



Bluebird

Spring 2004
Vol. 26, No. 2

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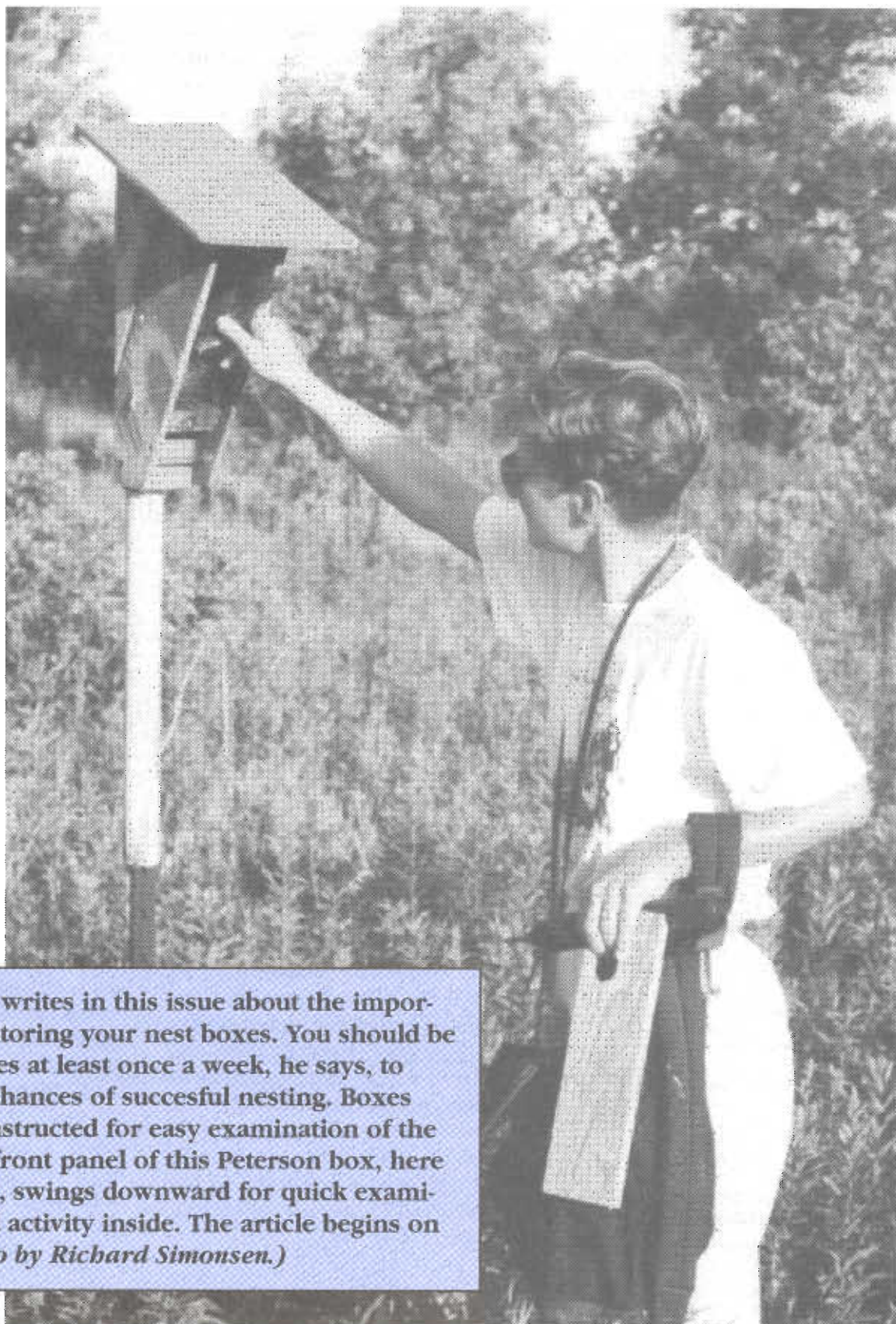
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Kevin Berner writes in this issue about the importance of monitoring your nest boxes. You should be checking boxes at least once a week, he says, to increase the chances of successful nesting. Boxes should be constructed for easy examination of the interior. The front panel of this Peterson box, here being cleaned, swings downward for quick examination of bird activity inside. The article begins on page 7. (Photo by Richard Simonsen.)



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From the Vice President

Steve Garr

I don't think we can ever say it enough to our many dedicated members: "Thank you for your support!" As the 27th annual North American Bluebird Society Convention approaches, I am looking forward to seeing the many great bluebirder friends I have met at previous conventions. It is good to get together with you to share experiences and stories. The only drawback has been that I was limited to visiting with "serious bluebirders" only once yearly.

As NABS' vice-president in charge of affiliate relations, I am increasingly appreciative of the role that NABS affiliates play in fostering interest in bluebirds. As our affiliates continue to grow and become more active, they provide greater opportunities for bluebirders to stay connected with each other throughout the year. At the same time, these organizations can provide awareness and support for NABS' research, education, and programs.

I would like to thank board member Jim McLochlin for setting up the e-mail communication line between NABS affiliates so they can keep in touch with each other and share ideas. I also thank Jim for the fine work he does on the NABS web site as our webmaster. There is a wealth of information there.

If you would like to find out how to contact the NABS affiliate in your area, go to www.nabluebirdsociety.org and click to the "Affiliates" page. The organizations are listed in alphabetical order by province or state. At NABS 2004, I look forward to meeting many of the affiliate representatives I have been communicating with this past year. Thursday, July 8, at the convention, we will hold our annual NABS affiliate meeting. All affiliates are invited to attend.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all of NABS's very dedicated board members and officers for all they do — it is appreciated. There are also many NABS committees that do a great deal of work for our cause. Few NABS members realize that committee members do not have to be board members. A board member usually chairs a committee, but they are always looking for volunteers to help with phone calls, represent NABS at shows or special events, and to help formulate and carry out ideas.

The membership committee, headed by board member Pauline Tom, is working with Executive Director Lisa Bulick on ideas for retaining current members as well as spreading the word about NABS to encourage new members. Please contact Pauline via the NABS web site or by leaving a message for her at the NABS headquarters (330/359-5511) if you would like to volunteer to be on the membership committee.

The future looks promising for NABS and the bluebirds! Do you remember why you became a NABS member? Because of the bluebird, of course, but no doubt it was also because of the encouragement and influence of another NABS member. I urge you to take a few moments this week to let that person know that you appreciate their influence. My bluebird mentor, Martin Smith, is gone now, but I am thankful for his having encouraged me to become involved with bluebirds. I would personally like to thank Steve Eno and Dean Sheldon for encouraging me to become a NABS board member and officer. It has been, and continues to be, a very rewarding experience — because of the bluebirds *and* the people who enjoy them!

From the Executive Director

Lisa Bulick

The NABS fiscal year runs November 1 through October 31. Here is the current budget for fiscal year 2003/2004.

Operating Income

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Corporate Donations | \$1,000 |
| Convention Contribution | \$1,500 |
| Misc Donations | \$2,000 |
| Membership Dues | |
| \$49,000 | |
| Corporate Memberships | \$3,600 |
| Life Members | \$1,500 |
| Adopt a Box | \$1,200 |
| Interest from Lifetime Memberships | \$60 |
| Adv Revenue (Bluebird) | \$1,745 |
| Royalties | \$660 |
| Merchandise / Catalog Sales | \$3,000 |
| Interest from 2003/2004 Zeleny Fund | \$1,500 |
| Total Income | \$66,765 |

Operating Expenses

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| Catalog Merchandise | \$1,000 |
| Catalog Supplies | \$150 |
| Accounting fees | \$2,500 |
| Annual Audit | \$1,750 |
| Bank Charges | \$150 |
| Credit card Fees | \$275 |
| Bolt Fund Grants | \$3,362 |
| Bluebird | |
| Design | \$2,400 |
| Editing | \$6,400 |
| Postage | \$2,200 |
| Printing | \$8,400 |
| Research Grants | \$3,000 |
| Life Memberships to Invest Funds | \$1,500 |
| Insurance | \$100 |
| Licenses | \$125 |
| Misc | \$350 |
| Office Supplies | \$200 |
| Payroll expenses | \$1,955 |
| Postage and Shipping | \$1,825 |
| Printing | \$1,000 |
| Rent | \$1,200 |
| Wages | |
| Exec Dir | \$17,250 |
| Clerical | \$3,210 |
| Software | \$200 |
| Awards | \$200 |
| Telephone | \$1,500 |
| Travel Expenses | |
| Board | \$2,500 |
| Executive Director | \$600 |
| Officers | \$1,000 |
| Total operating expenses | \$66,302 |

Summary: We are pleased to report that NABS stayed within three percent of budgeted expenditures for FY 02-03. The Endowment Fund continued to grow. Operating income, however, was considerably lower than projected, largely due to loss of membership and a downturn in the economy.

This fiscal year, the NABS executive director and Finance Committee have presented a balanced budget based on income figures that more closely reflect the current economic conditions, with expense adjustments to answer the need for more conservative fiscal practices.

— *NABS Finance Committee: Anne Little (chair), Robert Ewart, Fawzi Emad. Accounting Firm: K. W. Hoopes & Associates, Ken Hoopes, CPA. Endowment Fund Management: Wachovia Securities, Robert Marti.*

The Lawrence Zeleny Endowment Fund:

The Lawrence Zeleny Endowment Fund received strong support during FY 02-03, thanks to the generosity of many donors and a large bequest from Mr. Leonard Larson, of Farnhamville, Iowa. In addition, the NABS Board of Directors decided at the October 2002 meeting to transfer \$16,000, from a bequest from Ms. Jane Price Williams, to the Endowment Fund. By the end of FY 02-03 the NABS Endowment Fund balance exceeded \$60,000. Both Mr. Larson and Ms. Williams were posthumously included in the Zeleny Giving Circle.

A note from Steve Garr, vice president:

Membership is the lifeblood of every organization, and our budget is based on projected members each year. I want to thank the Finance Committee and the NABS board for all their work in modifying the 2004 budget to equal projected income. Lisa Bulick, executive director, also has agreed to work fewer hours at the NABS office, and we are looking for more volunteers to answer phones and do paper work.

