

*Nest boxes heating up?
Wood is cooler, and so
are lighter colors.
See stories, pages 5-6.*

**Ohio program offers
help to American
Kestrels, page 8**

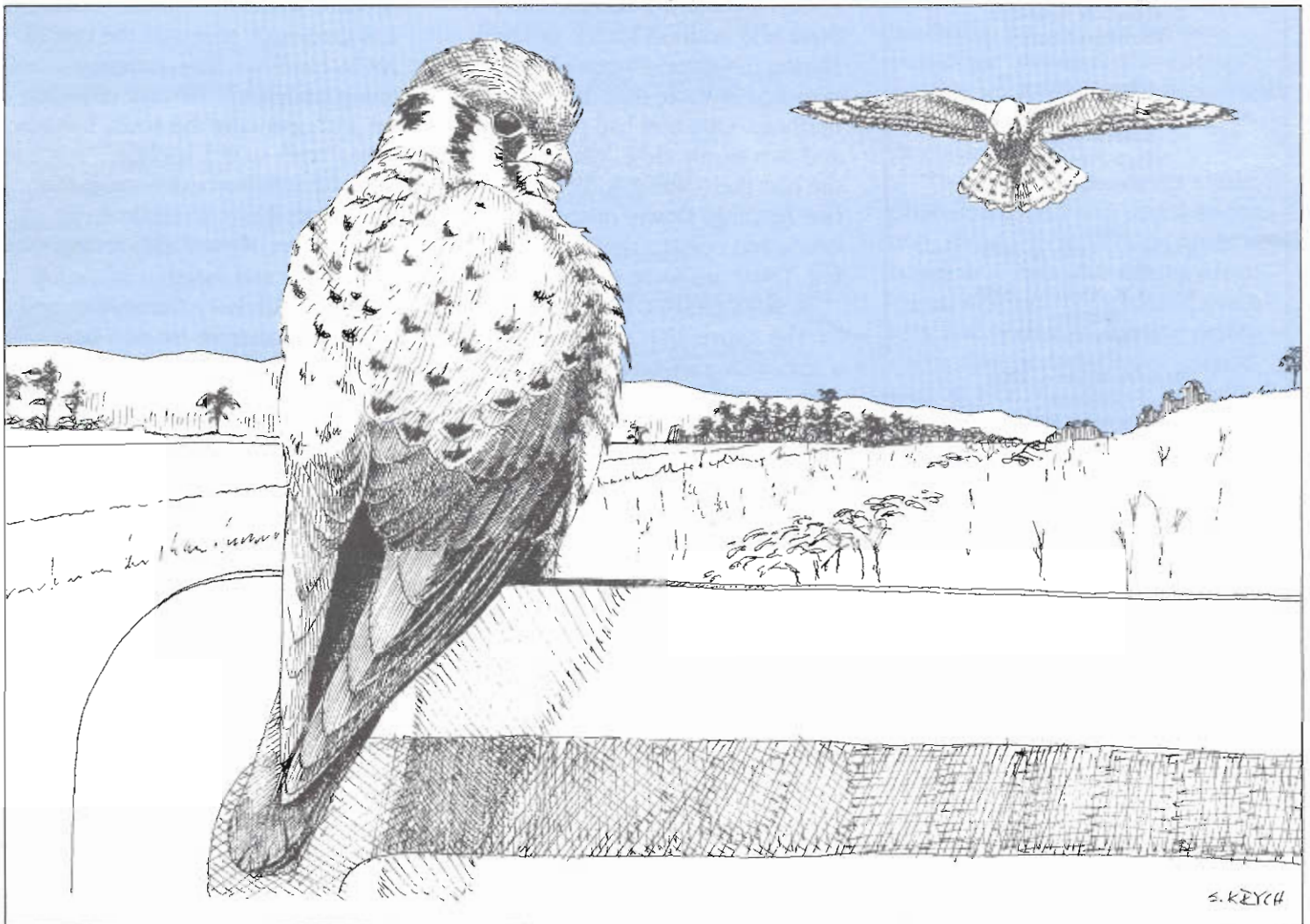
Bluebird

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• **Bluebird Sampler inside — new items for the holidays** •



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From the President

By Ray Harris

Monitoring a bluebird nestbox trail is like farming — next year country. My trail is in the foothills of Alberta, at about 4000 feet elevation, and spring here was cold. The Mountain Bluebirds were two to three weeks late in nesting, which resulted in only one nesting rather than our customary two.

July was cold, with four frosts. One morning there was an eighth of an inch of ice on our bird bath. The one week of cold weather coincided with the hatching of Tree Swallows. Because of the cold temperatures, no insects were flying and therefore there was no food for the nestlings. During the second week of July, I disposed of more than 175 dead nestlings. One box had three dead and two barely alive. When I opened the box there was a small chirp, and two nestlings slowly raised their heads and opened their beaks to be fed. There are some sad moments.

A SUCCESSFUL CONVENTION

The convention in Great Falls was a resounding success, with 258 persons registered, from 29 states and five Canadian provinces. Among the many session presenters were Colleen DeLong, education coordinator for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Nestbox Network, and Jeff Nance, director of marketing for Wild Birds Unlimited, Inc. Both spoke on their respective organizations' partnerships with NABS.

UPCOMING CONVENTIONS

Your executives and directors are trying to arrange conventions equitably geographically to give all members opportunity to attend a convention closer to home. The 2000 convention is slated for Galena, Illinois; 2001 for Ohio, and 2002

Penticton, British Columbia. Visualizing the geographic distribution in place, why not get your affiliate group to put in a bid for 2003.

NEW DIRECTORS

At the annual business meeting the 1999 officers were re-elected for another year. Four new directors were elected: Ann Wick, Wisconsin; Bob Ewart, Saskatchewan; Elsie Eltzroth, Oregon; and Arnold Gerlach, Alberta. The four directors whose three-year terms expired were Edwina Hahn, Georgia; David Shiels, Texas; Steve Eno, Nebraska; and William Wheeler, Tennessee. Edwina has graciously accepted the task of NABS historian. Two years ago David Shiels undertook the task of setting up and operating the NABS hot line. It has been such a success it has grown much beyond a one-person operation. Steve is remaining as chairperson of the Nestbox Approval Committee and member of the Technical Advisory Committee, and is gathering materials for nest boxes on golf courses.

Chuck Finley is chairing a committee reviewing and updating NABS Constitution and Bylaws, which were last amended in 1985. It is hoped that a draft can be presented at the Convention in Galena.

THIS IS FRIGHTENING

The following is a condensation from an article titled "Pesticides" from the *Bluebird News*, published by The Bluebird Recovery Program, Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis, May 1999, p. 6.

... "My neighbor and I have nest boxes. Unfortunately she uses a commercial firm to apply a lawn spray. I saw the technician spraying

Continued on page 3

2nd link in Trans-continental Trail opens

As plans continue for the May 2000 roll-out of the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail (TBT), a network of bluebird trails stretching across the U.S. and Canada which will provide nest boxes for bluebirds and other native, cavity-nesting species, a second trail link has been completed in Columbus, Ohio. Also, more than 700 nest boxes on privately owned bluebird trails have been enrolled since the project was announced in July.

The second trail section is located at the Highbanks Metro Park, owned and managed by the Columbus and Franklin County Metropolitan Park District. It is an Adopt-A-Box project, a trail participation opportunity designed to let individuals participate

—president

quite a bit on the ground around the nestbox. This caught my attention. I heard him say, 'I got him, I got him.' I grabbed my binoculars to see what he was doing and could not believe what I saw.

"He was spraying directly at the male bluebird and near the nestbox. When questioned he said, 'They (the bluebirds) frightened me.'"

Is Homo sapiens our next big problem?

GOOD WORK

One of our organizational loose threads was finally pulled into place by our co-executive directors this spring. The North American Bluebird Society now has official charity status for the state of Wisconsin, (our official headquarters). Our executive directors spent many hours on this item.

THANK YOU

My thanks to Schoharie County Bluebird Society, N.Y., for adding my name to their newsletter mailing list.



directly in this conservation effort. The first trail segment also is in Ohio.

The continent-wide ribbon cutting for this effort will be May 20, 2000. Education events are planned in many states and provinces. You can participate as an individual or through activities of a bluebird affiliate near you. The web site of the North American Bluebird Society (NABS) will carry frequent updates on these events. Check it at www.cobleskill.edu/nabs/.

A promotional campaign also was launched recently by NABS and Wild Birds Unlimited, the corporate underwriter of the TBT, featuring the Adopt-A-Box sponsorship as the perfect holiday gift.

You can help bluebirds and participate in this rapidly growing conservation cause by purchasing an Adopt-A-Box sponsorship on the TBT or by giving an Adopt-A-Box sponsorship as a gift.

Wild Birds Unlimited stores across North America are serving as local TBT headquarters. They are distributing Adopt-A-Box sponsorship forms, promoting NABS membership, and developing bluebird conservation displays.

On the new Columbus link, Joseph Hammond, Metro Park naturalist in charge of the bluebird program at Highbanks, is working closely with Darlene Sillick, TBT coordinator for Columbus and NABS education committee chair, and a team of trail monitors: Amy

Westhoven, John McCormac, Paul Swartzentruber, Marilyn Miller, Lisa Geleide, Rowena Willey, Donna Kowalczyk, Chuck Crawford, Caren Wagner, and Christine Blazak.

All the nest boxes were donated by Charlie Zepp, who collected most of the western cedar he used to build the boxes from dumpsters at construction sites in the area. Ms. Sillick has been the tireless backbone behind the successful pilot trails development.

All NABS members are encouraged to register their bluebird trails (five or more boxes) on the TBT. A registration form is on the back of the Nest Box Reporting Form enclosed in this issue of *Bluebird*.

Bluebird

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Wooden nest boxes found cooler

By Conley C. Black

Managed nest-box programs can significantly increase local populations of Eastern Bluebirds and other cavity-nesting species. Poorly designed boxes, however, may become population sinks rather than source centers. Internal box temperature is an important determinant of box success. Bluebird eggs and nestlings, for example, cannot survive temperatures exceeding 107° F (41° C).

Several researchers have investigated construction materials and nest box temperatures. Lawrence Zeleny in 1968 and Robert M. Patterson in 1980 studied wood, metal, and plastic bluebird boxes. Wood Duck boxes also have been studied. J. A. L. Mertens in 1977 developed a model predicting box temperature for any material and ambient temperature, but its complexity discourages amateur use.

The goal of this project was to examine the effects of construction material on nest box temperature and to develop a graphed model of the relationship.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Surrounding air temperature and the interior temperatures of four nest boxes were recorded daily from March 26, 1996, to March 31, 1997. Box 1 was a paper juice carton, modified from a design by Davis and Roca (1995). Box 2 was designed by the author and constructed of aluminum. Box 3 was constructed of 3/8-inch (0.95 cm) plywood, similar to a design by Davis and Roca. Box 4 was constructed of PVC pipe (Gilbertson 1991). Each box had a screened horizontal entrance slot and two coats of white exterior latex paint.

