

Bluebird

Journal of the North American Bluebird Society

Winter 2000

Formerly *Sialia*

Volume 22, Number 1



The hand of Ervin Davis of Charlo, Montana, holds a Mountain Bluebird fledgling from a nest box visited during the NABS convention in June 1999. The house is part of a trail maintained by Bob Niebuhr. See page 3 for more information and details on how you can purchase a color copy of this photo by Vivian Howard.

Identifying hen Wood Ducks by facial patterns. Story, illustrations on page 4.

Does removing used nests from boxes protect birds from blow flies? Page 7.

NABS 2000 Convention is waiting for you! Details, page 8

Recipe for winter food featuring cottonseed meal. See page 12.

Bluebird Sampler inside — order nest boxes



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From the President

By Ray Harris

Several years ago NABS board passed a motion to assist new affiliate state and provincial bluebird groups in getting started with a \$500 grant. One group which received assistance two years ago was the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania. Recently NABS received the following letter from them.

"Last year when our fledgling society was forming, NABS provided \$500 seed money to make sure we took flight. We sincerely appreciated that assistance. We now have over 400 members and are financially stable. As a result we enclose a check for \$500 to return the money and enable NABS to assist others."

What a remarkable, enthusiastic response.

This autumn, Ardell and I embarked on a 3,000-mile trip across the continent to Atlantic Canada. On the return portion, we stopped at a town in Quebec, Montmagny, on the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Montmagny is a stop-over for migrating Snow Geese which spend time here in the middle of October, feeding and resting before they begin the next major leg in their migration.

Montmagny holds a major 10-day festival to coincide with the birds' arrival, and residents have built a large educational and interpretative migratory bird centre along the shore of the St. Lawrence. One evening, as we gazed in the windows of the centre, we saw a display of feeders and nest boxes. Prominently displayed was a plaque which was inscribed "North American Bluebird Society —John and Nora Lane Award 1988, presented to Andre and France Dion for their contribution to Bluebird Conservation." Bluebirds and bluebirders are truly continent wide.

In the next issue of Bluebird there will be a condensed version of the October minutes of NABS executive board meeting. One new committee formed at that meeting is the Membership Committee. NABS sole source of operating revenue is derived from membership fees. These fees have been kept low in order to encourage a diverse range of bluebirders to join. I would urge you to renew and urge others to join.

Elsewhere in this issue you will find publicity on the NABS 2000 Convention in Galena, Illinois. The convention venue is a central east-west point in the continent. We hope you will plan to attend.

Many articles which come to me from newsletters outline the early history of bluebird nest-box trail pioneers in the late 1940s and early 1950s. An article in the Fall 1999 *Alberta Naturalist* by Dr. Edgar T. Jones mentions finding a large number of nest boxes on a fence line in central Alberta. Dr. Jones traced the boxes to two men, Earl Erickson, now 93, and Harry Scheideman. These two men placed and monitored over 400 boxes in the 1930s. This area now has one of the highest reported densities of bluebird/Tree Swallows in Alberta. What a fitting tribute for many years of grassroots efforts in conservation.

A high school chum of mine who now resides in Desert Hot Springs, California, wrote me saying his nine-year-old granddaughter informed her teacher that a friend of her grandfather's was the head bluebird man in the whole world, and his name was Rayardell. Nice to be famous even if I missed out on the rich part.

Prepping for Transcontinental Trail launch

Across North America, many NABS affiliated organizations are preparing for the launch of the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail in their state or province, and developing special Adopt-A-Box trails.

- In Nebraska, many Adopt-A-Box trail segments in public recreational areas developed by Bluebirds Across Nebraska will become part of the new 10-year project to create a statewide Trans Nebraska Bluebird Trail. Following a route that will wind 1,000 miles across the entire state, the Nebraska trail will rely on the expertise and dedication of county coordinators to help guide the developments and insure that the boxes are regularly monitored.

- In Oregon, the Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project will hold its Second Annual Champoeg Bluebird Festival May 20, 2000, at the Champoeg State Heritage Area in celebration of the TBT launch there. An Adopt-A-Box trail is being erected

in the Champoeg park.

- Using nest boxes built in partnership with National Audubon Society's Audubon Adventures' Camp Jeep in Virginia, the newly formed and affiliated Virginia Bluebird Society will create a trail at Meadowlark Gardens Regional Park. Three of the 18 boxes will be accessible to people with disabilities, and the park will distribute a self-guided brochure about the trail and the project. Other donated boxes will replace old boxes on several privately managed and registered TBT trails.

The voluntary participation in the TBT has sparked many new trail developments. If you would like to get involved with the TBT initiative in states with planned trails, contact the affiliates listed on page 23. Also, as the corporate underwriter of the TBT, Wild Birds Unlimited stores are serving as local TBT Headquarters, promoting bluebird conservation and facilitating sales of the Adopt-A-Box

sponsorships continent wide and welcome your involvement on a local level.

To date over 6,000 nest boxes on privately managed bluebird trails have been registered on the TBT. And to enhance the research efforts related to bluebird (and native, cavity nester) conservation, the NABS' board of directors recently approved a partnership with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to begin this Spring.

Visit the NABS website (www.nabluebirdsociety.org) for a more complete list of registered trails, and information about other partnerships and events related to the TBT.

Our cover photo

When NABS conventioners in Montana toured Bob Niebuhr's bluebird trail in June, photographer Vivian Howard of Great Falls, Montana, took the photo of the hand of Ervin Davis holding a Mountain Bluebird fledgling. Mr. Davis was giving a banding demonstration. "To me," said Ms. Howard, "the photo shows the love this man has for bluebirds, just by how comfortable and happy the bird seems to be."

Copies of the photo, in color and double matted for framing, are available from Ms. Howard by writing her at 4007 Hanging Tree Road, Great Falls, MT 59405. Prices are \$25 for 11x14, \$20 for 8x10, and \$15 for 5x7 (sizes are for matted measurements). Add \$5 for shipping and handling. Delivery will take about four weeks. Send a check or money order.

The trail is about 18 miles south of Stanford, Montana, and fledged 886 Mountain Bluebirds last season.

Bluebird

Published by
The North American
Bluebird Society © 2000
P.O. Box 74, Darlington, WI 53530

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address/telephone number
shown above. NABS web site
offers answers to many questions*

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Bluebird/Sialia (ISSN 0890-7021) is published quarterly by the North American Bluebird Society, P.O. Box 74, Darlington, WI 53530-0074. Subscription price is included in annual membership dues. Single copies \$2.50. Write for information about bulk quantities. Checks and money orders are made payable to North American Bluebird Society, in U.S. funds. Issues are dated Winter, Spring, Summer, and Autumn and appear approximately on the fifteenth of January, April, July, and October. Deadline for submission of material is three months prior to date of publication.

Identifying hen Wood Ducks by face pattern

By Roger Strand

From my home in west central Minnesota, I can observe many of my Wood Duck nest boxes from our breakfast window. Most of the boxes are mounted singly on free-standing, cone-guarded, six-foot poles. I can walk up and easily monitor them through their side-opening doors — daily, if needed.

My log book doesn't close very well, being happily jammed with years of observations and records of hatches and jumps. One particular theme, though, has taken over the pages in recent years.

With persistence, without banding or radio telemetry, it has become clear that one often can come to recognize individual Wood Duck hens, in unusual cases even year to year.

This can add a new dimension (to Wood Duck observations). For example, one can begin to make some sense of the local spring box competition.

In 1982, Michael Zicus, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources waterfowl researcher, published his findings regarding age determination in hen Wood Ducks. In his study, birds were live-trapped from wild flocks near Lac Qui Parle National Wildlife Refuge in western Minnesota.

Among other differences, he reported that the size of the hen's white eye ring is age-related: Immatures and yearlings, on average, have smaller rings than adult birds.

About five years ago, Ray Cunningham, who raised Wood Ducks in captivity for many years near St. Paul, offered up a challenge. He told me that, with practice, one can use eye-ring size, along with the presence of small accessory white and gray feather patches on the head and neck to roughly age and identify individual hens. He was right.

The accompanying illustration helps explain the scheme I now use to classify the heads of Wood Duck hens. It brings a measure of order to my log book observations, using four variable and visible (binoculars needed) characteristics.

1. Size of the white eye ring, ranging anywhere from trace up to 4+.

2. Shape of the eye rings, as recorded in a

Some Wood Duck facial patterns



A 1+ eye-ring; no bill ring.



A 2+ eye-ring with accessory patch between eye and bill.



A 3+ eye-ring with distinct bill ring and small accessory patch.



A 4+ eye-ring with wide bill ring and multiple patches.

simple head drawing. Some small eye rings are almost circular, while most will trail off in droplet shape to the rear. Notches can be present.

3. Presence or absence of another white ring, which creates a border around the base of the bill. In some young birds it is absent, while in older birds it can be prominent and may even merge with a 4+ eye ring.

4. Presence of small accessory patches of white or gray feathers anywhere on head or neck. Commonly, an extra patch will be present between the base of the bill and eye ring. Again, a simple drawing helps.

