

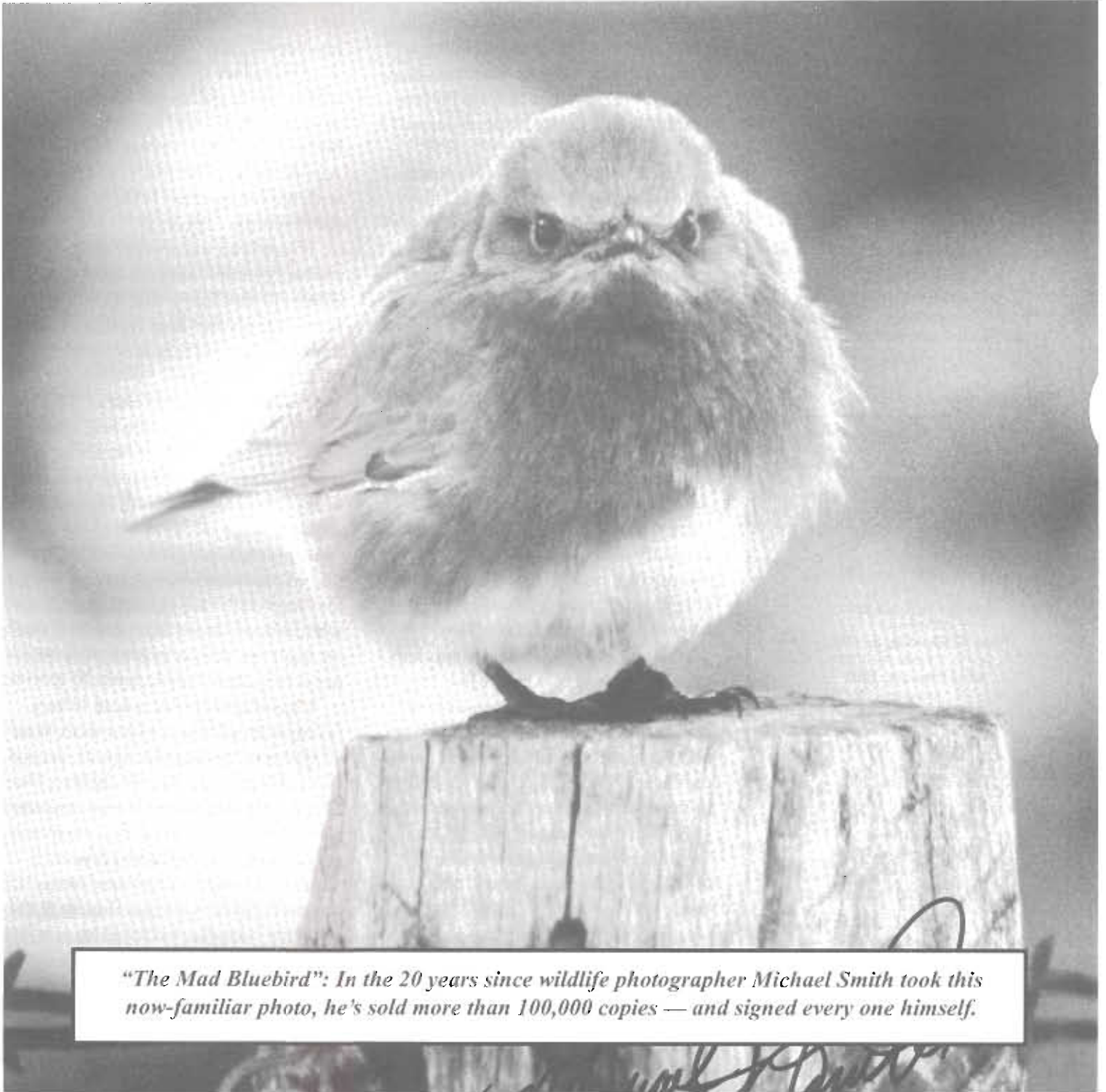
Bluebird

Journal of the North American Bluebird Society

Fall 2000

Formerly *Sialia*

Vol. 22, No. 4



"The Mad Bluebird": In the 20 years since wildlife photographer Michael Smith took this now-familiar photo, he's sold more than 100,000 copies — and signed every one himself.

Order 'The Mad Bluebird' photo from NABS. See Sampler.



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From the President

Doug LeVasseur

A friend recently found herself in a dilemma: to feed bluebirds or not. After reading an article critical of certain feeding practices, she wrote me, "I don't want to stop feeding at this point, but maybe I won't do it next winter." Should those who feed bluebirds feel guilty about doing so? I hope not.

My feeding instincts were kindled more than 20 years ago when I first saw the original NABS slide program. One slide showed snow-and-ice-covered trees and bushes. The caption read, "When berries are covered with ice and snow, many birds may die." How could any bluebird enthusiast hear this as anything but a call to arms? I set out to feed my bluebirds.

Jack Finch of Bailey, North Carolina, has long promoted the feeding of dogwood berries to bluebirds. So, there were berries to gather, bluebird cakes to make, and raisins to dice. Despite my best efforts, I never was able to attract bluebirds to my feeder. I decided it was because natural winter food supplies are so abundant in southeast Ohio, where I live.

Mealworms revolutionized bluebird feeding. Bluebirds just love 'em, and worms easily can be raised or purchased. Bluebirds come so readily to mealworm feeders that some ask, "Should be we doing this?"

Bird lovers have been feeding other bird species for years in their yards without adverse effects. Aren't we simply adding one more species to the list of birds we already feed throughout the year?

There is the argument that bluebirds become dependent on the mealworms. If there were a real case to be made here, it would be with the

feeding of hummingbirds. Never have I seen birds seemingly more dependent on a feeder. If there has been a cry to cease feeding hummingbirds, it has been muted. Why then bluebirds?

A corollary to this argument is that winter feeding disrupts normal migratory behavior. Feeding keeps birds in cold climates unnaturally. Again, we are told this is not the case with hummingbirds. Is the situation for bluebirds different?

If you read the articles on global warming in the Summer 2000 issue of *Bluebird*, you know that there are forces far greater than feeding that may be affecting migratory patterns of all bird species.

A close and dear friend in New York advised me that feeding bluebirds concentrates their numbers, making them more prone to predation. This is a compelling argument. And my heart has sunk on those rare occasions when I discovered a little pile of blue feathers in the yard. Some loss to predation is normal. But those who feed still must be convinced that the harm they do is greater than the good they accomplish.

I recently received a note from a fellow who said he had put more than 40,000 mealworms through his feeder last year. Can you overdo feeding? Is an over-abundant food supply unnatural? I think of the combined emergence of the 13-year and 17-year cicadas in Ohio last summer, or my boyhood memory of mayflies in drifts against a lake-shore cottage in Minnesota.

The final argument is that those who feed do it primarily for themselves — for the joy of viewing bluebirds closely and often, to our heart's content. And that is true.

Our new officers

Doug LaVasseur of Senecaville, Ohio, has been elected president of the North American Bluebird Society. He took the post after voting at the June NABS convention held in Galena, Illinois. Vice president is Joan Harmet, Elizabeth, Illinois.

Vice president for community relations is Carol McDaniel, Darlington, Wisconsin. Arlene Ripley of Dunkirk, Maryland, is secretary, and Bob Martin of Columbus, Ohio, is treasurer.

Members of the board of directors are Steve Garr of Mount Juliet, Tennessee; Elsie Eltzroth of Corvallis, Oregon; Bob Ewart of Regina, Saskatchewan; David Magness of Whiteford, Maryland; Ann Auer of Leesburg, Indiana; Dorene Scriven of Minneapolis, Minnesota; Anne Little of Woodbridge, Virginia; Darlene Sillick of Dublin, Ohio; Ann Wick of Black Earth, Wisconsin; Dean E. Sheldon Jr. of Greenwich, Ohio; Alicia Craig-Lich of Carmel, Indiana; and Ken Avery of Cheney, Washington.

Giving to NABS

As the year-end approaches, NABS wants to remind you that you can make charitable gifts of stocks, bonds, mutual fund shares, and even life insurance to the North American Bluebird Society.

Call Bob Martin, NABS treasurer, to discuss, confidentially, how you can proceed with this type of planned giving.

Mr. Martin is at First Union Securities, 375 North Front St., Suite 100, Columbus, OH 43215. Call him at 800/225-2419 or 614/241-2165.

First Union Securities does not provide tax or legal advice. Be sure to consult with your own tax and legal advisors before taking any action that would have tax consequences.

2001 convention — A Bluebird Odyssey — in Columbus, Ohio

The NABS 2001 convention — A Bluebird Odyssey — will be held June 21-24 in Columbus, Ohio. Site will be the Radisson Inn and Conference Center.

New at this meeting will be a series of three special seminars for NABS affiliates. One will offer tips on creating a successful newsletter. The second will discuss county coordinator systems. The third will explore ways to increase affiliate membership.

Field trips and exhibits will be available, as always. The banquet speaker will be wildlife artist and author Julie Zickefoose.

For information, visit the NABS web site, www.nabluebirdsociety.org, or contact the Greater Columbus Convention and Visitors Bureau toll-free at 800/345-4386.

A registration form for the event is on the web site. The host Radisson Hotel (800/333-3333) is accepting room reservations, and the Ohio Bluebird Society is prepared to take registrations for the event. For more information, contact Dean Sheldon, 419/752-1451, e-mail dsheldonjr@hotmail.com; Doug LeVasseur, 740/685-5220, e-mail emdlev@clover.net; or Darlene Sillick, 614/761-3696, e-mail azuretrails@columbus.rr.com.

Please pass along this web site information to others in your organization, especially your newsletter editor.