The boxes were mounted five feet (1.5 m) high and six feet (1.8 m) apart on a south-facing chain-link fence located five miles (8 km) south

of Brooksville, Florida. Liquid thermometers were placed in the boxes with the bulbs one inch (2.5 cm) above the floor. A shaded surrounding-temperature-control station was established 75 feet (23 m) to the southwest. Surrounding temperature, internal box temperature, cloud cover, and wind conditions were recorded at 2:30 p.m. each afternoon when air temperatures are near the daily maximum. Cloud cover was characterized as sunny, partly cloudy, or overcast. Wind speed was characterized as calm, breezy, or windy. Only sunny days with no wind were used in the analysis.

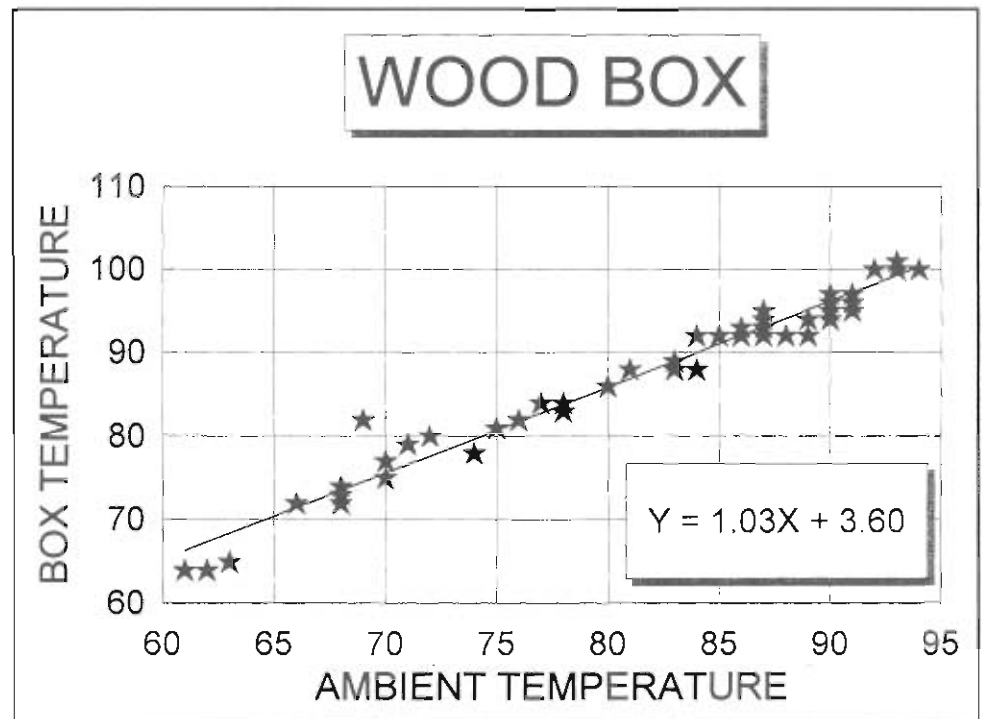
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Observed temperatures were within the range of previously reported results, confirming that wooden boxes are cooler and paper boxes are warmer than those constructed of other materials. PVC and aluminum boxes are between the two. A maximum internal increase of 8° F (4.4° C) was recorded for the

wooden box and increases of 10° F (5.5° C) and 16° F (8.9° C) were observed for the PVC and paper boxes respectively.

For these boxes, internal increases were proportional to the rising temperature of the surrounding air. The aluminum box behaved differently. Increases there were inversely related to rising air temperature. It is not clear why this occurred. A defective thermometer was suspected, but the instrument was tested and found to be reliable.

The data may be biased in some ways. A maximum air temperature of 94° F (35° C) was observed on July 27, 1996. Daily highs in west central Florida seldom exceed this value and temperatures above 100° F (38° C) have been recorded less than 20 times since 1899. Higher daily maximums, such as regularly occur in other parts of North America, might produce different results. Box status also must be considered. *Continued on page 5*



— wooden boxes

occupied boxes are warmer than unoccupied boxes, these data probably underestimate actual brooding temperatures.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

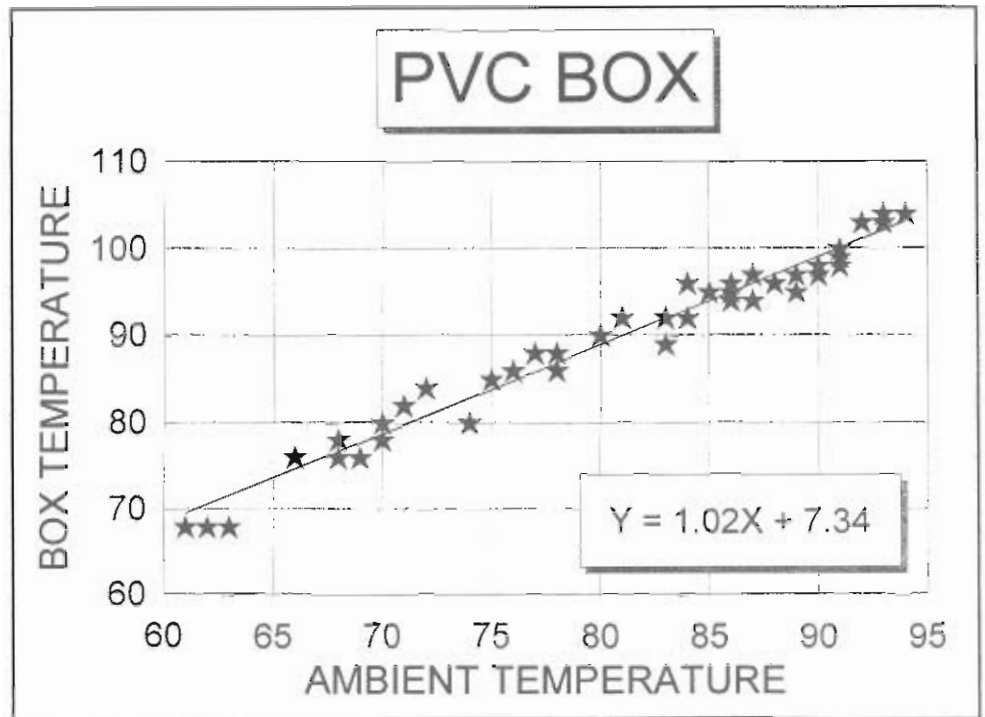
The contributions of student intern John Berry were crucial to the success of this project. The Southwest Florida Water Management District provided funding and other resources.

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(Mr. Black, a NABS member, can be reached at Southwest Florida Water Management District, 2379 Broad St., Brooksville, FL 34609.)



Lighter colors cooler, too

By Frank Navratil

I always have realized that surface color affects heat absorption by various materials. White reflects most of the sun's heat energy; black absorbs it. But I didn't know what amount nest cavity temperatures rose above the surrounding air temperature. I never painted birdhouses black. However, I do use dark brown because it seems unobtrusive and causes the house to disappear in the vegetation.

During late August 1998, I elected to make temperature measurements on PVC and wooden birdhouses. The birdhouses (two of each—one white and one dark brown) monitored were Gilbertson (PVC), Navratil Buoy (PVC), Peterson (wood), and NABS (wood).

The birdhouses were set up in my backyard. A limitation was that sun light was restricted by trees before 8 a.m. and after 5 p.m. All entry holes faced south. Care was taken to avoid

shading by adjacent houses.

Temperature measurements were taken with a dual-probe thermocouple thermometer. One probe was permanently placed below a roof insulated with one-inch foam wall insulation; it provided the ambient temperature. The second probe was pushed through a small hole one-half inch below the entry hole and two inches into the cavity; two minutes were allowed for this thermocouple to stabilize in each cavity, and then temperature difference within the cavity was recorded for one minute. Ambient temperature was recorded while the cavity probe was stabilizing. Measurements for each house were repeated at about one-hour intervals.

The thermometer is sensitive and responds quickly to temperature variations, so when a breeze blows and air temperature changes the relative cavity temperature varies.

Continued on page 6

— lighter houses

Therefore, a minimum and maximum temperature difference was recorded.

CONCLUSIONS

White is cooler and dark brown is hotter. A large roof overhang (Peterson and Navratil Buoy models) provides a cooler nest cavity, though I wonder how much hotter those nest cavities become between 4 p.m. and sunset; my measurements indicate the cavity differential continues to rise a least another couple of hours as the roof shadow diminishes.

Field experience shows that all colors are acceptable to bluebirds.

My response to this study has been that I have chosen to repaint my birdhouses white. Maybe it is an overreaction, but I've always had a nagging feeling about dark brown. That is why I did the study.

(Mr. Navratil lives in North Riverside, Illinois.)

Cats Indoors! has campaign material

Cats Indoors!, the national campaign for safer birds and cats, now offers a teacher's guide for grades K-6. Also available are new 15- and 30-second television public service announcements available for distribution to TV stations in your area.

The campaign is being conducted by the American Bird Conservancy. For information on the guide or the ads, write or call ABC at 1250 24th Street NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20037, phone 202/778-9619, fax 202/778-9778, e-mail <lwinter@abcbirds.org>, web site <www.abcbirds.org>.

Q&A

Q: We have two small dogs. Should any bird boxes or feeders be placed inside the fenced portion of our yard, where the dogs stay?

A: Unless the fenced portion of the yard is very small, the dogs probably would not bother the birds much. In fact, they might be helpful in keeping cats and other predators away. Your nesting boxes and feeders should be high enough to be out of the dogs' reach. Most dogs ignore birds feeding on the ground. If yours do not, it would be best to move your feeders from the fenced area. Dogs could pose a threat when young birds leave the nest and are on the ground.

Q: Is it better to build a roosting box for winter use by birds or just to leave my nest boxes in place for use as shelter?

A: Roosting boxes, if properly constructed, do provide somewhat warmer sleeping quarters than do ordinary nesting boxes. However, it has been observed that bluebirds are more likely to accept nesting boxes for roosting in winter. They seem to prefer these to the roosting boxes, probably because they are more familiar to them.

Q: Do raccoons generally prey on nest-box residents from the top of the box or by hanging onto the mounting post?

A: Raccoons often, but not always, reach in a nest-box entrance from above. They are agile, strong, and smart, however, and will do their work from any possible angle. They sometimes will even tear open a box that is not substantially constructed.

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Black Bears are very opportunistic foragers, eating cavity-nesting birds as well as many other things, according to David Arsenault, a graduate student at the University of Nevada in Reno.

The large animal's vast diet includes berries, nuts, tubers, small mammals, insects and their larvae, eggs, honey, carrion, and garbage. This diverse food selection is exemplified by predation of cavity-nesting birds, he wrote in a recent message to members of CavNet, an e-mail collective for persons interested in cavity-nesting bird species. Although it has rarely been reported, this behavior appears to be widespread.

In New Mexico, Black Bears attack Northern Flicker nests located in oak and pine trees, he reported. To reach a nest, bears will climb as high as 35 feet, and probably even higher, then tear open the nest cavity from the entrance down. Bears are only able to tear open cavities in trees that are sufficiently decayed.

"I have never witnessed such an event, but I find cavities torn open with fresh claw marks leading up the tree and feathers from flicker nestlings strewn about the ground and cavity floor," Mr. Arsenault wrote.

"I can only guess how the events unfolded," he wrote. "The bear may have consumed all of the nestlings while in the tree or maybe after they fluttered to the ground. Some may have survived, aided by their parent's harassment of the bear.

"Just how bears find nest cavities is uncertain. They may be able to detect the pungent odor of nests. However, I have only found predation on Northern Flicker nests, mostly during the late nestling stage. If odor was used as a cue, then bears should be able to detect nest cavities of other birds just as readily

"I suggest that bears cue in on the sharp hissing of begging nestlings that can be initiated by scratching the

BIG predator problem



nest tree. Nestlings of other cavity-nesting birds in these areas (e.g. Flammulated Owl and Western Bluebird) are relatively quiet compared to woodpeckers. This may explain why flicker nests are prime targets. Sapsuckers have also been reported as victims of Black Bear predation in natural tree cavities," he wrote. "Their nestlings are as loud as, or even louder, than flickers and make a prime target. Black Bears are also known to tear down nest boxes occupied by Wood Duck and Tree Swallow."

In a response to Mr. Arsenault's request for other examples of bear attacks on cavity-nesting birds,

reports were offered of predation on bluebirds, woodpeckers, and kestrels in Idaho and British Columbia, Wood Ducks in California, and Tree Swallows in Alberta and Colorado.

Some years ago in central Alberta, 100 miles northwest of Edmonton, wrote J. Cam Finlay of Victoria, British Columbia, a Black Bear robbed a line of about five Tree Swallow nest boxes set on fence posts.

"One box had five nestlings when we checked it," he wrote, "and two hours later, when we returned to band the young, the box was ripped off the post and smashed with bear claw marks on the sides and all young gone."

From British Columbia, John and Sandi Franken reported that in 1998 a Black Bear attacked bluebird boxes that contained the young of Tree Swallows and bluebirds. The boxes were located next to a well-traveled secondary gravel road. "The bear became adept at pulling off the front cover of the box," they wrote.

A report from Colorado said that the bears walked by boxes containing Tree Swallow eggs, but stopped at each box that contained young of that species, ripped the box open, and ate the young. The report suggested that the bear was using its sense of smell to determine if birds were in the boxes.

From Idaho came report of 32 instances since 1994 of Black Bears tearing open nesting cavities. The bird species involved were Lewis' Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, American Kestrel, and Mountain Bluebird.

Mr. Arsenault would like to receive other reports of bear predation of birds in nest boxes. You can send your information to David P. Arsenault, P.O. Box 15131, Reno, NV 89507.

COVER STORY

Highway falcons get nest-box help

By Richard M. Tuttle

If you travel through central Ohio, you might notice large, green bird houses on traffic signs along routes 23 North and 36/37 East from Delaware. These nest boxes have raised 59 American Kestrels, the result of a program started seven years ago.

At that time, the Delaware County Health Department encouraged classroom teachers in four school districts to motivate elementary and middle school students to donate money from recycling plastic, paper, glass, and metal for kestrel bird houses. The Delaware County Bird Club agreed to build and maintain a nest box trail on highway signs, and, with the blessing of the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), 10 boxes were up before the 1993 nesting season.

Grassy berms and medians along four-lane highways provide good hunting habitat for North America's smallest falcon. Kestrels, also called sparrow hawks, are slightly larger than the familiar Blue Jays. During aerial maneuvers, kestrels display black and rufous bands on their tails. They hunt from perches or hover in the air to pounce on mice and grasshoppers. When perched on wires, kestrels appear to have large heads and no necks, especially when compared with Mourning Doves.

The scarcity of nest sites has kept kestrel populations down. Since hollow trees with three-inch holes are scarce, some kestrels are forced to nest in old barns, which also are hard to find in Ohio's fastest-developing county.

Starting in 1983, sign-mounted nest boxes along I-35 in Iowa have created opportunities that help raise

more than 700 kestrels yearly. Delaware County's project was modeled after Iowa's success.

Delaware County's nest boxes stood idle for two seasons before the project's first pair raised five young in 1995. Three pair raised 11 the following season. By 1997, a pattern of adding more breeders each year was established as four pair fledged 15 young birds. Anticipating a growing demand for nest sites, club members added three boxes to the project's original 10 before the 1998 season. The hawks responded by using two new boxes and reclaiming all four original sites to produce 28 young from 29 eggs.

The boxes face east and are



Nest-box monitor Dick Phillips checks on the chicks, while the late Dick Orthwein steadies the ladder.

supported by two types of signs that are spaced more than a half mile apart. Seven boxes are attached to large signs supported by two I-beams; special hardware supplied by ODOT makes these mounts possible. Six boxes hang from smaller signs fastened to two corrugated steel posts. These simpler signs are lower to the ground and only 15 feet from the berm. Close proximity to the ground and traffic has not been a problem, however. The lowest box, with an entrance slightly higher than eight feet, has produced young for the past three seasons. Monitors easily reach all boxes with a 12-foot folding ladder.

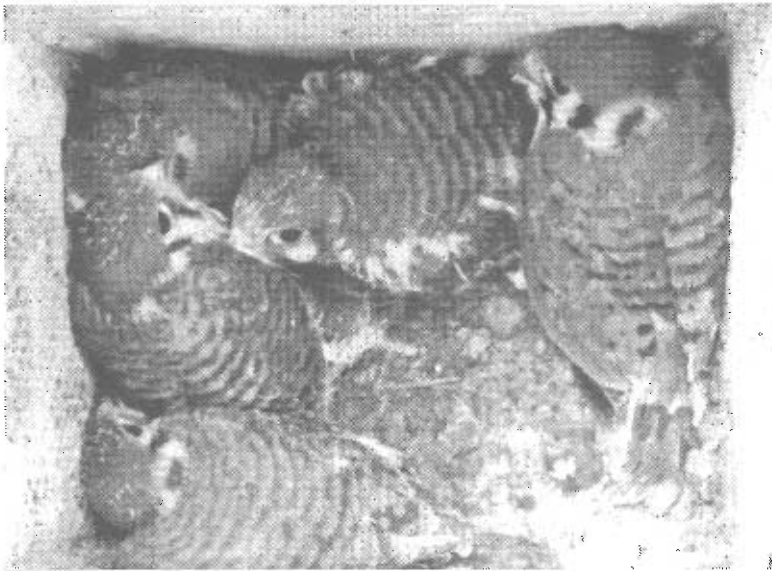
One important chore for monitors is removing European Starling eggs. Boxes are checked every two weeks from April through July, even though starlings lay no later than the first week of June. Starling nests are left alone. Kestrels readily lay eggs in nests won from starlings.

Unlike most birds, kestrels do not add material to their nest sites. Most conservationists supply wood chips for kestrel bedding, only to have the chips excavated by starlings, so club members no longer add chips, making their task easier.

Monitors do make sure that every box has a grass nest, whether starling- or man-made. Two large handfuls of dried berm grass make reliable nests that insulate kestrel eggs from the box floor. Kestrels flatten the nest into a concave bowl (much larger than a starling's nest cup) before their chocolate-colored eggs appear.

Kestrels occupy nest boxes for 10 weeks. The earliest breeders pair

Continued on page 9



Five young kestrels are a crowd in one of the Ohio project highway nest boxes.

— kestrels

bond and claim boxes in March. Three to six eggs are laid within seven to nine days in March, April or May. Incubation starts after the next-to-last egg appears. The incubation and nestling periods approach 30 days each. Incubation is the female's responsibility 80 percent of the time. The male will deliver food to his mate, or he will assume nest duty so she can hunt for herself.

Both sexes feed the young, and

nestlings are brooded from seven to 10 days after hatching. Since growing into an efficient and independent hunter takes time and practice, the young rely on parental support for two to three weeks after leaving the box, usually hiding on the ground in farm fields.

Nestlings always appear clean, but the nest is another story. Birds of prey are famous for standing and squirting their waste great distances. As youngsters grow, they plaster the

walls and ceiling of the nest chamber with whitewash. The blasted waste even sticks to the roof outside the entrance hole. The nest, reeking of ammonia, is carpeted with small, charcoal-colored fur pellets, the regurgitated remains of voles and field mice. Parent kestrels decapitate and skin birds before delivering them, explaining why legs make up most bird remains found in these nests. Cicada and grasshopper wings are added to fur and feet in July nests.

Monitors clean the boxes in August once nests are ammonia-free. Spackling knives are used to cut and lift each eight-inch-square "nest brownie" from its box. Dried whitewash is scraped from walls and ceilings before new grass nests are added. Also, when needed, the boxes are painted.

The project started by the Delaware County Health Department in 1992 goes on. The "highway falcons" continue to breed and to thrive because conservationists enjoy maintaining the 13 nest sites for them. Displaying their hunting techniques along roadsides and above medians of two major highways, the kestrels delight alert motorists.

And, hopefully, the students (the youngest participants are freshmen in high school this year, the older classes graduated several years ago) who financed the project through recycling are still doing what is best for the environment.

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NABS grant applications due

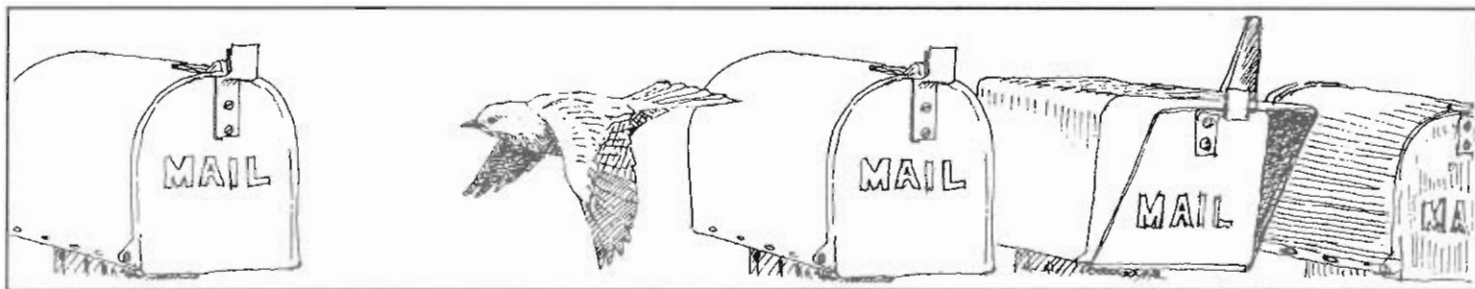
Applications for grants made by the North American Bluebird Society for ornithological research are due Dec. 1. Research projects should focus on those species of North American birds which use cavities for nesting. Three categories are considered:

Bluebird Research Grants — available to student, professional, or individual researcher for a suitable project focused on any of the three species of bluebird from the genus *Sialia*.

General Research Grants — available to student, professional, or individual researcher for a suitable project focused on a North American cavity-nesting species.

Student Research Grants — available to a full-time college or university student for a suitable project focused on a North American cavity-nesting species.

For more information and application materials, contact Kevin Berner, NABS Research Committee Chair, State University of New York, Cobleskill, NY 12043.



