige
RFD 4, Box 7600
Gardiner ME 04345

Minnesota

Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota (BBRP) Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis
P.O. Box 3801
Minneapolis MN 55403

Montana

Montana Bluebird Trails
P.O. Box 794
Ronan, MT 59864

Nebraska

Bluebirds Across Nebraska
P.O. Box 67157
Lincoln NE 68506

New York

New York State Bluebird Society (NYSBS)
15 Bridle Lane
Dryden NY 13053
c/o Rich Wells, President
9141 Cattaraugus Street
Springville NY 14141

Schoharie County Bluebird Society
c/o Kevin Berner
State University of New York
Cobleskill NY 12043

North Carolina

North Carolina Bluebird Society
P.O. Box 4191
Greensboro NC 27404

Ohio

Ohio Bluebird Society
c/o Doug LeVasseur
20680 Township Road #120
Senecaville OH 43780

Oklahoma

Oklahoma Bluebird Society
c/o Mark Weathers
5656 S. 161st W. Ave.
Sand Springs OK 74063

Oregon

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

Pennsylvania

Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania
PO Box 267
Enola PA 17025

Washington

Cascade Bluebird and Purple Martin Society
3015 Squalicum Parkway, Suite 250
Bellingham WA 98225

Wisconsin

Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisc.
6612 Akron Avenue
Plainfield WI 54966

Lafayette County Bluebird Society
14953 Highway 23
Darlington WI 53530

E-mail network for bluebirders

An e-mail exchange network for persons interested in bluebirds has been established and is available for free subscription. This listserv, as such networks are called, is a cooperative venture of the North American Bluebird Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

Messages sent to this network are distributed automatically to all net members. Subscribers receive and send messages as e-mail via their designated e-mail provider. Picture the network as a mailing list of persons interested in bluebirds: If you put your name on the list you share mail with other members.

To subscribe to this net, known as BLUEBIRD-L, send an e-mail message to: listproc@cornell.edu

containing this single line of text:
SUBSCRIBE BLUEBIRD-L

You must send this mail from the e-mail address on which you normally receive e-mail.

Send stories

Bluebird, as did its predecessor *Sialia*, relies on stories, articles, and photographs from you. The most interesting items used in this magazine are the ones you provide. We also welcome your letters. Please include your name and address on all communications. Stories and articles are best submitted via e-mail, on computer disk (Macintosh compatible), or typewritten (double-spaced, please).

Send submissions to:

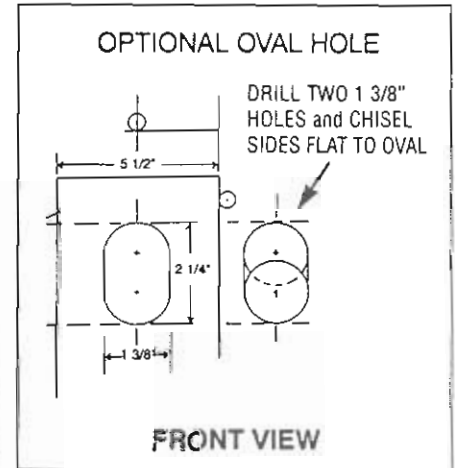
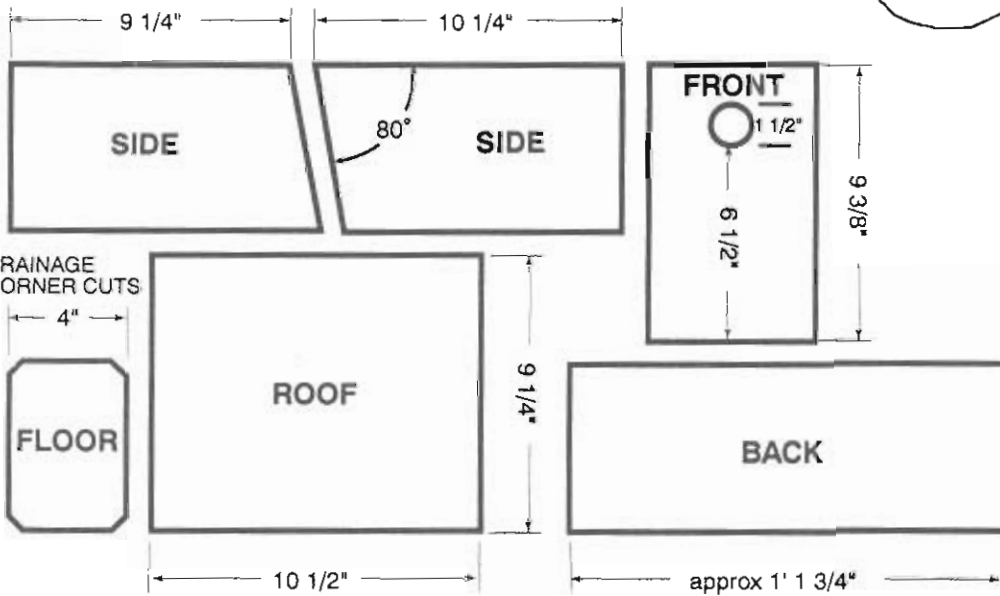
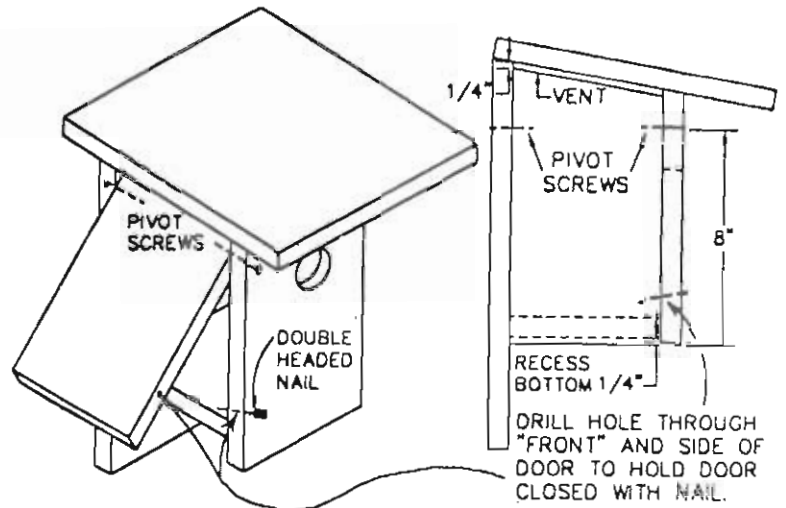
Jim Williams
c/o Bluebird
5239 Cranberry Lane
Webster, Wisconsin 54893
E-mail <twojays@win.bright.net>.