HOST A CONVENTION?

For information about hosting the annual NABS conference in 2003 or beyond, contact Bob Ewart, 2818 Sinton Ave., Regina SK, Canada S4S 1K3, or with e-mail at robert.ewart@sk.sympatico.ca. Recent conferences have been hosted in Regina, Sask.,

Great Falls, Montana, and Galena, Illinois. The 2001 meeting will be in Columbus, Ohio, and Penticton, B.C., will host the 2002 event. The NABS conference committee has recommended that the annual meeting be moved around North America in an orderly manner to give all bluebirders an opportunity to attend a conference near them.

Bluebird

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'The Mad Bluebird'

Famous photograph changed the photographer's life

By Lisa Pollak
Staff writer, *The Baltimore Sun*

A picture of a bluebird, that's all he was after. Not money and fame, not admirers and accolades, not the chance to quit his day job and take pictures full-time. Photographing birds was his passion; it always would be. One good shot out of 100 was worth it.

And so it was that on a cold February day in 1979, Michael L. Smith set up a tripod in his Largo (Maryland) backyard, pointed his camera toward a fence post and waited.

And waited.

And waited.

He wasn't trying to change his life. He wasn't trying to buy the house of his dreams. He wasn't trying to become Michael Smith, the guy who took that bluebird photo.

He was just trying to take a photo of a bluebird.

And here came his chance. A male Eastern bluebird flew into the backyard and landed on the fence post. It hunkered down. It fluffed up its feathers. It fixed its black beady eyes on the long lens of the camera.

Sixty feet away, Smith couldn't see any of this. He sat in his house, holding a remote camera trigger, watching the bluebird through a glass door.

All he could see was that the bird was facing the camera.

Click.

The bird flew away. The man went on with his life. Neither, it seems safe to say, had any idea what they'd done.

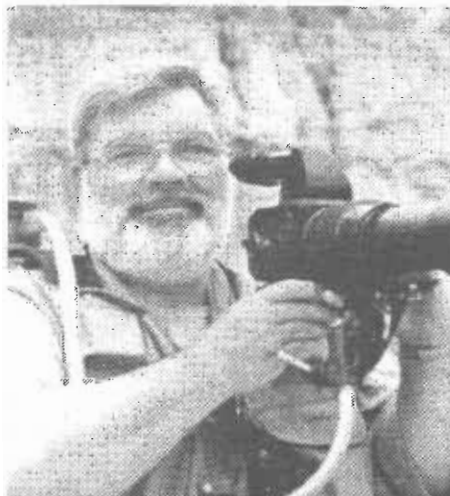
More than 20 years later, Smith still can't entirely believe it.

If you owed your fortune to a bird, you might not either.

As it turned out, that was no ordinary bluebird. It was a grumpy bluebird. A ticked-off, glowering, down-in-the-beak bluebird. Or so it appeared to humans, and that's what mattered, because at last count humans have bought more than 102,000 signed prints of "The Mad Bluebird" — a phenomenal number by most photographers' standards. And it doesn't even include the tens of thousands of "Mad Bluebird" stained-glass sun catchers that have sold.

In other words, the man who has spent his life taking intimate portraits of birds — a photographer who has slept in duck blinds, spent 13 years of summer weekends documenting the habits of a single Osprey, and crawled through his yard with a blanket over his head to avoid disturbing his subjects — achieved his greatest success with a photo he didn't especially like the first time he saw it and still doesn't list among his very best.

And that doesn't bother him a bit.



Photographer Michael Smith

Thanks to "The Mad Bluebird," Smith has quit his job as an electrician, become a full-time free-lance wildlife photographer, and traded his townhouse for a 4,000-square-foot dream home on 13 acres in New Windsor, Maryland. The financial details of his windfall Smith keeps private. But consider: Smith charges \$26 for a matted 5-by-7 print of "The Mad Bluebird"; the Signals catalog charges \$58 for a framed 5-by-7; the Orvis catalog charges \$95 for a framed 8-by-10.

It's not hard to get the picture.

"It has put me in a whole new world financially," says Smith, "I was an electrician for 32 years, and I made good money, but nothing like this."

When he says it, he doesn't sound like he's gloating. He sounds proud, grateful and still plenty stunned. When Smith moved into his new home in the fall of 1998, a copy of "The Mad Bluebird" was the first possession over the threshold; today, a giant print above the kitchen table reminds him every day who he has to thank. He feels indebted to the bird not just for his home, but also for his girlfriend, Marci Krishnamoorthy, whom he met while delivering prints to the nature store where she worked.

Despite the volume of prints sold, Smith still signs each one by hand — he bought a signature machine but it felt too impersonal. He still gets teary talking about the strangers his photo has touched, such as the old woman from Pennsylvania with cancer who told him "The Mad Bluebird" boosts her morale. And he still seems to

Continued on page 5

— 'The Mad Bluebird' photograph

Continued from page 4

relish telling his far-from-overnight success story.

It begins in 1983, when "The Mad Bluebird" was used as the cover of a brochure for a National Geographic bird book. People loved the photo so much that they ripped off the covers and framed them; the same thing happened when the photograph appeared on the Duncraft birding supply catalog a year later.

"A lot of our customers do take our covers off, but the response to this cover was way off the charts," says Sharon Dunn, Duncraft co-owner. "Then the idea occurred: We should be offering this as a print."

After the Signals catalog started carrying the print in 1996, sales really started to fly; Smith began filling orders for thousands, not hundreds, of prints at a time. Today "The Mad Bluebird" is available in five catalogs, about 80 stores, and direct from Smith. (The photo also is available from NABS. See the box at the end.)

Smith himself has taken few photos this past year, in part because he's been too busy signing, matting, framing, and shipping prints to customers. But his trigger finger is getting itchy, and his eyes have been roaming the woods behind his house, where three feeders and eight bluebird houses lure all manner of subjects. He's been mad about birds ever since he was a teenager; in his photographs he strives to capture their personalities and habits.

Here's a shot he'd like to get this year: a picture of a bluebird taking a bath in a pond. It's easier said than done, of course. Smith will have to lure the bird to the pond, set up his camera in the perfect position and then, as always, wait for the bird to do what it's supposed to.

If not something better.

A place to land, that's all he was after.

Or so we will assume. It wouldn't be right, after all, to end this story without the bird's side. Particularly regarding the matter of his mood.

Speaking for the bird we have Lillian Stokes, a Massachusetts-based bluebird expert and co-author of "The Bluebird Book," in which "The Mad Bluebird" appears on page 13.

Stokes: "If you look at a bluebird's face head on, they just happen to have the configuration that we interpret as looking angry. The brow is low, and the little point of red looks like their mouth is turned down. I don't know the exact mental state of that bird, but in general it may not have been mad. A lot of times birds hunker down like that and fluff up their feathers when they're cold."

She speculates that "he's probably thinking about 'where am I going to get my next meal to keep me warm?' and 'I hope the snow melts soon so I can find some insects on the ground.'"

There you have it. But what difference does it make? That once-anonymous bluebird — who bird sources say surely died years ago — has become "The Mad Bluebird." He has attained a level of fame that few humans can hope for.

(© 2000 The Baltimore Sun. Used with permission.)

If you would like a print of our cover photo, "The Mad Bluebird," you can order one or more from NABS. See the Bluebird Sampler pages at the center of the magazine.

Bluebird monographs are available

Monographs on all three species of bluebirds are available in the Birds of North America series being published by the American Ornithologists' Union, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, and the Academy of Natural Sciences.

The monographs bring together in one paper all current information on the life history (distribution, migration, habitat, food habits, sounds, behavior, breeding, population, conservation, appearance) of each species.

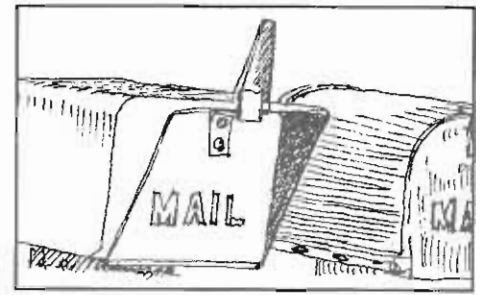
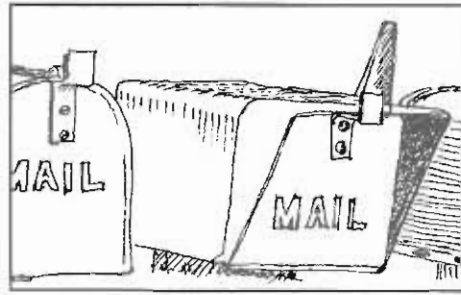
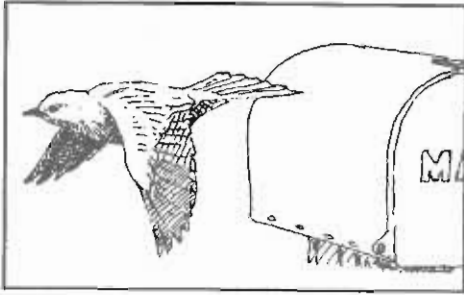
Most recently published is the paper on Western Bluebirds, number 510 in the series. Elsie Eltzroth, NABS board member from Corvallis, Oregon, is one of the authors. Mountain Bluebirds are discussed in paper number 222, Eastern Bluebirds in number 381.

All are available for \$7.50 each from Buteo Books by calling 800/722-2460.

Bluebirds and trails themes at symposium

NABS co-executive directors, Lisa Kivirist and John Ivanko, spoke on bluebirds and trails at the National Trails Symposium in Redding, California in September.