Favors pairing

To the Editor,

I want to heartily applaud the article by Linda Janilla in the summer issue of *Bluebird* about pairing houses. It was only after I paired all my nest boxes that the bluebirds no longer had to fight for a nesting site.

Granted, now and then a box remains empty in a pair of houses, but this assures me there are enough nesting sites available in the immediate area. Many times, though, both boxes are occupied, one by bluebirds and the other by Tree Swallows.

Like Ms. Janilla wrote, the boxes need to be about 15 to 18 feet apart to be considered paired. Putting nest boxes up every 30 or 50 feet is not pairing houses. And since we live in swallow country, i.e., lots of Purple Martins and Tree, Cliff, and Barn swallows, it is nice to know they have nest sites available to them, too.
— *Merlin Lehman, Middlebury, Indiana.*

Problem with plan

Dear Editor,

The new look of the NABS quarterly magazine is great!

I have a concern regarding the article "40 Plans for Nesting Structures" in the summer 1999 issue of *Bluebird* which recommends Carrol Henderson's book, *Woodworking for Wildlife*. We own this book, and have referred to it numerous times.

My husband constructed several bluebird nest boxes for a local non-profit birding organization fundraiser, using the plans on pages 83-85 (Peterson Bluebird House) and the plans on page 86 (Eastern Bluebird Nest Box).

I submitted these plans to the NABS Nestbox Approval Committee. The Peterson was approved. The other box was not approved for these reasons: "This box needs a sloping roof, an overhanging roof, and a vent slot rather than holes."

It is not my purpose to discredit the book, your article, or the committee, but I am concerned that this could possibly create a problem.

Thank you for a great publication.
— *Lois Rae Harder, Oak Harbor, Ohio*

TBT great idea

To the Editor,

Bravo! I really like the new *Bluebird* magazine! My inclinations from the beginnings of NABS were always in the direction you have taken our bluebird quarterly journal. While a founding member and the first executive director, my opinion never seemed to carry the day!

The Transcontinental Bluebird Trail is a great idea. We had heard the beginnings of the idea before the big turnover. Will you count me in? My backyard "trail" fledged 10 bluebirds last season, and, as a very busy third-grade teacher, I shall aim to install and monitor at least five nest boxes.

I am also encouraging vigorous cavity-nester awareness at my school. Our first venture with a single nest box has yielded 10 fledged young in two nestings and a very high interest among students, faculty, and parents!

I am sending separately my nostalgic thoughts on our beloved Bluebird Man, Art Aylesworth, to be added to the list of accolades presented at the NABS Annual Meeting in Great Falls. Sorry I couldn't attend! All of my bluebird friends were very much on my mind. Charlotte Jernigan and Marty Chestem have been filling me in! I know it was a smash hit!

So, carry on, bluebirders, and be assured of the applause of the other NABS founders, including Larry Zeleny and Chuck Dupree!

Yours for more heavenly Blues!
— *Mary Janetatos, NABS Executive Director Emeritus*

Questions focus

To the Editor,

In 1984, I joined the Pennsylvania State Parks' Bluebird Trails Program as a nest box monitor. At Codorus State Park, where I volunteer, a trail already had been placed by Dr. George Thomas. Nearly 13 years passed from his erection of the first box until the first successful nesting of an Eastern Bluebird within the park.

In 1981, one box fledged four young. As of 1998, 2,525 bluebirds have fledged from within this park
Continued on page 11

— focus

Continued from page 10

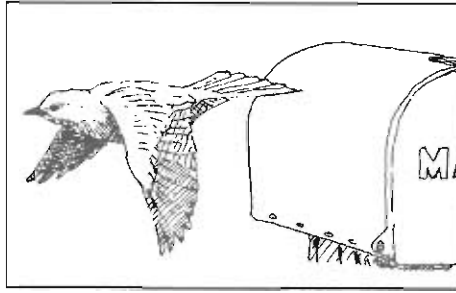
alone. There is a state park within a one-hour drive of every Pennsylvania citizen, and most of these also have very successful bluebird trail programs.

In addition, the Pennsylvania Game Commission also has a nest box program which focuses on all cavity-nesting birds and mammals. This program places boxes on the properties of cooperating land owners and within its extensive state game lands system. Added to this are the hundreds of county and city parks which have boxes erected by scouts, 4-H groups, and concerned sportsmen. I would be willing to wager that Pennsylvania today has more bluebirds than ever before.

While I take pride in being a small part of this great effort, I now begin to question our focus on nest boxes for bluebirds. Are we trying to make them into "welfare birds," such as the Purple Martin which today seldom uses natural nest sites?

Why are we not stressing the need for dead snags which would benefit many types of wildlife, as well as the bluebird? Indeed, we even stress that nest boxes not be placed on trees which might continue their natural association with these sites. True, in a natural setting, bluebird fledglings are lost to predators and parasites. This is part of the normal process of natural selection which insures only the strongest survive to pass on their genes. We are nullifying this process by removing all obstacles which impede the probability of failure in the nest box.

We are turning out great quantities of birds, but how about the quality? Are we diluting the gene pool? What effect are these great numbers of bluebirds having on food sources, which may affect other species? Is anyone even considering



these things? If not, why not?

(Organizations helping) other species, such as the Osprey, Peregrine Falcon, and Bald Eagle, set a goal for their programs. They (aim to) introduce a certain number of birds into the area, then allow nature to take its course. The result has been a slow but steady growth in these species, more naturally in keeping with natural dispersal.

If the North American Bluebird Society does not feel it has assisted the bluebird enough in its 21 years of existence to (now) turn some of its efforts to one of the many other species in decline, how many more years do you feel it will take?

I give many programs throughout the year, and I find it quite dismaying to have people tell me that they have evicted chickadees, titmice, nut-hatches, Tree Swallows, and other species because they put the box up to benefit bluebirds. The universal loss of cavity-nesting trees has impacted some of these species, as well as the bluebird. The focus of the (bluebird) society on numbers of bluebirds fledged, with little mention of other species, feeds this mentality. Controlling species competition means eliminating competing species to too many people.

Our program at Codorus State Park encourages species diversity, allowing flying squirrels, red squirrels, and even bats to utilize our boxes. In contradiction to the often-quoted theory that double pairing boxes eliminates problems with Tree Swallows, we have boxes back to back on posts, which were used by

Tree Swallows in five instances this year. We take as much pride in their successful fledging as we do a bluebird's.

As an established group with a track record for success with the bluebird, you could call on your members to focus some of their wonderful energy and ingenuity to solve problems for species such as the Barn Owl, Bewick's Wren, Prothonotary Warbler, and Great Crested Flycatcher — all species with declining numbers.

Even the chickadee has shown alarming declines in some areas. When I mentioned this recently to another bluebirder, he said, "No one cares about those birds because they are not cute." I don't think this is true. If people with the proper habitats are given the information they need to help these birds, I feel they will put as much effort into their recovery as they have the bluebird's.

As a member of NABS, I beg you to become a leader for all cavity-nesting species. The world is just as much diminished by the loss of the Bewick's Wren as it is by the loss of the bluebird.

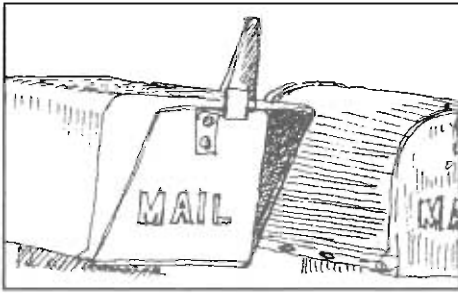
—Karen Lippy, Hanover, Pa.

Mountains of blues

Dear Editor,

I read the NABS fledging report for 1998 in the summer issue of *Bluebird* with great interest. The total of 128,816 bluebirds fledged shows we have made great strides in the last 21 years. It surprised me, though, when I added the bluebirds fledged by Mountain Bluebird Trails in Montana (17,575) to the total fledged in Alberta (13,339) and came up with 30,914, or 24 percent of all the fledglings reported.

While I'm on the subject of bluebirds fledged, I'd also like to mention what I think is an amazing
Continued on page 12



— blues

Continued from page 11

months ago I added up the number of bluebirds fledged by Mountain Bluebird Trails in Montana since 1974 when the late Art Aylesworth started keeping records. The total was 184,146, and 112,232 were fledged between 1992 and 1998. That is an average of 16,033 for the last seven years.

If 1999 is just average, the total bluebirds fledged by MBT will exceed 200,000 before the year 2000. That is a remarkable number and legacy to a man who meant so much to all of us involved in bluebird conservation.

— Bob Niebuhr, Great Falls, Montana

Nest-box issues

To the Editor,

In the summer 1999 issue of *Bluebird Q & A* section, there were comments regarding the Gilbertson box.

Three years in a row sparrows nested in such a box and fledged two broods of young each year. This year I removed the box rather than letting sparrows nest.

Bluebirds also have nested in a Gilbertson box the last two years and have not survived to fledge. In cold, rainy weather the PVC pipe does not insulate well, and condensation causes extreme dampness of the nesting material, causing the babies to die of hypothermia.

This year I happened onto one

baby barely alive on top of four dead siblings. They were all well fed with no evidence of blow fly infestation. After 45 minutes of warming under a light bulb, her feathers dried out and she began to gape for food. I put dry grass in the box. Parents continued to feed her, and she was alert and perky that evening. I thought all was well. That weekend we experienced weather in the high 90s, and Monday, when I checked the baby, it had succumbed.

I can't help but blame the Gilbertson box and its lack of insulation, as my wooden boxes do not get the least bit damp inside, even after heavy rains. Perhaps this style of box is not the best for western New York state. Has anyone else had such bad experiences?

I appreciate the articles about Hantavirus and the Victor Glue Mouse Trap; very informative. I no longer remove my nest boxes in the winter, but I do wire them open so that mice do not nest in them over the winter.

I also remember reading a comment from a biologist, I believe, who said to remove eggs that do not hatch, so they don't get broken and cause sickness. In my 30 years of helping the bluebird, I have never seen the birds break an egg. Five years ago I did experience a strange happening. There were three young and one egg in my nest box. I removed the unhatched egg. The second nesting, I found the exact same thing, and I yelled to the parent birds, "Why can't you hatch all your babies?", but I left the egg there. TWO days later, when I again looked in on my three babies, I had FOUR. I vowed then and there never to remove an egg until the babies were at least a week old, and I knew for sure the unhatched egg was not viable.

Thank you for a great newsletter.
— Elaine Crossley, Frewsburg, New York

Mouse-trap concern

Dear Editor,

I am having a good year on my expanded 88-bluebird-house trail, although the House Sparrows have been much worse than last year. So far I have trapped and disposed of more than 70, but I have been pleased to note that as long as I keep after them I am able to get bluebirds to nest where House Sparrows have been removed.

I also was very pleased to have my trail accepted as part of the new NABS national trail, and the framed certificate will have a place of honor in our home.

Regarding trapping House Sparrows, I was concerned to read about the system that uses the Victor Glue Mouse Trap. This is very dangerous to other birds, as many people will not be diligent enough to watch the trap carefully. Also I have had bluebirds and other cavity nesters enter a house even after a sparrow had started a nest. There is no substitute for the type of trap that simply closes the entrance to the house so the bird cannot escape. Then letting the bird into a clear plastic bag allows a "good" bird to be set free unharmed.

