



Bluebird

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Photo by Patrick Ready of Stoughton, Wisconsin

While checking boxes at Lake Farms County Park, near Madison, Wisconsin last spring Patrick Ready used his 8x40 power binoculars (as a telephoto lens) held against an ash tree and a Nikon 2 megapixel camera to shoot this photo. The male bluebird was about 25 feet away. He was preoccupied with defending the box from an aggressive tree swallow pair. The bluebirds won out and fledged five babies.

Patrick Ready is an artist and an amateur photographer from Stoughton, Wisconsin. He has been a serious bluebirder for the past five years maintaining four trails in Dane County. He is the editor and designer of the "Wisconsin Bluebird", newsletter of the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin. His favorite subject to paint and photograph of course is the eastern bluebird.

**North American Bluebird Society has a new home
in Royston, Georgia — SEE PAGE 14**



North American Bluebird Society

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

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From the President

By **STEVE GARR**

As I welcome new members to NABS this issue, I would like to also take this opportunity to thank and say farewell to Jim Williams, who has so faithfully served NABS as the Bluebird editor for so many years. Of course, we only say good-bye to Jim as editor — he remains a great friend to NABS and a fellow bluebirder!

Thank you, Jim, for your outstanding contribution to this organization.

At the same time, I extend a big NABS welcome to our new *Bluebird* editor, Karen Martin. Karen comes to us with decades of editorial experience and I have personally worked with her for years. She has been a strong, positive advocate for cavity nesters and will be a great asset to our team. Welcome Karen!

Each Spring NABS has an increase in new membership from people wanting to learn more about bluebirds. This interest may be because they read one of the many news releases referring to bluebirds, their beauty, their sweet song, or their nesting habits. Most articles refer to spring as the best time to put up a bluebird box.

Frequently, articles will focus on the passion of bluebirders and how they have "brought back the bluebird" to local parks and neighborhoods. Sometimes news articles mention the "backyard bluebirder" and the joy they derive from that one nest box in their back yard that has housed and raised bluebirds for many, many years. Regardless of the

focus of the story, each one revives the interest in bluebirds and most people still turn to NABS for more information on this gorgeous bird. Sadly, only a small percentage of those folks actually make the commitment to join NABS. Thank you for being one of those that cared enough to join!

**NABS has
a new place**

to call "home"

And if you are a recent new member, you have joined at the beginning of a new era for NABS.

We now have our own "Bluebird Center" and property for expansion. As a new member you will have an opportunity to turn in your nesting data that, when compiled with that of other NABS members, will help us understand and share more about all of our native cavity nesting birds.

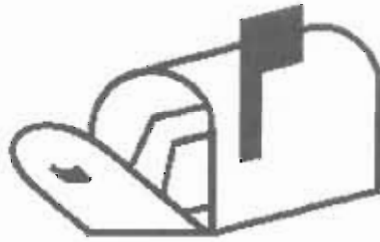
The North American Bluebird Society survives on Membership and Donations. I would like to sincerely thank all of those members that have rejoined each year and that continue to support NABS not only as members, but also as Ambassadors for the Bluebird. Your continued membership has helped thousands of people learn about bluebirds, even if those people never join NABS.

The North American Bluebird Society will always be a source for anyone to learn not only about Bluebirds, but also about other native cavity nesters. NABS continues to be the leader in the Conservation Effort to recover and protect all native cavity nesters.

Thank you for a warm welcome

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank everyone at NABS for making me feel welcome as your new editor of "Bluebird". A special thanks to Jim Williams who has graciously extended more than a little assistance in helping make this a smooth transition; and to Steve Garr, NABS president, to Gary Springer, NABS executive director, and to the NABS board of directors for their patience and kindness in answering my questions as well as providing a supportive network. My background with bluebirds began a few decades ago with the late Eleanor Dunham, longtime NABS member who served many years on the Speaker's Bureau. She was a mentor to the entire community (myself included) teaching how to care for a bluebird nest box as well as showing us the wonder of hosting these beautiful gems of blue. Countless miles of bluebird trails wind their way through our county because of Eleanor's dedication to bluebirds and patience with those who now look after them.

— Karen Martin, editor



To the editor,

Great Outdoors Almanac from Green Bay Press Gazette - Green Bay, Wisconsin: State reports record number of bluebirds.

The Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin reports a state record of more than 18,000 bluebirds fledged in Wisconsin last summer, an increase of more than 3,000 from 2004. A decade ago, the group reported only about 5,000 fledglings.

Proper box placement and design, pole mounting (metal) and monitoring (house sparrow removal) likely has boosted the success, according to Wisconsin Bluebird newsletter editor, Patrick Ready of Stoughton.

— Patrick Ready
Stoughton, Wisconsin

To the editor,

Here are photos of the bluebird taken by me to federal songbird rehabber, Linda Bethke, in Sauk City, Wisconsin after it was found on the ground under a picnic table. [It was] across the road from the

nestbox in rural Berry Township, Dane County, Wisconsin, from which it was banded as a nestling on June 22, 2005. (Band #1931-41960) age: approx. 6.5 months.

— Ann E. S. Wick
Black Earth, Wisconsin



Bluebird

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Gary Springer
Executive Director

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

The NABS web site offers answers to many questions.

Go to www.nabluebirdsociety.org

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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 of NABS (address at top).

To the editor,

I believe that Myrna Pearman's reference to the U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act I [*Bluebird*, Winter issue, p. 5, 2006] may not be current.

The Act was up for renewal in 2005. Though in 2003 a judge had ruled in a Mute Swan case (Hill vs. Norton) that it covered introduced birds, (like the mute swan and English sparrows, European starlings, etc.).

In renewing the Act in early spring of 2005, both houses of Congress, (H.R.4114 and S.R. 2547), negated that ruling and clarified by adding wording so that it applies only to **NATIVE BIRDS**, not non-native, human-introduced, invasive species. They also increased funding for the Act.

This makes it specific that we can deal with house sparrows, European starlings, etc. It passed both houses by overwhelming majorities. Audubon, Isaak Walton, many other environmental organization pushed for the changes.

The individual states do indeed have their own laws (until a few years ago, Wisconsin forbade killing house sparrows). Minnesota Statutes have some restrictions on releasing cultivated wild species, like the mute swan, but do not specify that pest species should not be released. (There is nothing about forbidding killing of pest species.) Their rules are up for review this year, and we have been trying to get that wording in, so that the



Wanted... *Bluebird* and/or *Sialia* back issues

Back issues of NABS journals are needed. If for any reason you cannot keep your copies, return and claim a tax deduction of \$2 each. Many new members want complete sets of back issues which we are currently unable to supply. Please mail back issues to NABS, 481 Athens Road, Royston GA 30662.

— Gary Springer
NABS executive director



Wildlife Rehab Center and others must stop releasing rehabbed house sparrows.

The second point is that we have a letter written to BBRP from Cyndi Perry, U.S.F.W.S. Chief, Branch of Bird Conservation, in reply to our inquiry about the legality of removing the male wren's dummy sticks (put in many boxes so the female can choose one on which to build her nest.) I quote:

"Thank you for your letter November 25, 2000, regarding the problem of house wren predation of your bluebird nest boxes. The short answer to your query is that you may legally remove the dummy twigs placed in the nesting cavities by the house wren.

"The issue you raise, regarding the legality of removing nesting material from nest boxes — or other locations — does merit clarification from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In general, inactive nests may be legally destroyed, while active nests may not.

"A permit is not needed to destroy nuisance empty nests of non-colonial species of birds (those that do not

cluster nests in colonies). This includes nests in the process of being constructed. If live eggs or nestlings are present in the nest, then the nest is active and may not be destroyed without a permit.

"This law prohibits possession of migratory bird nests without a permit, so anyone removing inactive nests should take care to destroy them at once."

(This letter was written before Congress' recent clarification of MBTA to exempt non-migratory introduced invasive species.)

I hope this current permission could be disseminated as widely as possible. Of the over 450 reports the Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota received this year, by far the most frequently reported predation was by house wrens, more than by house sparrows. It has also become clear that bluebirders who have been removing those dummy sticks for a year or two, and thereby freeing a nestbox for bluebird occupation, have lessened wren predation and gotten better bluebird success.

— Dorene H. Scriven
Retiring Chair, BBRP

To the editor,

I have been a member of the [North American] Bluebird Society since day one and I think it would be interesting to know how many current members are Charter members.

I enclose a copy of my charter certificate.

Years ago, I was also a member of the purple martin society out of Griggsville and wonder if it still exists. I still have J.L. Wade's book. It is interesting that your last name is Martin.

—Jon Belisle
Maplewood, Minnesota

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Nature Society, formerly Griggsville Wild Bird Society, is still going and just recently celebrated its 40th year of publishing the Nature Society News. As an added note, J. L. Wade will celebrate his 93rd birthday in April. My last name is actually a common one in this area.

2005 Oregon Ridge Park nestbox trail results

Submitted by
Pauline Tom
from the
Oregon Ridge
Nature Center
newsletter.

By Paul Kilduff

In 2005 house wren numbers were counted for the first time. House finches, not known as cavity nesters, used a mealworm feeder as a "nestbox" twice, successfully fledging nine young.

	Eastern Bluebird	Tree Swallow	Carolina Chickadee	House Wrens	House Finches
1988	17	0	-	-	-
1989	16	0	0	-	-
1990	18	0	0	-	-
1991	44	4	-	-	-
1992	41	16	0	-	-
1993	47	3	0	-	-
1994	42	15	0	-	-
1995	57	23	7	-	-
1996	28	52	5	-	-
1997	55	35	5	-	-
1998	43	28	4	-	-
1999	67	64	3	-	-
2000	43	36	2	-	-
2001	52	42	13	-	-
2002	99	68	4	-	-
2003	66	71	9	-	-
2004	83	81	6	-	-
2005	65	99	0	25	9



Next Bluebird deadline is Apr. 30

The deadline for the Summer 2006 issue of *Bluebird* will be April 30. Earlier submissions always are appreciated — you may send them by e-mail to: <bluebird-editor@excite.com> or by mail to: Karen Martin, PO Box 116, Griggsville IL 62340-0116.

Please 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.

Time to renew?

Your address label found on the back page, contains the date your NABS Membership expires. If it is time to renew your membership, please do so today, using the form on page 24. If you prefer not to cut the magazine, use a photocopy of the form or write on a sheet of paper the information requested, and send that with your payment.

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—Julie Zickefoose

Project SOS: Save Our Sialia

Data compiled by volunteers Bob and Judy Peaks during the 2005 nesting season for the Land Between the Lakes Association and the USDA-Forest Service.

By Bob and Judy Peaks

DESCRIPTION OF LOCATIONS

Primary Location:

Land Between The Lakes, also known as LBL, is a 170,000-acre National Recreation Area that is located in western Kentucky and Tennessee. LBL is a 40-mile long isthmus that was formed when the Tennessee River and Cumberland River were impounded, creating Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley (respectively). In 1963, President John F. Kennedy designated these federal lands as Land Between The Lakes National Recreation Area. The project was intended to demonstrate how an area with limited timber, agricultural and industrial resources could be converted into a recreation asset that would stimulate economic growth in the region. Today LBL is managed by the USDA-Forest Service, and, as the focal point of a \$600 million tourism industry, it remains one of the most visited attractions in Kentucky and Tennessee. With 300 miles of undeveloped shoreline, LBL hosts an average of two million visitors each year who come from all over the nation and more than 30 foreign countries. Land Between The Lakes offers a multitude of recreational opportunities and provides unique experiences in the areas of environmental education and historic interpretation. Bluebird nest boxes are located along bluebird trails in 17 areas of LBL, and birders and other visitors can



Photograph by the North American Bluebird Society

view nearly all of the boxes. (Note: According to the North American Bluebird Society, "a bluebird trail is a series of bluebird boxes placed along a prescribed route.")

Secondary Locations:

Consisting of 3,700 acres, Lake Barkley State Resort Park is the largest park in the Kentucky State Park system, and often called the system's flagship park. It is located on the shore of Lake Barkley in Trigg County, Kentucky, approximately five miles east of the center of Land Between the Lakes. The park offers a wide variety of recreational opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts including golf, fishing, boating, swimming, tennis, hiking, camping, trap shooting and birding. Nearly all of the bluebird nest boxes located there can be observed from the roads in the park.

John James Audubon State Park (ASP), also a part of the Kentucky State Park system, is located in Henderson County, Kentucky and is composed of 692 acres, with 325 of those acres serving as a state nature preserve. The Audubon Museum in the park houses many of Audubon's original watercolors,

oils, engravings and personal memorabilia. The park's Nature Center features a wildlife observatory, which serves as a reminder of Audubon's own love for nature and the great outdoors. The park also offers facilities for camping, hiking, fishing, golf, tennis and birding. Since bluebirds will tolerate humans in close proximity to their nests, the ASP nest boxes are located in areas where park visitors can easily observe them.

SUMMARY OF DATA

During the 2005 nesting season, a total of 1,161 eastern bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) eggs were laid in the 164 bluebird nest boxes at Land Between the Lakes (LBL) with 976 bluebirds fledging for an 84% fledging success rate. (Note: A young bird has "fledged" if it leaves the nest on its own.) Adult bluebirds made 276 nesting attempts in the boxes. (Note: An "attempt" is defined as a bird building a nest and laying at least one egg.) From nest construction to the fledging of the young birds, the eastern bluebird's reproductive cycle covers approximately one month. Therefore, volunteers must monitor nest boxes on a monthly basis to accurately determine the outcome of each nesting attempt. Volunteers monitored boxes on the following dates: March 29, April 2, April 29-30, May 26-27, June 23-24, July 21-22, August 19-20 and September 17.

The two volunteers spent over 200 hours working on Project SOS and drove approximately 1,200 miles to monitor, repair or relocate bluebird nest boxes at LBL. (Phil Hazle, the Jailer for Calloway County, Kentucky, provided replacement nest boxes through a special training program he

has developed for the jail inmates.) There were 142 unhatched bluebird eggs, 43 dead bluebird nestlings and two dead adult bluebirds (one female; one unknown sex) discovered in boxes. Evidence existed (feathers, eggshells, nests in disarray, etc.) that additional adult birds and eggs may have been victims of raccoon predation, but exact numbers could not be determined or corroborated by the volunteers.

There were 17 white bluebird eggs (1.46% of total) found in the following areas: North Information Center, Hillman Ferry Campground, Camp Energy and the South Buffalo Range. Seventeen of the white eggs produced birds that eventually fledged. (The other bluebird eggs were the more typical light blue color that is indicative of thrushes.) The gene for white bluebird eggs is recessive so it only manifests itself in about 5% of all bluebird eggs and there is no certainty that birds fledged from a clutch of white eggs will produce white eggs when they become sexually mature.

LBL nest boxes also [fledged] 34 Carolina chickadee (*Parus carolinensis*), nine tufted titmouse (*Parus bicolor*), four Carolina wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*), five prothonotary warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*) and 25 tree swallow (*Iridoprocne bicolor*). The prothonotary warbler, a neotropical migrant, is the only cavity-nesting warbler in the eastern United States. According to the Breeding Bird Survey data that has been collected and analyzed by the U.S. Geological Survey, the prothonotary warbler population has declined by 30% in the past 40 years.

Number of bluebirds fledged in 2005 was the fourth-highest total in the 16 years that the volunteers have managed LBL bluebird trails. Totals [fledged] for other years [number of boxes in parenthesis]

LOCATION OF LBL NEST BOXES AND RELATED DATA		
Location	# of Boxes	# Blues Fledged
North Information Center	5.....	23
Hillman Ferry Campground	7.....	44
Nature Station.....	4.....	194
Camp Energy.....	7.....	49
Elk-Bison Prairie.....	10.....	64
Golden Pond Visitor Center.....	15.....	94
Administration Office.....	5.....	32
Hunter's Check Station.....	3.....	16
Central Maintenance	10.....	42
Colson Overlook	1.....	13
Rushing Creek Campground	8.....	68
The Homeplace-1850	4.....	16
South Buffalo Range.....	23.....	128
South Maintenance Area.....	7.....	29
Brandon Spring Group Camp... ..	9.....	65
South Information Center.....	6.....	42
Piney Campground	10.....	57
Total.....	164.....	976

were: 1990, 544 (108); 1991, 720 (153); 1992, 727 (159); 1993, 820 (155); 1994, 898 (159); 1995, 872 (157); 1996, 754 (156); 1997, 599 (162); 1998, 774 (149); 1999, 719 (152); 2000, 871 (153); 2001, 964 (154); 2002, 1,086 (158); 2003, 978 (161); 2004, 1,129 (164). If one uses a ratio of bluebirds fledged per nest box, the 2005 nesting season ranked as the fifth-best year with a ratio of 5.95 bluebirds fledged per box.

During the volunteers' 16-year tenure, 983 additional juvenile birds, representing six species [Carolina chickadee, tufted titmouse, prothonotary warbler, Carolina wren, tree swallow and white-breasted nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*)] have fledged from LBL bluebird nest boxes.

In 2002 and 2003 nesting seasons, the volunteers participated in an eastern bluebird banding study under the direction of Dr. David Pitts, a University of Tennessee-Martin biologist and master bird bander. Due to relatively few banding recoveries and other limiting factors, Dr. Pitts decided to discontinue the banding study in 2004.

Interestingly, on June 24, 2005 a Hillman Ferry Campground resident informed the volunteers that a banded male bluebird was feeding a nestling in a nest box at his campsite. The nest box contained one nestling and two unhatched eggs. The volunteers were able to trap the male bluebird and discovered that it had a metal band (No. 1511-71796) on its right leg. An orange plastic band was missing from its left leg. The volunteers banded the bird on April 25, 2002 in the Rushing Creek Campground. In another incident, while birding in the Gatlin Point area on July 1, 2005 the volunteers observed a banded male bluebird (metal band on right leg, faded orange plastic band on left leg). Although the bird's exact identity could not be determined it should be noted that the location of the metal band indicates it was banded in 2002 and the orange band shows that it was banded in the southern portion of LBL. The female that appeared to be paired with the male did not have any bands.

While monitoring the bluebird nest boxes in 2005, the volunteers found that some of the boxes were used at various times by flying squirrels (*Glaucomys volans*), ants, wasps and a variety of other insects. While working on the project, the volunteers spotted numerous species of birds including many wild turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo*), many fallow deer (*Cervus dama*) and white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*).

Additionally, a number of ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*) were sighted during the summer months and a pair of bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) occupied a nest again on a power line crossbar in the Empire Farm Area. The volunteers do not know specific results of that nesting attempt and the nest was destroyed by a storm after the eaglet(s) had fledged.

In an unrelated anecdotal incident, on July 2, 2005 (about 9:40 a.m.) the volunteers were traveling north on The Trace (Highway 453) and they spotted a dead armadillo in the other lane between the 27 and 28 mile-markers. Judging by its appearance and information in a mammal field guide it was the nine-banded armadillo (*Dasypus novemcinctus*). An LBLNRA biologist confirmed that other armadillos have been sighted there in recent years.

As an additional part of Project SOS, the volunteers used their own vehicle to check and maintain a bluebird trail (41 nest boxes) they established at nearby Lake Barkley State Resort Park (LBSRP). In 2005 there were 366 bluebird eggs laid in the LBSRP boxes with 316 birds fledging for an 86.3% fledging success rate. Ratio of state park bluebirds fledged per nest box was 7.71. None of the LBSRP bluebird eggs were white. The volunteers also found 12 dead bluebird nestlings in boxes, 88 nesting attempts by bluebirds, and, for the third year in a row, raccoon predation had a less serious impact on fledging success of the birds than in previous years. (At the conclusion of the 2002 nesting season, the volunteers partially covered nest box posts with aluminum sheet metal, and as a result, raccoons had limited success in climbing posts and preying on bluebird nestlings. During the 2004 nesting season, the volunteers added additional sheet metal to nest box posts where raccoon predation was evident and installed taller posts in the most troublesome locations. Dramatic improvement in fledging success seems to indicate that sheet metal and taller posts are serving as an effective deterrent.) In previous years, the total bluebird fledglings at LBSRP were [number of boxes in parenthesis]: 1990, 23 (10); 1991, 27 (11); 1992, 91 (27); 1993, 97 (30); 1994, 85 (31); 1995, 87 (29); 1996, 67 (29); 1997, 99 (28); 1998, 93 (28);

1999, 118 (29); 2000, 128 (29); 2001, 116 (36); 2002, 148 (37); 2003, 302 (37); 2004, 296 (41). In 2005 the trail also yielded seven Carolina chickadee fledglings.

Since 1990, in addition to bluebirds, the LBSRP bluebird trail has yielded 205 fledglings, representing five species (Carolina chickadee, tufted titmouse, prothonotary warbler, Carolina wren and tree swallow).

As a further extension of Project SOS, the volunteers established a 10-box bluebird trail this year in John James Audubon State Park (ASP). