

# Bluebird

*Journal of the North American Bluebird Society*

Winter 2001, Vol. 23, No. 1

*Help us keep  
the promise by  
joining the  
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Giving Circle*

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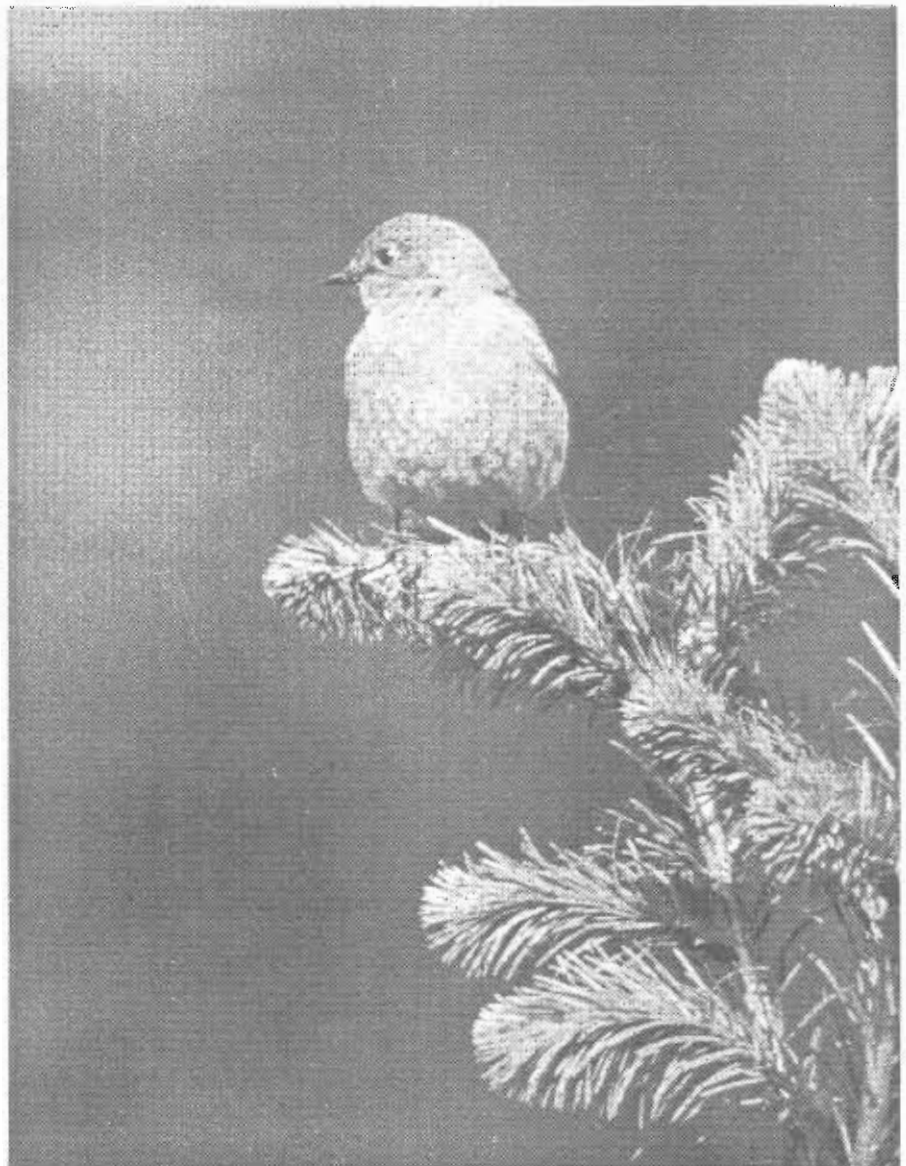
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*(Photo of female Western Bluebird By Dave Middleton.)*

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# From the President

Doug LeVasseur

If I am having a really bad day and need a happy memory to lift my spirits, there are several avenues I might explore. Family memories are about 85 percent happy. I mean, who doesn't have some less-than-happy family memories. Or I could draw upon my working memories, which are about 65 percent happy ones. I know, I know, it may seem a bit low but let me remind you that I worked on highway construction sites here in Ohio for the past 35 years. I'll bet you can't come up with a 65 percent happiness rating when it comes to highway construction zones!

Or I could turn to my bluebirding memories. Ah yes, those bluebird memories where the happiness index bounces between 98 and 100 percent, depending on House Sparrow population fluctuations from year to year.

My bluebird memories come in the form of trail and people memories. Trail memories are likely to be private, but oh so vivid. Even the oldest of them seems as though it took place only yesterday. I feel blessed to have trail memories from many states and several Canadian provinces, and, yes, even from Bermuda.

And then there are the bluebirdERS! If I had to relocate, move across the continent and find new friends, I would likely skip the singles bars, check out the churches, and then proceed directly to the nearest bluebird organization. My own personal experiences tell me that here I would find people warm and sincere, connected to and appreciative of the natural world.

A common interest brings people with extremely diverse backgrounds

together, but there is a tendency to talk shop when we gather. And you can always rest assured that conversations will be met with keen attention, a smiling face and a twinkle in the eye. You know you are among friends.

Do you want to stock up on happy memories for that occasional bad day? Consider attending and supporting your state, provincial, or local bluebird organization meeting. I have attended a number of them. You won't be disappointed. For a real treat, you might consider attending a NABS annual meeting where typically bluebirds from half the states and provinces gather for several days of fun and sharing. Come for the camaraderie and the good times; take home the memories.

## Two more affiliates

Since NABS affiliates met in Galena, Illinois, at our June 2000 convention, we have added two more groups. Other new groups are being formed.

The Massachusetts Bluebird Association (MBA) is led by Haley Priest of Amherst, Mass. Massachusetts bluebirders can reach her by e-mail at [MaBlue@gis.net](mailto:MaBlue@gis.net).

Bluebirds of Iowa Restoration was organized by Jaclyn Hill in Ellsworth, Iowa. Ms. Hill can be reached by e-mail at [athillhome@netins.net](mailto:athillhome@netins.net). This group is a division of the Iowa Audubon Society.

Please put these new groups on your newsletter mailing list (see affiliate list for address). If you live in a nearby state, drop them a line to say hello and share bluebird talk.

## THE LAWRENCE ZELNY GIVING CIRCLE

### *Help us keep the promise*

While your tireless grassroots conservation efforts have helped return bluebirds to most of North America, there remains much to be done to insure that bluebirds and other native cavity nesters continue to prosper.

To further that work, the North American Bluebird Society has established the Lawrence Zeleny Giving Circle. It will support a new NABS Endowment Fund honoring Dr. Lawrence Zeleny, founder of the North American Bluebird Society in 1978. This action was taken at the October 2000 meeting of the NABS board of directors, by unanimous vote.

Dr. Zeleny worked tirelessly with bluebirders across the continent on behalf of bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting bird species. In his ground-breaking book, *The Bluebird*, he wrote, "Bluebird conservation offers an unusual opportunity for people who are truly concerned about our wildlife heritage to accomplish something by means of direct action."

His call for action has been heard, as we see by the outstanding contributions of you and other NABS members and the many county, state, and provincial bluebird organizations. His love for bluebirds is shared by millions of us. Now, we have a leadership opportunity, the Giving Circle.

Please help NABS continue to grow by supporting this newly established endowment fund. The Lawrence Zeleny Giving Circle is a special opportunity for individuals to continue the award-winning and enduring work of the North American Bluebird Society.

You can do so by making or pledging a charitable contribution of \$5,000 or more. The first contribution to this fund comes from Dr. Zeleny himself, \$5,000 from the legacy he left at his passing. We ask you to match this amount if you can. You share his love of the birds. Now share support of his efforts on behalf of these beautiful creatures.

You need not make your gift in one sum. Consider the possibility of pledging your support over time. For example, to reach the \$5,000 amount, you might pledge to contribute \$1,000 for each of the next five years.

Donors to the Lawrence Zeleny Giving Circle will be recognized annually in *Bluebird*, although donations can remain anonymous.

NABS also welcomes donations to the NABS Endowment Fund of from \$50 to \$4,999. Donors will be recognized annually as supporters of the NABS Endowment Fund.

The most important thing is your contribution, whatever its size. The endowment will give continuity to our efforts. It will create a financial base that will carry our work for bluebirds well into the future.

**We have made a promise to the birds. The endowment will allow us to keep our promise. Help us keep the promise. Make a pledge today.**

•••

*For more information, please contact NABS, or call NABS treasurer, Bob Martin, at First Union Securities. The toll-free number is 800/225-2419. All inquiries will be held strictly confidential. Be sure to consult with your tax and legal advisors before contributing to NABS.*

## **\$8,600 gift**

Contributions of \$8,600 have been received by NABS from the Jo Daviess County (Illinois) Natural Area Guardians, host of the NABS 2000 convention. The money came from the silent auction, and from proceeds generated by the incredible attendance. Larger attendance meant a smaller portion of revenues went to cover fixed costs. The donation will help with production of a startup guide for affiliates, for revision of the educator's packet, and for a new trail-monitor's guide.

## **Bluebird**

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*Questions should be directed to the NABS headquarters address/telephone number shown above. NABS web site offers answers to many questions.*

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*Letters to the editor and articles in this magazine express the opinions and positions of the authors. Articles published do not necessarily represent the opinions and positions of the officers, directors, or employees of the North American Bluebird Society.*

## NABS wish list

Here is a list of items that NABS wishes it had, items you might be able to contribute to the society. Such contributions help us make best use of the limited resources and funds of the organization. Contributions mean there is more resource to be used for the birds.

Please contact NABS if you might be able to donate one or more of the items on the list. All donations will be recognized by an acknowledgment letter which can be used for tax-deductible purposes as allowable by the IRS.

- Photocopier for NABS office use. We would prefer Xerox or Ricoh-brand copiers due to ease of servicing.
- CPA services to complete annual Form 990 and quarterly payroll for NABS.
- Six-by-nine-inch padded envelopes made with recycled content material.
- Reams of 100-percent post-consumer or tree-free (hemp) paper for general office use.
- Long distance calling cards, to help offset long distance telephone charges.
- Airline tickets for NABS board members and staff for use as they represent NABS at various bluebird and conservation meetings, conferences and conventions. Tickets can be donated via frequent flyer miles programs.
- Professional web-site design services to help NABS continue to build an educational and e-commerce-based web site.
- If you are a manufacturer of a product, consider supporting NABS via a licensing arrangement.

## 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.

A registration form is included as an insert with this issue of *Bluebird*.

Speakers will be James M. Berry, executive director of the Roger Tory Peterson Institute in Jamestown, New York; James R. Hill III, executive director and founder of the Purple Martin Conservation Association in Edinboro, Pennsylvania; Andrew M. Troyer, designer and manufacturer of nest boxes for bluebirds and Purple Martins; Richard M. Tuttle, Ohio resident and winner of the Outstanding Bluebird Conservation Award from NABS; and Julie Zickefoose, naturalist, writer, artist, and contributing editor to the magazine *BirdWatcher's Digest*. Ms. Zickefoose will be the Saturday banquet speaker.

New at this meeting will be a series of three special seminars for NABS affiliates. These will be offered Thursday, beginning at 12:30 p.m. The first will offer tips on creating a successful newsletter. The second will discuss county coordinator systems. The third will explore ways to increase affiliate membership. Jim Williams, editor of *Bluebird*, will conduct the first seminar. Steve Eno and Chuck Finley, both active in Bluebirds Across Nebraska, will facilitate the second session. Darlene Sillick, NABS education chair, will conduct the third.

Exhibits will be on display throughout the meeting. NABS affiliates will have a special meeting Thursday at 7:30 p.m.

Three field trips will be offered Friday. The first will go to The Wilds, North America's largest conservation

facility, with animals in protected, large, open-range habitats. The second will take birders to the Dawes Arboretum where there are both bluebird trails and Purple Martin colonies. The third will tour urban sites for cavity-nesting species.

Dinner Friday night will be at the Columbus Zoo.

Programs fill the day Saturday, beginning at 7:30 a.m. and continuing until 4:30 p.m. A luncheon is scheduled for 11:30 a.m. The cash bar opens at 6 p.m., and the banquet begins at 7 o'clock.

Sunday at 6:30 a.m. another birding trip will be offered, this to the Columbus Greenlawn Cemetery.

For room reservations, call the host Radisson Hotel at 800/333-3333. You are advised to make reservations early.

The NABS web site at [www.nabluebirdsociety.org](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org) has more information. You also can 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. (Please consider passing along this web-site reference information to others, especially your newsletter editor, in affiliated organizations.)

For questions not addressed on the web site, contact Dean Sheldon (419/752-1451, [dsheldonjr@hotmail.com](mailto:dsheldonjr@hotmail.com)), Doug LeVasseur (740/685-5220, [emdlev@clover.net](mailto:emdlev@clover.net)) or Darlene Sillick (614/761-3696, [azuretrails@columbus.rr.com](mailto:azuretrails@columbus.rr.com)).

The conference is hosted by the Ohio Bluebird Society with assistance from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife; Ohio Biological Survey; and *BirdWatcher's Digest*.

# Give the bluebirds the space they need

## Montana bluebirder finds a distance is not a territory

By Bob Niebuhr

To reduce the number of Tree Swallows using nest boxes on a trail, try placing the boxes farther apart rather than pairing them. Accommodate the need of bluebirds for breeding territory of adequate size. It worked for me.

When Art Aylesworth convinced me to start my first bluebird trail in 1991 and sent me 25 NABS-style nest boxes, I knew very little about bluebirds and even less about Tree Swallows.

I began by getting permission from a cattle rancher in the Highwood Mountains to put boxes on his property. No bluebirds used the boxes in 1991, but the Tree Swallows loved them, using 20. I wasn't discouraged because a rancher up the road told me he had seen bluebirds, and that I could put nest boxes on his property. I built 44 more boxes. In 1992, Mountain Bluebirds used 12. Tree swallows used about 40.

Please don't get the impression I have something against Tree Swallows, but I built this trail to produce bluebirds. And the number of swallows was overwhelming.

The 1993 season was more encouraging because Mountain Bluebirds used 26 nest boxes, fledging 155 young. I thought this trend of increased usage would continue, but it didn't, leveling out instead. Tree swallows were using over half these nest boxes. People from back east kept suggesting I pair these boxes, and the same idea kept popping up in most of the articles I read in *Sialia* and *Bluebird*.

But the idea that bluebirds, like all birds, are territorial kept coming back



to me as I thought of solutions.

Everything we read mentions territoriality, and then follows up by saying, don't put nest boxes closer together than 100 yards. That's a distance, not a territory.

In *The Bluebird Book* authors Don and Lillian Stokes expand on this idea by saying, "Bluebird territories vary in size depending on the availability of food and nest holes and on the amount of pressure from other bluebirds trying to nest in the area. With sufficient food and a good nest hole, a bluebird territory can be as small as two acres. However, a bluebird pair will not limit themselves to this small an area unless there is pressure from neighboring pairs of bluebirds. Lacking this pressure, a pair may wander as much as a quarter mile from their nest site."

My trails are located in wide-open country, and I've seen bluebirds travel a quarter mile to feed or perch in a tree!

With that in mind, I took down 12 nest boxes where I thought they might be too close together, and put them up along five miles of a different county road in 1999, spacing them at quarter-mile intervals. Bluebirds used 10 of the 12.

In 2000, I added three more houses along the new road at the

same interval, and bluebirds used 13 of the 15 boxes, and 54 of the 78 boxes on the other trails. They fledged 304 young, 14 percent higher than in 1999.

My swallow use is down dramatically, and I think it is worth driving the extra seven miles of trail to see all those beautiful Mountain Bluebirds. Today, my nest boxes on this trail average 2.8 boxes per mile. I think this is closer to the territory size that bluebirds are looking for in this area.

I solved my problem of overuse by Tree Swallows and underuse by bluebirds not by putting two nest boxes close together, but by giving the bluebirds the space they need in this particular habitat.

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## Glue traps

To the editor,

When using glue traps (for mice) to catch House Sparrows, we now place two or three plastic eggs to one side of the mouse tray on the sparrow-claimed nest-box floor. These are positioned well toward the back so they draw the sparrows deep into the cavity. To date, it appears that the desire to destroy these eggs overrides any caution.

Little plastic or wooden eggs are ideal for this deception because they do not break. We used one-inch plastic eggs painted with three coats of Liquitex acrylic turquoise green paint. We finished them with matte varnish.

You also can glue the eggs to a narrow cardboard strip that allows the egg set to be placed beside the glue trap; it keeps the eggs from being bumped onto the glue.

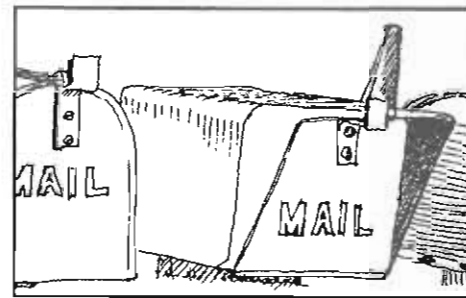
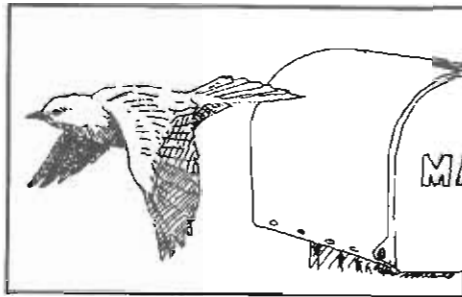
Temperature and moisture are factors. Warmer and drier is better. Blast the trap with your car heater for a moment if the weather is wet and cold.

Birds can be removed from the reusable tray by gently pulling them off. Use a tweezers to take grass and feathers from the glue surface.

You also can paint the edges of the glue tray a darker color to mute its appearance. A cotton swab dipped in paint thinner cleans glue off tray edges, and fingers, clothing, etc.

We glue trap at all times of day, but one must stay close by the nest box (very important!) and watch to make certain that native birds do not enter the box or become trapped in the glue. When we see native birds near a baited nest box, we hit the ground running.

— *A New England bluebirder (The writer asked that we withhold her name because of concern about local harassment. The name is on file.)*



## House Sparrows

To the editor,

After my first year of maintaining a moderate-sized trail with two sites heavily infested with House Sparrows, I have come to a conclusion on what to do with this problem.

I spent untold hours clearing these two sites of House Sparrows, which included educating the owners/employees of the sites, setting up trap boxes, moving them around, experimenting with different sparrow-resistant boxes, spending one week-end saving Eastern Bluebirds from House Sparrow attack, etc. I wondered as the season progressed if I had made the smartest of choices for sites.

I am convinced at the end of the season that these were absolutely the best choice of spots for my bluebird boxes because I successfully fledged more bluebirds than had I NOT set up my boxes here, AND I rid the area of House Sparrows. Why is this important?

Because we either sit back and let House Sparrows take over, which they will, or we get real smart, spending extra time and effort to help re-establish sites back where they belong, for bluebirds and other native cavity nesters.

I understand that I will have to maintain traps in these areas and probably spend extra time on these two sections of my trail, but I am a much better bluebirder because of it. I did not have one loss to House

Sparrow attack of my Eastern Bluebirds this year (2000) on these sites.

If I were to go where no House Sparrow has been before, I couldn't have anywhere near the boxes I have, because House Sparrows are nearly everywhere in my area!

I maybe would have been able to help 15 to 20 Eastern Bluebirds fledge from boxes with no House Sparrows, rather than the 73 Eastern Bluebirds and 51 Tree Swallows from my 20-to-25-box trail.

Finally, I have many people who I've educated about NOT feeding House Sparrows, as well as about the problems they caused. It is only by having boxes in areas infested with House Sparrows that I've been able to make headway in this area.