Their presentation discussed the implementation of bluebird trails in parks, along biking trails or other public places, using the Heritage Rail-Trail (TBT Adopt-A-Box-sponsored trail number two) as a case example.



More work required

To the editor,

There has been much success in bringing bluebirds back from their earlier downward population spiral. Those hard-working people involved in this effort can be very proud. However, the future for bluebirds is not so rosy, and much will be required to even hold the gains that have been made.

Human population growth projections show an increase of upwards of 50 million people in this country in the next few decades. This means significant habitat losses for the bluebirds, and large increases in areas favored by House Sparrows and starlings.

The best that we can do is to maintain the bluebird populations in every oasis that will remain open to them — golf courses, parks, rural areas that still have space to support them, wherever we can find suitable habitat.

We must increase our education efforts to young and old, pass on our trails and knowledge to those we have trained and prepared for the task. We must find positive ways to convert people who are feeding bird seed found attractive by sparrows to black oil sunflower seeds.

We must convince persons who practice passive House Sparrow control that this is absolutely not the way to go.

— Bob Walshaw, Coweta, Oklahoma

One-box reports?

To the editor,

I have been a member of NABS for many years. As soon as I receive *Bluebird*, I sit down and read it cover to cover. I noted in the article about nest box reports that there were fewer reports than last year.

I have only one nest of bluebirds in my yard, plus a few others with chickadees, titmice, nuthatches (Brown-headed and White-breasted), and Carolina Wrens. This is the usual scenario in my yard year after year.

I have never reported these to NABS because I don't know if the organization is interested in such small numbers. Everything in the magazine seems geared to trails. If an effort were made to induce "one-box" monitors to report, perhaps the numbers would go up.

— Virginia Stephens, Jonesboro, Georgia

Crows are problem

To the editor,

This is a predator alert: Crows are raiding bluebird boxes.

In 1998, we discovered several boxes where the nest material was pulled out through the entrance hole, clogging it. There was no clue as how this had happened.

In 1999, a crow was seen standing on the roof of a nest box, reaching forward and down, putting its beak into the entrance hole. Presumably, the young (birds in the nest box)

would reach up, expecting to be fed, and instead they were pulled out.

This year, all the boxes on the trail were retrofitted by adding new 14 inch by 12 inch tops. We attached them to the smaller original roof. Now, the crow cannot reach out and around and into the box anymore.

We are considering increasing the depth of the entrance holes next year to discourage kestrels, which make a frontal attack.

— Chris Cuddeback, Front Royal, Virginia

Four given grants

Four persons have received NABS research grants for 2000:

• Stephen S. Germaine, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Phoenix: "Effects of Ponderosa Pine Forest Ecosystem Restoration on Reproductive Success of Western Bluebirds."

• Dr. Gary Ritchison, Eastern Kentucky University: "Mating Decisions by Female Bluebirds: Multiple Clues and Multiple Benefits."

• Dr. Wallace Rendell, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario: "Patterns of Egg Mass Variation and Incubation in Eastern Bluebirds: Causes and Significance."

• John Citta, University of Montana, Missoula: "Population Dynamics of Mountain Bluebirds."

Continuation of tests of oval-holed boxes

Ovals require monitoring to check on use by starlings

By Kevin L. Berner and Bobby J. Cummins

Many researchers have compared Peterson boxes with more traditional boxes and found that Eastern Bluebirds preferred the Peterson design. In earlier tests to identify why Peterson boxes were preferred, I attempted to determine if bluebirds were selecting these boxes because of the hole or box shape. I tested NABS-shaped boxes with round and oval holes and Peterson-shaped boxes with round and oval holes. Amongst these variations, the NABS-shaped boxes with oval holes were the most preferred style for bluebirds.

A potential concern about the 1 3/8-inch x 2 1/4-inch (3.5 cm x 5.7 cm) vertical oval hole is that it doesn't guarantee European Starling exclusion as a 1 1/2-inch (3.8 cm) round hole does. My tests with live-trapped starlings indicated that they very readily escape from test boxes with these oval holes. I also have observed starlings readily enter oval-holed boxes. Restricting test holes to 1 1/4 inch x 2 1/4 inch (3.2 cm x 5.7 cm) did make passage far more difficult for starlings. However, it did not stop most starlings from escaping.

Since determining this, I have been interested in confirming whether or not bluebirds would exhibit the strong preference for oval-holed boxes if the holes were narrower.

The concern exists that while Peterson boxes are rarely used by starlings the larger interior size of a NABS box when combined with the standard-size oval hole may increase the probability of starlings using these boxes. I have had reports from several people who have had starlings use NABS-shaped boxes with oval

holes. With dozens of these boxes in the field, I have had one nesting attempt by starlings.

1999 TESTS

We continued our tests of traditional NABS-shaped boxes during the summer of 1999. All research boxes were paired approximately 10 feet apart. Two types of comparisons were done. The first involved pairing boxes with standard 1 3/8-inch wide oval holes with boxes having slightly smaller 1 1/4-inch oval holes. The second tests compared boxes with narrower oval holes paired with boxes with 1 1/2-inch round holes. This was done to see if the narrow oval maintained the preference that bluebirds that had shown for the standard oval when compared to round holes.

RESULTS

Bluebirds showed a strong preference for the standard over reduced-size oval holes, with 26 nesting attempts (at least one egg laid) in the larger-holed boxes and only four in their paired smaller-holed box. Swallows attempted 22 nests in the

smaller-holed boxes and only six in the larger-holed boxes. Nest initiation for swallows was generally later than for bluebirds, often leaving the smaller-holed boxes for their use. Wren use was negligible in these tests (Fig. 1).

When comparing narrower oval holes to round holes, the advantage of the oval shape appeared to be greatly diminished. Eight bluebird nesting attempts were made in boxes with narrow oval holes and five were found in boxes with round holes. Swallows had nearly equal use in both hole types. House sparrows, although quite rare on these trails, used the round holes three times and the oval hole once (Fig. 2).

Although bluebirds prefer the larger oval holes, when you reduce the hole width this advantage is diminished. I suspect that starling use of nest boxes with narrow oval holes would be infrequent although possible. As a result, in any trail that is not regularly monitored, oval-hole boxes should not be used.

Fig. 1. Comparisons between boxes with standard oval holes and narrow oval holes.

Hole size	Bluebird	Swallow	Wren	Sparrow
1 3/8-in. x 2 1/4-in. oval	26	6	2	0
1 1/4-in. x 2 1/4-in. oval	4	22	0	0

Fig. 2. Comparisons between boxes with round holes and narrow oval holes.

Hole size	Bluebird	Swallow	Wren	Sparrow
1 1/2-in. round	5	9	1	3
1 1/4-in. oval	8	11	1	1

The Gilwood Box

Steve Gilbertson's new wooden nest box

By Steve Gilbertson

Do we really need another nest-box design?

Well, I think so.

A few years ago, I realized that some people want only an all-wood nest box, if only for the very legitimate reason of enjoying woodworking. Of course, a design must be chosen, but of the dozen or so that I've seen, it appears to me that each have limitations that need not be. One need only investigate various newsletters and bluebird-related books to determine what designs exist and what their flaws might be.

What makes one bluebird house better than another? Desirability? Simplicity? Weight? Cost? Predator resistance? How about ease in mounting and relocating? Must something be given up for something gained? I think not.

Just about any reasonably designed wood box will produce bluebirds. Some might not be as desirable because of an entrance block or excessive depth. Some are heavier or more complicated than necessary. Others do not allow easy sparrow trapping or removal. Certain designs allow rainwater access at the top or sides. Most nest boxes do not allow quick or easy door replacement.

The Gilwood box is my effort to eliminate what I view as shortcomings in wood-nest-box design.

Weighing a little over four pounds, the Gilwood is safely attached to a 1/2-inch thin-walled metal electrical conduit with either conduit straps or a 2-inch section of galvanized plumber strap and 1 1/2-inch deck screws.

Sparrow trapping is accomplished by either the universal trap or a modified Bauldry trap (see page 11).

Easy door replacement allows unlimited entrance-style options. With an opening of nearly four square inches, the original door satisfies both entrance and ventilation requirements. That part of the 2 1/4-inch opening below the hinge pin should measure between 1 1/4 and 1 3/8 inches in height. If not, slightly bend the hinge pin. If a more traditional entrance is desired, remove the pin and door, and screw on a new 1x4x9-inch front, using the existing pin holes for attachment. Leave about a 1/8-inch gap at the top to prevent binding, and a 5-inch depth from the bottom of the entrance hole to the top of the box floor.

One can create a slot box by securing a solid 1x4x7 3/4-inch front piece at a point 1 1/4-inches down from the roof. Loosely place an additional floor piece upon the original to maintain an approximate 5-inch depth from the bottom of the slot.

No side ventilation exists in this box because the 4 square inches found in the entrance is adequate for ventilation during the day, and, I believe, is beneficial during cold periods. But, if you substitute a standard 1 1/2-inch entrance hole, reducing the entrance size to 1 3/4 square inches, then side vents of 3/4 inch nearly make up the difference. Side ventilation is required even with the use of the larger oval entrance of 3 square inches.

Economy, simplicity, and as few

lumber dimensions as possible are important to me. I feel that if a box is either complicated or requires unusual components, there may be added expense, waste, or frustration, leading possibly to fewer boxes afield. This is why there are only two lumber dimensions and only square cuts required to construct the Gilwood box.

I advocate use of screws, glue, and wood preservative. Together, they most certainly contribute to a solid, tight, and long-lived nest box. Is use of wood preservatives controversial? Eleven years and a few thousand PVC boxes ago, I was concerned, but no more.

Drying time for preservative products varies, but within two weeks of application, the box should be safe for occupancy. Its life is now extended a few more years. With annual fall application of preservative dribbled on the roof with a ketchup bottle or its equivalent, one risks turning the nest box into an heirloom!

In my opinion, it is absolutely required that all roofs never leak, period. The Gilwood box roof overhangs on all sides. This allows easy application of a glue seal at the roof line. If one felt additional protection was needed, a suitably sized piece of one-half-inch exterior plywood is easily attached. My research, consisting of cutting and examining 15-year-old plywood and chipboard roofs, showed nearly no plywood deterioration and near total decay of chipboard.

The floor of the Gilwood box is
Continued on page 10

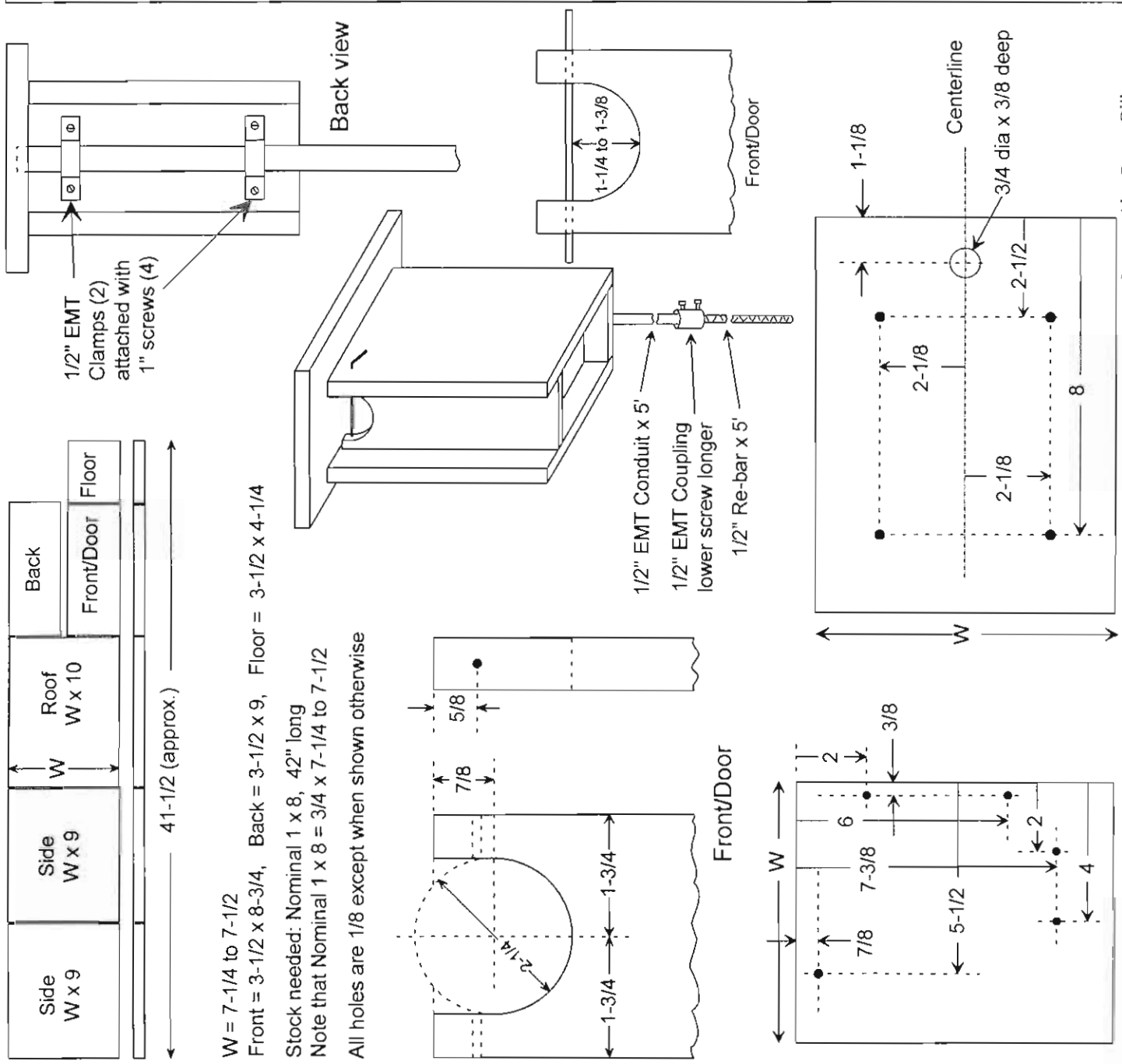
ADVANTAGES OF A GILWOOD NEST BOX

- ◆ Easy sparrow trapping with Bauldry or Universal style trap. Fitted with 3/4"x3-1/4"x1/4" hardware cloth adapter for slot boxes.
- ◆ Only 1 or 2 lumber dimensions required, 1"x4" and 1"x8" (or 1"x8" may be ripped to 1"x4").
- ◆ Eggs or young are not inclined to fall out of box during monitoring.
- ◆ Light weight - at about 4 lbs. is easily and safely mounted on steel wool and waxed 1/2" metal conduit which greatly reduces the problem of ants, squirrels, raccoons; and, more importantly, it reduces the chances of coming in contact with the Hanta virus through mice and their nests.
- ◆ Easy blowfly larvae removal. Reminder: plump, pupated larvae - those usually removed - have already fed to conclusion and are no further threat to nestlings.
- ◆ Dry, solid, long-lasting nest cavity is promoted by use of screws and construction adhesive.
- ◆ Easy door removal - replacement with similar or totally dissimilar entrance options hinged with screws at pre-drilled side locations.
- ◆ Door/entrance height can be adjusted from 1-1/4" to 1-3/8" by bending wire as shown on left.

NOTE: Side ventilation is recommended if entrance/ventilation area in square inches is reduced from 4 square inches as in Gilwood entrance style. Area in square inches of common openings is described below:

- 1-1/4" round = 1.22 square inches
- 1-3/8" round = 1.50 square inches
- 1-1/2" round = 1.75 square inches
- 1-9/16" round = 1.91 square inches
- 1-5/8" round = 2.10 square inches
- 1-3/4" round = 2.40 square inches
- 2" round = 3.14 square inches
- 2-1/4" round = 4.00 square inches
- 1-1/4" x 2" oval = 2.16 square inches
- 1-3/8" x 2-1/4" oval = 3.00 square inches
- 4" round = 12.56 square inches

Steve Gilbertson, Tel. 218-927-1953
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Invented by Steve Gilbertson
 Drawn by Fawzi Emad

Sides (2)

Rev. 5/9/00

— new box

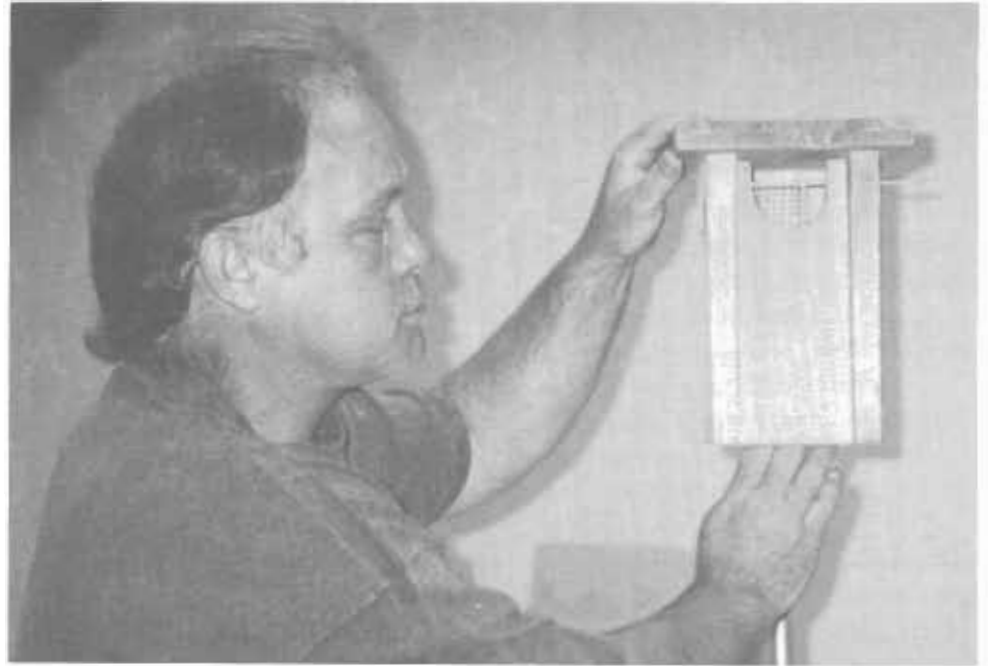
Continued from page 8

recessed nearly an inch in an effort to prevent water intrusion via capillary action. The floor has no drain holes because the roof does not leak, and, if it ever did, I'm sure it would be fixed quickly. A better reason might be the results of a moisture test I performed.

Simulating a leaky nest box, I chose a water drip rate of one per two seconds onto actual nest material. One minute elapsed as absorption took place, and another minute passed before the drain rate equaled the drip rate. After a minute or so, I stopped the drip into the box. After two minutes, no water exited the single drain hole.

How wet was the nest? Imagine water pouring onto your mattress until it can absorb no more, and then you laying in it for a few days. Water robs heat at a rate 25 times that of air. Tests like this are highly variable depending on the quantity of nest material and the type and amount of ventilation. It might rain for an hour or for a few days. Cool temps and high humidity slow the drying process. Drill a few drain holes if you like, but if it creates for you a casual regard for water intrusion, nestlings are done a great disservice. (Again, the best course of action is to prevent any water from entering the next box in the first place.)

In summary, I believe no other wood nest box to be as versatile and adaptable to the various needs or wants of dedicated bluebirders. Our concerns are similar, yet different. Whatever they might be, one must be ready and able to solve or eliminate the unexpected problem. I didn't learn this on my own. I was fortunate to have one of the best teachers and friends in the business, Dick Peterson.



Steve Gilbertson holds his latest nest-box design, the Gilwood box.

Gilbertson's design headquarters is a cluttered northwoods garage

By Jim Williams

Steve Gilbertson, who lives in Aitkin County in north central Minnesota, is what you might call a nest-box scientist. He is one of a handful of persons in North America who has expanded this branch of knowledge with systematic observation of and experimentation with materials, design, and nesting-cavity occupants.

When you swing off Aitkin County Road 2 into the Gilbertson driveway, one of the first things you see is a large stack of four-inch PVC pipes beside a building. Septic project underway? No. You are looking at raw material for some of the manufacturing done in the small garage near the house.

Here, PVC is cut and painted to form the body of a very popular bluebird nest box, many thousands of which can be seen in all parts of North America east of the Great

Plains. The PVC box was Steve's first contribution to the advancement of nest-box science.

If you prefer a wooden nest box, he now has a design in that genre as well, the Gilwood box, elegant in its simplicity, but not simple.

The garage is a handyman's delight. It is filled with workbenches and cupboards and shelves which in turn are filled with tools and parts and finished product. It is organized and efficient and comfortably messy, enough sawdust on the floor to accept tracks, enough general clutter to make it difficult to find a place to set a cup of coffee.

Steve and his wife, Mary, and their two children (now in college) moved from Anoka, Minnesota, to Aitkin County in 1995, when Steve retired. He was 43 years old at the time. He had worked hard and planned well. He was a half dozen or so years into

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Nest boxes should have 'bird appeal', Steve says

Continued from page 10
his bluebird fascination.

He learned of bluebirds and nesting boxes from Lyle Bradley, a Minnesota friend who is well known in Wood Duck circles. Lyle introduced Steve to the late Dick Peterson of Brooklyn Center, Minnesota. Dick was the designer of the Peterson bluebird nest box, perhaps the most famous configuration of them all.

Steve and Dick "hit it off perfectly," Steve told a recent visitor. Dick shared his bluebird trails and his nest-box designs with Steve. They visited and debated about bluebird nest boxes, debate on this subject easier than a non-afficionado might imagine. Steve soon joined the Bluebird Recovery Program of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis. The PVC design followed two years later.

Why did Mr. Gilbertson think the world needed another nest box design?

"I looked at different designs, different wood boxes, and it seemed like water could get in. People seemed to accept that. And they talked about predation at acceptable levels, by both mammals and House Sparrows," he said.

"The biggest thing that inspired me was Dick Peterson showing me his trail of bluebird houses in a park near his home, and the damage the sparrows had done. I thought he was going to cry. That made my mind up right then. I wanted to make a better nest box."

Why PVC pipe?

"Well," he said, "the small diameter of the four-inch PVC seemed acceptable. The box would stay dry because it's not going to come apart. It's easy to build. There is no heat buildup. Another deficiency I ob-

served was the difficulty of looking inside nest boxes to see what was going on. With my box, you could have a two-piece house, the roof and the body separate, so you could take it apart to look inside."

He sells about 3,000 of these boxes each year.

Asked about his new design, he said, "The Gilwood box is simple, but good nest boxes have to work in several ways. You need bird appeal first, and the box has to be tight, dry, discouraging to predators, easy to work with, and inexpensive to build."

Outside, in his yard, he points through a small grove of oak trees and across a sloping meadow to where last year he had a grid of 17

nest boxes for Tree Swallows. He took the boxes down because they were too successful, producing swallows that began to compete with bluebirds for nest boxes on other parts of his property. Now, he tends 19 boxes intended for bluebirds. All are of his new wooden design. He spaces them 125 to 150 yards apart.

His boxes are used by Eastern Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, Black-capped Chickadees, and House Wrens. He once tended a bluebird trail elsewhere in the county, but not any more. "I haven't got the time," he said. "I'm too busy building nest boxes."



Steve with his PVC nest box.

Modified Bauldry trap works on the new Gilwood box

The modified version of the Bauldry trap to be used with the Gilwood box is a 2x5-inch piece of quarter-inch hardware cloth bent to wrap around and pivot on the door's hinge pin. An inch or so of the free end can be bent back flat on itself, and can then cradle a large flat washer, or similar item, for added weight, if desired. A stiff wire with a right-angle bend at the top, and long enough to prop up the hardware cloth "closure," but not tight to the ceiling, is all that is needed. When the sparrow bumps the wire, the closure drops. The door of the nest box is recessed into the body of the box a little over an inch. This allows the door to be opened so a hand can carefully be slipped into the box without fear, in most cases, of the sparrow escaping.

NABS conservation awards for 2000

Boger, Hot Springs Audubon, Lippy, Green, NC state agency

The North American Bluebird Society annually recognizes individuals and groups who have made contributions to bluebird conservation. Each of the award recipients is nominated by someone who knew and appreciated the amount of time, energy, and dedication their nominee contributed to the bluebird recovery efforts in their area. The following award plaques were presented on Saturday, June 24, at the NABS 2000 convention in Galena, Illinois.

Ervin Boger

Enterprise, Alabama

Ervin has been involved with his local country club and golf course for over 20 years. As a direct result of his efforts, the Enterprise Country Club has become one of the best bluebird habitats in that part of the country. A once poorly maintained trail of bluebird boxes that housed mostly flying squirrels, the Enterprise Golf Course Bluebird Trail now consists of over 80 bluebird-fledging boxes and plantings that provide both food for wildlife and beauty.

In addition, Ervin has consistently maintained good records used to improve management practices. To publicize bluebird and other cavity-nester conservation, he assisted in the production of a Tri-state television program featuring his trail; he is a source of help and information to anyone interested in the subject, and he has even found the time to assemble some 2,000 nesting boxes himself.

Hot Springs Village Audubon Society

Hot Springs Village, Arkansas

The organization was recognized for the bluebird conservation work

that it has carried on for the past 30 years. The Audubon chapter was formed shortly after the retirement community opened in 1970. The group's first project was to build 300 bluebird boxes which were placed around the community's first golf course and in yards throughout the village.

Over the years the community has grown and so has the bluebird project. There are now over 200 boxes on seven golf courses and over 1,000 boxes in yards around the community. More importantly, the organization conducts regular bluebird workshops at its local county library, trains all trail monitors, and has kept good records since 1982. The organization also has conducted various studies throughout the years, sharing its findings in past issues of *Sialia*. The Audubon chapter has a well-organized Bluebird Committee which has been chaired for many years by Wayne Tice.

Karen Lippy

Hanover, Pennsylvania

Karen has been involved in bluebirding for the past 15 years. In 1984 she became a bluebird trail volunteer at Codorus State Park. That same year she jumped into bluebirding big time when she became the park's volunteer Bluebird Program Coordinator. Since that time she has dedicated untold hours to bluebird conservation and education. Those who know her say it's her enthusiasm and love of bluebirds that motivate her outstanding work.

In addition to her duties, which include the planning and development of all bluebird program activities, Karen also maintains and monitors a

bluebird trail of her own. Karen provides information on bluebirds to the general public, gives impromptu talks, writes newspaper and newsletter articles on bluebirds, and conducts interpretive programs. In addition, Karen is the current education chairperson for the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania.

Christopher Greene

Ellenboro, North Carolina

In just four years, beginning at the age of 15, Christopher Greene has compiled an impressive list of accomplishments and contributions very worthy of special recognition. He is the founder, president, newsletter editor, and web master of the Rutherford County Bluebird Club, a NABS affiliate organization that started with just three members and has grown to over 170. In addition to his own fledgling organization, Christopher is the Rutherford County coordinator and publicity chairperson for the North Carolina Bluebird Society, and he co-hosted the 2000 annual meeting of that statewide organization.

Christopher also designed and built a bluebird box that received NABS approval.

North Carolina

Surplus Property Agency

The state agency received special recognition for its outstanding contribution to bluebird conservation for its creation and implementation of the Year 2000 Love A Tree program. For the past five years, the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources has sponsored its statewide Love A Tree program designed to help educate fifth grade

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— awards given

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students about the interconnections of natural systems and the importance of their role in the natural environment.

The Year 2000 Love A Tree program came about after Jeff Nance, director of the North Carolina Surplus Property Agency, read an article by the North Carolina Bluebird Society about the plight of the bluebird and the need to build nest boxes. Jeff suddenly saw the hundreds of old shipping pallets destined for the landfill in a new light — bluebird boxes! With the help and cooperation of several state agencies, corporate partners and organizations, Jeff's idea became reality. As a result, 6,500 Love A Tree bluebird kits, each including a box, plans, and educational material, were delivered to education centers throughout North Carolina for pick up by fifth grade teachers. In just one year, this program reached 195,000 elementary school children.

Here's how to submit nominees for 2001 conservation awards

The North American Bluebird Society annually makes awards for outstanding contributions to bluebird conservation. If you wish to nominate an individual, a group, or someone involved in research for an award, please provide the following information. Deadline is March 1, 2001.

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, 2001 to: Awards Committee Chair Barbara Stinson, 25 North Chestnut St., Warrenton, VA 20186.



Chris Green, 19, from Ellenboro, North Carolina, was honored for several accomplishments, including creation of a NABS-affiliated bluebird club that now has 170 members.



Accepting the award for the Hot Springs Village, Arkansas, Audubon Society was Chuck Nelson. The organization's bluebird efforts have resulted in over 1,200 nest boxes being placed in the community.

Blowflies

Researcher says they rarely kill host birds

By Dr. Terry Whitworth

Most people who maintain bird boxes have heard of or encountered bird-nest blowflies. The bird blowfly is part of the blue bottle fly family, Calliphoridae. Most blowflies feed on carrion. A few, like the once-common screw worm fly, attack and injure or kill livestock or wild animals. The bird blowfly is unique in North America in that it infests only live baby birds.

I became acquainted with bird blowflies (*Protocalliphora*) in 1969 while searching for a graduate student research project at Utah State University in Logan, Utah. I met an entomologist at the Bear River Bird Refuge who had studied this insect. He convinced me it would be worthy of study. It was a perfect project; I spent my springs and summers searching for bird nests, and my winters analyzing material I had collected.

In four years of research, I collected about 1,800 bird nests from about 70 species of birds. I also got to explore some spectacular country in Utah, Wyoming, and Idaho.

As luck would have it, I had chosen an ideal spot to study this parasite. I found 19 species of bird blowflies in this area. When I began studying them, there were 11 species of bird blowflies known in North America. Early in my study, I joined forces with Gordon Bennett, a Canadian entomologist, and Curtis Sabrosky, a Smithsonian entomolo-

gist. We ultimately described 15 new species of this fly. This work was published in the 1989 book *Bird Blowflies in North America*.

Bird blowflies are a common parasite of bluebirds and many other cavity nesters. They also occur in open nests, but cavity nests usually are more heavily infested. Bird blowflies can infest any bird species where young birds spend a few days in the nest. They occur throughout the Northern Hemisphere, and (have been found on) over 200 bird species.

Adult flies overwinter. In the spring, they lay eggs in nests or on nestlings shortly after the birds hatch. Most species of bird blowflies feed periodically on the nestling's bare abdomen. Most feeding occurs at

"What I discovered is these larvae consume large amounts of blood from nestlings. However, nestling birds are incredible blood factories and they replace it very quickly."

night when nests are dark and nestlings are quiet.

In heavily infested nests you may find larvae attached to nestlings anytime of day or night. They are best seen when you lift nestlings and examine their lower body, or by examining nest material after the birds fledge. Heavily infested nestlings develop minute scabs and blood spots on their lower abdomen. In some species larvae may also invade

the ears or nostrils of the birds, and one species (*Protocalliphora braueri*) always burrows into the flesh of nestlings.

Rates of larval development vary, but tend to match the rates of nestling development. Species found in bluebird nests mature more slowly, while those in small open nesters mature more quickly. About the time nestlings fledge, larvae form a pupal case. About seven to 14 days later, adult flies emerge. (For people who want to contribute nests for study, the ideal time to collect the nest is shortly after fledging, before adult flies have emerged.)

In the summer of 1999, I examined 394 nests of 32 bird species contributed by University of Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology nest box cooperators. Of these nests, 209 were infested with bird blowflies, and 18 had over 100 larvae per nest. Of infested birds, 118 were bluebirds (86 Eastern, 19 Mountain, and 13 Western).

Rates of infestation were 62 percent in Eastern, 47 percent in Mountain, and 100 percent in Western Bluebirds. Eastern Bluebirds tended to have much higher populations of larvae; almost half those infested had 50 to 200 larvae per nest. Clearly, bird blowflies are a part of the life of most nestling bluebirds.

One major debate among entomologists and ornithologists has been

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An adult blowfly

— blowflies

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whether bird blowflies are injurious to nestling birds. Much of my Ph.D. research focused on attempting to answer this question. Our book, *Bird Blowflies in North America*, has a detailed discussion of this issue, and, in 1992, a colleague and I published an article in the *Canadian Zoological Journal* (70:2184-2191) detailing my research.

What I discovered is these larvae consume large amounts of blood from nestlings. However, nestling birds are incredible blood factories, and they replace it very quickly. I compared blood levels between infested and uninfested nestlings. I found that larval populations had to be quite high (10 or more per nestling) to cause significant reductions in blood levels. Even when nestlings were anemic, they rarely died, and most

recovered and fledged successfully.

No one has studied the fate of fledglings that have suffered high levels of parasitism, and it is possible their survival rates or breeding success is affected.

So, if impacts are minimal, should birders worry about these parasites or just accept them as part of nature? It is likely that these birds and parasites have coexisted and coevolved for millions of years. Most parasites do not kill their host. If they are lethal the parasite also will die. I believe Protocalliphora falls in this category.

If infestations are obvious, nestlings are likely heavily infested, and you could do a nest exchange to reduce the parasite burden. Is this really necessary? Probably not. In a world where survival of the fittest operates, parasites help weed out

Bluebird festival in Oregon successful

By Shelly Walker

Sponsored by the Prescott, Ore., Bluebird Recovery Project (PBRP) and Champoeg State Park, the Champoeg Bluebird Festival May 20 was a big success. Champoeg is the fifth Adopt-A-Box segment of the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail. The festival drew more than 500 people.

A special dedication was held at noon to formally recognize Champoeg State Park as a member of the TBT. Elsie Elztroth, NABS board member from Corvallis, Ore., made the trip to present PBRP with a \$500 check from NABS for the 50 boxes adopted at Champoeg.

Local Wild Birds Unlimited stores provided refreshments for the day and sold bluebird-related items. WBU was kind enough to donate half of the day's proceeds to the PBRP.

weak nestlings, the young of poor parents, or those nesting in marginal areas. It seems kind of cruel, but it is probably for the best in future generations.

If you become aware that your nests are heavily infested, you can reduce future numbers by removing nests right after fledging and preventing adult flies from emerging. This can be quite effective if there are few natural nests sustaining these parasites in the area.

(Dr. Whitworth is an entomologist in Tacoma, Washington. He can be reached by e-mail at wpctwbug@aol.com. His postal address is 3707 96th St. E., Tacoma, WA 98446.)

Bluebird deaths in Oregon examined

Analysis raises some questions to consider

By Elsie K. Eltzroth

Unfortunately, we all can find dead bluebirds, nestlings or abandoned eggs in the nest boxes we monitor. We always want to know how we can prevent this from happening again. It is important to remember that the more boxes on a trail, the greater number of losses we may encounter.

We have learned to expect some mortality from predation by accipiters such as the Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks, feral and domestic cats, raccoons or snakes, collision, drowning, or electrocution. House Sparrow depredation and competition from other endemic species take some bluebirds.

We find that most of our problems here, in Oregon, are weather related, usually a constant rainy, cold, and windy spring, that precludes the onset of a robust insect population.

As long ago as 1977, we investigated the death of a Western Bluebird that died for no apparent reason while nesting in a box on the Audubon Society of Corvallis Bluebird Trail (ASC). The staff at the Oregon State University Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (OSUVDL) necropsied the adult, and diagnosed the cause as ulcerative enteritis. The bird also was infested with an intestinal parasite, a thorny-headed worm.

Each year since 1977 the disease has been implicated in the death of adult bluebirds (*Sialia* 2:67-71). The thorny-headed worm was not always identified in the gut of the dead birds, but we could not rule out the possibility that parasites had been present at an earlier point in the disease process.

The intermediate host of the

thorny-headed worm is the common pillbug, a ubiquitous terrestrial isopod. Although the Western Bluebird may ingest infected pillbugs throughout the year, they may be attracted to this easy prey prior to the spring breeding season when the birds experience their greatest nutritional demand and preferred foods are scarce.

In *Sialia* 5:83-87, we briefly reviewed the losses observed during the first six years on the trail. Infestation with this parasite is common, so we are referring to this topic again.

Following three years of extremely adverse winter, spring and early summer weather in Oregon, we lost an unexpected number of breeding adult bluebirds in 1999. Thirty-nine dead Western Bluebirds were recovered from a nesting population of 120 pairs.

Analysis of records indicated that this mortality rate, 16 percent, was over twice the 1998 figure of seven percent and much higher than the level for 1997, 4.3 percent.

The losses experienced were of such concern that Dr. Rob Bildfell, pathologist at the OSUVDL, offered to examine 10 adult and five juvenile carcasses. Eight of the 10 adults had moderate to severe necrohemorrhagic enteritis; only four had parasites in the gut. Of five fledglings examined, three had evidence of less severe enteritis. Clostridial enteritis is suspected in each case, but confirmation of either *C. perfringens* or *C. colinum* as the causative agent requires further testing and research. Some strains of *Clostridium* spp. are a normal component of the intestinal flora, and may proliferate following changes in the

intestinal microenvironment.

Certain questions come to mind:

- Have we compounded the stress and frustration among bluebirds by overpopulating some sites on the trail, thus creating territorial disputes, especially when both the migratory Tree Swallows and Violet-green Swallows return and contend for nesting sites?

- Is the food source, in bad weather, insufficient for the existing breeding bluebird population? It is feasible to supplement some bluebirds with special mealworm feeders at some sites on the trail?

- Has this trail reached a carrying capacity for breeding success? The last four years has shown a leveling off of nesting attempts that was not as evident in previous years. We have taken into account that three consecutive years of bad weather may have had some influence here.

- Probably the most pressing questions this year concern the boxes in which there were fatalities last year: Should they all be replaced? Should we contact a veterinarian or pathologist within hours after death if a bacterial disease is to be diagnosed as the cause of death?

If a dead adult is found with live chicks, still in its nest box, assume that these young are healthy and may only show signs of deprivation. The decision to foster into another nest may depend on which adult remains at the nest, the size of the brood, age, and if the diet of the young could be supplemented with a special feeder.

Fostering does work, but the young might need additional nourish-

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— Oregon deaths

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ment before being placed with other nestlings of the same age. At the beginning of the season, find out where the nearest rehabilitator or veterinarian is located, should you need help. Any manipulation of birds, eggs or nests requires the handler to have the proper state and federal permits.

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(Ms. Eltzroth can be contacted at 6980 NW Cardinal Drive, Corvallis, Oregon, 97330, 541/745-7806.)

NABS web site has new features; easy to make nest-box reports on it

Several new features and new information on North American bluebird nest-box activity can be found on the NABS research web site recently launched. The web site is designed to provide immediate summary information for bluebird conservation efforts across North America, using a state-of-the-art on-line database system.

The site also gives NABS members the opportunity to enter nesting information directly on-line. You can find the instructions page for use of the site at www.bluebirdtrails.org/tbt/tbt_instructions.htm.

Here are some of the web site's Transcontinental Bluebird Trail statistics as of the end of July:

- Summary reports for the year 2000 — 813;
- ZIP codes represented by summary reports — 52;
- Problems or unusual events reports — 361;
- Described boxes (current members) — 1,005;
- Registered boxes (current members) — 15,412;
- Fledglings (all species) — 2,829;

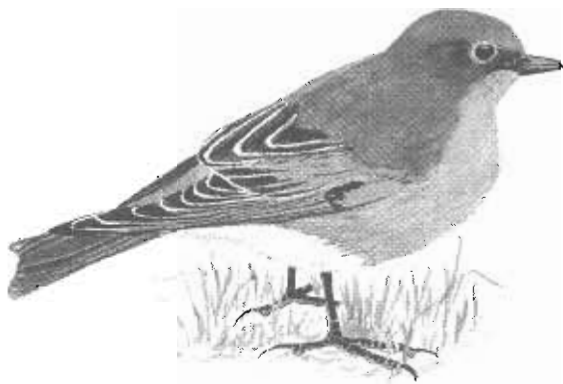
- Registered trails (current members) — 241;

- Registered boxes on trails (current members) — 15,376.

NABS members are encouraged to enter their nesting information on the web site. To enter your data, first go to the NABS web site at www.nabluebirdsociety.org. Follow the on-line data collection link to the main data collection web site page.

The on-line data submission program is free to all current NABS members, and it was designed to be as simple and as brief as possible. An on-line glossary of terms used on the research site helps address questions about terms and definitions.

For NABS members unable to enter data at home, at their local library, or through a relative (perhaps a great way to get kids or grandkids involved), please send a self-addressed and stamped envelope to NABS, Report Request, P.O. Box 74, Darlington, WI 53530. A printed form will be sent for your use. Information received by mail will not be part of the web site database.



Time to renew?

Do you need to renew your NABS membership? The best way to keep current with news in the bluebird world is to read every issue of *Bluebird*. Each issue has information important to your efforts to attract and fledge bluebirds.

Look on the address label on the back of this issue to see if it is time to renew your membership. If so, do it today to ensure that you are a member in good standing and that you will continue to receive each informative and entertaining issue of *Bluebird* magazine.

Bluebird News from Shore to Shore

In the Summer 2000 issue of *Bluebird*, in this column, we credited bird bander **Tom Nicholls** and associate **Ann Wick** with banding 374,000 Eastern Bluebirds. As good as they are at that task, the figure is wrong by a substantial margin. It actually represents bluebirds banded over many years by many people. The editor misunderstood his source material.

Naturalist **Tami Gingrich** of Geauga Park District, Chardon, Ohio, wrote of an instance of apparent bluebird-nest parasitism by European Starlings. Investigating a report from bluebirder **Patti Cook**, Ms. Gingrich found two starling babies in a nest box being vigorously defended by a pair of Eastern Bluebirds. No young bluebirds were to be seen, she said, and the young starlings seemed to be thriving. She watched the bluebirds feed the starlings, and returned a few days later to find an empty nest box. "It seems the starlings triumphed," she said.

In Manchester, Maryland, **Leroy V. Walker**, 83, continues to tend his bluebird boxes, something he has done since 1966 when he read an article by the late Lawrence Zeleny. He had immediate success with his first effort, and in recent years has maintained a trail of 70 boxes. He fledged 330 birds this year.

From Minnesota, record-early Eastern Bluebird returns this past spring, some birds seen in February, which can be a tough month there. Warming weather brought the birds north ahead of schedule. And from Faribault, Minnesota, came report of seven bluebird eggs in a nest box tended by **Lou** and **Elaine Gegen**. Both of these items were first re-

ported in *Bluebird News*, published by the **Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota**.

Bluebirds Across Nebraska has received a grant of \$14,820 from the Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund. The money will be used to aid in development of the **Dwane Zimmerman Trans-Nebraska Bluebird Trail**. The plan of BAN is to have the trail loop the state in 10 years, completing 100 miles of trail each year.

Using a formula that accounts for possible loss of nestlings in the maturation process, **Allen Bower** of Britton, Michigan, determined that one pair of bluebirds and the surviving progeny of each succeeding generation could produce as many as 5,161 birds in 10 years. He assumed five eggs per nest, with half of the nestlings surviving to adulthood, and then nesting on their own. We found his figures in the newsletter of **Bluebirds Across Nebraska**. Import-



Leroy Walker of Manchester, Maryland, with one of his 70 bluebird nest boxes.

tantly, Mr. Bower pointed out that each baby bluebird lost to predation means a total potential loss of 1,290 bluebirds during the next 10 years.

Gary Boone of Linton, Indiana, fledged 40 Eastern Bluebirds from three nest boxes in 1999. Each box had three successful nestings, according to an item in the *Indiana Bluebird Flyer*.

Jeff Nance, the director of the **North Carolina Surplus Property Office**, read an article about the need for bluebird nest boxes, and went right to work. He diverted old shipping pallets from his facility to a state prison where inmates now cut the wood into nest-box parts. Previously, the pallets went to a landfill. Other agencies and companies also are involved. The **North Carolina Office of Environmental Education** and the **Wildlife Resources Commission** produced instructions on how to successfully use a nest box. The state **Department of Transportation** shipped the pamphlets to the **International Paper**. And International Paper included the information and nest-box parts in kits distributed to fifth-grade students as part of its **Love A Tree** environmental education program. Now, the students are building nest boxes, and learning the hows and whys of bluebird restoration. Isn't it amazing what one good idea and lots of cooperation can do? This bit of good news came from *Bluebird Notes*, newsletter of the **North Carolina Bluebird Society**.

From Sullivan County, New York, comes another landfill story. **Bill Cutler**, coordinator of landfills for the county and son of **Olga Cutler** of

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— news

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Jeffersonville, New York, is working with other agencies to restore a closed landfill to green status as habitat suitable to wildlife. In a photo accompanying a newspaper article about Mr. Cutler's restoration efforts is a bluebird nest box securely attached to a methane well pipe atop the old landfill. A bluebird is on the box.

In Idaho, long-time bluebirder **Alfred Larson** most recently introduced two young men to the joy of bluebirding. They were **Casey** and **Jeremy Jenson**, brothers working on their Boy Scout merit badges for bird study.

Sylvia and **Don Essinger** of Chatham, New Jersey, write to tell us of a pair of Eastern Bluebirds that built their nest in one compartment of a 12-room Purple Martin hotel.

In conclusion, these words of wisdom from **Julie Kutruff**, president of the **Virginia Bluebird Society**. "Be open to new possibilities," she wrote to VBS members, "because you never know what you might learn or experience. Maybe that means trying a new kind of nest box, pairing bluebird boxes for the benefit of both bluebirds and Tree Swallows, or simply welcoming a different native cavity nester into your bluebird houses. Of course, we are all about promoting bluebirds, but we also have a responsibility to help other native cavity nesters. Let's keep working to preserve species diversity."

Vern Johnson dies

Vern Johnson, founder of The Southern Interior Bluebird Trail Society of British Columbia, died in May.

Mr. Johnson was a NABS award recipient in 1998.



A bluebird trail sponsored by the Jo Daviess Bluebird Recovery Program and Natural Area Guardians in Jo Daviess County, Illinois, became part of the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail at dedication ceremonies in May. Tending to the ribbon cutting were, left to right, Bob Todd, local TBT chair; Randy Nyhou, representing the Illinois Department of Natural Resources; Colleen Yonda, representing local co-sponsor Wild Birds Unlimited; and Jeff Henzel, also with the Illinois DNR.

Cornell looking for help with study of cavity nesters on golf courses

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Birdhouse Network recently submitted a pre-proposal for funding that would enable it to conduct a long-term, nationwide study of the impact, if any, that golf courses have on the breeding success of cavity-nesting birds. If the lab receives funding, it will collect data on pesticide use on golf courses, evaluate which courses are having better breeding success than others and why, and then create management plans for less successful golf courses to administer.

Cornell is looking for experienced nest-box monitors to help in the set up and data collection of this study. If you are interested, please read on.

Are you currently monitoring any nest boxes located on golf courses? Do you know of any golf courses in

your area that currently have nest boxes on the grounds? Would you be willing to erect nest boxes — this could be as many as 20 or 30 — on a nearby golf course?

If you answered "yes" to any of the previous questions AND would like to be a part of this study, contact Tina Phillips, The Birdhouse Network, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, NY 14850; phone 607/254-2416; e-mail cbp6@cornell.edu. Tell her which of the questions you answered "yes".

Cornell hopes to implement the study in spring of 2001. Having monitors in place now will cut down on the time it takes to coordinate this national effort later.

Coffee for the birds

Coffee grown in natural shade helps neo-tropical migrants

By Jim Williams

Your simple morning cup of coffee has ceased to be simple. It has moved from basic regular or decaf to ecological and economical nuances which give an entirely new flavor to the pot.

One of these flavors involves birds, and so we offer this overview of the issue of shade coffee and the opportunity it presents for you — as a consumer — to make a difference.

Focusing on our concern for birds, coffee grown under a shady canopy of trees helps those bird species which summer in North America and winter in the tropics of Latin America and the Caribbean by providing them with foraging habitat. The trees which shade the coffee harbor insects and other food items used by these birds.

Move now to the supermarket, aisle eight, right-hand side, coffees and teas. Ignore the coffee in the big round cans. It is not shade grown, period. Most of it is of the Robusta family or hybrids, grown in open sun where the bountiful crops mature quickly, generally at the expense of flavor, among other things.

When we talk shade coffee, we are talking about beans of the Arabica family, slower to mature, richer in flavor. You will grind these beans at home. (Some shade coffee is available ground for use.)

Can you find shade coffee beans in the supermarket? Maybe, maybe not. You are more likely to find them in a specialty coffee shop, at a food co-op, or by mail from a source savvy about the issues.

Coffee traditionally was grown in

the shade, protected by a canopy of native trees. This coffee matures at a more leisurely pace. Think of the two cups of coffee on a typical day, the hastily consumed cup as you rush in the morning, the relaxed cup after dinner: Sun coffee and shade coffee.

The new hybrid coffees can be grown in full sun. They grow faster there, and from a comparable number of plants often produce a larger crop. This growing method, however, requires more fertilizer and pesticide than does shade coffee. The economics are different as well: Sun coffee is a commodity sold by the farmer at prices he cannot control.

Shade coffee requires less fertilizer, less pesticide, less herbicide. It offers better, more fully developed and subtle flavors. Coffee that is slow to grow and slow to ripen, better converts its starches to sugars. This coffee can be marketed as a specialty product, providing the farmer a higher return for his efforts. That

“Shade coffee requires less fertilizer, less pesticide, less herbicide. It offers better, more fully developed and subtle flavors.”

farmer also grows the crop with a smaller financial investment if he must buy less agricultural chemicals and need not clear forest to create crop land.

If birds had thumbs, shade-grown coffee would get two thumbs up. Ornithologists writing in many journals over the last few years have documented the importance of shade coffee habitat in the increasingly

deforested landscape of Mexico and Central America.

“Up to 10 billion birds summer in the temperate forest of North America, then fly south to winter in Latin America,” says author Mark Pendergast in the book *Uncommon Grounds, the History of Coffee and How It Transformed Our World*.

“During the decade 1978-1987, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services’ Breeding Bird Survey showed an alarming decline in neotropical migrants, ranging from one to three percent annually. Although there may be other factors involved,” he says, “it is alarming that shade-grown coffee was declining at precisely the same time. ...”

Pendergast says that birds, insects, and other animals abandon coffee grown in the open as an ecological desert, citing information from Russell Greenberg of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center.

“The (Central American) plantations that provided great birding were those in which coffee is grown in the shade, beneath an overstory of trees that provide protective cover from excessive sunlight,” said John Kricher of the

Department of Biology at Wheaton College in Massachusetts, writing for *Birding* magazine about his own recent visits to that area.

Of a sun coffee plantation in Panama, Mr. Kricher said, “There were birds, but far fewer species than in any of the surrounding habitats.”

There is little question that shade

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Tips on how to successfully place nest boxes on private property

Editor's note: There is more than one way to put a bluebird house in a productive location. Kevin Putman does it by knocking on doors in his California neighborhood when he sees a good place for a nest box.

By Kevin Putman

I've got about 100 nest boxes in place at private residences.

I've found that it is good to be as concise as possible when approaching homeowners about putting a box on their property. I try to remember how I feel when someone comes to my door trying to sell something.

First of all, you want to put them at ease quickly by making clear that you aren't trying to sell anything, because that is what they suspect when they see a stranger at their door. Introduce yourself, and then tell them something like, "As a hobby, I put out nest boxes in an effort to boost the population of a beneficial bird that is

— shade coffee

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coffee is good for the birds, and shade coffee provides an extraordinary opportunity for those of us who drink it to help birds on a daily basis. You, as the consumer, need to search out the product. Ask retailers questions about where their coffee comes from and how it is grown. Educate them about the value of shade-grown coffee. And clearly let merchants know about your preference for bird-friendly, shade-grown coffee.

Your simple cup of coffee can make a significant difference.

rather rare here — the (Eastern, Western, Mountain) bluebird (not to be confused with jay).

"These birds are rare due to a shortage of nesting sites, and that's why I'm putting out the nest boxes. Your property looks like the kind of place where bluebirds might nest if there were a nest box. Would you mind if I put a box over there on a post, where I would be able to stop by and monitor it from time to time without bothering you?"

Now, before I ask anything, I usually know where I'm going to try to put the box(es), and this helps move things along. Be careful when looking over people's property, though; you have to do it with a few quick glances, without looking suspicious.

Don't bother with too many other details in your initial introduction of your project. People are usually doing something else (even if it is nothing), and don't want to stand around listening to a stranger for more than a minute or so.

Be clear and concise, but don't rush your speech. If they want to know more, they will ask. If you want them to know more, have some literature handy to leave with them. I've had about a 95 percent success rate with this approach. Some people become interested enough to check their own boxes.

(Mr. Putman, of Yuba City, California, can be reached by e-mail at dputman@syix.com.)

Book review

'Nest Boxes for Prairie Birds'

Birders interested in building nest boxes can choose from several books offering plans and information. One of the best is entitled "Nest Boxes for Prairie Birds." It was written by NABS board member Myrna Pearman, and published in 1992. It came to my attention at the recent NABS convention in Galena, Illinois.

With help from several fine photographers and artist Gary Ross, Ms. Pearman gives us an 80-page softcover book that offers well-designed box plans with species information that helps us understand some of the whys and wherefores of nest-box preference and placement.

Included are plans for boxes for ducks, kestrels, owls, woodpeckers, flycatchers, swallows, chickadees, creepers, nuthatches, wrens, finches, and, of course, bluebirds. She includes bracket and basket plans as well, for nesters such as American Robin, Eastern Phoebe, and Mourning Dove.

She also discusses predator problems and solutions, and House Sparrows and European Starlings. There is information on bird banding, supplemental feeding, and pesticides as they relate to cavity-nesting birds.

The book was priced at US\$12 on the table at Galena. It can be ordered by writing Ms. Pearman at the Ellis Bird Farm, Box 5090, Lacombe, AB, Canada, T4L 1W7.

It would be a fine addition to the library of any birder interested in providing housing for feathered friends.

— Jim Williams



Above: Lisa Kivirist, left, and John Ivanko, co-executive directors of NABS, share a Convention 2000 banquet table with featured speakers Don and Lillian Stokes.



Left: Convention co-chairs Joan Harmet, left, and Grace Storch share a hug and a laugh during festivities.

Below: On one of the birding excursions, participants stand on an overlook above the Mississippi River, looking for swooping swallows and admiring the view that extended for miles up and down the river valley.



NABS' new president, Doug LeVasseur of Senecaville, Ohio, read names of winners in the door-prize drawing during the Saturday evening banquet.



Ray Harris of Fort Macleod, Alberta, who served as NABS president for the past two years, said his goodbyes at the convention, thanking many for their contributions to the organization.

Convention 2000 flies high in Illinois

By Joan Harmet

NABS 2000 is history, and what a page in our archives! Over 350 bluebirders from across North America attended the convention June 22-25 in Galena, Illinois. Bluebirds were naturally the main topic heard in the lobby, on the field trips, and in the eating areas.

Lillian and Don Stokes offered the keynote presentation to Saturday's program, speaking on "The Joys of Bluebirds." In their slide presentation, the Stokes, authors of 23 books on birds and nature, said bluebirds have helped the public become more aware of the importance of conservation. Bluebird conservation on the local level is often the springboard to an individual's growing interest and effectiveness in larger conservation issues, they said.

Field trips in the countryside surrounding the resort location, on the bluffs above the Mississippi River, were well attended. The trips concentrated on birding and botanizing, history and geology, and the river itself. Saturday afternoon's program allowed participants to choose from a variety of speakers and topics.

Not to be missed was the Hog Roast Friday night and the annual Awards Banquet Saturday evening. New NABS officers and board members were elected at the business meeting.

The Jo Daviess County Bluebird Recover Program, a NABS affiliate, and its parent organization, the Jo Daviess County Natural Area Guardians, were convention sponsors and hosts. A very special thanks is extended to the volunteers for their time and talent, so generously shared with NABS.

See you next year in Ohio!

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
2-165 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 Parmigan Drive, #1
Walnut Creek, CA 94595

Colorado

Colorado Bluebird Project, c/o Bob Wilson
2654 Serber Lane, Grand Junction, CO 81506

Georgia

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

Illinois

Jo Daviess County, Illinois, Bluebird
Recovery Program
15 Cedar Rim Trail, Galena, IL 61036

Illinois Audubon Society
25582 Mallinson Road, Geneseo, IL 61254

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

Mountain 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 Dong LeVasseur
20680 Township Road, No 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 Johnstou
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

Tennessee

Benton County Bluebird Society of Tennessee
c/o Dan McCue
155 Post Oak Ave., Camden, TN 38320

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
3015 Squalicum Parkway, Suite 250
Bellingham, WA 98225

Wisconsin

Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin
6612 Akron Avenue, Plainfield, WI 54966

Lafayette County Bluebird Society
14953 Highway 23, Darlington, WI 53530