Bluebird

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*Questions should be directed
to the NABS headquarters
address/telephone number
shown above.*

*The NABS web site offers
answers to many questions.*

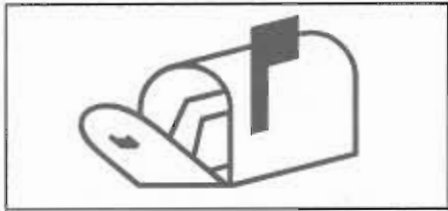
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Letters to the editor and articles in this magazine express the opinions and positions of the authors. Letters may be edited for length and content. Articles published do not necessarily represent the opinions and positions of the officers, directors,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

For advertising information, contact the executive director.

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To the editor,

On the surface, it would appear that the number of bluebirds fledged per the Wisconsin study would be improved using 300-foot house spacings. However, I find that the study does not go far enough, because the bluebird fledges, by their figures, determined on a large-area basis, would be increased ninefold comparing 300 foot centers to 100 foot centers.

For example: 300 feet X 300 feet = 90,000 square feet, whereas 100 feet X 100 feet = 10,000 square feet. Therefore, one would only have 100 boxes with 300 foot centers (236 resulting fledges) compared to 900 boxes covering an equal area with centers of 100 feet (1,107 resulting fledges using their 123 fledge figure X 9).

Do we wish to produce more bluebirds, or hold to a lesser production of possibly healthier birds? That would seem to be the question.

—Gerry Kopf, Elizabeth,
Illinois

To the editor,

As I travel by auto through many of our eastern states I notice an abundance of ideal habitat for bluebirds, but the absence of birdboxes there is depressing. I find many pastures and estates surrounded by fences that would be ideal habitat.

I try to get the word out each March via letters to small town/city papers in the northeast. Some letters are printed, some not. A concentrated effort by fellow NABS members asking such property owners in their area for permission to place appropriate birdboxes on

Buy two memberships for the price of one!

If you want to share the joys and excitement of bluebirding with friends, you can now buy **two gift memberships for the price of one**. For a limited time, NABS is offering two family memberships for only \$30.

Send NABS the names and addresses of two friends who would like to know more about bluebirds. Include your check — \$30 for each pair of names.

You can write “two for one” on the membership form you find on the back page of this magazine or simply write name, address, and telephone number (e-mail address, too, if available) for each new member.

This offer is valid until July 15, 2004.

Send your check or money order in U.S. funds (only \$30 for each pair of names) to: Two for One, NABS, P.O. Box 244, Wilmot, OH 44689.

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Bluebirds need our help. Extend our reach by adding two of your friends to our membership list.

opposite sides of these fences is a great method of bluebird evangelism. (It is better to place birdboxes on the opposite side of the animal-enclosed area so that the enclosed animals can't use the boxes for “scratching stations” which can destroy and/or knock the boxes on the ground.)

I have a bluebird trail along a semi-rural fenced area and have had good results due to bluebird cooperation (of course), frequent spring/summer monitoring, and annual trail extension. Wintertime is a great time to contact habitat-friendly landowners for permission to further our cause!

— Ellsworth W. Amidon,
Slingerlands, New York

Very late nesting

Emy McDonald, a Mountain Bluebird Trails member who lives in Snowflake, Arizona, had a pair of Mountain Bluebirds return to her yard in October. They built a nest in one of her nestboxes, and laid four eggs. All four hatched, and the birds fledged on Thanksgiving Day. She thinks the drought conditions and very warm weather were probably the reasons for the very late nesting. This item comes from the MBT newsletter.

Dr. Patricia Gowaty to speak at NABS convention in July

Dr. Patricia Gowaty, one of the foremost bluebird researchers in the world, will be the featured speaker when NABS holds its 2004 international convention July 7-11 in Ithaca, New York.

Registration will be limited to 350 persons. Register at the Clarion Hotel by June 1 for the \$79 guest rate.

Early in her professional career, Dr. Gowaty chose bluebirds as the subjects for research to better understand the social behavior of a species. She admits, "I was naïve when I began 30 years ago. I didn't realize how easy it was going to be to study bluebirds. I discovered that bluebirds spontaneously generate at the site of nest boxes! If I put nest boxes in places that I thought the birds would like, I had tons of birds."

She believes bluebirds to be a model species for behavioral studies. "I have watched bluebirds because they are extraordinarily aesthetically pleasing. I study an organism that pleases me every day. Also, I think a certain affection develops in anybody who has intimate and deep knowledge of another organism. I really like bluebirds," she said in a recent interview.

Dr. Gowaty is a Distinguished Research Professor in the Institute of Ecology at the University of Georgia. She is a Fellow of the Animal Behavior Society and American Ornithologists' Union, and recipient of many other prestigious honors.

Our banquet speaker, Dr. Charles R. Smith, an authority on grassland birds, was once a student of Lawrence Zeleny.

He is based in the Department of Natural Resources at Cornell University and will speak about the conservation of farmland birds.

Since 1992, Dr. Smith has coordinated the New York State Gap Analysis Project, in cooperation with multiple state and federal agencies. His research focuses upon biodiversity conservation and questions related to conservation of grassland birds and responses of northeastern breeding bird populations to habitat change and fragmentation.

Other speakers include Texas' Keith Kridler; John Rogers, central New York naturalist; and Kevin McGowan, who has led prominent research into the family life of the American Crow.

Ray Briggs, founder and first president of the Schoharie County (New York) Bluebird Society, retired teacher and cattle judge, will tickle your funny bone with his nest-box monitoring slide show. Entertainment will be provided by "The Fly Creek Philharmonic", a group made famous on the radio program "A Prairie Home Companion".

Field trips include such popular destinations as Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, the Corning Museum of

Glass, the Frederick Remington Museum of Western Culture, Finger Lakes National Forest, National Warplane Museum, and the Finger Lakes Wine Region. Information for self-guided trips to Cooperstown to the Baseball Hall of Fame and the Farmers Museum there, to Lake Ontario, and the Thousand Islands region of the St. Lawrence River, Adirondack lakes and parks, and many other vacation venues will be available.

The Clarion University Hotel and Conference Center offers the amenities of a busy college town. Within minutes are a variety of restaurants and varied shopping opportunities, museums, parks and summer recreation.

The foremost convention attraction may be the new Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology at Sapsucker Woods, just a couple miles from the convention hotel. The new \$30 million headquarters will bring all of us into the 21st century of ornithology.

You can add to the fun by bringing a donation for the Silent Auction.



A study in 1995 by Dr. Gowaty shows that pairing boxes might make nesting more likely. The story begins on page 8.

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—Julie Zickefoose

Why monitor nest boxes?

By Kevin Berner

It is very important that bluebird nest boxes be actively monitored (checked) at least once a week. Doing so increases the chances of success for bluebirds using the box and also is valuable for determining population trends. A box that is not monitored may be more harmful than helpful to bluebirds.

To make monitoring easier for you, all bluebird boxes should be built so that they can be opened either from the side, front, or top.

Monitoring nest boxes will alert you to problems the birds may be having with blowfly parasitism. Uncontrolled, the larvae of this species may weaken or possibly kill the nestling bluebirds. If you identify larvae in the nest, you should replace all the nest material with dried lawn clippings tightly packed in a shape similar to that of the original nest. This will increase the chance that the chicks will survive. Many bluebird enthusiasts replace all nests holding chicks periodically even before the blowfly larvae are visible. You should also replace any nest with young birds that has been saturated following rainfall. This is especially important during cold periods.

Being aware of what species is using the box is also beneficial. Bluebird societies would like you to monitor and report all species using your nest boxes, not just bluebirds. Species such as bluebirds, Tree Swallows, House Wrens, and chickadees all are native and beneficial birds. Mail survey forms submitted at the end of the nesting season allow the identification of population trends for each species.

House (English) Sparrows and Euro-

pean Starlings are non-native species introduced from Europe. Their aggressive seizure of cavity nest sites is the main reason for the rarity of bluebirds today. Starlings nest in many of the natural nest sites but can be excluded from nest boxes by only using 1-1/2 or 1-9/16-inch entrance holes. House Sparrows can readily enter bluebird nest boxes and frequently kill bluebirds, destroy their eggs, or drive them from their nests. At no time should they be allowed to successfully nest in bluebird boxes. Doing so will increase the House Sparrow population and further reduce bluebird numbers.

After any nesting effort has ended, either due to nest failure or successful fledging of young, the nest should be removed from the box. If a bluebird nest was successful, renesting in the same box may be encouraged if the first nest is removed.

What to monitor

Whenever you monitor a box you should determine what species is using it by examining the nesting material and eggs. You should record the date, and the number of eggs or young that you have observed. Knowing when the eggs were laid will help you determine when they should hatch, and when the young would be expected to leave the nest, or, if neither of those things happen, if the eggs are infertile.

In the case of bluebirds, the eggs are laid one each day until the entire clutch is complete. Incubation will then begin, and will last approximately 13 to 14 days. After hatching, the chicks will remain in the nest for 17 to 18 days. Your monitoring should be done carefully or limited to viewing from a dis-

tance after the 13th day or the chicks might fly from the box prematurely.

How to monitor

Nest monitoring should be done only during calm, mild, and dry weather conditions to reduce the chance of chilling the chicks or eggs. Open the nest box, being careful not to allow the eggs to fall out or chicks to jump out. Songbirds have a very poor sense of smell and will not abandon the nest due to your handling the nest, eggs, or chicks. If chicks are in the nest, look under the nest for signs of blowfly larvae. The chicks themselves should be examined for small scars, particularly under the wings that indicate blowfly parasitism. Sometimes you may observe the larvae attached to the chick. These are easily removed by hand.

Complete the monitoring as quickly as possible to minimize disturbance. When handling the chicks or removing them from the nest, they should be placed in something that will protect them from the sun or wind while preventing their escape. Avoid disposing of used nest material near the nest site or predators may be attracted to the site. Always be certain to close the box door securely before leaving. Record what you observed.