My final conclusion is that I would wish everyone would consider choosing one site that was House Sparrow infested and work to clear that area. The riches gained are tremendous.

— *Haleya Priest, Massachusetts*

## Crow predation

To the editor,

I read the letter from Chris Cuddeback (*Bluebird*, Fall 2000) about the crow predation, and would like to offer two suggestions that may help.

It might be good to attach Noel guards to the hole on the boxes. This effectively keeps out raccoons and cats. And, we would be interested to know if it would deter the crow and

kestrel as well. It would certainly create a six-inch depth around the hole very quickly, and with less effort and expense than adding new tops.

We have a pattern for Noel guards on our web page (The Virginia Bluebird Society, [www.geocities.com/virginiabluebirds](http://www.geocities.com/virginiabluebirds)). The guards are easy to assemble and attach.

We encourage bluebirders in Virginia to use two predator guards: the Noel guard at the hole and a stove-pipe snake guard on the electrical conduit pole to which we recommend monitors attach their boxes.

— Barbara Chambers, vice-president for education, Virginia Bluebird Society, Annandale, VA

## Bluebird capital of the U.S.A.?

To the editor,

I am writing from the Bluebird Capital of the USA, Bella Vista, Arkansas. We claim this title because in the year 2000 we fledged 2,632 Eastern Bluebirds within the boundaries of our village. Our village covers an area approximately 10 by 20 miles; it has about 13,500 residents.

For many years the Bella Vista Bluebird Society has been reporting to NABS results from its 11 monitored trails of 365 boxes. In the year 2000, these trails saw 1,402 bluebirds fledge. The society was formed in 1979, and since that time has fledged over 18,000 birds.

Last year we expanded our coverage, establishing 26 neighborhood trails of at least five boxes each. We had residents of the village with bluebird boxes report their individual successes. We publicized our desire for this information through the local newspaper. The new trails produced 624 fledglings, individuals through-

out the area 606, for a grand Bella Vista total of 2,632 fledglings.

We challenge any other area the size of Bella Vista to beat this number, and to take the title of Bluebird Capital of the USA.

— Jim Janssen, Bella Vista, Arkansas

## Mistake on awards

To the editor,

This is about an error of identification and information that appeared in the Fall 2000 issue of *Bluebird*.

A photo on page 13 is correctly identified as being of Chuck Nelson, but I belong to and proudly represented the Bella Vista, Arkansas, Bluebird Society, not Hot Springs, Arkansas.

I attended the NABS 2000 convention to learn, share, and participate. Because I was unable to attend the 1999 convention, when our chapter received the 1999 Conservation Award, I spoke at the 2000 convention, expressing my appreciation for the past year's award. I am pictured as I made those remarks.

It was a great convention, and everyone involved is to be congratulated. We are proud to be a part of NABS.

— Charles F. Nelson, Bella Vista, Arkansas

(Editor's note: Our apologies to Mr. Nelson for giving him a new home and failing to accurately report why he was speaking.)



## Woodpeckers capture birds from cavities

Two stories about Red-bellied Woodpeckers attacking other bird species have come to our attention recently. The first came to us from Mary Strasser of La Crosse County, Wisconsin. She wrote:

"Early one evening, I watched a very agitated House Wren swooping at a Red-bellied Woodpecker inching down the side of a birch snag. I saw the woodpecker poking its head into a cavity in the snag. The wren then really went wild!

"Suddenly, the woodpecker dragged a flailing bird out of the nest cavity, and flew off with the struggling creature. I couldn't tell if the victim was a nestling or an adult wren, but the Red-bellied soon lost its grip on the prey. Shortly thereafter, two adult wrens attacked the woodpecker. These presumably were the adult wrens that had been raising young in that snag."

The second story came from Dawn Hinebaugh Madison of Dane County, Wisconsin. She wrote:

"While working down in Tennessee, my supervisor watched as a Red-bellied Woodpecker flew to a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher nest and snatched a nestling out of the nest. The small adult gnatcatcher was too small and outmatched by the woodpecker. My friend watched as the woodpecker returned for seconds and thirds. It most likely was feeding the gnatcatcher nestlings to its own young nearby."

A quick check of two reference books, Kenn Kaufman's *Lives of North American Birds* and Arthur Cleveland Bent's *Life Histories of North American Woodpeckers* finds no reference to this species eating birds. Kaufman does say that Red-bellied Woodpeckers are known to eat the eggs of other bird species.

# Clutch-size variation in Eastern Bluebirds

## *Nest-box monitors document previously unknown results*

By Andre A. Dhondt, Tracey L. Kast, and Paul E. Allen

When we began the Cornell Nest Box Network (CNBN) three years ago, we were quite ambitious: We wanted to study how clutch size (the number of eggs females lay in one nest attempt) varied geographically, the effects of blowflies on reproduction, and possible effects of calcium deficiency on egg quality. These studies simply required observations around nest boxes or simple experiments by project members.

Although the number of participants in CNBN was not as large as we had hoped, we did obtain a substantial amount of data on the reproductive biology of cavity-nesting birds. This article summarizes data pertaining to factors that influence clutch size variation in Eastern Bluebirds.

Our main questions were, would clutch size in Eastern Bluebirds increase from south to north and from east to west? Although such a pattern has been found in some bird species, literature on whether such a pattern generally exists in most bird species has been controversial. Regarding the Eastern Bluebird itself, an earlier analysis of the Lab of Ornithology's Nest Record Cards published in *Living Bird* in 1970 could not document significant clutch size variations with latitude.

One reason there is still so much controversy about geographic variation of clutch size is that many other factors can influence clutch size, and often not all factors are taken into account when analyzing data. For example, in many bird species older

females, or birds that breed early, at lower altitudes, or in larger nest boxes tend to lay larger clutches than younger females or those that lay later in the season, at higher elevations, or in smaller cavities. Furthermore, birds tend to lay more eggs in some years than in others.

To carry out a meaningful analysis, researchers need a large data set,

clutches we analyzed were complete clutches, we included only data from nests in which young had been observed. That left us with 611 clutches for which we had information on all of the variables we wanted to study. Because the first analysis showed no effect for nest box volume or altitude, we could then add 334 more observations.

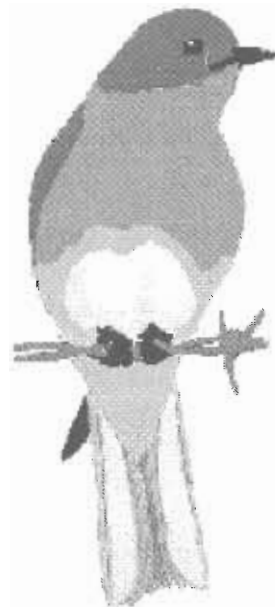
The distribution of reported latitudes (29.88-48.60° N) and longitudes (103.34-70.03° W) spanned the Eastern Bluebird's range in North America, although the majority of observations came from the northeastern United States. The results described below are based on the 945 observations for which we had information on clutch size, egg-laying date, latitude, and longitude.

The mean clutch size was 4.49 eggs, with extremes of two and seven eggs. We calculated whether latitude, longitude, egg-laying date, and year in which the clutch was laid had significant effects on clutch size.

Does clutch size vary with geographic location? The quick answer is yes. Clutch size increases from south to north and from east to west.

Longitudinal variations were the same in both years and across all latitudes. We can therefore say that per degree of longitude the average clutch size of Eastern Bluebirds increases by 0.014 eggs. Over the Eastern Bluebird's geographic range, this is not insignificant. All else being equal, a participant in Maine at 70° W would report a clutch size that was smaller by 0.46 eggs than a participant in North Dakota at 103° W.

*Continued on page 9*



spread over the entire breeding season. That way, even though we don't know the age of the female or the quality of her territory, we can partition out possible effects of egg-laying date, year, altitude, or nest-box volume.

In 1997 and 1998, CNBN participants reported data on 2,234 nesting attempts of Eastern Bluebirds as far south as Florida and Texas and as far north as North Dakota and the Canadian provinces of Quebec and Ontario. To be certain that the



# Consider these cautions if taking over trail

By Haley Priest

There are occasions when bluebirders are asked to assume monitoring and maintenance duties on a bluebird trail started by someone else. This is what I've learned about doing that.

First, check the trail to make sure it is something you can handle comfortably. If you decide to do this, tell the owner you will tend their trail/box(es), but only if you can revise things, if needed, to be certain the bluebirds will have an optimum and safe environment, and as many bluebirds as possible will fledge.

I tell people that I will pay for any changes needed, and they won't need to monitor at all if they don't want to; I'll keep them informed about what is going on. If they do want to help

monitor, they need to know you are the boss. If they say OK to all of this, make a map and a list of what you see on the trail.

I recently checked an established trail that had only active House Sparrow nests. I figured that was very good reason to make the changes I wanted.

Note the repairs each box needs (caulking etc.), and also how you need to move boxes if they are in improper locations. Note which trail habitats are especially good for bluebirds.

Then, sit down and show the owner your maps and notes, starting with the positives first — what is working on their trail. Next, tell them all the things that will need to be changed. Be clear what kind of help if any you expect from them. Have the NABS

fact sheet in hand to help explain why you are suggesting changes.

I find it makes it easier for me if people want to participate in trail duties a little, anyway. But I am learning not to have great expectations. Most people are only mildly interested in the day-to-day grind of maintaining a box or trail.

Take the owner with you, if you like, as you do your work on the trail. Feel free to revise your plans if necessary. Have fun, and make it a trail that works for you! Reap the rewards of seeing more bluebirds and new bluebirds! Everyone will be excited by the results!

*(Ms. Priest lives in Amherst, Massachusetts. Her e-mail address is hpandtl@crocker.com.)*

## — clutch-size variation

*Continued from page 8*

The effects of latitude are more complex because clutch size also varies with date. But how clutch sizes vary with date depends on the latitude at which we make our observations. In the southern part of the range, the early clutches are relatively small, clutch sizes reach a peak in the middle of the season, and clutches laid late in the season are small again. In the northern part of their range, however, clutch sizes decrease gradually with the laying date. The earliest clutches are, on average, the largest, and as the season progresses, females lay smaller and smaller clutches.