The observer may begin to match the physical head pattern with behavior. Example: During egg laying, individual hens develop the habit of using a particular viewing perch before dropping down to the box. When very unusual head patterns allow it, box choice and perching patterns may be recognized as consistent from one year to the next.

Since it is very common for more than one woodie hen to lay eggs in the same box or natural cavity (compound or dump nesting), it adds interest to be able to identify the two, three, or even more hens which frequent a particular nest site. A single hen will lay up to 16 eggs, with the usual range being 8 to 14 for an initial attempt. If she is in a serious egg-laying mode, a hen will lay one egg a day, with occasional skip days. Knowing this, late afternoon box checks may help determine how many hens are actively laying in a given box.

Observation is one thing and interpretation is another matter, and on a quite different level. Nevertheless, here is a sampling of interpretations from monitoring this particular 60-box unit. None of this is really new and perhaps could best be classed as what I think I know so far.

1. The majority of successfully hatched clutches contain eggs from more than one hen. This includes many where the clutch

Continued on page 5

Three species of bluebirds at one location

By Mike Henwood

On an early morning walk on the outskirts of the Tiara Rado Golf Course near Grand Junction, Colorado, in May 1999, I stood in one spot near the tee box for the 17th hole and observed all three bluebird species — Eastern, Mountain, and Western.

The Tiara Rado location is one of the few places in the United States where this could happen.

All three species were using nesting boxes near the southern and western edges of the back nine holes at Tiara Rado. Bob Wilson, as well as other folks at the golf course, have placed bluebird boxes on and around the course, and the bluebirds were using these boxes.

Both the Eastern and Western bluebirds raised two different broods. I observed adults of both species with young on May 31 and then

again on July 5. I suspect the mountain Bluebirds raised one brood and then left sometime in the latter half of May for higher elevations. I continued to see family groups of varying size of both Eastern Bluebirds throughout the summer and into September.

(This story first appeared in longer version in the Chukar Chatter, newsletter of the Grand Valley Audubon Society, October-November 1999, and is used with permission.)

— wood ducks

Continued from page 4
would be considered normal by total egg count alone.

2. It is the exception when this multi-hen, intraspecific laying pattern leads to abandonment, with dumped eggs lying in haphazard piles and with no attempt at incubation. In such a situation, production for that season can be salvaged by removing the eggs and starting afresh.

3. With more than one hen laying, it is almost a given that the oldest-looking bird will prevail and incubate the clutch.

4. A single, identifiable young hen may lay eggs in as many as three different boxes over a course of several weeks, and incubate none of them. As an older bird begins to incubate in the first box, the young hen may start adding eggs to a second box, until it too is taken over by an incubating older bird.

5. By the end of April, most house-hunting hens on this unit look young, with small eye rings. They occasionally enter boxes known to be occupied by an incubating older bird, sometimes staying 10 or more minutes. During this time, a late egg may be added to the clutch.

Some final thoughts arising from

these hen observations: A yearling hen that contributes eggs to a number of clutches before they are incubated could be said to have had a banner reproductive year, even though she doesn't go on to establish and incubate her own clutch. She has, after all, usually left her genetic material in the care of more experienced hens.

Studies of prairie dabbling ducks have concluded that old hens survive better and are more likely to hatch and carry a brood through to fledging. The same may be true for Wood Ducks.

Articles which discuss intraspecific compound nesting generally mention only the negative aspects, e.g. the abandoned dump nest. Watching an old, white-masked hen lead 20 or more genetically diverse ducklings to water suggests a couple of the positive reasons why this behavior presumably has persisted within the species for thousands of years.

(This article originally appeared in the Wood Duck Newsgram, August 1999, published by the Wood Duck Society, and is used with permission. Membership is \$8 per year. Write to Lloyd Knudson, 5463 W. Broadway Ave., Forest Lake, MN 55025.)

Top 10 feeder birds

Here is a list of the top 10 feeder birds of North America, in terms of frequency seen, as determined by the folks at Project FeederWatch, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

1. Dark-eyed Junco
2. Mourning Dove
3. House Finch
4. Downy Woodpecker
5. American Goldfinch
6. Blue Jay
7. Northern Cardinal
8. Black-capped Chickadee
9. White-breasted Nuthatch
10. European Starling

Meal worm poetry

The mealworm is a tasty worm.

I like it.

It has a glabrous epiderm.

I like it.

I peck it 'til it's good and dead,
And pulp it up, and smash its head,
Then feed my chicks, and go to bed.

I like it.

— B. Burdett, Poet Laureate of Sunapee, N.H.

Corrections

The story on American Kestrel nesting boxes in Delaware County, Ohio, which appeared in the Fall 1999 issue of *Bluebird*, first appeared in the Fall 1999 issue of *Bluebird Monitor*, the fine newsletter produced by Gil Trail for the Ohio Bluebird Society. It was used with permission, but we neglected to mention that. Our thanks, and our apologies for the oversight.

The caption for the photo of persons receiving awards at the NABS convention in Great Falls, Montana, in June, which appeared in the Fall 1999 issue of *Bluebird*, misidentified participants in the ceremony. Charles Nelson was not present. Erv Davis received the award for Justin Paugh, Youth Award winner. Also, Dave Heidenreich accepted the award presented to Herman Bressler, who was not present. We apologize for the errors.

Nest boxes to last forever

Every February I send out my annual eight or 10 letters to the editors of shrewdly chosen New Hampshire newspapers, offering my free packet of information and suggestions about attracting and rearing bluebirds. Each year I get something on the order of 350 requests, and my total as of this week is 1,705 over the five years since I started the conspiracy.

In 1996 I was surprised to receive a beautifully written letter from an inmate at the state prison. He explained to me how much he had enjoyed the bluebirds that nested at his folks' New Hampshire home when he was a child. He said he wanted to become a conspirator in my project. If I would send him some plans, he told me, he would make me a half-dozen houses each year and donate them to the cause.

I was a little skeptical, but I decided to give it a try, and I mailed him drawings for the standard NABS side-opening box. Halfway into March, he wrote me that his first batch of houses was done, and that I could pick them up at the prison store. He said I was in for a surprise when I saw them. He was right.

Because he was not permitted to use pine in the prison wood shop, he had decided to make them out of furniture-grade clear ash. They were meticulously built, perfect in every detail, and strong enough to deflect anything short of anti-tank fire.

Without question, I had the Cadillac of bluebird houses. And true to his word, every March he produces the promised half-dozen, and I find them waiting at the store, snugly shrink-wrapped in pairs.

We've become friends, and my wife and I visit him several times a year. We correspond regularly, and all his letters have been as finely composed as the first one. Best of all, the bluebirds seem to like his houses as much as I do, and neither squirrel nor woodpecker can make so much as a scratch on the entrance block. They've tried, but all they get is splitting headaches.

— Bruce Burdett, *New Hampshire Bluebird Conspiracy, Sunapee, N.H.*

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NABS web site

There is a new World Wide Web address for the North American Bluebird Society. You can find the NABS site at:
<www.nabluebirdsociety.org>

Does removing used nests from nest boxes protect birds from blow flies?

By Tracey Kast

Occasionally, people open their nest box to find maggots attached to the nestlings. Such a sight is disconcerting for anyone who has been closely monitoring the progress of nesting birds.

The maggots are the larval stage of bird blow flies, genus *Protocalliphora*. The female blow fly lays her eggs in a bird's nest. When the eggs hatch, the larvae climb up through the nest material, attach themselves to the growing nestlings, and suck their blood. Blow flies are found throughout most of North America, and are found in the nests of many birds species, including cavity-nesters.

Nest-box monitors everywhere want to know what they can do to prevent blow flies from parasitizing the birds in their nest boxes. Scientists are interested in blow flies because little is known about them and how much they harm their bird hosts.

Conventional wisdom tells nest-box monitors to clean out their nest boxes after a brood has fledged. One reason for doing this is to remove any remaining nest parasites, thereby preventing parasitism in future nests. This sounds sensible, but is it correct? Does removing a used nest protect nestlings of subsequent nests from blow flies?

Data collected by the Cornell Labora-

tory of Ornithology Nest Box Network participants since 1997 say, no. In boxes where used nests were removed, 14 percent had blow flies. In boxes that contained used nests, 11 percent of the nests had blow flies. These percentages are not significantly different, telling us that cleaning your box before a nest attempt does not affect whether blow flies will parasitize the next birds to nest in the box.

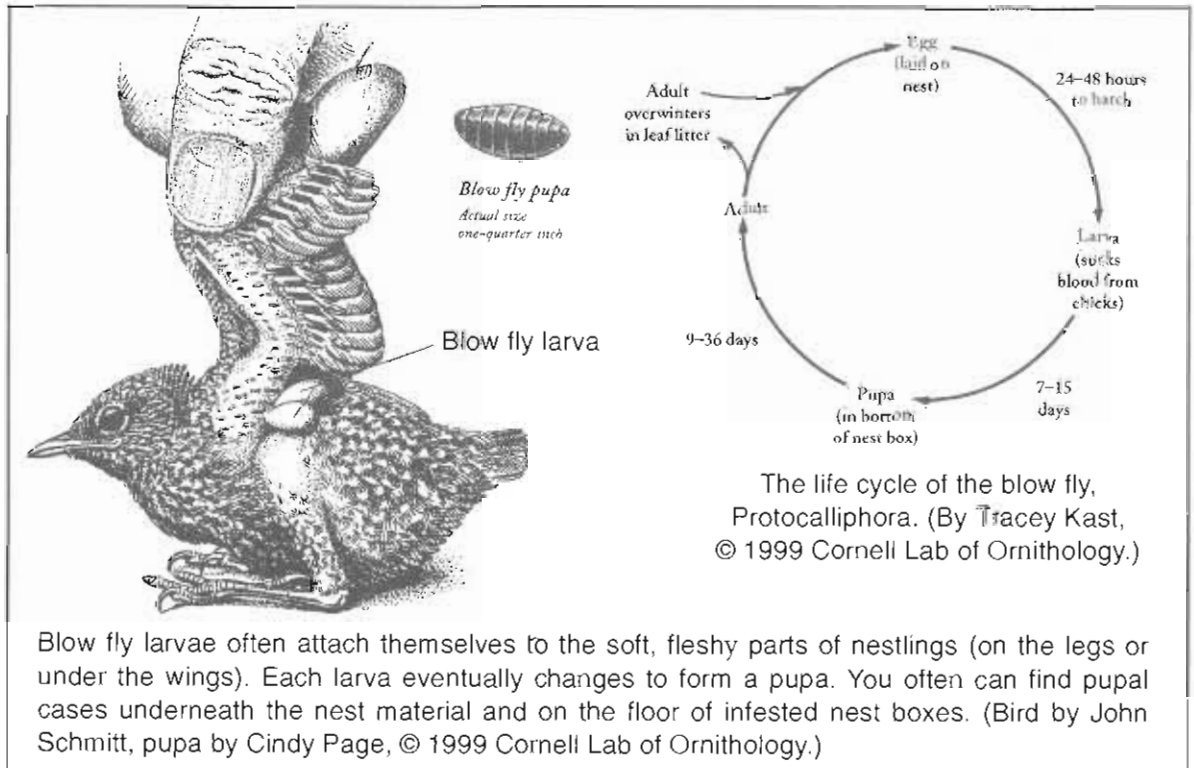
The study includes blow fly data reported for 24 species. Of these species, blow flies were reported in nests of 10 species: Ash-throated Flycatcher, Tree Swallow, Purple Martin, Black-capped Chickadee, House Wren, Eastern Bluebirds, Western Bluebird, Mountain Bluebird, House Finch, and House Sparrow.

This result is preliminary and only the tip of the iceberg. The lab has data from 1999 to include in the

analysis. There are more questions to ask about birds and blow flies. For example, the study includes multiple species, but what about individual species? It may be that cleaning nest boxes decreases blow fly parasitism for Eastern Bluebirds but not Tree Swallows, or vice versa. Does blow fly parasitism affect the number of young that fledge from the nest? Also, does the incidence of blow fly parasitism vary within different regions of the country?

If you would like to help answer these and other questions about cavity-nesting birds, call 800/843-BIRD.

(This article first appeared in the Autumn 1999 issue of BirdsScope, newsletter of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. It is used with permission. For information on membership in the Lab, call 607/254-BIRD or write 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, NY 14850.)



Where Bluebirds Fly and Eagles Soar

Galena • Jo Daviess County • Illinois

Galena, Illinois, is sometimes called "the town that time forgot." You won't forget it, not after attending the North American Bluebird Society's convention there June 22-25, 2000.

Eighty-five percent of town buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Its Main Street is a smorgasbord of antique stores and charming shops and restaurants. And the history! Well, more about that elsewhere.

Hosting this year's convention is the Jo Daviess County Natural Area Guardians.

Featured speakers will be Don and Lillian Stokes, authors of many popular books on birds, including *The Bluebird Book*.

THE SETTING

The site will be Chestnut Mountain Resort, a full-service resort eight miles southeast of Galena on a wooded palisade overlooking the Mississippi River. The special rates apply to early arrivals and those extending their stay to vacation in the area.

For other accommodations or campgrounds or RV facilities, contact the Galena Jo Daviess County Convention and Visitors Bureau: 800/747-9377 or <www.galena.org>. An impressive list of places to stay is available.

For those flying to the area, the Dubuque (Iowa) Regional Airport is an hour away. You may rent a car there (Avis, 800/331-1212; National, 800/227-7368) or a Chestnut Mountain Resort van will meet planes for \$12 per person. Discount is available to parties arriving on same flight. For van service, make arrangements with the resort.

NABS 2000 CONVENTION WILL FEATURE DON & LILLIAN STOKES, AUTHORS OF "THE BLUEBIRD BOOK"

THE PROGRAM

The NABS 2000 Convention events take full advantage of the uniqueness of this area in northwestern Illinois that the Ice Age glaciers spared. Following a day of registration on Thursday, June 22, slide presentations will acquaint you with the area. "The Geology of The Driftless Area" and "Birds of Illinois" will be presented at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. No registration is required.

Thursday also will include meetings of NABS directors and of NABS

affiliates.

Three different all-day field trips are planned for Friday, June 23.

Choose from "Birding and Botanizing," "History and Geology," or "Mississippi River: Up Close and Personal." All trips return to the resort in time to relax by the pool, to visit the NABS exhibit room, or simply to enjoy the view. Trip details are in an accompanying article. (**See insert to register for trips.**)

A sumptuous hog roast, a local tradition, caps the evening. It follows a 5 p.m. guided bus tour through The Galena Territory, a premier golf resort which is home to several bluebird trails, to the Galena Winery, where the vineyard may be toured and the wines sampled.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Saturday, at 9 a.m., the general meeting will begin. Keynote speakers will be Don and Lillian Stokes, two of America's best-selling nature writers. You will have the opportunity to meet the authors throughout the weekend.

A buffet lunch will be served overlooking the Mississippi River.
Continued on page 9

You MUST register for rooms, convention by June 1 (but earlier is better!)

Please look for the insert in this issue of *Bluebird* to register for the convention (\$25 fee per person includes Saturday lunch), as well as the field trips on Friday (per person fees range from \$20 to \$30), the hog roast Friday night (cost is \$20 per person), the banquet

and entertainment Saturday evening (cost \$25 per person), Sunday morning diversion (no fee, but registration is required).

Co-chairpersons for the convention are Joan Harmet (815/845-2390) and Grace Storch (815/777-9691), e-mail address <jdswcd@humus.com>.

— convention information

Continued from page 8

Beginning at 1:30 p.m., six 45-minute programs will be offered, two each hour. The schedule will be posted. Pick and choose as you wish.

The programs are "Discovering Bird Life at the Savanna Army Depot," presented by Dr. Dan Wenny, biologist with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources; "Migratory Birds—It's a Tough Life," by Dr. Scott Robinson, University of Illinois professor and Illinois Natural History Survey biologist; "Life on the Mississippi River," by Jerry Enzler, executive director of The Mississippi River Museum, Dubuque, Iowa; "Soaring Eagles and Sinking Species," by Sue Lauzon, IDNR Endangered Species Protection Board; "Bluebirds 2000," by Dr. Kevin Berner, chairman of NABS Research Committee; and "How to Fledge Bluebirds On-line: Utilizing Web Pages to Promote Bluebird Conservation," by Lisa Kivirist and John Ivanko, co-executive directors of NABS.

THE BANQUET

A cash bar opens at 6 p.m. The annual NABS banquet follows at 7 p.m. at the resort, and it will include awards presentations, musical entertainment, and The Main Street Players, who will present "Remembering Old Galena," a fascinating portrait of the

town's colorful history. (See insert to register for the banquet.)

For those staying over, Sunday morning diversions are offered: Serious Birding (early start, transportation provided); Nature Journal Writing (tips from Sheryl DeVore, noted Illinois journalist and photographer); Bluebird Collectible Road Show (Kyle Husfloer, editor of "The Antique Trader," will give pointers. Bring items or photos.). No fee for these events; see insert to sign up.



3 all-day field trips planned

Three all-day field trips are offered Friday, June 23. Each trip will return in plenty of time for you to relax before heading off for Friday evening's tour and hog roast.

Birding and Botanizing — \$20 per person. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Spring Lake Refuge is a system of dikes and ponds rich in bird life. Yellow-headed Blackbirds can be seen, and White Pelicans often are counted in the hundreds. The Savanna Army Depot, a former 13,000-acre military base, contains some rare sand prairie, with unique and endangered flora and fauna. It is home to Upland Sandpipers, Loggerhead

Shrikes, Red-shouldered Hawks, and Bald Eagles, and other species. A box lunch will be provided at the Mississippi Palisades State Park. This trip includes three stops.

History and Geology — \$20 per person. The Tri-State Area (parts of Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin) was once known for its lead mines. It was a rich and thriving area before the Civil War. An hour north in Wisconsin, we will be touring the historic Platteville Lead Mine and Museum. Box lunches will be enjoyed at the Apple River Canyon State Park, home to the rare bird's-eye primrose, which exists by clinging to the cold canyon walls of the Apple River. A brief tour of the Apple River Fort in Elizabeth will tell the story of the settlers' battle against Black Hawk and his warriors in 1832. This trip has three stops.

Mississippi River: Up Close and Personal — \$30 per person. There is limited space on this boat trip. Only 50 people will be able to experience the backwaters of the river with a naturalist. They will tour the Riverboat Museum in Dubuque, Iowa, and take a two-and-a-half-hour boat ride. A box lunch is included.

See registration insert in this issue.

About Chestnut Mountain Resort

This beautiful 119-unit resort offers rooms with a view of the Mississippi River to early registrants. It's a perfect place for a family vacation, offering an indoor pool, whirlpool, sauna, children's programs, miniature golf, mountain bike rental, horseshoes, volleyball, Alpine Slide, game room, and playground. Care for children under 10 years old may be arranged through the hotel.

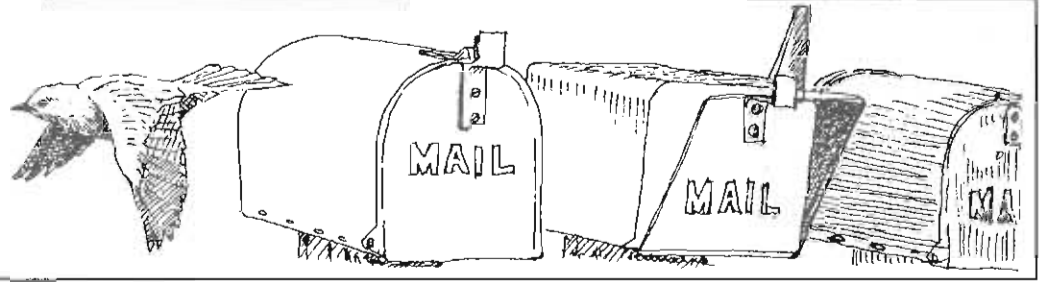
You'll also find restaurants, a

lounge, apparel shop and a gift shop.

Make your reservation directly with the resort.

Room rates per night are: Single, \$90; Double, \$95; Triple, \$100; Quad, \$105. To make reservations, call the resort toll-free 1-800-397-1320. The resort also may be contacted via

<www.chestnutmtn.com>.



Don't pit cavity nesters against each other

To the editor,

Most cavity-nesters have been dealt a bum hand by our burgeoning human population and its resultant urban sprawl (in California, at least). I think we should be careful about pitting one cavity-nester against another, since, in the final analysis, there is a shortage of cavities.

Since we are intervening (I prefer ameliorating), I have no problem with making informed choices on which species we choose. I have my own hierarchy of preferences, as most people do. Mine is not based on color or behavior; rather it's based on increasing and decreasing populations and the species' own ability to do something about it.

Primary cavity builders get little of my attention (woodpeckers, for example) unless a particular species is endangered (Red-cockaded). Secondary cavity-nesters that have alternative nesting opportunities also are not my target species. (House Wrens can nest in a number of concealed sites or make their own pile of twigs. Even Mountain Bluebirds often nest in crevices in rocks in the high mountains.)

If the population is declining in the particular area in which I'm working, I give those species my preference. That means, if I lived in the East, I'd no longer be working hardest for Eastern Bluebirds. Because of all of you, they've come back. So have the Mountain Bluebirds, (and) maybe Western Blue-

birds in Oregon and the east slope of the Rockies.

Here in my backyard, the close relative of the House Wren, the Bewick's Wren, needs help. The Oak Titmouse finds its oak moths are sprayed in most of the major subdivisions where planning commissions require builders to leave the trees. Violet-green Swallows are in short supply.

The California Waterfowl Association has done such a good job some environmentalists are worrying about other species of ducks being squeezed out by the woodies. But the Common Barn Owl is in very short supply. Vineyardists have finally gotten the word and barn owl houses are sprouting up all over our Central Valley because the owls are such good gopher-getters.

I am concerned that we put our efforts where they are needed most, and not pit species against each other without a reasonable analysis of their needs in each geographic area.

— *Hatch Graham, editor, Bluebirds Fly, California Bluebird Recovery Program, El Dorado County*

Bluebirds in urban backyards do well

Dear editor,

I have read with interest various comments about location, and how bluebirds would be better off if we placed boxes on country trails instead of near the house where we can watch them. I agree in part, but must remind everyone that some of

us don't have the stamina to trot around for a mile carrying stepladders, etc.

Fortunately, it is indeed possible to raise bluebirds near the home. I live in a suburb of a small city where the yards are around half an acre, with established trees. My nest box most preferred by the birds is 10 yards from the garage. All boxes are mounted at six feet so I can see without stepladders. While not ideal, we have fledged almost 40 bluebirds in six years, which pleases me, since almost no one in the area has ever seen a bluebird.

We also have tree swallows and chickadees every year, and once a Red-breasted Nuthatch. I hang lots of flimsier boxes along the trees at the very back to keep the wrens happy. I visit all neighbors who feed birds or put out water and suggest good locations for a box. I invite them and all the many children into my garage to watch the birds at the box, and lift them up to see the babies.

I put rolls of chicken wire under active boxes extending out five or six feet on either side to deter cats and ground predators (it can easily be rolled away for lawn mowing), and monitor daily. The children chase any cat, chipmunk, squirrel, or starling from the boxes, and tell me immediately if they hear a House Sparrow (I show them pictures and play bird tapes).

Three of my neighbors fledged bluebirds this year and are getting an enormous kick out of the whole thing! And hopefully the kids will
Continued on page 11

— letters

Continued from page 10

grow up to be bluebirders. Back yards perhaps offer a great opportunity for all of us who can't monitor a trail. The bluebirds would probably prefer wide-open spaces, but seem to be adapting very well to our neighborhood.

— *Dot Forrester, Oswego, New York (a very small city 40 miles north of Syracuse, on the eastern tip of Lake Ontario)*

He favors variety

Dear editor,

Responding to Karen Lippy's letter in the Autumn 1999 issue, I totally agree with her comments about not discouraging other cavity nesters such as the chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Bewick's Wren, etc. On my 88-bluebird-house trail (to be increased to 100+ in 2000), I enjoy the variety and actually place some of my houses in wooded areas where the chances of attracting birds other than bluebirds is very high.

It is a real thrill to see a tiny chickadee pair raise as many as eight young in a single nest, and Tufted Titmice often have nearly as many. I also like the way the female titmouse pecks loudly on the inside of the nest box to warn you to stay away! These other cavity nesters usually have only one family per year, and I often have bluebirds moving in for their second nesting after these birds have fledged. The weather is much warmer then, and it appears that the bluebirds are more inclined to use these shaded areas for their second families.

— *Bluebird Bob Walshaw, Coweta, Oklahoma*

Backyard bird count will be February 18-21

With the recent proposed delisting of the Bald Eagle from the federal Endangered Species List, people across North America are being asked to help monitor this magnificent species as part of the third annual Great Backyard Bird Count Feb. 18-21.

The Great Backyard Bird Count



Bald Eagle

(GBBC), a joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, asks everyone to count the numbers and kinds of birds that visit their feeders, local parks, schools, and other areas during these four days. Participants enter their reports online at BirdSource <<http://birdsource.org>>, a user-friendly, state-of-the-art web site developed by National Audubon and the Lab.

Now that the conservation status of Bald Eagle may change, the North American public is being asked to keep an eagle-eye out for our national symbol.

National Audubon and the Cornell Lab also need all sightings of less high-profile birds, like the chickadees, finches, and jays most bird lovers may take for granted.

To participate in this year's count, simply tally the highest number of each bird species seen at one time (to prevent counting the same birds more than once) and record the amount of time spent counting. Then go to the BirdSource web site and click on the appropriate state or province for a checklist of the most frequently reported birds in that region. Results will be updated hourly in the form of animated maps and colorful graphs for all to view, so participants will be able to see right away how their observations fit into the continent-wide snapshot.

Citizen bird watchers are also encouraged to help get their communities involved. For more information, call the Cornell Lab of Ornithology toll-free 1-800-843-BIRD (2473).

Joan Davis dies

Joan Davis of Dayton, Ohio, long involved with bluebirds died on Oct. 29, 1999, in Dayton, Ohio. Her involvement with the Ohio Bluebird Society (OBS) and the North American Bluebird Society was extraordinary in all the lives touched, feathered and human.

Joan was a Charter Member of OBS, and served as a secretary and a board member. She and husband Bill received the society's prestigious Ohio Blue Feather Award in 1996.

Cottonseed meal makes good food for wintering birds

Howard Malone of Marion, Miss., has come up with a less expensive way to provide bluebirds with healthy fare. He uses cottonseed meal instead of some of the spendier items found in many recipes for food supplements.

"It's 43 percent protein. I considered it a substitute for the nuts and peanut butter for economy reasons," Mr. Malone said in a recent e-mail on the Bluebird-L network. "It attracts not only bluebirds but Blue Jays, mockingbirds, wrens, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Downy Woodpeckers, sapsuckers, Chipping Sparrows (by the dozens!), and crows. The meal is so attractive that I had to build excluders to keep the larger birds from getting it all.

"I introduced the bluebirds to the mixture by smearing a little on the top of a dozen fence posts scattered around my garden. The smaller birds, notably Chipping Sparrows, found it first, and soon the bluebirds followed.

"The mixture has become so popular for a number of larger birds, notably Blue Jays, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, and crows, that I have constructed hardware cloth cages which restrict them from taking the whole wad, but allows entry to bluebirds and smaller friends. And I can load more into each feeder.

"Our poodle also loves it. That's how I get him to go with me for his walks."

Mr. Malone explained that "cottonseed meal is a by-product of the process to extract the oil from the de-linted cotton seed. It is used extensively as a protein supplement in beef cattle feed, particularly during the winter. It also might be used by the dairymen in your area. Check with your local cop-op/feed/seed store.

"Plant nurserymen also might

carry the product as a fertilizer. As it decomposes in the soil, it releases nitrogen slowly, preventing the over-enthusiastic gardener from burning his/her plants."

Cottonseed Meal Recipe

(Use the cheapest ingredients available. Bluebirds do not recognize brand names.)

4 cups cornmeal

1 cup plain flour

1 cup cottonseed meal (replaces peanut butter called for in other recipes)

1 cup applesauce or mashed



Black-capped Chickadee

Thank you

NABS would like to thank the Purple Martin Conservation Association for its generous donation of two Macintosh computers and software. These computers will help sustain NABS as the organization continues to grow. If you have computer/office equipment that you would like to donate to NABS, please contact the NABS headquarters.

banana (my experimental additions)
2 cups lard, barely melted in microwave

1/2 cup finely chopped raisins

1/2 cup finely chopped nuts (pecans here in the South)

With the steel blade of a food processor, finely chop the raisins in one cup of cornmeal — count the cornmeal as one of the four cups called for in the recipe. This prevents the raisins from forming a gooey mess. (I do several batches at a time to minimize cleaning the processor. Freeze the extra batches in plastic sandwich bags.)

Finely chop the nuts in the same processor. (I also make several batches of nuts at one time. Freeze as above.)

Combine all dry ingredients in a large pan. I use a 10-qt. plastic dishpan from Wal-Mart. Mix thoroughly until well blended.

Mix in the applesauce. It begins to get lumpy, so more effort is required to get a smooth mix.

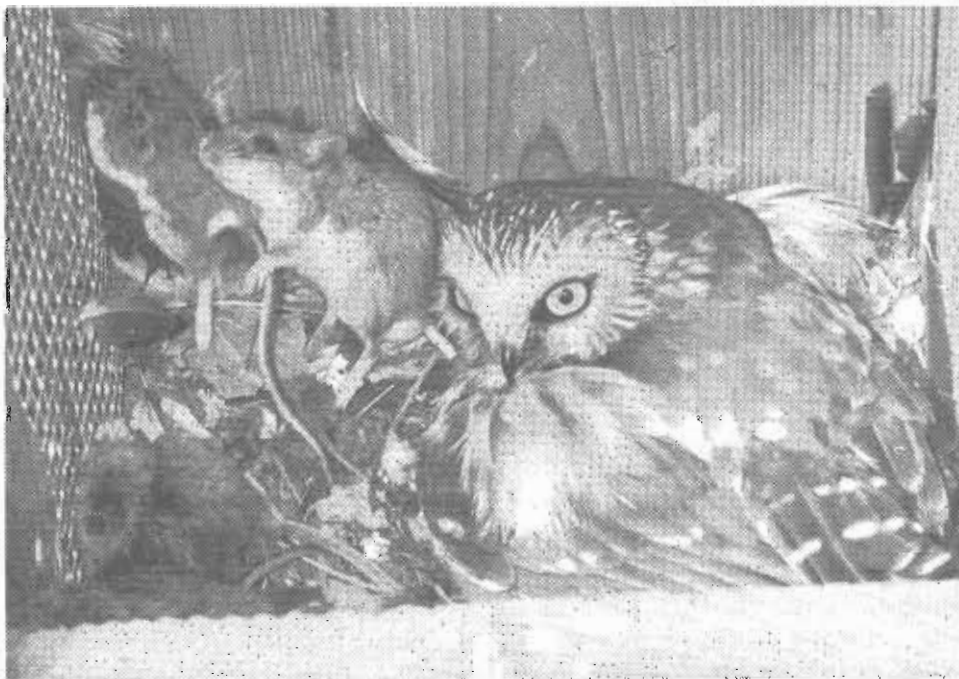
Pour most of the melted lard into the mix while stirring. (Northerners should experiment, adding some vegetable oil with the lard to maintain an edible consistency when cold.) I use Miss Anne's heavy-duty, hand-held mixer. The going gets rough here; I finish the mixing with my hands, squishing the mixture through my fingers.

The mixture now can be formed into a ball which will stand alone; the process is similar to making biscuit dough. If it is too dry, add a little lard (or vegetable oil in cold climates). If too greasy, use less lard next time, or dust on a little flour. By dividing and sub-dividing, the recipe makes 16 balls the size of a handball.

Place on a cookie sheet, freeze, and store in a plastic bag. Defrost in microwave (15 seconds) before using.



Nest-box monitor Bob Clayton, second from the left, speaks to members of the Sons of Norway about nesting bluebirds. This nest box is part of the Pecatonica River Trails Park near the headquarters of the North American Bluebird Society in Darlington, Wisconsin. This trail is the third segment in the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail now under development. Carol McDaniel, NABS vice president of community relations, coordinates the monitors for this 13-box park trail. Another nest-box monitor, Velma Klenke, is at the far right. (Photo by John McDaniel.)



A Northern Saw-whet Owl nested in spring 1999 in a Wood Duck box at Stillwater, Minnesota. The box, 8x8x18 inches, contained about five inches of cedar chips, and was mounted nine feet above the ground in a wooded area. When the box was checked for nestlings, in mid-April, five dead White-footed Mice were found. The literature says that this species of mouse is the preferred prey of Saw-whet Owls. Saw-whet Owls weight about three ounces each, deer mice less than an ounce. Here, you can clearly see two mice at the upper left. The owl visible is the brooding female. (Photo by Kraig Kelsey. Used by permission of the Wood Duck Society, Forest Lake, Minnesota.)

Program finds new homes for used optics, aids bird conservation efforts

Birders' Exchange is a collaborative program by the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences and the American Birding Association which collects birding equipment — binoculars, scopes, tripods, cameras, tape recorders, field guides, bird books, camping gear — and distributes it to environmental organizations in Latin American and Caribbean countries.

The effort is being made in support of ornithological research and conservation work done by schools, universities, and governmental agencies in those countries.

Birders' Exchange is a clearing house for these donated materials. It has already helped more than 100 groups in 26 countries. New or used equipment in good working condition is welcomed, as are financial contributions in support of the program.

A good pair of used binoculars or an old field guide is a priceless tool for a researcher with nothing but an inquiring mind and an eye for birds.

Birders' Exchange is partnered with 25 or more outstanding conservation groups and companies in support of this important research work. Further information can be obtained by contacting Lina DiGregorio, program director, at <cdcon@aba.org> or by phoning her at 719/578-9703.

Orphaned chick raised by foster parents

By Susan McCutcheon

Each spring nature offers multiple challenges for the Eastern Bluebirds' mating attempts, ranging from radical temperature fluctuations to competition from several other avian species and predators.

I monitor nest boxes from April to August, and it is a constant and changing battle for our passive New York State bird against the aggressive Tree Swallows, tenacious House Sparrows, nest box hoarding wrens, and even Black-capped Chickadees.

Nineteen-ninety-nine was a banner year for bluebirds. I checked on 50 boxes this hot and dry summer in Robert Treman State Park, Butter-milk Falls State Park, Robert Treman Marina and Taughannock State Park. Ten pairs of bluebirds attempted to nest at least once, seven pairs of bluebirds made a second attempt and two pairs nested for a third time. The bluebirds that I observed generally laid five or six eggs in the first nesting attempt, one or two fewer in the second nesting attempt, and on the rare occasion of a third clutch, three eggs could be expected. Bluebirds begin incubating their eggs when the last egg of a clutch is laid. The eggs generally hatch within two weeks and all on the same day.

Of the nest boxes that I monitored, two were of particular interest. In Box 30, during a second nesting attempt, only one of three eggs hatched. The lone chick was thriving, for a few days anyway. It then became apparent that the adults had abandoned the nest or died. When I opened the box, the chick was cuddling next to two cold, blue eggs, and had become too weak to open its usual gaping mouth. An unusually large third clutch in Box T-3 had all hatched and the box was full of six rapidly growing bluebird chicks.

There seemed to be three choices: I could concede that Mother Nature is tough on her children and this lone chick was destined for an abbreviated existence; I could assume parentage, but I am not that good at chewing worms; or I could interfere with Mother Nature's scheme and give the overworked parents of Box T-3 another mouth to feed.

The transfer was made at dusk. I held the sparsely feathered chick of Box 30 in the palm of my hand for the walk across the fields to the new home. I was hoping that the parents



Eastern Meadowlark

would make a miraculous appearance and aggressively dive and swoop around my head as I stole into the night with their lone offspring. There were no bluebird sounds that evening, only the crickets. The adult bluebirds tending the nestlings in Box T-3 flew off as I approached with the new sibling.

The transfer would dispel the old wives' tale that the smell of human scent on the feathers would cause the adults to abandon their parental duties. I quickly placed the orphaned chick on top of the nestful of bodies and retreated to the cover of a nearby tree to observe any immediate reaction by the adult pair. Within minutes, the female returned to the box with a worm dangling from her beak. She cautiously glanced around from the nest box top and proceeded to make a rapid drop-off while

perched in the entrance hole, seemingly unaware of another mouth to feed.

The next morning when I opened the nest box, I was fully expecting the orphan chick to have died under the scrambling of the six robust, resident chicks during the night.

Instead, I was pleasantly greeted to seven sparsely feathered bodies facing heads out like the spokes on a wheel. The orphan chick was easy to spot because it was a few days younger in feather growth. Overnight it had become part of the clutch.

Part of my nest box monitoring involves banding the right legs of the chicks at about nine days of age with a U.S. Department of Interior band from the Bird Banding Laboratory in Maryland. The number on the band is one of a series of band numbers authorized to the holder of the permit. When I recapture a bird with a leg band, the location, date, and age of the particular bird banded can be identified by reporting the number to Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, Dispersal Study. They collectively report the bandings and recaptured adult band numbers of this study to the Bird Banding Laboratory.

Birds found that are not part of this study can be reported directly to the address found on the inside of the leg band: Bird Band, Laurel, MD 20708 USA, or by calling 1-800-327-BAND.

The data collected from the banding of the adults and nestlings is used to determine how far the birds move to breed from year-to-year. As next season approaches, be on the lookout for an Eastern Bluebird with band #1571-97842. It's a survivor!

(Ms. McCutcheon, a full-time mom, beekeeper, and bluebird enthusiast, lives in Ithaca, New York.)

Two females lay, one raises 7 young

Editor's Note: Carolyn Hall lives at Bassett, which is in the sandhills of north central Nebraska. She is an Audubon member, a member of Bluebirds Across Nebraska (B.A.N.), and the county coordinator for B.A.N. in Keya Paha, Rock and Brown counties. She does bluebird programs in schools, at county fairs, and for the NE Ranch Expo held each June in Bassett.

During the 1998 nesting season she monitored 34 boxes. There were 22 Peterson houses which fledged 115 bluebirds and nine Tree Swallows; four slot boxes fledged 24 bluebirds and six tree swallows; seven NABS houses fledged 27 bluebirds and 11 Tree Swallows. One box, she believes, had two different birds lay eggs in it. Here is the story.

By Carolyn Hall

On April 24, I erected a Peterson box along a country road. A day or two later, both male and female bluebirds were coming and going from the box. On May 2, it contained three eggs. Four days later, it still contained three eggs. But, on May 10, it contained seven eggs.

On May 15 the box had EIGHT eggs in it! Another female must have discovered the box and laid five eggs. Now, how was she going to incubate EIGHT?

When I checked the box on May 24, it contained six tiny babies and two eggs. On May 25 the count stood at seven babies and one egg. Would that last egg hatch?

On May 31, one egg was still in the nest with the rapidly growing babies so I removed it. It had never started to grow an embryo so it either was infertile or perhaps it got too cold.

I had been worrying about how the parents were going to feed seven baby bluebirds, so I got some mealworms and began feeding two days before the eggs hatched. I nailed an aluminum pan to the top of a fence post near the box.

One day I watched Mama returned with a moth, then immediately fly to the pan and eat 30 worms. I had the 20-power spotting scope on her and watched her swallow them. Then she began to ferry the worms to the box. She would pick up six or seven at a time.

The male continued to bring moths from the trees to the south. He never did visit the worm pan while I was there.

We had two days of cold, rainy weather June 7 and 8. I was gone, so on June 10 I went to see if the babies were still in the box. When I arrived I could hear them squabbling inside. I peeked carefully into the box and it was FULL of blue.

I put two generous handfulls of mealworms in the pan and almost immediately Mama was there. First she ate and then she began to feed the BIG babies inside. Papa again appeared from the trees, but I could not see what he was carrying.

When I checked the box on June 12, all was quiet. I cautiously opened the box, and a baby bluebird flopped out. I managed to catch it in the tall grass and put it back into the nest. I put mealworms in the pan and left.

When I returned about 20 minutes later, the male bluebird was on the gravel road and took an insect into the box. Then he caught another insect and took it into the tall grass about 15 yards from the box. He repeated this about three times and there must have been at least two babies in the grass because he would land in two different spots about a yard apart. Then he left, and so did I. I hoped it would not rain that night and that varmints would not discover the baby birds in the grass.

On June 13, the box was empty, mealworms all gone. Time to clean out the nest box, take down the pan, and wait for the next bluebird to lay her eggs.

Timing on removal of House Sparrows

If there is one best time to remove a House Sparrow nest it is right after all eggs are laid and the incubation has started. This is when you have the best chance of evicting them with no return and no retaliation on other birds.

Cleaning out a House Sparrow nest at any other time is not a good idea unless you have trapped and rid the area of the male. Repeated removal of a House Sparrow nest can cause them to destroy other birds nests. Many people do replace the eggs in the sparrow nest with infertile eggs and make it through the season.

I still prefer trapping and ridding the area of these pests since there is no threat remaining. These are birds we can't trust near bluebirds.

— Joe Huber, charter member NABS, charter member Ohio Bluebird Society, Life member OBS.

Golf course program produces many birds

By Don Tilly

There have been six nesting seasons since we installed 20 bluebird houses on the golf course of Woodway Country Club, Darien, Conn., in the spring of 1993. We had begun our association with the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program (ACSP) in August 1991, and wildlife enhancement cover was only one of several categories which needed to be completed for Woodway to become certified under the sanctuary program.

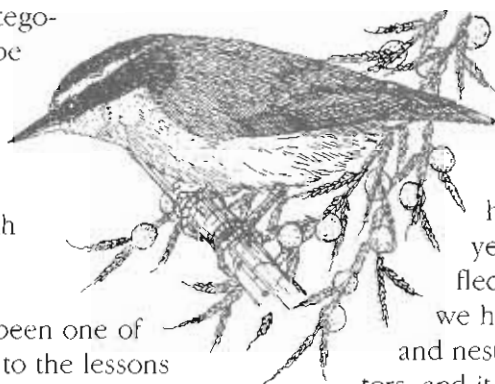
Our experience with bluebirds in the years since establishing the country club trail has been one of learning and adapting to the lessons taught by nature. We have learned that bluebirds are not as timid as originally thought. Placement of boxes in the golf course's tee-off areas proved to be the most productive locations, regardless of human traffic.

Nest boxes must be kept away from heavily wooded areas because that is the habitat of wrens — who also like our boxes; they are much more aggressive, and will drive away bluebirds. Bluebirds and swallows seem to compete about evenly for nesting sites, but the swallows will use other places, such as under the wooden bridges which cross the streams running through the golf course, and they usually begin nesting later in the season, giving bluebirds a head start.

Bluebirds are territorial, and nest boxes must be separated by 100 yards, which for me is about a nine iron. Bluebirds love the open fair-

ways of Woodway, and they feed voraciously on insects and caterpillars, reducing the need for insecticides. Their brilliant blue color adds to the beauty and enjoyment of our exceptional golf course.

As we complete this sixth nesting season (1998), we can look back and see significant progress each year.



In 1996, we fledged 56 bluebirds; in 1997, 62 were fledged; and in 1998, we had a banner year with 82 fledged. However, we have lost 41 eggs and nestlings to predators, and it is here that we hope to show improvement with the installation of Noel guards.

Our bluebird story is only a small part of the work of the ACSP committee and its impact on the environment at Woodway. Other significant measures of the success of this program are the 73 species of birds identified during bird walks held twice a year on the golf course and, although the quality of the water in our streams and ponds always has been good, the water quality improvement.

Our certification is evidence of our desire to be good citizens of the community in which we operate, and it is our best defense against the naysayers who constantly beleaguer golf courses for creating environmental disasters.

(Mr. Tilly resides in New Canaan, Conn., and Naples, Fla.)

Above, a Red-breasted Nuthatch.

15,000 U.S. golf courses offer much potential for bird conservation

The Audubon International Cooperative Sanctuary Program (not affiliated with or part of the National Audubon Society) offers a non-regulatory approach to environmental enhancement and wildlife conservation for golf courses.

In 1996, its golf course nest-box survey collected information for 4,400 boxes on 175 courses. Participants reported 9,612 fledged birds, including 4,158 bluebirds, 2,558 Tree Swallows, 1,093 Purple Martins, and 565 House Wrens. An Osprey platform was part of one golf course's program, and endangered Red-cockaded Woodpeckers benefited from the efforts of golf courses in North Carolina.

What is the potential of golf courses for bird conservation? There are about 15,000 courses in the United States, occupying about four million acres of land, 70 percent of it considered out of play.

For information on this effort, contact Audubon International, 46 Rarick Road, Selkirk, NY 12158, e-mail <acss@audubonintl.org>.