Identifying nests, eggs by species

Bluebird: The one- to four-inch tall nest is built with fine grasses or pine needles with a fairly deep nest cup. Eggs (four to six) are powder blue or occasionally white.

Tree Swallow: Their nest is also made of grasses but they may use somewhat

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— monitoring

Continued from page 7

coarser fibers than a bluebird. The nest generally has a flatter cup than a bluebird nest and is usually lined with feathers. Eggs (five to seven) are white and smaller than those of a bluebird.

House Wren: Wrens fill a nest box with sticks and line the deep nest cup with fine plant fibers or feathers. "Dummy nests" without the nest cup often are built in all other cavities within the male wren's territory to reduce competition for resources. The eggs (six to eight) are tan, speckled with brown and quite small.

Black-capped Chickadee: Chickadees build a nest of moss and plant down with the nest cup lined with hair. They lay five to eight white eggs covered with brown speckles. Eggs are often covered with fur or hair when the female leaves the box.

House Sparrow: House Sparrows build a tall nest of coarse grasses, often with pieces of scrap paper, cellophane, or other garbage. The nest forms a canopy with a tunnel-like entrance to the five to seven cream-colored eggs with brown markings.

For further information or membership information contact: North American Bluebird Society, P.O. Box 244, Wilmot, OH 44689. Send your e-mail to info@nabluebirdsociety.org. Website: <http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org>. Fax: 608/329-7057

(Kevin Berner can be reached at the State University of New York, Cobleskill, NY 12043.)

Pairing boxes might make nesting more likely, according to 1995 study by Gowaty

To add yet another page to the discussion of whether or not pairing of Eastern Bluebird nest boxes is a benefit or a detriment to your bluebirding efforts, we offer this summary of a 1995 research paper.

The field work for this project showed that bluebirds were more likely to be present at sites containing two nest boxes as compared to sites with a single box. The paired boxes in this case were within 80 feet of one another.

The paper was written by Jonathan H. Plissner and Patricia Adair Gowaty, and published in the *Wilson Bulletin* (Vol. 107, No. 2). Dr. Gowaty, who teaches at the University of Georgia, is widely known for her research work with bluebirds (see *Bluebird*, Summer 2003, Vol. 25, No. 3).

In January of 1985, the researchers erected nest boxes on 43 sites in northwestern South Carolina. The sites chosen were suitable for nesting by bluebirds. The boxes were placed randomly, and this was done during early winter to avoid birds returning to a given site because of particular familiarity with it.

At 20 of these sites, a single nest box was put in place. At the remaining 23 sites, two boxes were placed, each within 80 feet of its companion. This is a distance that the researchers describe as easily allowing defense of both boxes by a lone male Eastern Bluebird or a pair of birds.

In early March of the year of the study, just before the beginning of the breed-

ing season, the researchers played the territorial song of the Eastern Bluebird at these sites. Drs. Plissner and Gowaty found that they were more likely to get song response from bluebirds on those sites that contained two boxes. At two-box sites, the researchers recorded 13 responses, while at one-box sites there were only two responses.

What reason can be given for this?

"Explanations ... include that bluebirds prefer ... sites with two boxes because of increased habitat quality or that bluebirds locate two-box sites more readily than one-box sites," the authors wrote. "We infer from our result that potential territorial sites with two nesting boxes are more attractive to bluebirds than sites with only one nesting box."

Over the entire field season (March-September), there were 94 nesting attempts in boxes on the experimental sites. Thirty-nine (41 percent) were in boxes on one-box and 55 (58 percent) were in boxes on two-box sites.

Mean dates for the start of nest building and of the laying of first eggs were earlier for two-box territories, although these differences were not statistically significant. The research team also found no statistical differences in the numbers of eggs laid and hatched or nestlings fledged.

The single significant difference between one- and two-box sites observed by the researchers was response to taped territorial calls, according to Plissner and Gowaty. "We conclude that the likelihood of response by bluebirds

to taped territorial calls is associated with the number of nesting boxes on a site," they wrote.

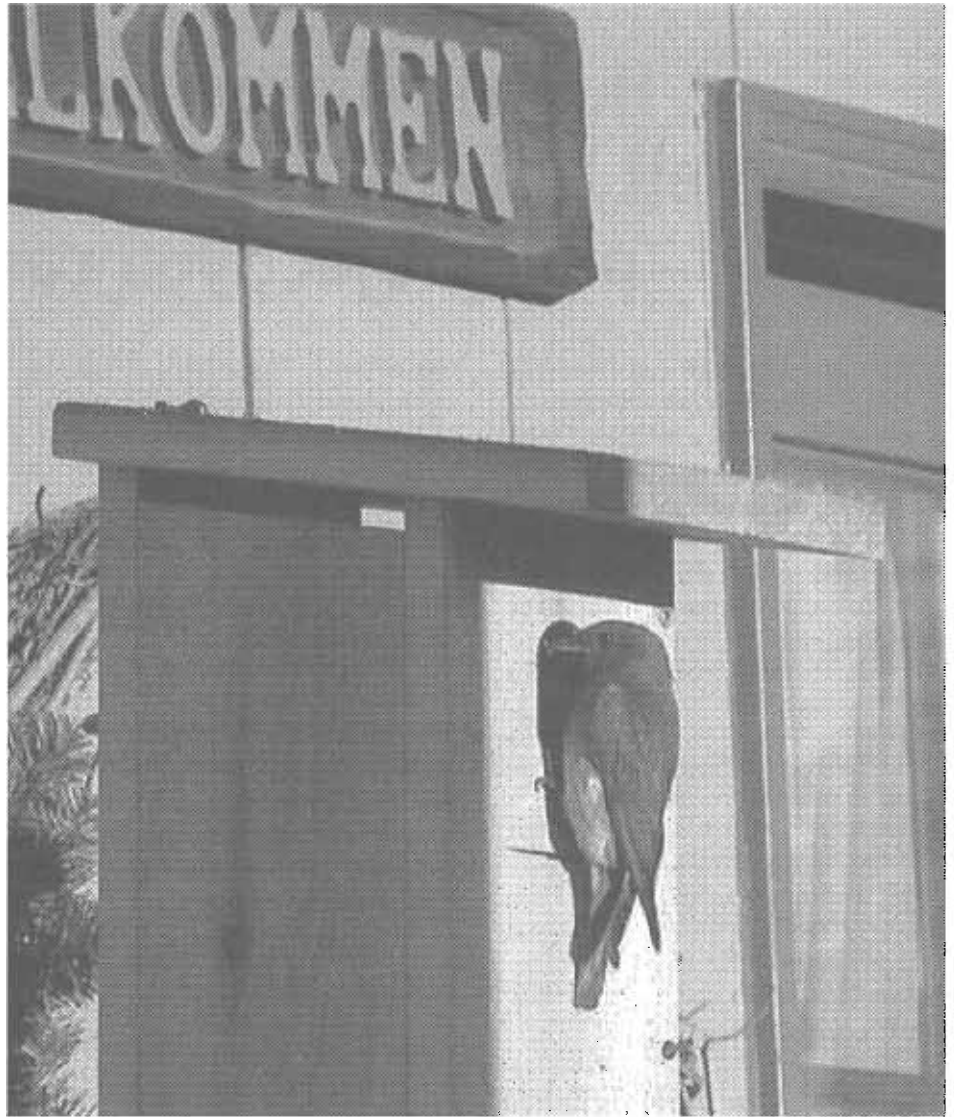
The researchers state in their paper that bluebirds might find two-box sites more readily than sites with only one box. "At all seasons of the year and at all ages bluebirds examine cavities," they wrote. This happens because suitable nest sites usually are in short supply. The birds learn to be on the lookout for good nesting locations.

"If bluebirds imprint on the characteristics of nest sites and use old nest site characteristics in their searches for new nest sites, a two-box site might be more readily found in comparison to one-box sites," the report says. This could be because the potential cues for nesting sites might be doubled when two boxes are present. The report goes on to say this could be especially so for bluebirds fledged in a nest box or whose previous breeding site was a nest box.

"Certainly if their searches for cavities are random searches and if an important cue to territory suitability is the presence of a cavity, sites with two nesting boxes will be found more readily than sites with one," the report says.

Also mentioned in this paper is another study showing that Tree Swallows also were more likely to be attracted to two-box locations.

— Jim Williams



Bluebirds commonly nest in open areas that are grazed or mowed. They seldom seek cavities in or close to buildings. However, in May of 2003 bluebirds chose to vacate an established nest with no eggs that was located about 40 feet from the east side of our dwelling to energetically establish a new nest on the west side in a portable display nest box on the porch of our home. During a garage renovation all tools and equipment were placed on the porch, and the display nest box was inadvertently placed two feet from the front door to our dwelling. These bluebirds built their new nest in spite of the presence of power tools and human activity. The female laid five eggs. Seventeen days after hatching, the youngsters all fledged. The behavior of these bluebirds during incubation and rearing was fascinating. We attempted to minimize human activity near the nest box, but the bluebirds apparently recognized our needs and became tolerant of lawn mowing, vehicles passing, and people using the front door. They scheduled their visits around our movements and we reciprocated. This experience suggests that bluebirds are not afraid of humans and are actually willing to associate with them. Perhaps these bluebirds recognized the additional protection from rain, wind, sun, and predators at the front porch location. — Leif Marking

House Sparrow problems? Cornell University has tips for control plus project you can join

In the mid-1800's, little brown birds called House Sparrows were introduced into the United States from Europe, reportedly to promote the birds mentioned in Shakespeare plays and because they were believed to control insect pests. Since then, these little brown birds have made themselves quite comfortable here, spreading their wings across all of North America in vast numbers.

Their surging populations have resulted in fierce competition with native birds for nesting sites. According to 2003 data collected by The Birdhouse Network (TBN), a citizen-science project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, House Sparrows account for 43 percent of all competitor species, i.e., species that take over nest boxes intended for native birds. And while most nest-box monitors discourage nesting by House Sparrows, they still comprise 10 percent of all reported nesting attempts, where at least one egg is laid.

"What effect is this having on North America's bluebirds, swallows, and other native cavity-nesting species? We don't know," says TBN project leader Tina Phillips. "There are no long-term studies showing the effect of competition between House Sparrows and our native cavity-nesters. This is one reason why we're asking everyone across the continent to become part of our nest-box monitoring project. The only way to get answers is to get data, which can be provided only by people who monitor nest boxes."

TBN participants monitor activity inside

nest boxes, and keep track of data such as egg-laying dates, numbers of eggs and nestlings, and fledging dates. They send their observations to researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, where they are combined with observations from across North America, to determine the annual nesting success of cavity-nesting birds.

In the middle of the last century, things were not looking so good for bluebirds. Their populations were seriously declining due to pesticide use, habitat loss and competition with nonnative species, such as House Sparrows. Today bluebird populations are rebounding thanks to bird enthusiasts who provide nest boxes in their yards, fields, and neighborhoods.

Phillips points out that simply putting up nest boxes isn't enough. In order to ensure the long-term future of native cavity-nesters, nest-box owners need to monitor and report what's going on inside their boxes. Only then

will scientists have a truer picture of the current status and factors influencing breeding success of native cavity-nesting species.

One thing is known for sure. In head-to-head competition, House Sparrows readily out-compete native species for nesting sites. House Sparrows are prolific breeders, raising up to four broods per season (compared to just one or two for bluebirds), and each brood averages four to five eggs. They are expert nest builders, building and rebuilding nests at a rapid rate.

For these reasons, TBN is collecting data for a new Nest Box Competitor Study, which examines the effect of nest-box competition from invasive species on native cavity-nesting birds. Participants collect information about the competitor species using the nest box, the type of interference, if any, by monitors, and the final outcome of the nesting attempt.

Continued on page 11

Nest-box cameras — a peek inside the mysterious lives of cavity nesters

Cornell Laboratory's The Birdhouse Network once again in providing live images of cavity-nesting birds to viewers around the world. Using a system of Nest Box Cams — small cameras placed inside nest boxes — Internet viewers can follow species such as bluebirds, swallows, Barn Owls, American Kestrels, and chickadees, as they build their nest, lay eggs, hatch, feed the young, and much more. Developed and managed by the TBN staff, the cams have attracted nearly half a million viewers. To get a peek, visit The Birdhouse Network's web site at www.birds.cornell.edu/birdhouse.

— sparrows

Continued from page 10

In addition to collecting data, monitors also can avoid using filler grain such as milo, millet, or cracked corn, at bird feeder stations. Placing nest boxes away from houses and barns is a good idea. Plug the entrance hole of nest boxes until the desired species arrives for breeding. Remove nest or eggs and deploy traps.

Phillips says that becoming part of TBN and sharing your observations with researchers is a good way to help make a difference for the birds. So far, the project has received more than 41,000 nesting records for over 40 cavity-nesting species. Information however, is still badly needed for the new Nest Box Competitor Study.

NABS members are invited to become part of The Birdhouse Network. A registration fee of \$15 (\$12 for Lab members) helps offset the cost of running the project. Participants receive a Welcome Packet that includes a beautiful poster of cavity-nesting birds, access to private and public listservs, an annual subscription to the Labs quarterly newsletter *BirdScope*, and access to an online database where participants can submit, organize, share, and store their nest-box observations.

Enroll by calling the Lab toll-free at 800/843-2473 (outside the U.S., 607/254-2473) or at The Birdhouse Network web site at www.birds.cornell.edu/birdhouse

(The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a membership institution interpreting and conserving the earth's biological diversity through research, education, and citizen science focused on birds.)

Candidates announced for NABS '04 election

The election of officers and directors will be held on July 10, 2004, at the NABS convention in Ithaca, New York.

Candidates for officers to be elected for a one-year term are:

President: Steve Garr, Mexico, Missouri. He has served as acting-president since December 2003 and as first vice-president for affiliates from 2003 to 2004. Steve has also served on the board as a director.

First vice-president for affiliates: Julie Kuttruff, Lorton, Virginia. She has served on the board as a director from 2003 to 2004. Julie currently serves on the membership committee.

Secretary: Position open.

Treasurer: Gary Springer, Carnesville, Georgia. He has been a long-time and active member of NABS. Gary is a licensed CPA and a business consultant. Results of his pilot studies concerning bluebirds and other cavity nesters have been published by national birding organizations.

Below are candidates to be elected as directors for a three-year term:

Robert Benson, Stoughton, Massachusetts, traces his love and care for bluebirds back to his childhood. Although Bob can claim a variety of work histories, he currently is a featured photographer and writer for numerous national publications.

Bernard Daniel, Cincinnati, Ohio, has served in the past as an appointee to the board of directors and is currently active on NABS hotline, journal advisory and research committees. Bernie is a senior environmental research scientist with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Dick Park, Boerne, Texas, has 30 years business experience in manufacturing and human resources with emphasis on organizational effectiveness, training and development. Has served on many boards including national minority and women small business organization and native plant society. Dick is a member of NABS, the Texas Bluebird Society, and many other organizations.

Dan Sparks, Nashville, Indiana, has been an active bluebirder for many years and is known to many through the Indiana Bluebird Society and the Bluebird-L listserv. For the past 25 years, Dan has been the proprietor of his bookshop in Nashville.

This report has been submitted by the 2004 nominating committee: Bernie Daniel, Ohio; Steve Eno, Nebraska; Terri Kromel, Pennsylvania; Grace Storch, Illinois; and Mary Ellen Vetter, chair, Minnesota.

Mountain Trails regional meeting in May in Montana

Mountain Bluebird Trails will hold a regional bluebird meeting May 21-23 in Hamilton, Montana. Ellis Bird Farm of LaCombe, Alberta, will be co-sponsor. For information write Mountain Bluebird Trails, 600 Central Ave., Suite 230, Great Falls, MT 59401.



One bluebird: Mr. Troyer's story

Text and drawings
by Julie Zickefoose

I had known this day would come, had been thinking about it a lot, lately, but I wasn't truly prepared for it. Mr. Troyer didn't come in for his mealworms this February afternoon.

His widow, if widow she be, is already consorting with another male, the same day Mr. Troyer disappeared. He came to the kitchen window to remind me about his mealworms this morning, and this afternoon he is simply gone, erased, replaced. Such is the nature of songbird bonds, even long-standing ones. Bluebirds can't live forever, after all. This one, I know, was at least eight years old, and probably closer to nine. A Methuselah among Eastern Bluebirds.

He wasn't banded, but he had been marked just the same, by the quick talons of a Sharp-shinned Hawk, on May 19, 1993. It was at that moment that he became more than just another bluebird to me, that our lives were knit together, that I began to know him as an individual.

Bill and I had been gardening all day, and dusk was approaching. My notes from that day:

Bill saved the male bluebird from a sharpie who barreled between the forsythia and garage, picked the male bluebird off the clothesline pole and carried him, shrilling, for a distance before Bill's yelling scared the hawk into dropping him! The bluebird's mate just sat on the wire, stunned. If Bill hadn't heard a robin scolding and thought fast, the bluebird just would have been gone that morning.

This was not the considered action of a well-informed naturalist — though Bill more than qualifies. This was the same primitive response that snatches a toddler off a curb as a taxi sweeps by. Denying a Sharp-shinned Hawk a well-earned meal is not something we routinely do, or recommend. There was no thought involved, and thus no excuse to be made for his intervention.

The sharpshin dropped the bluebird. I picked him up, his tiny chest heaving, bill wide open, bright beads of blood on his left bicep and breast. Carefully, I spread both wings, stretched his legs, blew apart the feathers on his breast to search for wounds. Finding nothing gashed or broken, I smoothed his feathers and released him. His brood was due to fledge in four days, and he had work to do.

For two days, we didn't see much of him; he sat mopily in the wooded border, left wing drooping. But then his parental instincts won out over his discomfort, and he helped his mate see the brood out of the box. There was a marked difference in his demeanor, though. This once-skittish bird seemed to have completely lost his fear of us, and he'd bathe merrily in the bird bath as I weeded barely 10 feet away. Having kept, healed, and grown up watching wild birds, I knew that a bird will not bathe if it feels in the least threatened, for wet feathers spell vulnerability. Clearly, he no longer regarded me as a threat. Could he view me as a protector after the hawk incident, and ac-

tually feel safer when I was near?

I thought back to other, similar instances I'd experienced. Several years earlier, I'd enjoyed watching a pair of Barn Swallows raising their brood in my landlord's garage. I'd hung an old umbrella beneath their nest, upside down, to catch the fallout from the nest and spare my landlord's truck. The swallows, perhaps resenting this, always dive-bombed me when I approached the garage, giving shrill *kiveet!* calls.

Then, one hot day, I heard the same calls, with a more hysterical tone, and rushed out to find a five-foot long Black Rat snake oozing along a rafter toward the nestful of young swallows. With a rake, I coaxed the snake down and into a burlap bag for detention until the young swallows fledged. The adult swallows sat stone-still in the rafters, watching the procedure, then silently escorted me and the writhing burlap bag from the garage. From that day on, they never dive-bombed me or voiced an alarm call at me again.

A female Hairy Woodpecker who frequents our peanut and suet feeders hit our large plate-glass window twice in the winter of 2000. The second time, she was knocked almost cold, and lay sprawled on the lawn, vulnerable to attack from a predator. My heart sinking, I picked her up, checked her for

broken bones, and, finding her intact, gently placed her in the crotch of a thick pine tree to recover.

I checked on her several times over the next two hours, and was glad to find her preening, then flying back to the feeding station for a snack. Her mate is as shy as ever, as befits a Hairy Woodpecker, but the female has shown not the slightest fear of me from that day on, feeding calmly as I fill feeders only a few feet away. Still stunned, or just smart?

I know it's unfashionable to conjure words like "trust" in a discussion of animal behavior, but as much as my mind circles around this and similar incidents, it keeps running into the same conclusion.

Having forged this bond with the rescued bluebird, I took renewed interest in his doings. After all, he was instantly identifiable, with that drooping left wing. He was to nest with the same mate in the east box for the next three seasons, successfully fledging 18 young.

When the male bluebird nesting in our front yard suddenly disappeared on March 16, 1996, I was surprised to see the injured male making forays from his eastern territory into the front yard. Little matter that he had a mate building a nest in the east box. He waved his wings at the widowed female, who,



seemingly energized by his presence, began gathering nesting material.

Singing vigorously, he encouraged her to build in the front yard box. The widow had other ideas. She flew around the corner of our house to a box on the west side and began to build in it. Savagely, her new escort attacked her, and drove her back to the front yard box. Again and again she attempted to build in the west box, and each time he drove her back to the front yard.

I was mystified at his behavior, until I realized that he wanted both his mates in sight at once. From the front yard box, he could keep an eye on the east box. Not so the west box. If he was to have a chance of squiring two females and holding two territories at once, he had to keep an eye on both at all times. When the widow finally gave in and took a billful of possum fur to the front yard box, he rewarded her with a soft caterpillar. Not so dumb, this droopy-winged male.

Largely without help from him, the injured male's first mate raised a brood of five. His affections clearly had been won by the widowed frontyard female. When, on June 16, 1996, a new male arrived to woo the east box female, the double-timing male had little argument. He settled in with the frontyard female, and conceded his first mate to the interloper.

Now that they were an official pair, the droopy-winged male and the widowed female seemed to need a name. I decided on The Troyers, after Amish bluebird Andy Troyer. He had sent me a nifty slot box and PVC baffle to try out, and it was here that the pair settled.

Mr. Troyer fit the injured bluebird somehow; like Andy, he was smart and had a zest for life. He came to know our schedule, and would appear like magic at breakfast, lunch, and dinnertime,



*Eastern Bluebird
preening.*

peering into the appropriate windows with a gentle reminder that he'd like to eat, too.

In the morning, when I was rising from bed and dressing, he'd perch on a cast-iron bell just outside the window and watch for me to raise the blind. When the two set to their mealworm feast, Mr. Troyer always let his mate eat her fill before feeding himself.

The pair seemed set on making bluebird history. While in 1994 and 1995, Mr. Troyer had managed to raise a total of only 14 young with his first mate, in 1996, with the widow by his side, his production took off. That season alone, 14 young in three broods fledged from the Troyer's box, one of which was an orphan I sneaked into their second brood.

In 1997, there were 13 young in three broods, and the 1998 season resulted in 17 fledged from four broods — a first for me in Ohio. There was a downturn in 1999, when all but one of the Troyers' second brood died of bacterial enteritis; still they managed to fledge nine that year in three broods. Carefully paging through my notes, I found that Mr. Troyer had fathered and fledged no less than 67 young in his

eight years of nesting in our yard, an awesome output for a droopy-winged bluebird.

I have to take some credit — or blame — for this production, for this pair was unique among those nesting in the 15 bluebird boxes on our farm. The Troyers were subsidized, quite heavily, with mealworms that I doled out onto the deck railing. It was easy, and fun, and I enjoyed the close companionship it fostered.

Spurred by this abundance of food, Mrs. Troyer usually had her first clutch complete by April Fool's Day, even as snow flew around the little slot box. In 1998, the banner year of four broods, I fed the pair as many mealworms as they could eat. And I learned a lesson, at their expense.

By the time their fourth and final brood had fledged at the astonishingly late date of Sept. 14, the Troyers were clearly done in. Neither had followed a proper bluebird molting schedule, gradually replacing their feathers in late July and August. No, they looked like bad mounts.

Mr. Troyer lost his tail all at once, and every feather on his head, and Mrs. Troyer didn't look much better. It was a wonder they were able to fly, much less feed their young. I realized that I had overtaxed their systems by offering too much food, and encouraging them to raise one too many broods. I'd thrown their metabolisms off, and I clearly hadn't done them any favors. The fact was that they didn't need all those mealworms; the superabundance of food brought on overproduction, and exhausted their energy reserves.

All that fall, I watched and worried as cool weather came on, and the Troyers still wore their shabby summer feathers. To my great relief, their smooth autumnal plumage finally emerged, and the Troyers looked good by mid-October. I'd never do that to them again!



By spring, 1999, I realized that Mr. Troyer was getting old. A House Sparrow had cornered him in his box, and pecked the back of his head bald — another identifying mark for a bird who'd become a beloved neighbor to me. We eventually were able to remove the House Sparrow threat, and the Troyers carried on with their fourth sea-

son together.

It wasn't to be their best; an infectious enteritis killed all but one of their young in the second brood. When the Troyers abandoned her, I removed and fed her until she was strong enough to be fostered into another box. Wisely, they switched boxes for their third brood,

nesting on the west side of the house. That's the best way to avoid an infectious disease, I thought. I hoped Mrs. Troyer was pleased to finally occupy her first box choice at long last.

Five healthy young fledged from their third brood of 1999, and then construction started on an addition to our house, which effectively eliminated the Troyers' territory. Great gaping pits and piles of earth replaced their lush lawn and flower garden habitat. The Troyers wisely quit the premises. They'd appear first thing in the morning, a few fledglings in tow, and sit atop the chimney, surveying what had once been their yard. Then they'd fly off down the orchard to parts unknown.

I felt terrible about it, and promised them that we'd rebuild it better than ever once the addition was completed in the winter. I hoped they wouldn't desert me altogether, though I couldn't have blamed them if they did.

On a fine September day, the Troyers returned, and asked for mealworms as if nothing had ever happened. Their box was back up in the front yard, and they inspected it, and from then on they were regulars, navigating the construction moonscape with aplomb. All winter they stayed around, accepting a mealworm handout at sunup and sundown, and disappearing deep into the woods during the day.

Spring crept in, and buds started to swell, and the Troyers' thoughts turned to nesting once again. Mr. Troyer spent increasing periods sitting on and near the box, singing intermittently, and waving his wings on fine mornings. What a trooper, what a life he'd had, I thought, and marveled that he was ready to start perhaps his ninth season of nesting, to feed and fledge yet more young.

He was the first bluebird to nest on our farm, moving in the same spring

that we did in the first box we ever put up. He'd weathered floods and drought and ice storms, construction and excavation, a Sharpshin attack and a sparrow drubbing, and who knows what other vicissitudes that I hadn't had the privilege of witnessing.

One summer he'd taken ill and developed a sneeze and cough, and he'd become sluggish and stopped feeding his young. I worried him through that, trying to figure out how to administer an antibiotic in his mealworms, but he recovered, and carried on.

We'd intervened so often on his behalf that I suppose it was open to question whether Mr. Troyer was truly a wild bird. He should have been dead in 1993, and would have been, but for Bill. That was 67 young and seven years ago. Through it all, he taught me the ways of a bluebird, the thought processes of which he was capable, the dispassionate hedging of bets that led him to abandon a sickly brood and try again. I was desperately fond of him, his old droopy wing and his bald spot.

The last time I saw him, he was perched on the front door awning, peering in the kitchen window at me as I played with baby Liam on the floor. "Mealworms? Aren't you forgetting my mealworms?" he seemed to say. Dutifully, I put them out, and he and Mrs. Troyer feasted.

That afternoon, he was gone. The smooth, bullet-blue male Sharpshin who often strafed the yard might have borne him off without a trace, plucked him in the woods, littering the duff with bright azure feathers as he stoked his own frantic fire. I would never know what happened to Mr. Troyer.

That same afternoon, a new male was escorting Mrs. Troyer, a sleek, young thing, traces of juvenal plumage lingering about his throat, snappy of movement and boisterous in song. How quickly her mate was replaced in

Silver anniversary in Minnesota; meeting April 17

The Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota will celebrate its 25th anniversary at its annual meeting April 17 in Monticello, Minnesota (38 miles northwest of Minneapolis). As usual, the Minnesota folks expect about 300 persons to attend the meeting. For a registration package, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to BBRP, Box 3801, Minneapolis MN 55403.

April 30 next deadline for Bluebird

The deadline for the Summer 2004 issue of *Bluebird* is April 30, 2004. Earlier submissions always are appreciated. The editor prefers to receive material by e-mail (no attachments, please) at two-jays@.att.net. Postal address is Jim Williams, 345 Ferndale Road N, Wayzata, MN 55391. Include a self-addressed stamped envelope if you wish return of manuscripts or photographs. Letters to the editor are welcome. Letters may be edited for length and content.

her life. I should be more like her, I thought, willing to fast-forward to the next act.

I suppose if my allotted span were less than a decade, I'd be better at it, but we humans have time to mull and grieve and reflect on a life well-lived, no matter how small. I had held him in my hand, helped his young through rain and cold, changed their nests when parasites threatened, fed him in bitter cold and snow, spoken to him nearly every day for eight years.

I thought about human intervention, and the debates around bird feeding. I have colleagues who view bird feeding as the equivalent of turning wild birds into backyard pets. I know birders who have never opened a bag of sunflower seed. Knowledgeable bluebirders maintain that bluebirds don't need a mealworm subsidy to thrive and raise young, and I know that, on the whole, they are right.

When a week of cold rain hits in mid-summer, soaking the adults and making it impossible for them to find food, these trail operators simply clean the starved nestlings out of the houses so the adults can start again. I, on the other

hand, travel box to box with tweezers and mealworms, and feed the young birds through the hardship. It's not easy, and it's going overboard, I know, but I am compelled to do it, and I don't apologize for it. I feel responsible for these birds who have chosen to nest in my boxes.

Then my thoughts jumped to the larger issue: Where would bluebirds, as a species, be without human intervention? When the long-term decline of bluebirds became evident in the 1960's, the nationwide move to provide housing for them was the largest single-species conservation effort ever launched. Thanks to pioneers like Lawrence Zeleny, who worked hard to make their plight known, to the thousands of dedicated bluebird trail operators across the nation, and to state and national outreach organizations like the North American Bluebird Society, bluebirds are now a reasonably common sight on telephone wires and fencerows across America.

In my experience with Mr. Troyer, I had a microcosm of the larger picture. By waving our arms at one hawk, we'd unwittingly allowed 53 more young bluebirds into the world. I'd had the

privilege of chronicling the long and productive life of a single bird. I'd learned a valuable lesson about nearly loving a bird to death with too much provender. My little girl, Phoebe, had known the magic of providing for wild birds who would come to within an arm's length when she called to them. We had intervened, and we were much the richer for it. One bluebird had made the world a more beautiful place for us, and his memory will burn, a small azure flame, in my heart.

("One Bluebird" has been reprinted from Bird Watcher's Digest, July/August 2000, by permission. Sketches copyright 2004 by Julie Zickefoose. Ms. Zickefoose is a freelance writer and artist who lives in southeast Ohio. She has been writing and drawing for Bird Watcher's Digest since 1986, and tending bluebird boxes since 1982. For more of Julie Zickefoose's writing and artwork, including limited-edition bluebird prints, visit www.juliezickefoose.com. A one-year subscription to Birdwatcher's Digest is \$19.99. NABS receives \$10 of that price when NABS members subscribe. Call 800/879-2473 or visit www.birdwatchersdigest.com.)

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- Full-page ad — \$245

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For more information and to schedule your advertising, contact Lisa Bulick at NABS headquarters, 330/359-5511 or lisabulick@nabluebirdsociety.org.

Prothonotary Warblers bury a cowbird egg

By Douglas R. Wood

Although Brown-headed Cowbirds rarely parasitize cavity-nesting species, Prothonotary Warblers are frequently host to cowbird eggs. In June 2003, I observed an unusual response to cowbird parasitism of a Prothonotary Warbler nest at the Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge in south-central Oklahoma. The warblers buried the cowbird egg within the nest.

Monitoring a nest with four Prothonotary Warbler eggs, I noticed a Brown-headed Cowbird egg in the clutch after the third egg was laid. The host warblers initially accepted the cowbird egg into their clutch, but five days later the cowbird egg disappeared. I assumed the warblers had removed it.

All four warbler eggs hatched, and eight days after hatching, I banded the chicks. Removing the chicks for banding, I found the cowbird egg buried under the nest material. Approximately 10 percent of the eggshell was visible through the nest material, but the egg was clearly buried. The egg contained a partially developed embryo.

Of the 40 Prothonotary Warbler nests I monitored, only one was parasitized by cowbirds. The nest boxes used in this study were installed in flooded oak and willow stands surrounded by agricultural fields and a lake. Cowbirds were abundant throughout the study site.

Prothonotary Warblers accept cowbird eggs in their nests but often abandon that nest. This pair buried the cowbird egg, and continued incubating their clutch. Thus, the parasitism event was nullified and a successful clutch was produced without re-nesting.

The following literature was used in preparation of this article:

Burgham, M. C. J., and J. Picman. 1989. Effect of Brown-headed Cowbirds on the evolution of Yellow Warbler anti-parasite strategies. Animal Behaviour 38:298-308.

Clark, K. L., and R. J. Robertson. 1981. Cowbird parasitism and evolution of anti-parasite strategies in the Yellow Warbler. Wilson Bulletin 93:249-258.

Petit, L. J. 1991. Adaptive tolerance of cowbird parasitism by Prothonotary Warblers: a consequence of nest-site limitation? Animal Behaviour 41:425-432.

(Douglas R. Wood. Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 1405 N. 4th Ave., PMB 4068, Durant, OK 74701-0609, 580/745-2272; fax 580/745-7459; e-mail dwood@sosu.edu.)

Red-headed Woodpecker nest-box project is goal of Georgia birder

A man in Georgia is promoting an effort to do for Red-headed Woodpeckers what the bluebird restoration and conservation effort has done for that bird species.

"Efforts to assist the bluebird in its comeback seemed like a long shot to many when Lawrence Zeleny's book, "Bluebird, How You Can Help In Its Survival," was published in 1976," said Gary Springer of Carnesville, Georgia.

"Without ever making a single sighting of a bluebird many people faithfully maintained and monitored nest boxes for several years," he said in a recent note. "Without the faith and determination exhibited by these early bluebirders, the bluebird might remain a rare sight in the Eastern United States to this day."

That same faith and determination might be all that is needed to make the Red-headed Woodpecker a common sight once again, Mr. Springer believes. He wants to offer appropriate nest boxes throughout the woodpecker's range to determine if this effort will help to significantly increase Red-headed Woodpecker numbers. He points out that the breeding habitat of the Eastern Bluebird is often perfect habitat for Red-headed Woodpeckers. The woodpecker's range essentially lies east of the Rocky Mountains and south of the Canadian border.

The woodpecker prefers open areas where it can hunt insects from an elevated perch in much the same way

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*The second roof on this nest-box, topped by a pair of Red-headed Woodpeckers, was placed to protect the birds from potential destruction from heat as temperatures in the nesting area had exceeded 100 degrees. Eight of these boxes were included in the pilot study for temperature data loggers conducted by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology last year. This study shows that on hot days the inside of this box was cooler than the air temperature. Therefore, the threat of heat damage to the eggs may not have existed. Construction plans for this box and more photographs of the nest box the Red-headed Woodpeckers used for roosting and nesting can be found in the book *The Bluebird Monitor's Guide*. (The photo is from the web site of Real Bird Homes. It is used with permission.)*

Speakers carry our conservation message

By Ron Kingston

In January 2003, questionnaires (survey of the 2002 Programs) were sent to each member of the NABS Speakers' Bureau. Every year the speakers are asked for a summary of the past year's programs, a few questions about

what worked and what didn't, and how NABS could help them. In this review of the past presentations, we hope all bluebirders will be inspired to tell the public about bluebirds and other cavity nesters, and increase an awareness of bluebird conservation throughout North America. The speakers were asked for comments and suggestions on making presentations. Here are some of the replies.

Lee Petersen, Michigan: I'm just getting started in bluebirding and gave my first presentation at the Senior's Luncheon at our church. I had no slides, video or items, just plans. Probably 20 people attended with loads of questions. Three of them have made boxes from the plans of my favorite nest box (Troyer's Slotted) and one person is raising mealworms now and will monitor a trail this summer. Lots of people now call with questions. I plan on giving more presentations next May. I am so excited about this wonderful project.

Frances Sawyer, Georgia: As a substitute teacher, I have many opportunities to teach children about bluebirds. I usually ask the teacher if our science lesson can be about bluebirds. I usually demonstrate a good nest box and discuss box placement, monitoring, predators and show a video so that they can see a bluebird. Many children call me Mrs./Ms. Bluebird. We encourage the placement of nest boxes around schools and offer a certificate to those schools that put up the boxes and monitor them for a nesting season.

John Rogers, New York: From early January to late November I gave 27 programs around the Brewerton area using my PowerPoint program and handing out NABS and NYSBS brochures. (A newspaper article that about his work with bluebirds states that "Mr. Rogers' enthusiasm hasn't abated any

in the years since his father first gave him a bluebird box when he was a boy. ...In the fall, when he catches flashes of bluebirds in the air or sees them perched on fences or wires, Rogers said it makes all those bluebird miles on his car worth it."

Kevin Berner, New York: I gave seven programs last year, including a Conservation Council and an elementary school. During the year I used slides, videos and a PowerPoint presentation. A nest/egg display and various nest box styles were very popular.

Emory Brooks, Georgia: The program given to the senior citizen group using slides was exceptionally well received. I feel that a good response to bluebird conservation will follow.

Thomas Curry, Georgia: I made 20 bluebird nest boxes according to NABS specifications and gave them away to interested people who attended my programs in February. The programs were presented to the local Lions Club and two other groups. The programs were very enthusiastically received with more requests for nest boxes than I had made. Feedback was very positive and I plan to repeat the programs next year.

Evelyn Cooper, Louisiana: I gave programs at a garden club, bird club, and two schools by using a video with books, traps, display items and a complete nest box. By the way, speaker **Tena Taylor** from Mississippi did a superb job for us at our first annual meeting.

Darrell Gammon, Ohio: One of the seven programs given was at the Alliance Park board meeting which was followed later by creation of a bluebird trail. At many of the programs people are looking for advanced information beyond the basics. It is of-

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— woodpeckers

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the Eastern Bluebird does. In summer, the woodpecker seems to prefer open fields with an occasional tall tree here and there, open areas with stands of mature trees nearby or open park-like stands of mature trees near grassy areas or fields.

"Some may assume that because the Red-headed Woodpecker excavates its own cavity that cavity shortages would not be as severe a problem for this bird as it is with the bluebird," Mr. Springer said. "But, as with the bluebird, the location of the cavity is key.

"I really believe this birds' decline can be arrested if we can give it a little edge in its competition with European Starlings," Mr. Springer said. "Starlings prefer the nesting sites created by the Red-headed Woodpecker far more consistently than those of the other medium sized woodpeckers.

Persons interested in placing boxes for the woodpeckers can get more information from Mr. Springer by writing him at 617 Shepherd Road Carnesville, GA 30521 or sending e-mail to springer@alltel.net. Red-headed Woodpecker nest photos can be found at the web site www.realbirdhomes.com/photospg1.htm.

— speakers

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ten times difficult to keep their interest and involvement in the club after they know the basics.

Cindy Hedges, Illinois: I enjoyed giving the program as an orientation to volunteers to the DuPage County Park. I showed the video along with nest boxes and different nests. I am looking for an audio introduction to the Stokes video that is equivalent to the slide program manuscript.

John Holm, Nebraska: One of the programs was on outdoor education. Sixty sixth-grade students built and erected Peterson nest boxes, peeked into other boxes at eggs and nestlings, and autographed their nest box. At another program, I gave a talk to retired teachers and loaned them some bluebird videos.

Ron Howe, New York: I traveled 7,114 miles last year giving 67 bluebird programs. I answered 198 information requests and sent 46 promotional letters to schools and 30 to public libraries. I contacted over 2,205 people by giving programs, and established a new Route 11 satellite trail in Franklin County, and I had a great time doing it.

Jerry Hunefeld, Indiana: I gave nine programs at various locations. The Kiwanis club, women's home economics club, church groups, Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Older American's Club were among those at which I spoke.

Terry Johnson, Georgia: As program manager of the Non-Game Endangered Wildlife Program, I gave four programs in 2002 and am looking for additional slides and information to the NABS program that deal with the recent advancements in bluebird nest box designs.