Clutch sizes farther south are small early in the season, increase to a mid-season peak, and become smaller again late in the season. Clutches farther north decline

throughout the season from an initial high.

Finally, we found that clutches laid in 1997 were different from those laid in 1998. Thus, at a given location, early clutches were larger in 1998 than in 1997, whereas for clutches laid late in the season, the opposite was true.

Once more these results illustrate the power of citizen science. By coordinating the efforts of hundreds of careful observers, we have documented a previously unknown result. If we continue to collect these kinds of data, we should be able to determine, for example, to what extent global warming has variable effects for different species and for a single species in different parts of its range. We can also ponder why our study revealed a pattern in Eastern Bluebirds that had remained hidden until our project took flight.

We believe there are several reasons for this. One is that in previous analyses, data from all years were lumped together, and we found from this study that clutches varied between years. We now have powerful statistical tools at our disposal that permit the kind of complicated analysis that was needed for this report — tools unavailable just five years ago.

If you are not a member of The Birdhouse Network but would like to join, please visit the web site at <http://birds.cornell.edu>, send e-mail to us at [birdhouse@cornell.edu](mailto:birdhouse@cornell.edu); or call (800) 843-BIRD.

*(This article first was published in the Spring 2000 issue of Birdscope, the newsletter of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. It has been edited for use here. It is used with permission.)*

# The European Paper-wasp

## A new threat to cavity-nesting birds

By Eugene S. Morton

A new exotic importation, the European Paper-wasp (*Polistes dominulus*), sometimes found in nest boxes, is spreading. First recorded in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1980, it moved quickly to nearby towns in the Boston area. It since has been recorded in New Jersey (1986), Pennsylvania and upstate New York (1991), northern Ohio (1991), Connecticut (1993), and Vermont (1994). It is rapidly spreading across the lower part of Michigan and, in 1995, was spotted at an Interstate 95 rest stop in Maryland, just north of Laurel, and also in a small shopping center in Biddeford, Maine.

And, like the gentle encouragement people gave the European House Sparrow in the early years of its U.S. invasion, the first Michigan record of the European Paper-wasp was based on a single worker collected carefully, at night, "to minimize any threat to the survival of the newly discovered colony."

Déjà vu?

You can identify a paper-wasp by its thin waspy waist and the paper nest, which usually hangs downward and has open cells on the bottom. The European Paper-wasp prefers cavities for its nests. It will build on a vertical surface as well as, inside the top of a nest box, for example. Its nests are common under eaves and inside outbuildings. No mud is found in paper-wasp nests.

The European Paper-wasp is colored black and yellow like a yellowjacket, and is slightly smaller than our native brown and tan Common Paper-wasp (*Polistes fuscatus*). A good picture of the wasp and its

nest can be found at [www.news.cornell.edu/releases/Aug98/WaspQueen.bpf.html](http://www.news.cornell.edu/releases/Aug98/WaspQueen.bpf.html).

Hornets and yellowjackets have thicker bodies, and build domes of paper enclosing the cells where the young are raised, which often take on the classic football shape of cartoon fame.

The European Paper-wasp, unlike our native Common Paper-wasp, which also sometimes uses bird boxes, is bad news. The European prefers to nest in cavities, and it attacks people with much less provocation than the native paper-wasp.

My first encounter with it occurred in 1996 in northwestern Pennsylvania at the Hemlock Hill Biological Research Area in Crawford County. Plastic tree tubes, five feet high, had been placed

around small oaks to protect them from deer browsing. I peered into the top of one and found myself eyeing a paper-wasp nest one foot down the tube. Immediately, wasps flew up at me and I instinctively jumped back. They did not follow me very far, but I was surprised at the rapid attack.

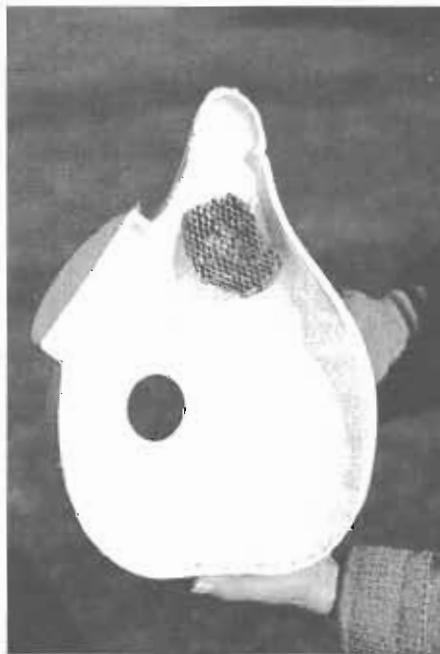
That's odd, I thought. Paper-wasps do not attack unless really provoked. Gingerly, I looked at the nest, and thought the wasps might be a forest species of paper-wasp, unfamiliar to me, that found the tree tubes adjacent to the forest just a dandy new forest environment. Paper-wasps, in my experience, were usually around human abodes, not out here in the middle of a field near the woods.

I queried a Smithsonian colleague, Karl Krombein, at the National Museum of Natural History, and first learned that this was the European Paper-wasp, not a native species as I had assumed. The European Paper-wasp is native from the Mediterranean region to China.

The next year, 1997, the European wasps colonized my house and garage, usurping colonies from the native paper-wasp. My first sting occurred when I was winching down my Troyer 14-unit Martin House to remove the latest starling nesting attempt. The wasps were nesting under the predator guard. The heavy wooden house plummeted down as a wasp stung my cheek and I jumped backwards, releasing the handle. Ouch!

My second sting occurred two weeks later as I scaled an aluminum ladder to check a starling box trap. The ladder's rungs were hollow, and

*Continued on page 11*



*Wasp nest in artificial nesting cavity for Purple Martins. (Photo by James R. Hill III.)*

# Scholars now believe honey bees helped drive one cavity-nester, the Carolina Parakeet, to extinction

By Jim Williams

Bees, hornets, and wasps long have been a problem for keepers and occupants of nest boxes. These interlopers take space we intend for birds, and some pose danger to us when we are surprised by their presence.

Did you know that honeybees now possibly share blame for the extinction of one species of cavity-nesting North American bird?

That bird is the Carolina Parakeet, once a common resident of timbered river bottoms in the eastern half of the continent, as far north as Wisconsin and Minnesota.

The parakeets — 12 inches long, spectacular birds in green and yellow and orange plumage — were found

in forests bordering larger streams and in cypress swamps. They nested high above the ground in holes in large trees. They also used these cavities for roosting at night.

The birds fed on seeds and fruit, and had a reputation for raiding orchards.

The parakeets moved in flocks, their flight fast and erratic. The bird's voice has been described as loud and harsh. If you have ever been to Miami or one of the Texas border cities where other species of parrots and parakeets can be seen today, you can imagine what the Carolina Parakeet flocks looked and sounded like as they flew out of the forest and across a ripening field.

The parrot flocks I have seen came

at us in a tight bunch, all of them screaming their parrot screams. They circled and wove, looking for their destination, then in a flash disappeared into a tree, their green feathers making them invisible in the foliage. You could hear them, though, arguing in there about important parakeet business.

Carolina Parakeets last were seen in the wild in 1920, in Florida, although some say the birds persisted in the wilds of South Carolina until the late 1930s. The bulk of the population east of the Mississippi river was gone by the 1870s, slowly driven west over a period of 50 or 60 years. West of the river, the parakeets prevailed into the 1880s and 1890s.

*Continued on page 12*

## — European Paper-wasp

*Continued from page 10*

every one of them but the lowest was housing the beginnings of a European Paper-wasp nest!

Native paper-wasps usually begin a new nest each year. One result is that the colony does not become very large. The European Paper-wasps, which, like all paper-wasps, overwinter as queens, often stay on the nest all winter, and use it the next year, and so on. Due to this head start, the colonies become larger than those of native paper-wasps.

Checking nest boxes is no longer the pleasant task it once was because the European Paper-wasp may have staked a claim in them. I now wear gloves and have a spray handy whenever I check nest boxes. One box I cleaned contained the stick nest of a House Wren and 34 overwinter-

ing queen European Paper-wasps in the bottom, under the wren's twigs.

I am planning two studies, one to document the percentage of nest boxes colonized by the new European wasp invader, and the other to determine whether or not they deter birds from using a box. In my mind, there is no doubt they will deter birds.

We are initiating a paper-wasp study in nest boxes at the Conservation and Research Center, Front Royal, Virginia. Here, the European Paper-wasp is still unknown.

On the plus side, paper-wasps help gardeners by removing Cabbage Butterfly larvae from broccoli. Nobody knows if they will affect the success of butterfly gardens by eating all the caterpillars, but few Monarch larvae survive the native paper-wasp foragers in my experience.

Please let me know if you encounter the European Paper-wasp. Take data on its occurrence in bird boxes. We need to know how much of a pest this latest invader might become.

*(Dr. Eugene S. Morton is a senior scientist at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. He is also a scientific advisor to the PMCA. He is well-known for his landmark work with Purple Martin dawnson, and on DNA fingerprinting in martins. He can be reached at the Conservation and Research Center, National Zoological Park, Smithsonian Institution, 1500 Remount Road, Front Royal, VA 22630. His e-mail address is emorton@crc.si.edu.)*

*(This article first appeared in The Purple Martin Update, Vol. 9, No. 3, pages 12-13. It is used with permission. It has been edited for use here.)*

## — parakeet

*Continued from page 11*

John James Audubon, the artist, recognized the shrinking population of these birds early in the century. In *The Birds of North America* (1840-44), he wrote, "... our parakeets are very rapidly diminishing in number; and in some districts, where twenty-five years ago they were plentiful, scarcely any are now to be seen ..."

A new discussion of extinctions in North America, *Hope Is the Thing with Feathers*, a book by Christopher Cokinos (Tarcher/Putnam 2000) visits the responsibility of man for loss of the Carolina Parakeet, and then introduces a role some think was played by bees, an agent of man.