I would also like to comment on the Wayne Davis study that showed that there was no significant difference in bluebird usage between cleaned and uncleaned nest boxes. This is probably true, but there is a significant problem in not removing old nests — and that is when the bluebirds build a new nest over an old one and it raises the nest level to a point where predatory birds, such as crows, bluejays, etc., can easily reach the eggs or nestlings. The old nest should always be removed as soon as the young birds fledge.

— Bluebird Bob Walshaw, Coweta, Oklahoma

About competition among species

To the Editor,

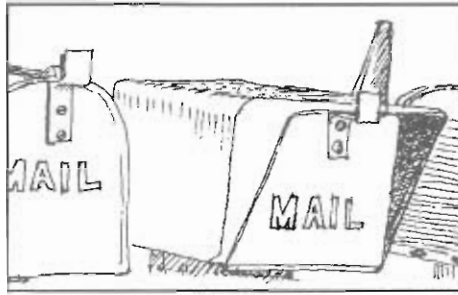
There are many ways of responding to the natural competition among species for nest boxes or natural cavities. The most simplistic is to believe that, because you have conceptualized a nest box as a "bluebird" nest site, [other species cannot use it]. Such conceptualizations are of no interest to these species.

If you desire to have bluebirds occupy a nestbox, first and foremost, you need to place it in the proper habitat — which is either somewhere that bluebirds are currently resident, or could be reasonably expected to be found. I trust it is intuitively obvious that if there are no bluebirds, then they won't use the box.

Now, if you want a guarantee that only bluebirds will use the box, things get more difficult. You can keep out most climbing things (mammalian, snake, or insect) by some combination of proper mountings and guards, locating away from trees (so squirrels can't jump down), using a tab of Tanglefoot or a repellent, and soaping the inside top of the box (keeps wasps from nesting).

Assuming that the only type of competition is now going to have feathers and come flying in (and that you've got 1-1/2 inch or smaller openings that won't admit starlings), we're down to two classes of competitors: protected species and House Sparrows. For the former, you can do nothing, since they and their nesting endeavors are entirely protected by law. You can, of course, freely violate the law if you wish, but I wouldn't suggest that you make a point of bragging about it over the Internet or at your club meeting.

With regard to House Sparrows,



you are pretty much free to do whatever you wish, and you can share all the gory details with everyone you know.

OR, you could stop and think about what fuels your irrational behavior. Why you've chosen to focus so much enmity on this single species. You might ponder what makes a species native or non-native. Are such things immutable? When, if ever, do the definitions change.

You might, if you observe closely and long enough, observe bluebirds killing House Sparrows.

You might think about all those well-meaning bluebirders (and groups) who give away (or encourage the production of) thousands of bluebird houses that will never be monitored — making them all ideal sparrow factories.

You might consider putting up your bluebird houses after the bluebirds return, which discourages their choice as sparrow nest sites.

You might simply consider removing sparrow nests, or removing the nestbox that has attracted sparrows.

You might look at the Breeding Bird Survey counts and acknowledge that bluebirds are becoming quite common — not at all the threatened species of yore.

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

Reynolds: Product treated unfairly

Editor's note: The following letter was written by Patricia Reynolds, designer and manufacturer of a predator guard for nesting boxes used by a variety of bird species, including bluebirds. Her Bird Guardian product has been mentioned over a period of several years in this publication, its predecessor, Sialia, and in a verbal presentation by a representative of the North American Bluebird Society. Ms. Reynolds believes these comments have been inaccurate and unfair. She has asked for an opportunity to correct these comments and to explain how her product came to be, how it works, how well it has been accepted by thousands of members of the birding community, and how it can work for bluebirds, if properly used.

To the Editor,

Much has been said and written about Audubon Entities Bird Guardian predator guard, and I believe it is way past due for the facts to be fairly acknowledged. To say the least, it is Audubon Entities' time to have equal billing in lieu of all the negative and misleading press given by the bluebird organization, both verbally and in print.

The Bird Guardian was designed for all cavity-nesting backyard birds, not just bluebirds. When I designed, tested, and eventually patented the Bird Guardian, I did not have bluebirds in mind as a particular resident for Bird Guardian-protected houses. I designed it after watching a Blue Jay take baby chickadees from a box outside my house in Wisconsin. It wasn't even raccoons or squirrels that inspired me at that time.

I experimented with various materials to protect my backyard birds from crows, Blue Jays, rac-
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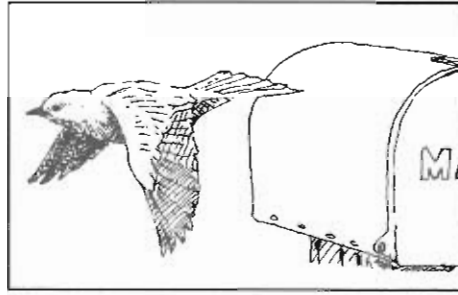
— Guardian

Continued from page 13

coons, and others. Please keep in mind, I am referring to *backyard birds* which include *wrens, chickadees, nuthatches, small woodpeckers, titmice, tree swallows, and, for bird lovers who are lucky or who work at it, bluebirds.*

I have worked with many, many folks, including naturalists (myself included), wild bird-product manufacturers, wild bird stores, catalog companies, distributors, retail stores, and backyard bird lovers in many states, testing the Bird Guardian every year.

Through these tests, I have redesigned the Bird Guardian screw-on unit with a slightly shorter tunnel that functions the same as far as keeping out predators, but appears to be preferable for bluebirds. The side holes have been removed, and I



have shortened the tail-brace and put a very small foothold on the end of this unit. This has proved more satisfactory. From the beginning, I have realized chickadees and wrens actually seem to prefer the Bird Guardian-protected houses.

When Kevin Berner (research committee chairperson of the North American Bluebird Society) did tests several (10) years ago, I had been using the Bird Guardian for my exclusive use, along with friends and neighbors. We all had such success with the guard that I decided to move forward and make it available

to all backyard bird lovers, after realizing there was nothing much out there to protect songbirds in nest boxes.

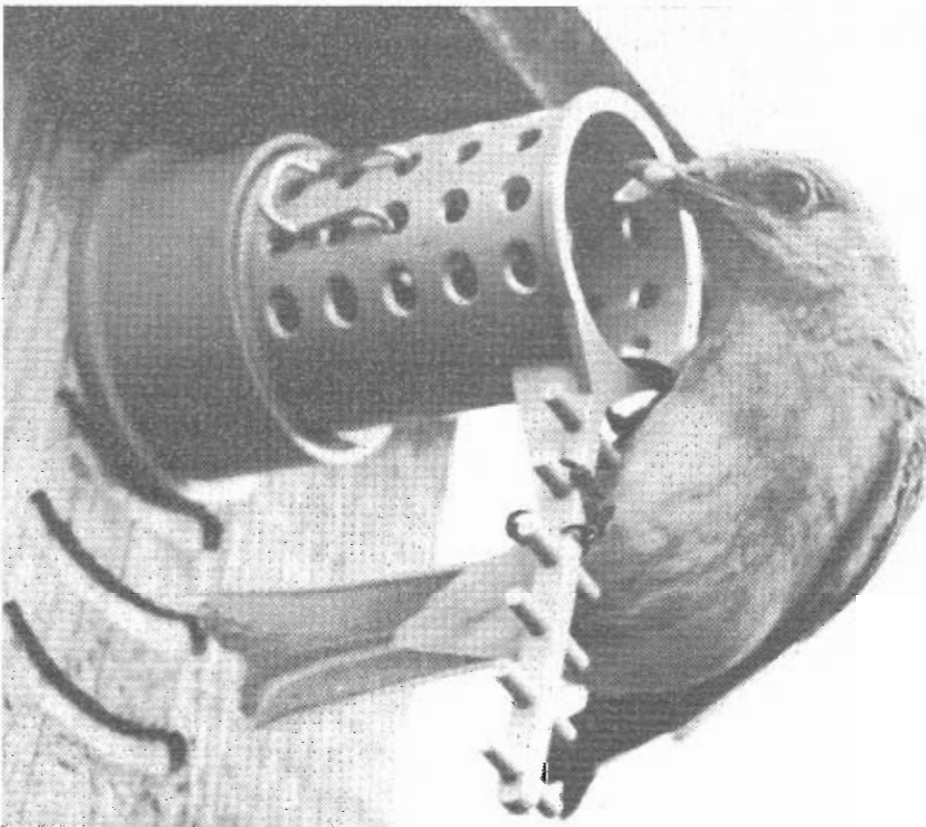
The point to be made is that the Bird Guardian was not designed just for bluebirds. It was, in fact, designed for your everyday backyard bird lover. These are the people who put up feeders and just love seeing and hearing the sound of birds in their backyards. When they discover that raccoons, jays, cats, crows, opossum, squirrels, grackles, and others prey upon their nest boxes, they are happy to know about Bird Guardian.

We have had bluebirds, throughout the years, take to Bird Guardian-protected houses from the very start. We have had them take to it after it was applied during nest building and incubation. We also have had the occasion when they abandoned the nest completely, thus the "Special Consideration for Bluebirds" insert which always has been packaged with the Bird Guardian. (The insert tells people with bluebird nest boxes how to use the Bird Guardian on their boxes.)

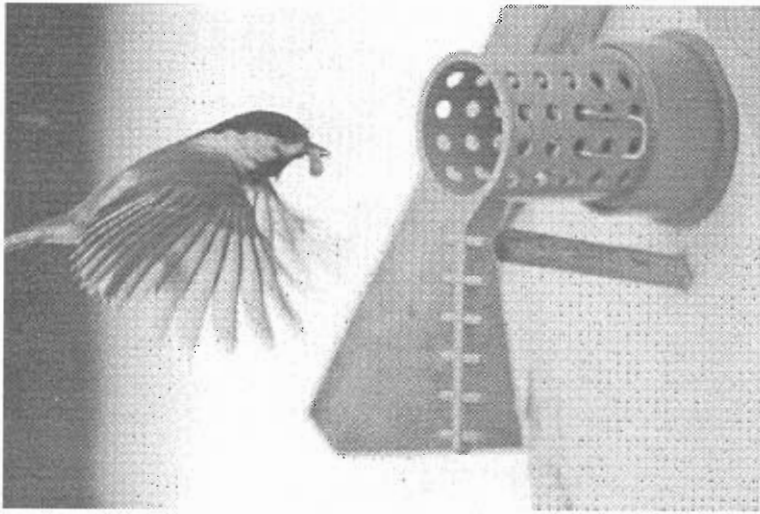
The Bird Guardian has been approved by the Humane Society in the United States and by The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in England. (They tested the Bird Guardian with CJ Wildbird Foods for four years, until they were satisfied. I have been informed that it is the best thing they now have for protecting their birds.)

Duncraft Catalog, Plow & Hearth, Wild Birds Unlimited, distributors throughout the USA and Europe, manufacturers, wild bird seed companies, and hundreds more have been purchasing the Bird Guardian for over nine years, with repeated success.

There have been no complaints other than a few, and, when they
Continued on page 15



Eastern Bluebird, with food, enters nest box mounted with a Guardian.



Black-capped Chickadee approaching nest box with food for young. Bird Guardian is attached over the entrance.

— Guardian

Continued from page 14

were referred to me, it was always something they didn't understand, something explainable, something correctable.

When it was suggested to me to send Bird Guardians to the bluebird society [North American Bluebird Society], had I known the type of tests that would ensue and what was going on in regard to bluebirds, I would have declined. We had not studied bluebirds enough at that time. The Bird Guardians I sent to Mr. Berner were not finished; they had no tail-brace at that time. I requested both in writing and verbally that a small stick or twig be added as a tail brace. This was not done in most cases reported to me.

From what I gather from Mr. Berner's test, I know that bluebird folks were not satisfied with the number of bluebirds using Bird Guardian-protected boxes. It is my belief that Mr. Berner's comments did not always include the fact that his criticism concerned only bluebirds. It was not mentioned that other species of birds readily use nest boxes protected by the Bird Guardian, and that bluebirds will, too, if the device is used properly.

It should be known that when

Kevin Berner made his tests, many nest boxes were used but only a few contained the Bird Guardian. The nest boxes which were used by bluebirds at all were those without a Guardian because that is what the birds were used to seeing and using.

Folks doing testing put up the Bird Guardians but did not return to monitor them for one week, then made a brief visit to monitor and left for another week. Not one person in these tests referred to the information I provide about bluebirds. It states you should watch your bluebirds for about 15 or 20 minutes after installation, and if both birds do not enter the house during that time, then you are to remove the Guardian and try the next day and the day after that. The Guardian must be used correctly for bluebirds. That is why, as I have explained, we include with each Guardian sold the insert offering special information on bluebirds. The Guardian works for bluebirds, if properly used. Most other species of birds have no problem with it.

In the *Bluebird* magazine, summer 1999, volume 21, number 3, page 12, there is a statement telling bird lovers the Bird Guardian is not satisfactory. It is printed next to the "highly recommended Noel cat and coon guard" which is sold on the bluebird society's web site. That

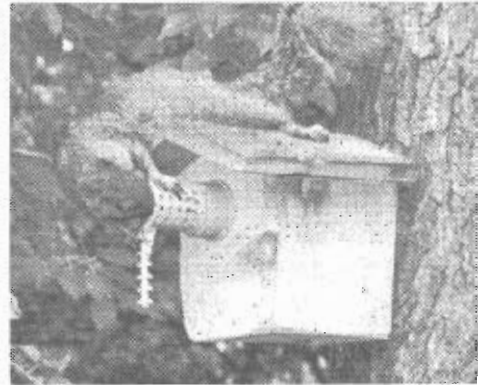
statement is false and damaging both personally and professionally to me.

Nothing is 100 percent, but the Bird Guardian is as close to 100 percent as anything has ever been for keeping out raccoons, cats, crows, Blue Jays, squirrels, grackles, opossum, and more. The rewards of using the Guardian are well worth the extra effort because once the bluebirds, both members of the pair, have entered the house with the Guardian, you have success. Isn't that what this is all about?

I believe the time is here for fair and true recognition of this predator guard that does the job it was designed to do — save eggs, baby birds, and even the adult bird in the nest box. The Bird Guardian really is the best device on the market for this purpose. It saves many species of songbirds, not just bluebirds.

And, thanks to NABS, bluebirds are all over the place, not endangered anymore.

— *Patricia Reynolds, President, Audubon Entities, Inc., P.O. Box 530, Fontana, Wisconsin 53125*



Squirrel tries unsuccessfully to enter nest box through the Bird Guardian.

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

Bluebirders flock to Big Sky country

By Bob Niebuhr

Over 250 persons from 29 states and five Canadian provinces attended the 22nd Annual NABS Convention at the Heritage Inn in Great Falls, Montana, June 16-20. The schedule was organized so people could participate in planned events and still have time to visit other area attractions, such as Ulm Piskum (buffalo jump) and the C.M. Russell Museum.

The first day, Wednesday, June 16, was set aside for registration, sightseeing, and viewing the 22 exhibits in the hospitality room. Exhibitors came from as far away as North Carolina and Arizona. It also was a great time to meet old friends and to make new ones.

Thursday, a field trip was taken through the Missouri Canyon and along the Rocky Mountain Front. Saturday, the trip went in the opposite direction, into the island mountain ranges of Central Montana (the area Charlie Russell made famous in his paintings) to visit one of the largest bluebird trails in the state. On both trips, a great variety of wildlife was seen, including elk and Mountain Sheep, and the bird watching was great. One person added seven birds to his life list. Lunches were served both days at dude ranches.

During breakfast on Friday, round-table discussions were held on various bluebirding topics. The remainder of the day was filled with

panel discussions and presentations on subjects ranging from bluebirds to Montana wildflowers and wildlife. Vince Yannone and his live birds entertained the group in the morning. In the afternoon, Denver Holt — "Mr. Hoots & Toots" — fascinated the audience with the owls of Montana.

The weather, food and sights were great, and a wonderful time was had by all who attended. If you missed it, you'll have another chance. A great convention is scheduled for June 22-25, 2000 in Galena, Illinois, and plans are underway for a convention in Columbus, Ohio in the year 2001 and in Penticton, British Columbia, Canada, in the year 2002. Make plans now to attend!

Galena, Illinois, in 2000

The year 2000 NABS convention will be held in Galena, Illinois, a historic town nestled tight in the northwest corner of the state. Dates are June 22-25.

The convention will be located at the Chestnut Mountain Resort on the Mississippi River shore. Featured speakers at the event will be Don and Lillian Stokes, famed authors of *The Bluebird Book* and other nature guides.

Make your plans early because a large attendance is anticipated. Reservations at the resort should be made no later than June 1 next year, reserve now for rooms with a river view. The toll-free number for the resort is 800/397-1320. If you want a preview look at the facilities, check the Chestnut Mountain Resort web site at www.chestnutmtn.com.

If you are flying in, the Dubuque, Iowa, airport is the closest major air facility, one hour west. The resort will provide transportation from the airport.

Convention arrangements are being handled by co-chairs Joan Harmet and Grace Storch.

Galena, known for the lead mines in that area



since at least the early 1600s, is in JoDaviess County, a bluebird hotspot, thanks to the JoDaviess County Bluebird Recovery Program, a NABS affiliate.

The area around Galena was untouched by the glaciers which slid down from the north about 11,000 years ago. This means Galena sits amid a picturesque mixture of high ridges, deep valleys, steep ravines, and limestone bluffs. The town is old and well preserved. Eighty-five percent of the buildings in Galena are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The town's main street features many antique and other shops. The preserved home of U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant is here.

More convention information will appear in the next two issues of *Bluebird*. Registration forms will be sent with the Winter issue.

Volunteers help with mail mountain

An article that appeared in the May 2 issue of *Parade* magazine, a national Sunday supplement, generated 23,000 mailed inquiries from people who wanted to know more about bluebirds. NABS also received 300,000 web-site hits because of the article. Postal inquiries were answered by a wonderful crew of volunteer workers.

Volunteers from the Lafayette County Bluebird Society, Bluebirds Across Nebraska, the Indiana Bluebird Society, the Ohio Bluebird Society, and the Natural Area Guardians/Jo Daviess County gave their time and envelope-licking skills to help respond to these inquiries.

NABS would like especially to thank the following volunteers for helping: Melvin and Mary Ellen Bolt, Jim and Ann Auer, Steve and Cheryl Eno, Chuck and Connie Finley, Phyllis Niebuhr, Julie Milota, Patsy and Ron Mellen, Gene Gaddie, Pam and Connie Conover, Stan and Dorothy Matzke, Sandy and Bill Seibert, Marge and Doug Smolick, Mary Linne Smith, Warren Close, Bob Clayton, Gladys Christensen, Carol McDaniel, Harvey Hartwig, Judy Butz, Joe O'Halloran, Marjorie Bucher, Cornerstone Christian School, Velma Klenke, Harriet Rowe, Glen Winslow, Susan Fiesler, Joan Harmet, Julie Moore, Joan Gray, Barbara Rutherford, Sylvia Downing, Judy Wallace, Kitty Rhodes, Grace Storch, and Rosemary Burns.

Grace Storch, president of the Bluebird Recovery Program with the Natural Area Guardians/Jo Daviess County, said, "Many folks wrote about how they remember growing up with bluebirds and how the *Parade* article brought back warm memories."

Dog kibble can be used to make nourishing winter food for birds

Here is an idea for acquainting bluebirds with a source of nourishment with which they might not be familiar — dry dog food. It is offered to birds during late fall, winter, or early spring. It comes from Marge Gibson, a wildlife rehabilitator in northern Wisconsin.

You begin with one cup of water or Pedialyte, the latter a brand-name for an electrolyte solution found in the baby-product section of your super market or drug store. Pedialyte contains potassium/sodium/chloride and dextrose in solution. It is similar to Gatorade, without the artificial color and added flavor. You could, in fact substitute Gatorade for Pedialyte, or use Ricelyte or any other pediatric electrolyte solution. Even boiled Coca Cola will work (boiling removes the carbonation), Ms. Gibson said.

To the liquid, add 3/4-cup dry dog kibble. "It is important to stress a good brand of dog or cat food and the growth variety denoted for young animals which has additional calcium that birds need," said Ms. Gibson.

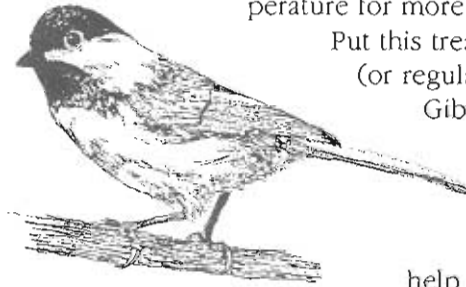
"I use Science Diet Feline or Canine Growth," she continued. "The Canine Growth has more fat, and at this time of the year (mid-winter) might be a good thing for the birds to have."

"Many of the dog foods formulated for elderly or fat animals has rice and is lower in calories. This is not what you want to give your bluebirds/robins at this time of the year," she said. "They need all the calories they can get. This is one

reason, of course, why suet is important for some species, and bluebirds will eat it, too, if they get the idea that it is food."

Soak the kibble and electrolyte solution overnight in your refrigerator (it will sour if left at room temperature for more than half a day).

Put this treat in your bluebird (or regular bird) feeder. Ms. Gibson covers the top of the mushy kibble with mealworms, she said. The worms



help attract the bluebirds and make them familiar with the new foodstuff.

"It is a game of calories," she explained, "especially if you are feeding during the winter. With extreme temperatures, it becomes a balancing act with birds not equipped with heavy down insulation and extra fat layers as are most arctic species. Everything they do takes calories/energy, including digestion."

"So, digesting large amounts of low-calorie foods can actually be a negative. Birds restrict activity on their own at this time of the year, and fluff up to provide air space between the feathers and the skin (the layering theory your mother taught you). All of this is done to conserve energy and calories. Even old Christmas trees set out close to the bird feeders will allow birds to conserve calories. My small winter birds are using nest boxes as warming sheds right now. Those winter roosting houses with perches inside are a good idea if the birds will use them," she said.

1999 NABS award winners

Each year the North American Bluebird Society is honored to recognize organizations and individuals for their outstanding contributions to the field of bluebird conservation. The 1999 Outstanding Bluebird Conservation Awards were presented at the NABS annual convention in June in Great Falls, Montana.

Here are highlights of the work done by these dedicated bluebirders to earn this special recognition.

Avon Grove Lions Club Landenburg, Pennsylvania

What started in 1987 as a small fund-raiser for the Avon Grove Lions Club has turned into a successful bluebird recovery program. To date, there have been over 5,300 Peterson-style bluebird boxes made and sold by the organization, the money raised going back into the community. The boxes are now found in fields and backyards locally, as well as in 23 other states.

Wanting the project to be more than a fund-raiser and being aware of the importance of education, the Avon Grove Lions Club produced a bluebird information sheet that is included with each box sold. Club members use only wood from old barns and mushroom houses to build their boxes. They also put on many bluebird programs for scout and youth groups, senior citizens, and at many other nature-related events.

Gene McDowell, founder of the Avon Grove Lions Club Bluebird Recovery Project, accepted the award on behalf of the organization. It is Gene's drive and earnest interest in the Eastern Bluebird that has kept this program going strong.

Marcia Hoepfner

Metamora, Illinois

Marcy Hoepfner is better known to many across the country as the Bluebird Lady. She is a NABS mem-

ber, a past board member, and a member of the Speakers Bureau. Her promotion of bluebirds and the North American Bluebird Society has been ongoing on a national level for several years through her column, "Gems of Blue," which appears monthly in *Nature Society News*.

Marcy was featured in the October/November 1996 issue of *Birds and Blooms* which resulted in several thousand reader responses and requests for more information about bluebirding. Marcy answered every inquiry with a personal reply and printed bluebird information. On top of all that, her web site, Marcy's Bluebirds, was featured earlier this year in *WildBird* magazine.

Marcy has operated her own trail of some 25 high-quality nest boxes (built by husband Don) for over 10 years. Based on her personal trail successes, Marcy has freely offered the tricks and knowledge she has gained over the years to others. She has presented slide shows to untold numbers of garden clubs, birding organizations, and various groups.

Dick Purvis

Anaheim, California

Over 15 years ago, Dick Purvis had a dream of bringing bluebirds into Orange County, California, which Dick himself has described as "smack in the middle of a mega metropolis." In the winter of 1984, Dick put up his first 10 boxes in the foothills there. He found that each year the range of the bluebirds expanded a mile or so from the original locations. So, each year Dick has searched out locations and added trails to draw the bluebirds into the flat urban areas. But his trails in urban parks, golf courses, and cemeteries were threatened by vandalism and nests were often drowned by sprinklers.

At the 1994 NABS convention in Boise, Idaho, Dick heard Roger Thompson tell of a new technique for hanging bird houses rather than nailing them to a post or tree. Recognizing the hanging box system as an answer to his urban trail problems, Dick immediately implemented the hanging box method. Today, each of his more than 330 nest boxes hang from trees at heights of 15 to 20 feet. Each box has a hook and is placed in a tree with a telescoping pole.

In addition to his own trail work, Dick chaired the 20th annual meeting for NABS in Newport Beach, and finds time to share his experiences and knowledge with others through field trips, workshops and articles he writes. In 1998, he fledged over 1,000 bluebirds right in the middle of Orange County, a dream come true.

Herman Bressler

White Lake, New York

Working from his garage, Herman Bressler has built and distributed in the last 12 years approximately 22,000 nest boxes and nest-box kits, 3,000 boxes for other cavity-nesting bird species, and 11,000 bird feeders.

So what do you do with 22,000 nest boxes? Herman's boxes and kits are used for programs that he presents for schools, 4-H clubs and scout groups. Other boxes are given away at the various bluebird programs he puts on (he averages 20 programs a year). His donations of nest boxes and other bird-related items provide the major source of revenue for the New York State Bluebird Society's educational activities and newsletter.

Approximately 1,500 of his boxes were used on the Route 20 trail that runs across the state, and he builds the experimental-design boxes used by Kevin Berner on the NABS



Five of the NABS award winners for 1999 are shown here. From the left are Charles Nelson of Belle Vista, Ark., Gene McDowell of Landenburg, Pa., Herman Bressler of White Lake, N.Y., Cheryl Eno, chair of the NABS award committee, Marcia Hoepfner of Metamora, Ill., and Dick Purvis of Anaheim, Calif.

research trail. Herman also maintains his own 72-box trail which fledged 175 bluebirds last year.

**Charles Nelson
Bella Vista, Arkansas**

Twenty years ago, Charles Nelson was one of the founders of the Bella Vista Bluebird Society, and he has been deeply involved in that organization ever since. Through his leadership, the Bella Vista Bluebird Society monitors 400 nest boxes from which fledged over 1,250 bluebirds last year. His efforts have resulted in literally hundreds of people in Bella Vista putting up bluebird houses.

In addition, at the age of 80-plus, Chuck continues to present bluebird programs and works with the local newspaper to promote bluebirds.

**Justin Paugh
Kalispell, Montana**

Justin Paugh received the NABS 1999 Youth Award. Justin caught the attention of many in an article in the April/May 1997 issue of *Birds & Blooms*. It was a wonderful story about a young man who, at the age of 10, saw his first bluebird, and then started his own 12-box trail on his grandparent's farm near Kalispell. For the past eight years his bluebird trail and his interest in wildlife conserva-

tion has grown.

He has built, maintained and monitored a bluebird trail since 1991, and has kept careful records on each nest box. He has been banding bluebirds since 1994. He participates in the yearly nest-box survey conducted by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. He builds and helps others to build nesting boxes and platforms for area wetlands as well as bluebird boxes. He currently is a regional coordinator for Mountain Bluebird Trails of Montana.

**SIGECO
(Southern Indiana Gas
& Electric Company)**

SIGECO partnered with NABS to develop an informational educational poster and pocket field guide designed for children, K-6. This poster will be distributed to community schools in SIGECO's service region of southwestern Indiana, as well as continent-wide thanks to a generous donation of 1,000 poster and field guides from SIGECO. The company designed bluebird classroom curriculum. It has worked with the Indiana Bluebird Society in putting up nest boxes in habitat around the A.B. Brown Generating Station. It focused on community bluebirding education

during a day-long bluebirding seminar in March, 1999. SIGECO is a corporate member of NABS.

Wild Birds Unlimited, Inc.

Wild Birds Unlimited, Inc., (WBU) is a corporate leader in bluebird conservation. It is the nation's first and largest birding retail franchise, with over 260 WBU stores across the continent. WBU has consistently provided both financial support and resources to help NABS spread its bluebird educational programs and mission.

WBU is the first corporate sponsor of the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail (TBT), providing a three-year grant of \$45,000. Additionally, WBU retailers will be supporting the TBT by distributing information about bluebird conservation, the trail, and the Adopt-A-Box program in their stores. WBU retailers are leaders in promoting bluebird conservation through their support of the NABS nest box approval process, providing NABS-approved informational fact sheets to consumers and conducting bluebirding seminars.

WBU provided financial support to cover the printing of the program booklet for the NABS Annual Conferences in 1998 and 1999. WBU is also one of the first advertising sponsors in *Bluebird*, and has been one of two corporate sponsors of the NABS color educational brochure, "Welcome Back the Bluebird." WBU is a corporate member of NABS.

Bob Orthwein dies

Bob Orthwein, Columbus, Ohio, who received an Individual Achievement Conservation Award from North American Bluebird Society in 1996, died in early June. He was 70 years old, and had been involved with bluebirds and other cavity-nesting bird species for 57 years. He also was recipient of the Ohio Bluebird Blue Feather Award

Bluebird News from Shore to Shore

Ten trail monitors were honored recently for completion of one year of service in the **Bluebird Society of Belle Vista, Arkansas**. They are **Bob and Delila Caselli, Aaron and Dorothy Stratman, Sandy King, Beth Holloway, Ron Rear, Jack Little, Don Zimmerman, and Gordon Christisen**. Society president **Jim Janssen** reported that 1,253 fledglings were counted in 1998 from the organization's 353 nest boxes, most of which are located on area golf courses.

How fast does the wind have to blow to drive rain into your nest boxes? That question was asked by **Steve Eno of Bluebirds Across Nebraska**. He received an answer from **Dr. David Stokesbury**, a regional climatologist at the University of Nebraska. Finding the answer was not simple, and some estimation was involved, the professor said. At a wind speed of 10 mph, rain falls at an angle of 22 degrees from vertical. At 20 mph the angle increases to 39 degrees. Up the wind to 30 mph and the angle moves to 53 degrees. At 40 mph, when you think rain is blowing straight into your face, well, it almost is: it's coming down (or across) at an angle of 61 degrees.

Bonnie Boex-Baker, a NABS member from Colorado, recently was featured in a story in the *Summit Daily News* for her concern about habitat destruction caused by widening of a local highway. When interviewed she was busy moving bluebird nest boxes she had placed and monitored in the area to be used for the road project. Nests had been started in some of the boxes, she told the reporter. Speaking to concern for the constant attack by development on environment, Ms. Boex-Baker said, "The people who don't go to

meetings (about such projects), who don't speak up, should get involved. People should be cautioned by what is happening."

Members of the **Rutherford County (NC) Bluebird Club** spoke recently at a local nature center, offering advice on a bluebird trail to be started there, and finding eight new club members in the process. Participating were **Christopher Greene, Lorene Dodson, Heather Melton, Irene Henson, and Allyson Greene**.

Mr. Greene, president of the Rutherford County club, has designed a new nesting box. Constructed of exterior plywood and pine, it features a 2x4 back for greater insulation and a pull-down front for easy viewing.

Toni Lynn Merchen of Crofton, Nebraska, shares an interesting experience. She wrote, "In early May I came across a coyote while running my bluebird trail in northwest Nebraska. As I left the trail, I noticed the coyote running parallel with me. I tried unsuccessfully to scare it off. It followed me for one-quarter of a mile, until I reached my neighbor's farm. The coyote carried its head very low! I felt like lunch! My Border Collie runs with me, but she was more scared than I was. A neighbor said that he had a coyote growl at him while he was on his tractor. Does anyone have any words of wisdom? Any advice on how to handle future coyote encounters?" Suggestions may be sent to Ms. Merchen at R.R. 1, Box 263, Crofton, NE 68730.

Thirty Wood Duck eggs were found in one box this summer by **Mike Houle of LaCrosse, Wisconsin**. They were being incubated by a single hen, he reported, and 25 of

the eggs hatched.

The Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania from a core of 14 founders from the Harrisburg area has expanded in one year to over 400 members from across the commonwealth and from other states as well. Members of the new society helped fledge over 1,000 bluebirds this past season. Members also monitored state park trails, hosted box-building programs, put on educational programs throughout the state, and assisted members with a wide variety of questions and concerns. **NABS** provided a \$500 Seed Money Grant to help the new group get started. "The opportunity to become a NABS affiliate played a large role in our success in organizing our local bluebird organization," said **Diane G. Barbin** of the Bluebird Society. Several of the NABS affiliates, including particularly **Bluebirds Across Nebraska**, the **Ohio Bluebird Society**, and the **Minnesota Bluebird Recovery Program**, graciously offered advice and support, she said. "We also received assistance from a few individuals who deserve special acknowledgment," Ms. Barbin said. They are **Dorene Scriven, Dave Ahlgren, Steve Gilbertson, Andrew Troyer, Linda Janilla, Kevin Berner, Dean Sheldon, and Doug LeVasseur**. "Each provided special assistance which we appreciate and wish to specially recognize. Thank you all, very much," she said.

Vaux's Swifts found to accept nest boxes

By Evelyn L. Bull

In 1995, we began an experiment to determine if Vaux's Swifts (*Chaetura vauxii*) would use nest boxes.

Over the last decade, the Western Spruce Budworm has killed thousands of Grand Fir in eastern Oregon, the tree species that Vaux's Swifts typically use for nesting. Older trees (usually larger than 24 inches in diameter at breast height) have extensive decay that leaves a hollow chamber inside the tree that the birds use. They enter the tree either through a broken top or through a Pileated Woodpecker hole; pileateds roost in these hollow trees at night.

Because so many of the nest trees were killed by the spruce budworm, they would eventually fall and leave a void of nest trees. We believed nest boxes might provide alternative nest sites for the swifts.

We put up 12 nest boxes in 1995. The boxes were made from solid boards 1 x 12 inches, so the boxes were about a foot square, but the depth varied. We made boxes four-, eight-, and 12-foot deep to determine how deep a nest box the swifts preferred. The boxes were put 35 feet above the ground in trees.

This spring (1998) we climbed the trees and checked the boxes. We found twigs from past swift nests in two 12-foot boxes, lichen nests from Flying Squirrels in three boxes, feathers from roosting Northern Flickers in 10 boxes, and feathers from roosting Pileated Woodpeckers in three boxes.

This summer (1998) we watched the boxes, and observed swifts nesting in a 12-foot and an eight-foot box. We banded two adults at each of these two nests. In August we checked these two boxes and found that the nests already had disintegrated, but previously were attached

about 19 inches from the bottom of the box. The amount of droppings and the lack of dead nestlings suggested that young fledged from both nests.

As a result of these findings, we have put up another 50 nest boxes (12-foot depth) in old-growth Grand Fir stands, in logged stands lacking nest trees, and in stands of Ponderosa Pine that would never have had nest trees. We want to determine if we can entice swifts to use this new habitat, as well as provide additional

nest sites in habitat where they are currently nesting. In many stands with severe tree mortality, the nest boxes will provide the only available nest sites for the next 100 to 200 years.

(Ms. Bull is Research Wildlife Biologist, Pacific Northwest Research Station, La Grande, Oregon. Her article appeared in the spring 1999 issue of *Chaetura*, the newsletter of Driftwood Wildlife Association, Austin, Texas. It is used with permission.)

Count Your Birds!



White-breasted Nuthatch
Feather by C. Page

Need something to do while your nest-box birds are overwintering in more tropical climes or hiding out in the woods?
Join Project FeederWatch!

You'll have so much fun FeederWatching—counting and identifying your feeder birds for ongoing research—you'll hardly miss those fair-weather friends. And you'll learn more about your own backyard birds.

FeederWatchers receive a quarterly newsletter plus a Project Kit and access to special web sites. The project runs November through March, but sign ups are taken any time. A \$15 annual fee covers the project cost.

For even more information or to sign up using VISA, MasterCard, or DISCOVER, call 800-843-BIRD (2473). Or, make check payable to "Project FeederWatch" and send to PFW/NAB, P.O. Box 11, Ithaca, NY 14851-0011

FeederWatching is easy and fun! At the same time, your counts help scientists keep track of feeder-bird populations.

"FeederWatch gives me a great excuse to watch my feeder birds in fall and winter when nest-box birds are elsewhere. It is guilt-free bird watching!"
Barbara Stinson, Warrenton, VA (Participant in Project FeederWatch, the Cornell Nest Box Network, and board member of the North American Bluebird Society).



Cornell Lab of Ornithology/National Audubon Society

Go to <<http://birds.cornell.edu/pfw>>

*Canadians please call Bird Studies Canada toll-free: 888-448-BIRD (2473)



Edited minutes from June board meeting

(This is an edited version of minutes from the June 16 and 17, 1999, meeting of the North American Bluebird Society board of directors.)

Doug LeVasseur reported that the affiliates list is growing. Affiliates represent over 8,000 individuals in the various organizations.

The educational bluebirding display at the NABS headquarters was installed for another season of visitors. A NABS volunteer (has been) at the display to answer questions and sell merchandise.

A total of 341 new members had joined NABS between May 1 and the middle of June.

Lisa Kivirist, co-executive director, reported that May 1999 catalog sales were 30 percent higher than May 1998 sales.

President Ray Harris congratulated Ron Kingston for serving as the Speakers Bureau chair for 10 years.

NABS is in the planning stages of working with the National Association of Conservation Districts on improvement and creation of new educational materials about bluebirds, including development of an educational comic book on cavity nesters. NABS will work with the association to create bluebird educational curricula and a financial agreement.

Arlene Ripley reported on development and progress of NABS domain and web site found at www.nabluebirdsociety.org. Reciprocal links which could take a visitor from the NABS web site to one which does not contain NABS-approved information or products were discussed. It was suggested that NABS require businesses selling bluebird-related items to become NABS corporate members before they receive a link on our web site. Named to a web site advisory com-

mittee to make recommendations to the board were Arlene Ripley (chair), John Ivanko, Lisa Kivirist, Nancy Niles, Ann Wick, and Marci Hoepfner.

Richard Tuttle wrote a letter to the board saying NABS conventions should not be held during bluebird nesting season. The discussion that followed pointed out that it is up to the host committee to decide the timing of the convention. Most of the board agreed that meeting during the nesting season is probably best. A motion was approved that the timing of the convention should be left up to the discretion of the hosting organization.

A suggestion was made that NABS have a committee of past convention chairpersons as a resource group to give advice to affiliate groups sponsoring conventions. Logical committee members would be past convention chairpersons. Dorene Scriven, Joan Harmet, Bob Ewart, and Bob Niebuhr volunteered to serve on this committee.

Colleen DeLong of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology reported on the new partnership established between NABS and the Lab. She discussed Bluebird-L, the Internet mailing list that serves as a venue for bluebird discussion, and Birdhouse Online, which allows persons to submit nesting-box data for a Lab research project.

A motion that NABS present a proposal to the David and Lucille Packard Foundation for funding for the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail was approved.

Don and Lillian Stokes are making a 20-25 minute educational video, and are interested in partnering with NABS. A motion was approved for NABS to continue exploring this.

A motion was approved to

explore a partnership relationship with Roads Scholars, Inc., which is interested in developing a six-day conservation trip incorporating, among other things, bluebird conservation.

The board will meet in Chicago, on Saturday, Oct. 16.

Insect scientist wants old nests

A scientist who studies insects is looking for used bird nests.

Dr. Terry Whitworth, Tacoma, Wash., co-author of a book on bird blowflies, invites you to send him used nests. Nests are needed from a variety of bird species, including both cavity nesters and those which use an open-cup nest. Most wanted are nests from species not commonly monitored or easily found.

Collect only inactive nests. It is important that the nest was used by nestlings for most or all of the nesting period. You need not identify signs of blowflies in the nest before you collect it.

Put collected nests in plastic ziplock bags. The nest should be dry. Keep bags cool and dry, and do not freeze. Check with local wildlife officials for collecting permission before taking nests.

Box and send the nests to Dr. Terry Whitworth, 3707 96th St. E., Tacoma, WA 98446. Dr. Whitworth will want samples from the 2000 nesting season as well.

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.

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

Manitoba

The Friends of the Bluebirds
3011 Park Ave.
Brandon, Manitoba, Canada R7B 2K3

Ontario

Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society
2-365 Green Valley Drive
Kitchener, Ontario, Canada N2P 1K3

Arkansas

Bella Vista Bluebird Society
c/o Jim Janssen, president
27 Britten Circle, Bella Vista AR 72714

California

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

Colorado

The Bluebird Project: The Denver Audubon Society & 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
1033 E. Washington, Iowa City IA 52240-5248

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

Rutherford County Bluebird Club
P.O. Box 247, Ellenboro NC 28040

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

Audubon Society of Corvallis
P.O. Box 148, Corvallis OR 97339

Pennsylvania

Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania
P.O. Box 267, Enola PA 17025

Virginia

The Virginia Bluebird Society
c/o Julie A. Kutruff / Anne Little
3403 Carly Lane, Woodbridge VA 22192

Washington

Cascade Bluebird and Purple Martin Society
3025 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

Book review

Bluebird Trails, A Guide to Success, Third Edition, edited by Dorene Scriven, published by the Bluebird Recovery Program, Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis, 1999.

Some bird books tell you where, others tell you what, this one tells you how, and does it as well as anyone could ask.

Now in its third incarnation, *Bluebird Trails* is more and better, an encyclopedia of details, stories, and photographs covering the bluebird world from early spring to late fall.

Ms. Scriven, instrumental in formation of the Bluebird Recovery Program and its missionary work across North America on behalf of bluebirds, has through her own passionate interest in this species become an authority on the specifics and idiosyncracies of bluebird propagation.

This book continues her efforts at providing sound and useful information, clearly presented, on birds, nest boxes and trails, monitoring procedures, nest-box competitors, predators, and bluebirds' feeding preferences. The book includes information on all three species of bluebirds, Eastern, Mountain, and Western. It is illustrated with a well-chosen selection of color photographs.

The book is valuable for anyone providing nest boxes for bluebirds. It also is a fascinating read for the birder who would enjoy being immersed in the detailed world of one seemingly simple creature.

— Jim Williams

(*Bluebird Trails*, \$12 postpaid, is available from the Bluebird Recovery Program, Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis, Box 3801, Minneapolis, MN 55403. Organizations ordering five or more copies for resale pay \$7.37 each plus shipping. The retail price of books so purchased cannot be less than \$10.50, not including postage.)

Join/renew NABS today

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- Donor \$250
- Life Membership \$500

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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
P.O. Box 74, Darlington, WI 53530**

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

NABS mission

The North American Bluebird Society, a non-profit conservation, education, and research organization, promotes the recovery of bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting bird species.

Send stories

Bluebird relies on stories, articles, and photographs from you. We also welcome your letters. Please include your name and address on all communications. Stories and articles are best submitted via e-mail or typed (double-spaced, please).

Send submissions to: Jim Williams, c/o *Bluebird*, 5239 Cranberry Lane, Webster, WI 54893. E-mail

<twojays@win.bright.net>.



BLUEBIRD (formerly *Sialia*)

North American Bluebird Society
P.O. Box 74
Darlington, Wisconsin 53530

Autumn 1999

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