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

Tools for the trail — a list of ideas

By Dean Sheldon Jr.

Every trail manager has a list of tools, special equipment, and what-nots which make bluebird-monitoring efforts a little easier, more rewarding. Here is such a list. Use it as a reference to expand your bluebird toolbox, or circle wanted items and leave the list where others are sure to see it, especially just before a birthday or other special gift-giving occasion.

- **Vise-Grips:** No bluebirder can get along without this vital piece of equipment. We find that the five-inch size with square end works best.

- **The Leatherman (or Gerber) Tool** (folds up into a holster), with all kinds of handy tools built into it, makes an excellent addition to the monitoring tool collection.

- **The Brookstone Hard-To-Find Tools** catalog has a superb collection of implements useful in the bluebird trade. Among the best: the 9-in-1 Pocket Tool and the 6-in-1 Wonder Tool.

- **A.M. Leonard, Inc.**, PO Box 816, Piqua, OH 45356-0816 or by FAX 800/433-0633 or at web site <<http://wwwamleo.com>> or at 800/543-8955 has absolutely the world's best catalog of field items for bluebirders, including safety gear, measuring equipment, marking and tagging items, fasteners, tools and outdoor clothing.

- A hive tool (beekeeper's item) or small WonderBar does the best job in scraping/cleaning box interiors at the beginning of the nesting season and between nestings. These are found at hardware stores or wherever beekeeping supplies are sold.

- Visit the lumberyard and pick up a sheet of 3/4-inch CDX (outdoor) plywood for box construction or repair. Check out the nail shelves for Ardox (zinc coated) twist nails to

use for box construction. Also, a box of double-headed framing nails would provide a good supply of nails for box closures.

- The farm-supply store in your area would have a large selection of coiled fence wire for box mounting. We've had the best luck with 14-gauge galvanized wire which is plenty strong and easy to work and twist into place.

- A new, sharp, 1-1/2-inch hole saw or Forstner bit for the drill press is always a welcome addition. Better yet, how about a gift certificate at the hardware store (or wherever) for a new table saw, band saw, drill press, or (at least) an electric hand drill.



Black-capped
Chickadee

- Go back to the farm supply store or to the bulk petroleum supplier in your area and pick up a five-gallon bucket of heavy-duty lubricating grease for predator-proofing mounting pipes and posts on the trail.

- An assortment of permanent Magic Markers, lumber crayons, and paint sticks for nest box marking are a welcome addition to any bluebirder's kit.

- A trip to almost any farm auction would yield endless supplies of nuts, bolts, washers, nails, wire, sledge hammers, post pounders, steel fence posts, lengths of black or galvanized iron pipe, PVC pipe/fittings, used lumber, and miscella-

neous hand tools — all of which are very useful.

- The literature of bluebirding has grown marvelously over the past decade, and the amount of information on bluebird trail management has grown right along with it. While many title citations could be made, two books come to mind as being particularly helpful to the beginning bluebirder: *The Bluebird Book* by Don and Lillian Stokes, and *Enjoying Bluebirds More* by Julie Zickefoose.

- Magazines keep everyone current on the latest in birding. Among the more readable periodicals containing good information, photographs, diagrams, maps, how-to information, and stories about travel to birding hotspots are *Audubon* (included in the membership package for The National Audubon Society, P.O. Box 52529, Colorado Springs, CO 80322), *Birder's World*, (44 E. 8th St., Suite 410, Holland, MI 49423), *Bird Watchers Digest*, (800/879-2473), and *WildBird*, (P.O. Box 52898, Colorado Springs, CO 80322).

- Nothing could be more productive for the beginning bluebirder than a membership in those organizations having to do with bluebirds and other cavity nesters. Among the groups which get primary consideration are: The North American Bluebird Society, The Purple Martin Conservation Association (including its quarterly, *Purple Martin Update*; write to Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, Edinboro, PA 16444), The American Bird Conservancy (888/247-3624), and Cornell Lab of Ornithology (including its quarterly *Living Bird* magazine; write to 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, NY 14850).

Paper wasp solutions

Paper wasps can be controlled with a four-inch-wide putty knife, said Keith Kridler of Mt. Pleasant, Texas. "In our area," he wrote, "the bluebird nest box should be mounted at eye level and have 1/2-inch roof ventilation slots on two sides so when you walk up to the box you can see if there is a paper wasp nest attached to the roof.

"If there is, slowly open the box and flatten the wasp with the putty knife. Only the queen wasp overwinters, so if (you) check your boxes once a week you will only have to deal with one wasp at a time. On cool spring mornings the wasps don't fly. Wasps cease to be a problem in regularly checked nest boxes after (late spring) since most queen wasps have found a nesting area. You can apply liquid hand soap to the inside of the roof and stop some wasps.

(This note originally was posted to Bluebird-L, the e-mail collective for persons interested in bluebirds. To subscribe, send an e-mail message to: <listproc@cornell.edu>, containing this single line of text: <SUBSCRIBE BLUEBIRD-L your name>. Do not put anything in the subject line of your message. The text line must appear exactly as you see it here, with the addition of your name where indicated. You must send this mail from the e-mail address on which you normally receive e-mail. Once you have subscribed, the Cornell network management center will send you a set of instructions for use of this network.)

NABS conservation award

The North American Bluebird Society annually makes awards for outstanding contributions to bluebird conservation. To nominate an individual, a group, or someone involved in research for an award, please provide the following information.

INDIVIDUAL

(1) Name, address, county, state, and telephone number. (2) Affiliation(s) with bluebird group(s) or other bird or conservation societies with bluebird programs. Describe the individual's involvement and activities. (3) Number of years active with bluebird/cavity nester conservation (minimum of seven years necessary except for Youth Award nominees). (4) If nominee has a trail, describe its location, when established, number of boxes, production, record-keeping techniques, etc. (5) Describe any ways in which nominee has publicized or aided bluebird/cavity-nester conservation. Examples might include (but are not limited to) speaking before groups; working with young people; obtaining publicity in newspapers, radio, or television; working at nature centers, workshops, or fairs; inventing or improving trap or box designs; designing and producing publications; plantings, etc. (6) Anything else you feel is relevant to understanding the outstanding commitment to bluebird/cavity-nester conservation of the nominee. (7) NABS encourages the recognition of young people who are active in the bluebird/cavity-nester conservation efforts.

GROUP

(1) Complete name, address, location, current president or other officer or contact (for governmental agency). (2) Specific information about the bluebird program: printed information (enclose samples),

workshops, number of boxes, increase in bluebird production, methods of recruiting monitors, successful fledglings, etc. (Program must have been in place for a minimum of five years.)

RESEARCH

1. Name, address, telephone number, and academic affiliation. (2) Briefly summarize research completed (and in progress) involving bluebirds/cavity nesters. (3) Bibliographic citations of articles published about bluebirds or other North American cavity nesters (copies of articles or abstracts are desirable).

Send all nominations by March 1, 2000, to Awards Committee Chair Cheryl Eno, 2500 W. James Drive, Raymond, NE 68428.



When Fred Eads, pictured here with wife Edith, built a bluebird nest box and fastened it to a fence post in 1970, he never dreamed that bluebirds would raise young in the same box for 29 consecutive years. The fence was torn down in 1979, but the post with the box was left in place in the Eads' yard in Bellefontaine, Ohio. The box was built with scrap 3/4-inch cedar siding. It is 12 inches high with a 5x5-inch floor. The entrance hole is 1.5-inches, six inches above the floor. The box is top opening. The Eads are members of the Ohio Bluebird Society.

Bluebird News from Shore to Shore

Nesting boxes for toads and salamanders? Well, not for nesting, but **Dick Hjort** of **Chisago City, Minnesota**, does build structures for these critters. He puts them in his garden to help attract the insect-eating reptiles. For toads, according to a story in **Bluebird News**, newsletter of the **Bluebird Recovery Program of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis**, Mr. Hjort begins with a board six inches wide by 24 inches long. In the middle of the board, he drills a 3/4-inch hole, widening its exit to one inch. On the edges of the underside of the board are attached 3/4-inch wooden strips. The board is placed over a 24-inch long, two-inch deep trench in the garden. The ends are banked with loose dirt, and, if there has been no recent rain, the soil is moistened. Mr. Hjort places the first toad into its new home. The toad soon makes itself a peep hole, through which it hunts. Other toads may follow. Success is likely to be better if there is standing water nearby to provide the necessities for mating and reproduction.

For salamanders, the same board is used minus one of its underside strips, and there is no trench. Salamanders like to squeeze into tight, moist places.

Brenda Wrape of **Rock Spring, Georgia**, wrote to tell us of a memorable experience with bluebirds.

"One spring afternoon as I walked into the kitchen to begin dinner, I opened the window for some fresh air," she wrote. "I heard a baby bird chirping. I told myself it was probably a robin or Brown Thrasher hiding in my flowers.

"Later, the chirping seemed louder. Something told me to open the doors to my fireplace. There sat a

fledgling. As I brushed the ashes away I discovered it was a bluebird.

"One of the boxes in my yard had just fledged five bluebirds. I decided to take it near the box and release it, hoping the parents would find it.