For Carolina Parakeet, said Cokinos, "the most obvious suspect for ultimate cause (of extinction) is the loss of forest and swamp habitat." Environmental historian Mikko Saikku suggests, says Cokinos, that logging for fuel wood, in addition to construction lumber, was a major factor. Swamps were converted to rice fields. Native bamboo grass was cleared for farms. Habitat important to the birds was lost on all sides.

A researcher studying Carolina Parakeets from the 1950s to the 1980s, Daniel McKinley, "recognized another, more insidious culprit," wrote Cokinos.

What intrigued McKinley was the early start to the bird's decline. It began in the first third of the 19th century, before clearing or settlement of particular areas, before timber was cut or fields plowed. The parakeet was a tough and adaptable bird, McKinley said. It had "evolved stability in a changeable environment." But something upset that stability.

McKinley said his study showed it seemed increasingly likely that an insect had driven the parakeet from

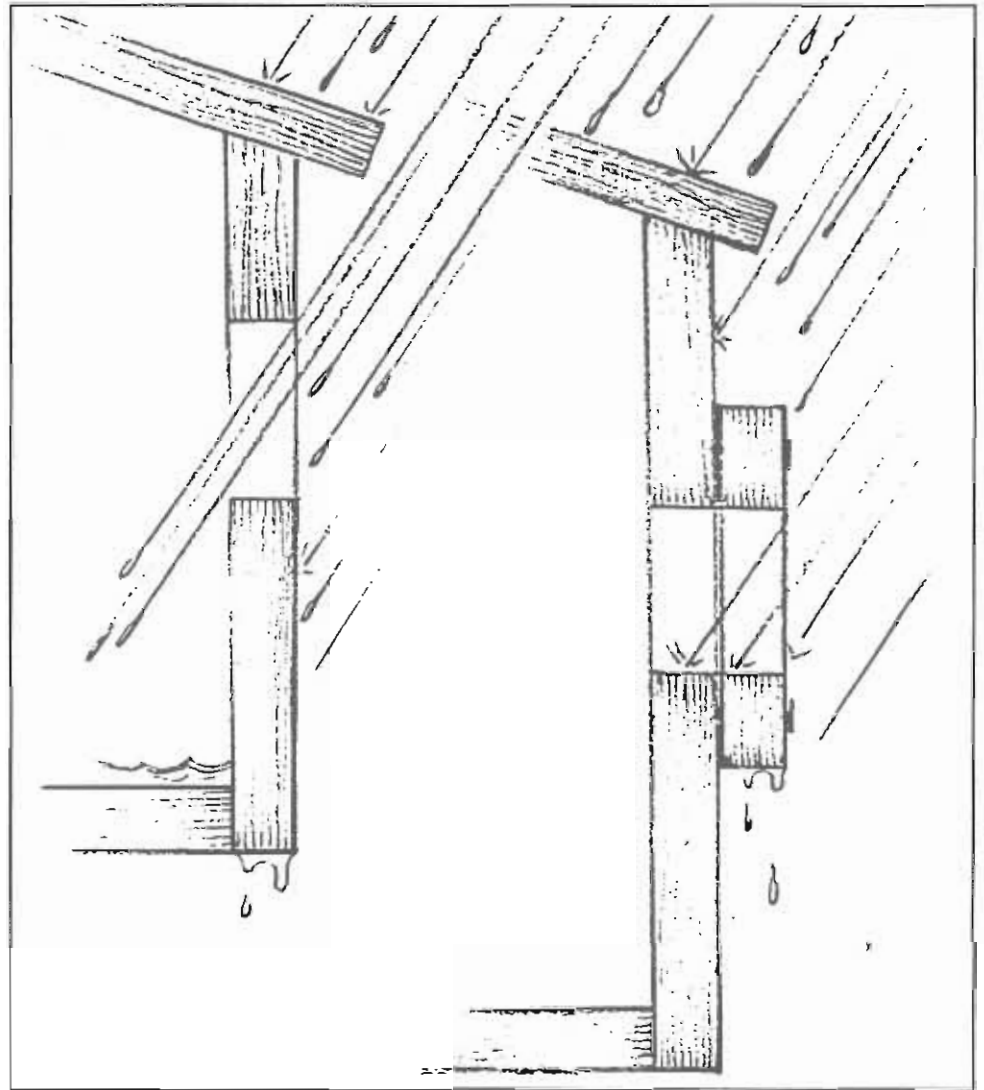
the hollow trees it needed for nesting and roosting. The suspect is the European honeybee, introduced by settlers to North America, and capable of spreading into the wilderness far in advance of the pioneers.

Cokinos quotes McKinley: "As a primary competitor for nesting and roosting sites, the honeybee barnstormed across forested eastern North America in colonial and early federal times ..." Cokinos says that Native American tribes could tell when white settlers were about to arrive because "the white man's flies —

honeybees" arrived first.

McKinley points out that Chimney Swifts and Purple Martins, two other cavity-nesting species, abandoned hollow trees at the same time the parakeets began to feel the pressure. Swifts and martins, Cokinos says, adapted to man-made structures. The parakeet, for some reason, could not adapt. It fled the problem until there was nowhere else to go.

Many factors combined to reduce parakeet numbers to the point where extinction was a matter of time. Add honeybees to that list.



*Use of a wooden nest-box entrance-hole predator block has been given a new life by bluebirders in Massachusetts: They put it in position as a rain guard. As the drawing shows, the block creates a deeper entrance tunnel, making it less likely that driven rain will enter the box.*

# New hope for Western Bluebirds?

## *Effect of forest restoration being studied*

**By Heather L. Germaine and Stephen S. Germaine**

Looking into my mirror I see three tiny, pink creatures, hardly moving, yet very much alive. Two other siblings are still hiding in light-blue oval packages, waiting for the right moment to join the outside world. The parents anxiously fly from perch to perch scolding my intrusion with a familiar "chweer, chweer."

Straining my neck and back to get the perfect look inside this little world, I count again three young nestlings and two eggs. Keeping my time there to a minimum, I climb back down my rickety wooden ladder smiling at the proud new parents. This is just one of the many Western Bluebird nests my colleagues and I have closely monitored over the past few years.

Western Bluebirds were historically birds of open areas, forest clearings, savannahs, or forest edges. However, recent dangerous declines have been noted for the Western Bluebird in many parts of its range. These declines have been attributed to the removal of large degenerating trees in which nests were most often found and to increased competition for nest sites with House Sparrows, European Starlings, and swallows.

In addition, the open forests in which Western Bluebirds were historically most abundant have become dense forest stands dominated by young trees that contain few nest cavities and low numbers of insects. Due to suppression of natural fires, current tree densities in southwestern ponderosa pine forests may be up to 8.5 times greater than a century ago. These conditions lead to

poor nutrient cycling, increased potential for large, high-intensity, stand-replacing fires, and a reduced ability of pine forests to support wildlife species supposed to have been present historically. For these reasons, efforts to restore southwestern forests are gaining momentum.

Forest scientists from Northern Arizona University's (NAU) Ecological Restoration Institute and the Arizona Strip District of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are cooperatively working to experimentally restore 4,000 acres of ponderosa pine forest in the Mount Trumbull area in northwestern Arizona. Restoration treatments include mechanical thinning of trees, slash manipulation, burning, and reseedling of native grasses and plants.

In addition, periodic prescribed burning will be continued in this area to reintroduce fire into the system. Restoration of these lands will result in an 85 percent decrease in tree numbers. In the next few years, tens of thousands of acres of western forest lands will be treated in similar fashion.

Changes of this magnitude have great potential to affect populations of wildlife. Therefore, as wildlife biologists with the Research Branch of the Arizona Game and Fish Department, we are investigating the effects of forest restoration treatments on a variety of the wildlife groups that inhabit these forests, including the Western Bluebird.

Western Bluebirds do breed in current-condition forests in northern Arizona, but how would they respond to restoration treatments creating forest conditions more consistent with

descriptions of historical bluebird habitat? Would nest success be higher in open forests, or would there be no difference? Would it be easier for parent bluebirds to find food for nestlings in open forests?

To begin answering these questions, we initiated a study comparing Western Bluebird reproductive success between current-condition (dense) forests and restoration-treated (open) forests. Specifically, we monitored the number of nestlings that survived to fledge, nest predation rates, nestling parasitism, and the parental provisioning rate (how often parents feed their young).

We began by searching for Western Bluebird nests once pairs established territories each year. We located nests by following adult bluebirds transporting nesting material or prey items to cavities. Upon locating each nest we would visually inspect the contents of each cavity using a ladder, a mirror with a pivoting head, and a mini-mag flashlight, or a micro-video camera mounted on top of a telescoping pole, depending on cavity height. We continued to visually inspect nests every three days to monitor nesting progress (e.g., start of incubation, number of eggs or nestlings, and date of fledging or failure).

In addition to nest inspections, we rotated video cameras among active nests to record parental provisioning rates. We placed fully camouflaged cameras within a few meters of a nest tree with the field of view zoomed in at the cavity entrance. We recorded feeding sessions in both the morning and evening with each taping session

*Continued on page 14*

## — forest restoration and Western Bluebirds

*Continued from page 13*

lasting two hours. We reviewed tapes at a later date to record the number of times each parent visited the cavity with a prey item.

Finally, after nestlings fledged, we collected nesting material from all accessible cavities and sent it to Dr. Terry Whitworth, a leading expert on nest parasites of songbirds. Dr. Whitworth examined the contents of each nest for the presence of blowfly pupae or adults. Blowflies lay their eggs in the nesting material shortly after nestling bluebirds have hatched. After a couple of days, blowfly larvae emerge and spend up to 14 days intermittently feeding on the blood of the nestlings in the nest.

We monitored 64 active Western Bluebird nests during the summers of 1998, 1999, and 2000; 36 were located in current-condition forest, 28 were in restoration-treated forest. In addition, we collected 45 nests to be analyzed for parasitic infestations. Finally, we recorded 365 feeding sessions over the three summers, collecting 730 hours of videotape!

To date, nest success (fledging of at least one nestling per nest) has been higher for bluebirds nesting in restoration-treated forest than in current-condition forest. On average, 93 percent of nests in treated, open forests successfully fledged at least one nestling, whereas only 61 percent of nests in current-condition, dense forests successfully fledged at least one nestling.

Nest failure can be attributed to many different factors. Common bluebird nest predators include snakes, corvids (jays, crows, and ravens), ground squirrels, raccoons, and in urban areas, house cats. Nest failure can also result from abandonment and severe weather, especially

in conjunction with low food availability. All of the failures we documented were a result of predation. We have video documentation in two instances revealing gopher snakes as the perpetrators.

It takes an hour to watch and record provisioning data from a two-hour taping session; consequently, we have only reviewed 210 tapes to date. So far our data shows no difference in the number of times adult bluebirds deliver prey items to nestlings between the two forest conditions. On average, adult bluebirds brought food



*Male Western Bluebird with food for nestlings. (Photo by Dave Middleton.)*

items to each nestling 4.5 times an hour; this responsibility was split fairly evenly between both parents. These data suggest a couple of different things: Either bluebirds are not food-limited in the dense forests, or, if they are, the predicted increase in insect abundance in treated areas has yet to occur.

Analysis of nesting material revealed that almost three times the number of nests in restoration-treated forest were infested with blowflies. Ninety-one percent of the nests we monitored in treated areas were infested with parasites while only 36 percent of the nests we monitored in current-condition forest were infested. In addition, infested nests in restoration-treated forest had almost five times the number of blowflies per nest than infested nests in current-condition forest. The average number of parasites per nest in restoration-treated forest was 25; however, some nests contained over 100.

Most research investigating the effects of blowfly parasitism on nestling survival suggests that parasitism alone rarely causes the death of nestling birds (see Terry Whitworth's story, Fall 2000 Bluebird). However, parasitism does result in decreased hemoglobin and haematocrit levels in nestlings, and can drain a significant amount of blood. The weakened condition of parasitized nestlings may increase susceptibility to cold weather, and decrease ability to compete with siblings for food. In addition, little is known about the ability of parasitized nestlings to survive once they have left the nest.

The effects of forest restoration treatments on the reproductive success of Western Bluebirds are complex; it is not as simple as knowing the number of fledglings pro-

duced in the two forest conditions. Our research reveals that bluebirds nesting in open forests have a better chance of successfully fledging young than bluebirds nesting in dense forests; however, nestlings in open forests have a higher parasitism rate than those in dense forests.

While the increase in nesting success is encouraging, bluebird populations will increase only if young bluebirds survive to produce offspring of their own. Therefore, it is now important to study the survival rates of bluebirds fledged from parasitized nests in treated forest areas. Ultimately, we want to know whether restoration treatments in western forests will benefit Western Bluebirds and other species of forest songbirds dear to so many of us.

NOTE: Our inspection of natural cavities discussed in this paper is for the sole purpose of scientific investigation. We take many precautions to avoid unnatural attraction to cavities by predators (e.g., checking dummy cavities, walking different routes to and from each nest tree, and listening for presence of avian predators). Number and availability of natural cavities may limit western bluebird populations in some areas and disturbance at nests may cause parents to abandon nests. Therefore, we urge readers not to begin inspection of natural cavities unless under the guidance of a defined research project.

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(Heather L. Germaine is an associate biologist, Stephen S. Germaine a wildlife biologist, both with the Research Branch of the Arizona Game and Fish Department, 2221 W Greenway Road, Phoenix, AZ 85023; e-mail addresses warbler@cybertrails.com and sgermaine@gf.state.az.us.)

## Wooden birds

Bluebirders work well with wood. For those of you with an extra hour or two, here is a list of birds you might carve.

Wood Duck, *Aix sponsa*  
Wood Lark, *Lullula arborea*  
Wood Nuthatch, *Sitta europaea*  
Wood Sandpiper, *Tringa glareola*  
Wood Snipe, *Gallinago nemoricola*  
Wood Stork, *Mycteria americana*  
Wood Thrush, *Catharus mustelinus*  
Wood Warbler, *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

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# Book review: House Sparrows *are everywhere*

House Sparrows are everywhere. Literally everywhere. All over the world.

You might struggle mightily to keep them out of your nest boxes. You might not like this member of the genus *passer*, one of 21 species in that group. But it likes you.

The House Sparrow “has flourished widely largely as a result of successfully adapting to and benefiting from the activities of man,” says James Clement in his 1993 book *Finches and Sparrows*. That volume was issued in a paperback version recently by its publisher, Princeton University Press.

Paging through a review copy, I was struck by the plates for the *passer* birds. They are beautiful creatures, even the House Sparrow, if you can look at it with unprejudiced eyes. You want to see it in fresh plumage, though, crisp and bright, as illustrated for the book in plates by Alan Harris.

I went from plates to text, beginning with *The Big Nuisance*.

When Clements wants to tell the reader how widely the House Sparrow is found around the world he finds it much simpler to list the places where the bird is not. Basically, if you want to get away from House Sparrows, you can go to parts of the Far East, to a band of land across the northern reaches of the planet, and to parts of Australia, South America, and Africa. The bird is found everywhere else, on every continent except Antarctica. And wherever it is, it is common.

Whereas most birds are specialists, confined to particular habitats by food preferences, the House Sparrow is a generalist. It feeds principally on

seeds, but also takes insects and their larvae, and will eat berries and mollusks and crustaceans (or stale bread and cookies). As Clements says, “It is no surprise that it easily survives and prospers alongside mankind.”

The House Sparrow has been seen feeding at night on ledges on the 80th floor of the Empire State Building in New York City, says Clement. It has been recorded as living and breeding 2,000 feet down in a coal mine in South Yorkshire, England. (It lived on food provided by miners.) It lives well from sea level to 15,000 feet.

Looking at the Harris paintings, the family resemblance among *passer* species is obvious. All but three of the males of these species share the black around the eye and the black throat. The silhouette of the birds and the bill shapes are similar.

Most of these birds are recorded as common or very common. They are social, gregarious, sometimes shy. Clements describes several members of this family as filling the niche elsewhere occupied by the House Sparrow. Some of these species co-exist with that bird, which has been introduced in more places than North America.

Clement explains that the genus *passer* is “sometimes regarded as part of the Ploceidae family, which includes the weavers, whydahs, and indigobirds, largely because of (its) complex nest structures and feeding behavior.” Weavers build some of the most intricately woven nests of all birds, some having long funnel-like entrances. While the House Sparrow is less architecturally precise in its nest construction, the family relation-

ship does help explain the incredible tangle those sparrows call home.

One other member of this family can be found in the United States as a breeding species: the Tree Sparrow. We call it the Eurasian Tree Sparrow. These birds were introduced in 1870 from Germany to St. Louis. Small populations are found in parts of Missouri and Illinois, and the species has reached southeastern Iowa.

Eurasian Tree Sparrows also have been reported as strays in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Kentucky, Manitoba, and Ontario.

Kenn Kaufman in his book *Lives of North American Birds* says this species might have spread farther faster but for competition from “tougher” House Sparrows.

Eurasian Tree Sparrows resemble House Sparrows, but the entire crown of the male tree sparrow is brown, not just the back of the head as found on male House Sparrows.

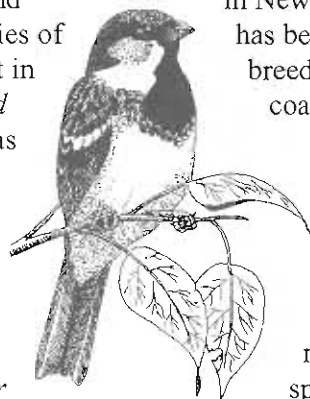
Also, the Eurasian Tree Sparrow has a large black ear patch, and the black spot beneath the chin is very small compared to the extensive black bib of the House Sparrow.

**About the book:** The text seems complete. It is clear. The illustrations (by Harris and John Davis) are well done, the reproduction excellent. The range maps are small but serviceable. This would be a good addition to a birding library.

— Jim Williams

The kingdom of ornithology is divided into two departments — birds and English (House) Sparrows. English Sparrows are not real birds; they are little beasts.

— Henry van Dyke, *American Ornithology for the Home and School, Vol. 1, 1905.*

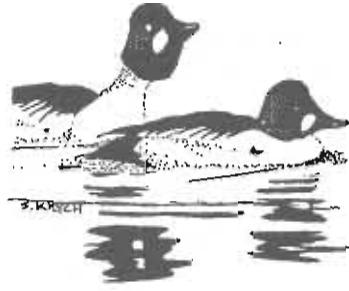




# 98 species of North American birds nest in cavities

Here is a list of the 98 North American bird species nesting in enclosed cavities (natural, self-created, or man-made) always or occasionally. The asterisk (\*) means the bird will use a nesting box. There are 49 such species on this list. This information has been gleaned from the book *A Guide to Nests, Eggs, and Nestlings of North American Birds*, by Paul J. Baicich and Colin J. O. Harrison, second edition, Academic Press, 1997.