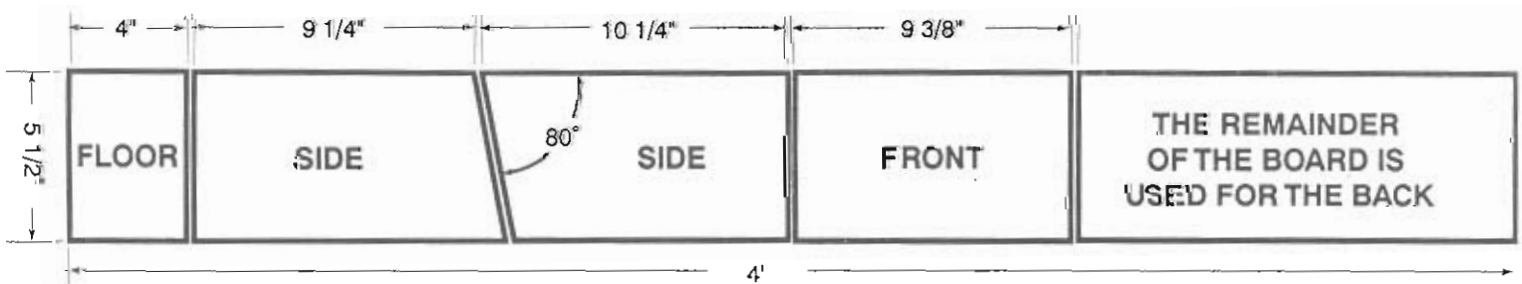
The North American Bluebird Society Eastern Bluebird Nest Box

MATERIALS LIST

- STANDARD 1" x 6" - 4 FEET LONG
- STANDARD BOARD 1" x 10" - 10 1/2" LONG
- 1 3/4" GALVANIZED NAILS - APPROX. 20
- 1 3/4" GALVANIZED SCREW FOR PIVOT POINT - 2
- DOUBLE HEADED NAIL FOR HOLDING DOOR CLOSED - 1



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- Contributing \$100
- Corporate \$100
- Donor \$250
- Life Membership \$500

Research contributions

I wish to contribute an additional \$_____ to help fund research on bluebirds and other cavity nesters.

For memberships outside the U.S., please pay by VISA/MC or by Postal Orders made in U.S. dollars; add \$4 to cover international postage.

Send completed form and payment to:

**North American Bluebird Society
 PO Box 74, Darlington, WI 53530**

\$6 of each member's dues is designated for subscription to Bluebird, publication of NABS.

The mission of NABS

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 maladroitness 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 mankind.



**North American Bluebird Society
 PO Box 74
 Darlington, Wisconsin 53530**

**Spring 1999
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 Formerly Sialia**

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