"As I walked outside, the bird began to chirp. Suddenly, two adult bluebirds flew toward me. I opened my hands and released the bird, and all three flew to a nearby tree. Almost immediately the two adults flew back to me and hovered near my face as if to say, 'thank you'."

A story about bluebird houses being used in 1914 recently appeared in the newsletter of **Bluebirds Across Nebraska**. **Les Roslund** of **Easton, Maryland**, formerly of **Valley, Nebraska**, wrote about his father, Willard, using old fence posts to make bluebird nesting sites. He cut off the post top, hollowed the core, drilled an entry hole, and wired the top back in place. Young Willard, 13 years old at the time, built a box in the spring of 1914, mounted it, and had a pair of bluebirds nest. In a letter Willard wrote describing this experience, he said, "I kept making more nesting places until I must have had about eight scattered along pasture fences on Dad's farm. The nests were near enough that I could hear, on still mornings, the sweet warble of the birds as they took up housekeeping."

Randy Jones of **Lower Macungie Township in Pennsylvania** was the subject this summer of a nice newspaper article, with photos, which told the story of his bluebird trail and banding efforts with Eastern Bluebirds. The article included good basic information about bluebirds, and offered contact information for persons seeking more information

about bluebirds.

Bill Thompson has a bluebird trail at the **Wayzata Country Club** west of **Minneapolis**. He includes a combination bird bath/meal worm feeder of his own design at each house. He also reported this past season a bluebird nest in a Wood Duck box.

Also in **Minnesota**, **Loren LeBlanc** found a bluebird egg in a chickadee nest. It hatched and the bird fledged with the chickadees. And **Arden Aaenstad** of **Edina** found a cowbird in one of his Peterson boxes. He said the entry hole had not been enlarged. **Keith Radel**, near **Faribault**, reported starlings had entered an oval hole 1-1/4 by 2-1/4 inches. (The Minnesota items come from **Bluebird News**, newsletter of the Bluebird Recovery Program.)

This bluebird web site has much information

Unless you've had the opportunity to review the marvelous anthology of BLUEBIRD-L (e-mail network) submissions that Jim McLochlin has put together (on a web site), you cannot begin to appreciate the importance of this communication medium in our lives.

It is unreal. What an extraordinary group of learned people we have contributing (to BLUEBIRD-L) for the benefit of all of us ... and, more importantly, for bluebirds all across this continent.

Please contact Jim at <JimMcL@aol.com> for instructions as to how you, too, can read this wonderful piece of work.

— *Dean Sheldon, Huron County, Ohio*

Speakers: What works for you?

By Ron Kingston

Every year the speakers are asked for a summary of the past year's programs, a few questions about what worked and what didn't, and how NABS could help them. In January 1999, 350 questionnaires were sent to members of the NABS Speakers' Bureau. One of the questions asked was: "What works in your presentation that could help other speakers?"

Here are suggestions we received from NABS speakers.

Susan Beasley and Beth Weatherford, Ashford, Alabama: After the slide show, we show the students a nest box, show them how to approach, open and monitor, which generates lots of questions.

Susan Yasuda, Camino, California: (We use a) bluebird puppet and puppet nest that fits into the nestbox for easy removal and display. People can handle it and put back in without fear of destroying it.

Roger Lawson, Derby, Connecticut: Make the presentation varied with a mixture of media and presentation styles. Give the big picture as well as the local picture.

Fred Comstock, Bethlehem, Connecticut: Enthusiasm and give programs at libraries.

Henderson Traylor, La Grange, Georgia: With smaller groups I conclude by presenting a bluebird nesting box to someone in attendance.

Edwina Hahn, Columbus, Georgia: A picture of a Blue Jay to show what you are not talking about and a bluebird to show what you are talking about.

Edward Gray, Atlanta, Georgia: Use a tape recorder and play a bluebird tape for 4-6 grade children.

Lorena Zanier, Hamburg, Iowa: Lots of props and bluebird houses to

display and discuss. A good video and give a nest box as a door prize.

Gail Barels, Marion, Iowa: Must have script completely memorized and adapted for your area.

Joan Harmet, Elizabeth, Illinois: I talk about conservation that works now, with results in one season because you helped.

Jim and Ann Auer, Leesburg, Indiana: People (especially kids) love your stories about personal relations with the birds. The facts are important, but it needs to be fun!

Jon Boone, Oakland, Maryland: Emphasizing context, habitat, other cavity nesters and history in ways that show how, unlike other issues in the environment, individuals can make a telling difference.

Elizabeth Nichols, Middletown, Maryland: Show live mealworms; I feed them year round, a big help in early spring.

Jerry Newman, Rising Sun, Maryland: Used nest/eggs let the public see eggs and materials used in nest making. I explain why we need conservation of birds and tell about the extinction of the Passenger Pigeon and Carolina Parakeet. I show pictures of the Passenger Pigeons.

Jill Miller, Natick, Massachusetts: We usually have a bluebird box building session right after the talk and (depending on the season) look for bluebirds in nearby boxes.

David Eastman, Center Sandwich, New Hampshire: Kit building prior to slide show plus ecology of reproduction.

Steve Eno, Raymond, Nebraska: Hands-on displays, boxes, traps, box kits, and mounting poles.

Barbara Treiber, Wynantskill, New York: Bring a sample box with fence post and pipe (shortened) to show how to mount a box. People just have a hard time visualizing

without samples.

Sam Phelps, Walden, New York: Pre-cut kits are put together in a work session, records are kept by the members, and reports are due at the end of each nesting season, so that everyone is involved.

David Heidenreich, Colton, New York: With school programs, if possible, I like to submit bluebird brochures ahead of time to the teachers. Then they have knowledge about bluebirds before the class. During class, I ask questions after my talk and/or video. Also stress the importance of placing boxes in the right habitat for bluebirds. Students practice teamwork, as it works out better if two work with one kit. Donate a Stokes bluebird book and a copy of NABS Education Kit for teacher and school library. Giving a kit for a pattern also works very well.

Herman Bressler, White Lake, New York: Hands-on with children building and placing bluebird nest boxes. I assemble kits and have children construct their own.

Michael Wheatley, Republic, Ohio: Keep it light, keep it fun. Have things to see, be honest and down to earth, always allow for questions.

Jean Rutan, Mechanicsburg, Ohio: Have nest box with nest and eggs, even though it is expensive to have permits.

James Little, Bucyrus, Ohio: Handouts on how to monitor a bluebird trail and sample record forms.

Marion Liles, Sand Springs, Oklahoma: Lots of visual stuff and something people can get hands on. A picture is worth a thousand words.

Elsie Eltzroth, Corvallis, Oregon: Have volunteers who monitor boxes talk about individual positive experiences.

Continued on page 21

— speakers

Continued from page 20

Robert Walshaw, Coweta, Oklahoma: Hands-on demo, details on why, where and how, with hand-outs followed by question and answer period.

Bob Bodine, Newtown Square, Pennsylvania: An anecdote or two about own experiences on local nest box trails.

Barry Graden, Clinton, South Carolina: Have a nest box as a door prize.

Bill Wheeler, LaFayette, Tennessee: Use calendar pictures of birds as a visual aid for programs with bird boxes, feeders, etc., for demonstration purposes.

Barbara Stinson, Warrenton, Virginia: Enthusiasm for the subject.

Fred Sahl, Church Road, Virginia: Limit presentation to 30 minutes for garden clubs, church groups, and senior citizens. I always allow 10 minutes or more for question-and-answer session after every presentation.

Hobart Ellifritt, Clarksburg, West Virginia: Take along bluebird boxes (unpainted) and have the children paint them and mount them on a trail at their school. I try to give each student a bluebird box.

Carol McDaniel, Darlington, Wisconsin: I have a chart showing how one pair of House Sparrows, if allowed to produce young, explodes, and how one pair of bluebirds, if successful, multiplies.

The persons listed here returned their 1998 questionnaires, helping us determine what works and what doesn't. Thanks to all for responding and for all they do for bluebird conservation.

Our thanks to all the speakers

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Robert Lechner

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Elaine Sweitzer

Jean Tierney

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Mel Toellner

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Gordon Backer

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John Holm

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Donna Hagerman

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David Eastman

NEW JERSEY

Ken Karnas

NEW YORK

Kevin Berner

Herman Bressler

Chris Case

Elaine Crossley

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David Junkin

Sam Phelps

Evelyn Rifenburg

John Rogers

Barbara Treiber

Richard Wells

Paul Wilson

Carl Zenger

NORTH CAROLINA

Christine Ammons

OHIO

Bill Davis

James Little

Tami Locher

Jean Rutan

Darlene Sillick

Michael Wheatley

OKLAHOMA

Charlotte Jernigan

Marion Liles

Kevin McCurdy

Robert Walshaw

OREGON

Elsie Eltzroth

Patricia Johnston

Brenda McGowan

Marilynne Keyser

PENNSYLVANIA

Diane Allison

Bob Bodine

Ted Morus

Wilbur Peachey

Larry Rohrbaugh

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Bill Wheeler

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**Send completed form and payment to:
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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).

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