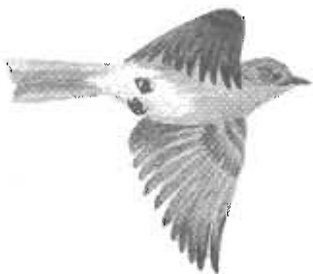
Fulvous Whistling-Duck  
 Black-bellied Whistling-Duck\*  
 Muscovy Duck\*  
 Wood Duck\*  
 Mallard  
 Common Goldeneye\*  
 Barrow's Goldeneye  
 Bufflehead\*  
 Hooded Merganser\*  
 Common Merganser\*  
 Red-breasted Merganser  
 Black Vulture  
 Turkey Vulture  
 California Condor  
 American Kestrel\*  
 Budgerigar\*  
 Canary-winged Parakeet  
 Barn Owl\*  
 Flammulated Owl\*  
 Eastern Screech-Owl\*  
 Western Screech-Owl\*  
 Whiskered Screech-Owl  
 Great Horned Owl  
 Northern Hawk-Owl  
 Northern Pygmy-Owl  
 Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl  
 Elf Owl



*Common Goldeneyes*

Burrowing Owl\*  
 Spotted Owl  
 Barred Owl  
 Boreal Owl\*  
 Northern Saw-whet Owl\*  
 Chimney Swift  
 Vaux's Swift  
 Elegant Trogon  
 Eared Trogon  
 Lewis's Woodpecker  
 Red-headed Woodpecker  
 Acorn Woodpecker  
 Gila Woodpecker  
 Golden-fronted Woodpecker\*  
 Red-bellied Woodpecker  
 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker  
 Red-breasted Sapsucker  
 Williamson's Sapsucker  
 Ladder-backed Woodpecker  
 Nuttall's Woodpecker  
 Downy Woodpecker  
 Hairy Woodpecker\*  
 Strickland's Woodpecker  
 Red-cockaded Woodpecker  
 White-headed Woodpecker  
 Three-toed Woodpecker  
 Black-backed Woodpecker  
 Northern Flicker\*  
 Gilded Flicker  
 Pileated Woodpecker  
 Ivory-billed Woodpecker

Pacific-slope Flycatcher  
 Cordilleran Flycatcher  
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 Dusky-capped Flycatcher  
 Ash-throated Flycatcher\*  
 Great Crested Flycatcher\*  
 Brown-crested Flycatcher\*  
 Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher\*  
 Purple Martin\*  
 Tree Swallow\*  
 Violet-green Swallow\*  
 Black-capped Chickadee\*  
 Caroline Chickadee\*  
 Mexican Chickadee\*  
 Mountain Chickadee\*  
 Gray-headed Chickadee (formerly Siberian Tit; uses nest boxes in Scandinavia)  
 Boreal Chickadee  
 Chestnut-backed Chickadee\*  
 Bridled Titmouse\*  
 Plain Titmouse\*  
 Tufted Titmouse\*  
 Red-breasted Nuthatch\*  
 White-breasted Nuthatch\*  
 Pygmy Nuthatch  
 Brown-headed Nuthatch\*  
 Carolina Wren\*  
 Bewick's Wren\*  
 House Wren\*  
 Winter Wren  
 Eastern Bluebird\*  
 Western Bluebird\*  
 Mountain Bluebird\*  
 White Wagtail  
 European Starling\*  
 Crested Myna  
 Lucy's Warbler  
 Prothonotary Warbler\*  
 Common Grackle\*  
 House Sparrow\*  
 Eurasian Tree Sparrow\*



**D**o 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.

# Speakers offer presentation tips

By Ron Kingston

At the end of each year, questionnaires are sent to members of the NABS Speakers' Bureau. Speakers are asked for a summary of the past year's programs, for comments on what worked and what didn't, and how NABS could help them. If they returned their questionnaire, they received an official 2000 speaker's button.

In this review of the year past, we hope these ideas about communicating to the public about bluebirds and other cavity nesters will increase an awareness of the conservation of the bluebirds across North America. (All of our speakers are doing an outstanding job, but not all comments can be printed in this review.)

Purchase a set of slides or a video and hit the road yourself. You definitely will be helping the conservation of the bluebirds by getting the information out to those interested in helping the bluebirds in your area.

**Diane Allison:** Providing box parts and building boxes with the groups is very popular. If you are looking for building materials, check with furniture makers in the area and get boards from their throw-away area. Just ask!

**Jim and Ann Auer:** Always allow ample time for questions. Everyone is always interested in the meal worms and they love the slides and/or videos.

**Lorna Beasley:** For meetings with local garden clubs, give a box as a door prize. The winner is always elated over winning a box.

**Chuck Bliss:** Ask people to interrupt with questions at anytime. Use different types of boxes, and explain the advantages of each. It's good to show the membership map of your state or area.

**Jon Boone:** I think having brochures along with the most beautiful slides of bluebirds possible is important. Show them in the context of literature and poetry.

**Barbara Chambers:** Adjust to the knowledge level of audience. Do not use a script. A free-ranging question and answer session is essential.

**Kevin Colton:** I think that humor helps. Stay on track, answer their questions or get back to them, and stay away from graphs and charts.

**Mary Danboise:** Use as many props as possible for kids. Puppets and whatever will keep it moving. If you have a museum or nature center in your area, always have an educational display on the bluebirds.

**Bill Davis:** It's good to use a video along with a nest box mounted on a steel post with baffle, and sparrow traps. Building a box or boxes with participants works well.

**Debbie Delevan:** I always advertise programs in local media, and talk about discovering the joy of having the delightful bluebirds in you backyard, year round.

**Eleanor Dunham:** Sometimes I have a drawing for bird-related prizes, a birdhouse gourd for wrens, a nest box, or suet feeder and recipe. A short video is just right for a Brownie Girl Scout program. For schools, I give the video to the teacher a few days before my program which boosts their enthusiasm for their bluebird project.

**Elsie Eltzroth:** I use slides, posters, books, NABS brochures, nests, eggs, charts, graphs, maps, handouts, nest box, and study skins of Western Bluebirds. Approach elementary and middle school teachers with the "Getting to Know Bluebirds" education guide and ask permission to present a program after they do a

pre-week study in class. Showing how birds are banded and discussing the results of banding is fascinating to young people. Show them how to raise meal worms to feed bluebirds.

**Lillian Files:** I encourage folks to come to my property and see my bluebird trail.

**Joan Harmet:** I use pictures of bluebirds, Blue Jay, and Indigo Bunting along with tape of a bluebird song. I remind them that this is instant conservation; a bluebirder can expect quick results in increasing bluebird populations.

**Richard and Marlys Hjort:** We work as a team. Marlys adds her thoughts and answers questions as the show goes on. We think the SIGECO Poster and Pocket Field Guide Set from Indiana is an excellent, interesting and productive way to get people started in birding.

**Patricia Hunter:** I am glad that the Stokes have a 15-minute video of the basics. I feel that this is a much-needed tool.

**Art Jeffries:** My little jar of preserved blowfly larvae gets a lot of attention. It seems to make the problem of blowfly larvae more real than just a photo.

**Marilynne Keyser:** Enthusiasm is the most important factor in a successful presentation.

**Keith Kridler:** It is best to use slides of local children or groups, showing their participation. Show and stress the different cavity nesters in the area that also need housing. Have nest boxes for sale or as a door prize. It is best to concentrate on young groups below 5th grade, for if you get them involved you will also get their parents involved. I have found that helping the children build their own box gets them involved far easier than  
*Continued on page 19*

## — speakers

Continued from page 18

a slide program alone.

**Al Larson:** Use anecdotes of your actual experiences. Invite visitors to accompany you when you monitor nest boxes.

**Roger Lawson:** Incorporate bluebird recovery information specific to your state. Incorporate a bluebird box-building workshop as part of the program. Invite active bluebirders in your community to provide enthusiastic testimonial as part of a bluebird program/presentation.

**Dan McCue:** Have lots of handouts, photos and show different nest boxes. I use the video "Bluebirds Upclose."

**David Magness:** I use a home video of feeding bluebirds and an aggressive bluebird protecting its nest

box along with lots of literature. Relate personal experiences with humor.

**Jennifer Mattrick:** It's fun to bring grasses and pine needles to a program and have the children make their own nest. The children find the task very challenging and go away with a better understanding of the life of bluebirds and other birds.

**Betty Nichols:** My articles in our local newspaper about the progress of my trail have generated considerable interest and appreciation for efforts in conservation.

**Vera Rauscher:** If I give someone a nest box at a program and help put it up, I'll tell them that I'll take it back if they let sparrows use it.

**Chris Salberg:** Meal worms always get the audience interested, and a nest-box display with lots of handouts helps.

**Bill Wheeler:** Folks like visual

aids. I especially demonstrate a NABS-approved nest box and one NOT approved to show differences.

**Robert Williams:** Allow questions and discussions during and after the presentation. Speaking to as many children as possible is most important, since they are the future.

All the speakers in the bureau have one thing in common: They all do what is comfortable for them. Some videos may be too long, and some slide programs may not show the information needed in a particular area; however, a short visual program with questions and answers, some information to take along, and maybe a newly made nest box should be a very good start. I know the late Dr. Larry Zeleny showed a few slides and held a nest box while he talked, and had a few brochures to hand out. He was always well received.

## Our thanks to these contributors

The following individuals returned their 1999 questionnaires which helped us determine what works and what doesn't. I want to thank all the speakers for taking time to

fill out and return the form, and also for all they do for the bluebird conservation.

— Ron Kingston, Speakers Bureau chair

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Mary Duncan	Oliver Russ	Gordon Backer	Chuck Bliss		

# Bluebird News from Shore to Shore

A nest box called the Johnson Slot Box has been given approval by the NABS Box Approval Committee. The box is the work of **Vern Johnson**, a member of the **Southern Interior Bluebird Trail Society** of Penticton, British Columbia.

To honor the late **Art Aylesworth**, the **Mountain Bluebird Trails** club has placed a collection of four bluebirds books in the libraries of public schools in Ronan, Charlo, St. Ignatius, Polson, and Arlee, Montana. The city libraries in Ronan and Polson also received a set of books. The books are *Bluebirds Forever* by Connie Toops, *Living with Mountain Bluebirds* by Helen Johnson, *Bluebird Trails*, edited by Dorene Scriven, and *The Bluebird Book* by Don and Lillian Stokes.

**Bluebirds Across Nebraska** has challenged its members to fledge 12,000 bluebirds in 2001. One reason: **Steve Gilbertson**, nest-box designer from Aitkin, Minnesota, promised the group he will write a song about Nebraska bluebirds, learn to play the banjo, and perform at the BAN 2001 conference if that goal was met. (Has anyone ever heard him sing?)

**Gene Gaddie** of Norfolk, Nebraska, was named Bluebirder of the Year by **Bluebirds Across Nebraska**. The honor was announced in April 2000 at the group's conference meeting.