Doug LeVasseur, Ohio: Using a personal video and the 40-slide set of Bob Orthwein's available from the Ohio

Bluebird Society, I spoke to eight groups from Ohio to Montana and spoke to hundreds of people at the Ohio State Fair booth in August.

Anne Little, Virginia: I spoke to about 40 attendees at the local library using my slides and handed out lots of NABS brochures.

Bob Niebuhr, Montana: I talked to over 240 people in 2002 and drove 1,761 miles to present programs to individual groups that had never had a bluebird program given to them. My biggest audiences were at the Augusta Senior Center and the Nasuha High School, which was 630 miles from my hometown.

Richard and Marlys Hjort, Minnesota: We did about eight programs in late winter and spring. We do mostly schools and state parks and we change the slides to fit the age of the group. We like using our own slides showing local landmarks plus lots of close-ups and macro close-ups of nestlings, flowers, and even blow flies. This fills the screen with color and detail. We like a six-foot square screen best of all. We greatly enjoy doing this.

Donna Legare, Florida: We have slides, but people really enjoy seeing the props. We set up a table with screech owl, flycatcher, woodpecker, and bluebird nest boxes. We display nests, snake skins and photos that folks have brought in for display.

Dan McCue, Tennessee: I use the Stokes video, the longer 50-minute video and three different slide shows to help present my programs. This year I talked to the 4-H groups, two different schools, and service organizations in Tennessee and Mississippi.

Mary Penn, Virginia: I take hand-outs such as the NABS and Virginia brochures with a nest box and predator guards when I show a slide program. I gave 11 in 2002, and every year I'm receiving more invitations to speak es-

pecially at schools.

David Shiels, Texas: In most of my programs I focused on my heat-shield research. I had bluebird nest boxes there when I used my PowerPoint presentation.

Ron Svec, Vermont: I explain the concept of the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail while using the NABS slides plus my own. I speak about NABS organizational efforts and try to encourage viewers in the audience to become active members and participants. I would like to encourage Vermonters to enhance the bluebird recovery and to become NABS members.

Finally, two of the Bureau's ambitious members passed away in 2003, **Betty Nichols** of Maryland and **Hobart Ellifritt** of West Virginia. It was also learned from Mrs. Boulton that **Alan Boulton**, a Michigan bluebirder, passed away in April 2000, and that one of their grandsons has started building bluebird houses "just like Grandpa's."

The following individuals returned their 2002 questionnaires, helping NABS determine what works and what doesn't. I want to thank all the speakers for taking time to fill out and return the form by mail or email and also for all they do for the bluebird conservation.

CANADA

Ray Harris
Sherry Linn
Jean Lister
Myrna Pearman

ARKANSAS

Stan Reed

CALIFORNIA

Jim Olsen
Susan Yasuda
Donald Yoder

CONNECTICUT

Frederick Comstock

FLORIDA

Lorna Beasley
Donna Legare
David Wonsey

GEORGIA

Emory Brooks
Thomas Curry

Lyn Davies
Edward Gray
Terry Johnson
Frances Sawyer
Amy Waite

ILLINOIS

Eleanor Dunham
Joan Harmet
Cindy Hedges

Kay MacNeil
Kenneth Schar

Lloyd Wilson

INDIANA

Jerry Hunefeld
Arthur Jeffries
Kathy Krum

IOWA

Jaclyn Hill
Kelly Norris
Donna Reimers

Continued on page 21

— speakers

Continued from page 20

Pat Schlarbaum
Jim Walters

LOUISIANA

Evelyn Cooper
Maryland
Michael Gillis

Jerry Newman

MASSACHUSETTS

Lillian Files
Gail Hansche

MICHIGAN

Lee Petersen
Douglas Sciberras

MINNESOTA

Richard and Marlys
Hjort

Dorene Scriven

MISSISSIPPI

Tena Taylor

MISSOURI

Mel Toellner
Jerri Ziegler

MONTANA

Ervin Davis
Bob Niebuhr

Roger Siemens

NEBRASKA

Steve Eno
John Holm

Toni Lynn Merchen
Bill and Sandy Seibert

NEW HAMPSHIRE

David Eastman

NEW JERSEY

Marie Hageman

NEW YORK

Kevin Berner
Ricky Bruce

Chris Case

Elaine Crossley

David Heidenreich

Ron Howe

Sam Phelps

Evelyn Rifenburg

John Rogers

Jennifer Schlick

Barb Treiber

Richard Wells

Paul Wilson

Carl Zenger

NORTH CAROLINA

Charles Abbey

Helen Munro

Catherine Traylor

OHIO

Darrell Gammon

Doug LeVasseur

Jean Rutan

Michael Wheatley

OKLAHOMA

Charlotte Jernigan

Fread Loane

Kevin McCurdy

Robert Walshaw

OREGON

Elsie Eltzroth

PENNSYLVANIA

Diane Allison

Ted Morus

Larry Rohrbaugh

SOUTH CAROLINA

Barry Whitney

TENNESSEE

Zellie Earnest

Dan McCue

TEXAS

Keith Kridler

Mary Reed

David Shiels

Pauline Tom

VIRGINIA

Barbara Chambers

Mary Janetatos

Anne Little

Mary Penn

VERMONT

Ron Svec

WASHINGTON

Bill Ryan

WISCONSIN

Howard Rasmussen

(You can reach Ron Kingston by mail at 3690 Country Lane, Charlottesville VA 22903, and by e-mail at kingston@cstone.net.)

Bluebird News from Shore to Shore

Renee Duckworth, a graduate student from Duke University, had a male Western Bluebird and a female Mountain Bluebird mate and fledge two hybrid babies last season on her trail near **Missoula, Montana**.

Russ Heindselman of **LaGrange, Missouri**, writes to say that he devotes 12 nest boxes to House Sparrows, allowing that species to nest but routinely removing nests and eggs. Last year, he collected and destroyed over 600 eggs. He says this action has reduced the adult sparrow population in his neighborhood by 90 percent in 10 years.

Jean Rutan of **Mechanicsburg, Ohio**, wrote to tell of finding two abandoned Eastern Bluebirds hatchlings and an egg in a disturbed nest last summer. She and her husband placed them in a box where a pair of bluebirds were tending three hatched young. The egg was hatched by the foster hen, and that pair of birds eventually fledged all six babies.

Success reports

The **Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project** in **Sherwood, Oregon**, reports a 23 percent increase in nest attempts last summer with a 33 percent gain in Western Bluebirds fledged. Birds nesting in Project boxes fledged 1,639 young birds, an increase of over 400 from the previous year.

In **Minnesota**, **The Bluebird Recovery Program** received 411 reports (54 from out of the state) for the 2003 season, accounting for 14,269 bluebirds fledged.

The **North Carolina Bluebird Society** received reports for 1,286 boxes in

2003, Eastern Bluebirds using them producing 3,693 fledged birds.

An interesting report on the type of habitat in which nest boxes are located and production from each type appeared in a recent issue of the **Ohio Bluebird Society** newsletter. The figures were taken from information submitted for the 2002 nesting season. Boxes located along roadsides produced the highest number of fledged birds, 1,240. Other habitats used, in descending order, were parks, farm fields, urban areas, pastures, nature areas, and golf courses. If one considers nests per box, however, the ranking of the various habitats changes. Roadside boxes continue at the top, producing .92 nests per box. Golf courses were the next most successful habitat, with .74 nests per box, followed in order by pastures, urban areas, farm fields, parks, and nature areas.

The fledgling report for 2003 from **Mountain Bluebird Trails** in **Montana** showed 18,607 Mountain Bluebirds and 2,758 Western Bluebirds produced, a total of 21,365 bird fledged. This was the organization's most productive year ever.

10 years in Nebraska

Bluebirds Across Nebraska celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2003. Membership has grown from the 24 people who organized the group to over 1,700 members today.

A nestling's first flight

By Darrell Gammon

On a usual August morning, I was walking the bluebird trail I have had for over six years. It's an ideal place for nest boxes, an old cow pasture covering most of the area, a golf course on one side, a shallow stream flowing through it.

This beautiful scenery disappeared when I approached Box 90. The distraction was from a willow tree about 100 feet away from the box. It appeared that the parent bluebirds had been busy springing their youngsters from the box before I arrived.

The male was excited, chattering, jumping and then swooping down at me. The female was with two fledglings that were close to her on a branch, but she also seemed agitated with my presence. I looked for the other two fledglings, knowing that there were four nestlings in the box the last time I checked.

I turned around. "No wonder they're upset", I said, as I saw one of the little ones in the box entrance. The little guy was as still as can be, not even moving his head. I slowly walked away from the box, but circled around a clump of brush so I could still watch.

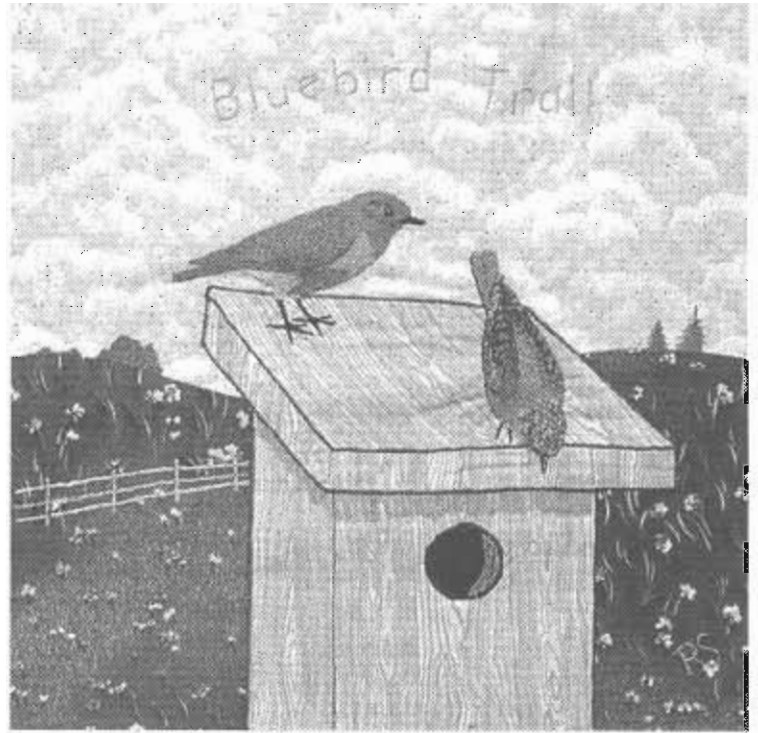
Time moved slower than molasses on a cold winter day. My feet started to tingle. I wondered, how long does it take for a nestling to decide to take the leap of faith? I kept watching. My back began to ache. The parents seemed more receptive of my disappearance, and began to call to the little one with a sweet voice.

The young bird looked around and around for a very long time, then pushed himself out, airborne! He flew away from the parents. The female bluebird took off after him. She flew and chattered to get his attention.

I stood in awe after this experience because I noticed that this-first time flier had flown over 200 feet! I turned in time to see the fourth nestling ready to meet the world.

I had always wanted to see a nestling's first flight, and I received it twice in one day. It will always be a wonderful reminder why I love bluebirding.

(Mr. Gammon lives in Alliance, Ohio.)



Rita Snyder, a member of the Audubon Society of Corvallis, Oregon, was honored recently for a quilt square she created showing Western Bluebirds at a nesting box. The square was among 50 chosen to be included on a commemorative quilt. Rita is a volunteer on the society's bluebird trail. She and her husband, Bill, have been hosting pairs of Western Bluebirds in boxes on their property since 1988. The Snyder's nest boxes, now numbering eight, have fledged 269 young bluebirds in that time. Their contribution has made a tremendous difference in the local population which returned to the Willamette Valley year after year, according to Elsie Eltzroth, another Oregon bluebirder and former NABS board member.

A membership in NABS makes a wonderful

GIFT



Now buy **two gift memberships for the price of one.** For a limited time, NABS is offering two family memberships for only \$30. Send NABS the names and addresses of friends who would like to know more about bluebirds. Send your check or money order in U.S. funds (only \$30 for each pair of names) to: Two for One, NABS, P.O. Box 244, Wilmot, OH 44689. This offer is valid until July 15, 2004. Include your name and address as well so we know who is giving this wonderful and generous gift. **See the gift article on page 4.**

Affiliates of the North American Bluebird Society

The North American Bluebird Society serves as a clearinghouse for ideas, research, management, and education on behalf of all 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 further partnership in international bluebird conservation" No cost is associated with

affiliating with NABS. Your affiliated organization will be recognized and listed on the NABS web site. If your organization has a newsletter, please forward a copy to our headquarters. To find out more about becoming a NABS affiliate, read our Affiliate Letter Notice. If you are listed below, please check listing to see if it is current. If not, please contact webmaster@nabluebirdsociety.org with the correct information.

CANADA

Alberta
Calgary Area Bluebird Trail Monitors
 c/o George Loades, 167 Canterbury Dr. SW
 Calgary, AB, Canada T2W1H3
bluebird@creb.com
Ellis Bird Farm, Ltd.
 c/o Myrna Pearman, Box 5090
 Lacombe, AB, Canada T4L 1W7
myrna@ellisbirdfarm.ab.ca
Mountain Bluebird Trails Cons. Society
 Contact: Gwen Tietz
 P.O. Box 401 Stn Main
 Lethbridge, AB Canada T2K-3G9
 403-553-2780

British Columbia
Southern Interior Bluebird Trail Society
 Sherry Linn, President, Box 494
 Oliver, BC, Canada V0H 1T0
goldstm@vip.net

Manitoba
The Friends of the Bluebirds
 3011 Park Ave.
 Brandon, MB, Canada R7B 2K3
 204-727-5102, fax 204-728-7346
smitha@brandonu.ca Contact Ann Smith

Ontario
Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society
 2-165 Green Valley Drive
 Kitchener ON , Canada N2P 1K3
 Contact: Bill Read

UNITED STATES
Arkansas
Bella Vista Bluebird Society
 c/o Jim Janssen, 27 Britten Circle
 Bella Vista, AR 72714. 479-855-7277

California
California Bluebird Recovery Program
 2021 Plamigan Drive #1
 Walnut Creek CA 94595
 925-937-5974, fax: 925-935-4480
cbrp@value.net

Colorado
Colorado Bluebird Project
 c/o Bob Priester, 6060 N. Broadway
 Denver CO 80216. 303-291-7253
bluebird.project@state.co.us

Georgia
Bluebirds Over Georgia
 c/o Frances G Sawyer
 5858 Silver Ridge Dr.
 Stone Mountain GA 30087
fgsawyer@bellsouth.net
 770-469-6672

Idaho
Our Bluebird Ranch
 152 N 200 E., Blackfoot ID 83221
 208-782-9676. pjbames@micron.net
Rocky Mountain Blues
 c/o David Richmond
 HC67 Box 680, Clayton ID 83227
 208-838-2431, fax 208-838-2685
fowest@salmoncountry.net

Illinois
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 431 Stadel Road, Elizabeth, IL 61028
bluebird@naturalareaguardsians.org
East Central Illinois Bluebird Society
 c/o Loren Hughes
 1234 Tucker Beach Road, Paris, IL 61944
 217-463-7175. suziq@comwares.net

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 812-988-1876, fax: 812-342-3820
b4bluebirds@yahoo.com
American Bird Conservation Association
 c/o Merlin Lehman
 59980 C.R. 35, Middlebury, IN 46540

Iowa
Johnson County Songbird Project
 c/o Jim Walters
 1033 E. Washington, Iowa City IA 52240
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Bluebirds of Iowa Restoration
 c/o Jaclyn Hill
 2946 Ubben Ave., Ellsworth, IA 50075-7554
 515-836-4579. hillhome@netins.net
Iowa Bluebird Conservationists
 c/o Jerad Getter, P.O. Box 302
 Griswold, IA 51535. 712-624-9433
jgetter@hotmail.com

Kentucky
Kentucky Bluebird Society
 c/o Bob Ivy
 P.O. Box 3425, Paducah, KY 42002
 270-898-6688 or 731-688-0031
bobivy@centurytel.net
www.biology.eku.edu/kybluebird.html

Louisiana
Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society
 c/o Evelyn Cooper
 1222 Cook Road, Delhi, LA 71232
emcooper@bayou.com
www.labayoubirdsociety.org

Massachusetts
Massachusetts Bluebird Association
 Contact: Haley Priest
 89 Pulpit Hill Rd., Amherst, MA 01002
 413-549-3937, fax: 413-549-2901
MaBLue@gis.net
www.massbluebird.org

Minnesota
Bluebird Recovery Program
 (Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis)
 c/o Mary Ellen Vetter
 P.O. Box 3801, Minneapolis MN 55403
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Mississippi
Mississippi Bluebirds
 c/o Tena Taylor
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cblbluebird@tycom.net

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Mountain Bluebird Trails, Inc.
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blubdrbob@prodigy.net
www.blackfoot.net/~bluebirds

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 E-mail derrywolford@hotmail.com

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New Hampshire Bluebird Conspiracy
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bluebird@tds.net. 603-763-5705

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 c/o Kevin Berner
 499 West Richmondville Rd.
 Richmondville NY 12149
 518-294-7196 bernerkl@cobleskill.edu
Schoharie County Bluebird Society
 c/o Kevin Berner
 499 West Richmondville Rd.
 Richmondville NY 12149
 518-294-7196. bernerkl@cobleskill.edu

North Carolina
North Carolina Bluebird Society
 c/o Dempsey Essick
 PO Box 1149, Welcome, NC 27374
 336-731-3499, fax 336-732-3444
essickart@lexcominc.net
Rutherford County Bluebird Club
 P.O. Box 247, Ellenboro, NC 28040
 Contact Christopher Greene

Ohio
Ohio Bluebird Society
 c/o Bernie Daniel, 9211 Solon Dr
 Cincinnati, OH 45242
bdaniel@cinci.rr.com

Oklahoma
Oklahoma Bluebird Society
 Manon Liles, 5656 So. 161 W Ave
 Sand Springs, OK 74063
 918-241-2473, fax 918-699-3358
salia@worldnet.att.net

Oregon
Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project
 c/o Voice of Prescott
 P.O. Box 1469, Sherwood OR 97140
 503-245-8449. email@prescottbluebird.com
Audubon Society of Corvallis
 Elsie Eltzroth, 6980 NW Cardinal Rd
 Corvallis OR 97330. 541-745-7806
eltzroth@peak.org

Pennsylvania
Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania
 P.O. Box 267, Enola PA 17025-0267
 c/o Joan Watroba
 717-766-2102, fax 717-790-0568
rputt@ezonline.net www.thebsp.org
Purple Martin Conservation Assoc.
 Edinboro University of Pennsylvania
 Edinboro PA 16444
 814-734-4420 (Louise Chambers)
 Fax 814-734-5803
info@purplemartin.org

Tennessee
Benton County Bluebird Society of Tennessee, Inc.
 Dan McCue, President
 108 Bland Street, Camden, TN 38320
 731-584-5060 dmcucue5060@aol.com
Tennessee Bluebird Trails
 c/o Steve Garr
 P.O. Box 190, Mt. Juliet, TN 37121
 615-612-4546
tnbluebirdtrails@msn.com
www.tennesseebluebirds.com

Texas
Texas Bluebird Society
 c/o Pauline Tom
 P.O. Box 40868, Austin, TX 78704
info@texasbluebirdsociety.org
www.texasbluebirdsociety.org

Virginia
The Virginia Bluebird Society
 Charlie Chambers, 8911 Moreland Lane
 Annandale, VA 22003
 703-978-6609. vbs@virginiabluebirds.org
www.virginiabluebirds.org

Washington
Cascadia Bluebird & Purple Martin Society
 c/o Dr. Michael Pietro
 3015 Squalicum Pkwy # 250
 Bellingham, WA 98225

Wisconsin
Bluebird Restoration Assoc. of Wis.
 Rt 1, Box 137 Akron Ave
 Plainfield WI 54966
Lafayette County Bluebird Society
 14953 Hwy 23, Darlington WI 53530

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