**Carol Fitzpatrick** of Oxford, Michigan, looked in one of her four-inch PVC boxes last June and saw seven Eastern Bluebird eggs. Concerned about space, she asked the **Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota** for advice. All seven eggs hatched, and the birds were trans-

ferred to a five-inch PVC box.

NABS board member **Dorene Scriven** of Minneapolis was tending a box on a trail in that city last summer when she found House Sparrows beginning to nest in a box. She promptly set a Universal trap and captured the sparrow, then killed it. This was observed by a young man who then asked what she was doing. He was told about the sparrow problem and the legality of killing of sparrow. The next day, however, a uniformed animal control officer came to Ms. Scriven's home with a warrant to investigate a report that she had been killing birds. He was unaware of state and federal regulations concerning introduced bird species. He accepted Ms. Scriven's explanation of what had happened, and left.

**Pat Johnson** of the **Prescott, Oregon, Bluebird Recovery Project**, reports finding emu feathers, some of them 12 inches long, in the nest of a Western Bluebird. The nest box and the emus, birds native to Australia sometimes bred in captivity, shared the same piece of land. This nest fledged three bluebirds. It also was noteworthy because two male Western Bluebirds were helping the lone female with feeding chores.

Follow this story closely. It comes from **Tami Gingrich**, naturalist for the Geauga Park District in Chardon, Ohio. She forwards information from bluebird volunteer Thomas Sterlekar.

April 1 — House Sparrow nest removed from box.

May 2 — Sparrow nest removed from box.

May 9 — Another sparrow nest removed.

May 16 — Tree Swallow nest

started; sparrow kills swallow, starts new nest, which is removed.

May 24 — Sparrow nest started, but House Wren builds nest atop it. Tree Swallow is found on box, guarding it.

May 30 — Tree Swallow flushes from box. Wren nest is lined with feathers, but contains five wren eggs.

June 8 — Tree Swallow is sitting on four wren eggs and four swallow eggs.

June 15 — Nest now contains two wren eggs and two swallow eggs. Both swallows and wrens protest examination of nest box.

June 25 — Three nestlings in box, two swallows, one wren, and one unhatched egg.

July 9 — It appears the three young successfully fledged.

The **Schoharie County (New York) Bluebird Society** is offering its members the society newsletter, *Bluebird News*, via e-mail. The new form of delivery is quicker, says the society, and saves money. The content of the newsletter will be sent as a file that can contain color photographs, a perk not available in the paper version because of cost.

And in Carlisle, New York, **Edna Warner** last year had Eastern Bluebirds nesting in a box located 15 inches from her house and 34 inches from the window she uses to keep track of the birds. Bluebirds have used the box for several years, she reports, and last year fledged clutches of three and four young.

Items for this column came from contributors and from the *Mountain Bluebird Trails Bulletin*; *Bluebirds Across Nebraska Newsletter*; *Bluebird News*, published by the Bluebird Recovery Program of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis; and *Bluebird News*, published by the Schoharie County (N.Y.) Bluebird Society.

# North American Bluebird Society Nominating Committee Report

The NABS Nominating Committee is submitting the slate of candidates for the five elective officers, to serve one-year terms, and for four directors, to serve three-year terms. The Nominating Committee is chaired by Mary Ellen Vetter. Committee members are David Eastman, David Magness, and Dean Sheldon.

## Officers: (All but Ms. Sillick are incumbents)

**President:** Doug LeVasseur

**Vice President:** Joan Harmet

**Vice President for Community Relations:** Carol McDaniel

**Treasurer:** Robert Martin

**Secretary:** Darlene Sillick. Ms. Sillick, of Columbus, Ohio, has led hands-on conservation programs and avian research for the past 15 years. She has been chair of the NABS Education Committee, has directed pilot trail development for the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail, has served as CNBN Ambassador for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and actively bands birds for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

## Candidates for Directors (four positions open)

**David Cook** of Cambell, California, is co-director of the California Bluebird Recovery Program for Santa Clara County, and a board and committee member of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society. Along with establishing and maintaining bluebird trails, David actively promotes NABS and nest-box programs at public and media events, and serves as an Audubon field trip and Christmas Bird Count leader.

**Ervin Davis** of Charlo, Montana, is current president of Mountain Bluebird Trails. He monitors 350 to 400 nest boxes along six trails. Ervin holds a Master Bander permit, and in 1998 received the National Wildlife Refuge System Volunteer of the Year award for Region 6.

**Christine Hill** of Highland Park, Illinois, began her avid interest in bluebird restoration with her mother in the 1980s. As a high school environmental science and biology teacher, she now involves her students in bluebird and prairie restoration. Christine has done field research in the Canadian Arctic and Greenland.

**Arlene Ripley** of Dunkirk, Maryland, along with maintaining three bluebird trails for Calvert County and her own trail, is a willing consultant for new bluebirders. Her hobby birding list exceeds 500 species for North America. She is a volunteer naturalist at Flag Ponds Nature Park. Arlene is the NABS web master. Her own bluebird activities are recorded on her web site.

NABS members wishing to vote for these candidates or nominees of their choice but unable to attend the annual meeting during the June 2001 convention in Columbus, Ohio, may vote by mail. Simply complete this ballot or write on a sheet of paper the position(s) to be filled and the name(s) of the person(s) you are selecting. **Send this ballot or your facsimile ballot to Arlene Ripley, NABS Secretary, 3513 Smithville Drive, Duukirk, Maryland 20754. Ballots must be received no later than 1 March 2001.**

## Ballot for use by mail if you will not be at the annual meeting in June, 2001

### Nominees for officers:

**President:** Doug LeVasseur \_\_\_\_\_

or \_\_\_\_\_

**Vice President:** Joan Harmet \_\_\_\_\_

or \_\_\_\_\_

**V.P. Community Relations:** Carol McDaniel \_\_\_\_\_

or \_\_\_\_\_

**Treasurer:** Robert Martin \_\_\_\_\_

or \_\_\_\_\_

**Secretary:** Darlene Sillick \_\_\_\_\_

or \_\_\_\_\_

### For three-year positions as directors:

#### (vote for four persons)

David Cook \_\_\_\_\_ Christine Hill \_\_\_\_\_

Arlene Ripley \_\_\_\_\_ Ervin Davis \_\_\_\_\_

Or, your nominated candidate(s):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Nominations other than those candidates named above must be accompanied by written acceptance by the nominee. Members are limited to one ballot each. See above for mailing instructions.

## Making charitable gifts to NABS

**Y**ou 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.)

Many employers offer matching gifts programs for their employees, thus doubling the financial contribution made to NABS. Consider checking with your employer to see if such a program exists.

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NABS is privileged to include the following individuals, corporations and foundations among the organization's most valuable financial supporters. The following list recognizes contributions of \$50 or more made this past fiscal year, Nov. 1, 1999, through Oct. 31, 2000. Please consider joining this list of supporters by making an additional donation, using the form on the back of Bluebird or sending your donation with a note that includes your name and address. Thank you for your continued support

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# 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.

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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

Mountain Bluebird Trails  
Conservation Society  
c/o Bob Harrison, Sec/Treas  
1725 Lakeside Road S  
Lethbridge, Alberta T1K 3G9

### 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 Ptarmigan Drive, #1  
Walnut Creek, CA 94595

### Colorado

Colorado Bluebird Project, c/o Bob Priestler  
6060 N. Broadway, Denver, CO 80216

### Georgia

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

### Idaho

Our Bluebird Ranch  
152 N. 200 E., Blackfoot, ID 83221

### Illinois

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

Illinois Audubon Society  
Illinois Bluebird Project  
c/o Loren Hnghes,  
1234 Tueker Beach Rd., Paris, IL 61944

### 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

Bluebirds of Iowa Restoration  
c/o Jaclyn Hill  
2946 Ubben Ave., Ellsworth, IA 50075

### Kentucky

Kentucky Bluebird Society  
P.O. Box 3425, Paducah, KY 42002

### Maine

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

### Massachusetts

Massachusetts Bluebird Association  
Haley Priest, 89 Pulpit Hill Road  
Amherst, MA 01002

### Minnesota

Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota  
Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis  
P.O. Box 3801, Minneapolis, MN 55403

### Mississippi

Mississippi Bluebirds  
c/o Tena Taylor, 192 County Road 457  
Calhoun City, MS 38916

### Montana

Mountain Bluebird Trails  
604 N. Main, Charlo, MT 59824

### Nebraska

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

### New York

New York State Bluebird Society (NYSBS)  
c/o James Kuuz, 454 Ashley Road  
Maine, NY 13802

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

### North Carolina

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

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

### Ohio

Ohio Bluebird Society  
c/o Doug LeVasseur  
20680 Township Road, No. 120  
Senecaville, OH 43780

### Oklahoma

Oklahoma Bluebird Society  
c/o Marion Liles  
5656 S. 161 W. Ave.  
Saud Springs, OK 74063

### Oregon

Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project  
c/o Patricia Johnston  
P.O. Box 1469, Sherwood, OR 97140

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

### Pennsylvania

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

Purple Martin Conservation Assoc  
Edinboro University of Pennsylvania  
Edinboro, PA 16444

### Tennessee

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

Tennessee Bluebird Trails  
P.O. Box 190, Mt. Juliet, TN 37121

### Virginia

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

### Washington

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

### Wisconsin

Bluebird Restoration Association of Wis  
Rt. 1, Box 137 Akron Avenue  
Plainfield, WI 54966

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

## *CavNet archive is available*

CavNet, an e-mail listserve that includes information on cavity-nesting birds, has created an archive of all its messages dating back to its beginning in October 1995. You will find these at web site [www.eScribe.com/science/cavnet](http://www.eScribe.com/science/cavnet). The CavNet web page, at [www.bio.fsu.edu/~jameslab](http://www.bio.fsu.edu/~jameslab), also offers an archive link.

CavNet members number over 400, representing over 30 countries. The listserve command center is based out of the University of Victoria in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. Eric Walters moderates the list from Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida.

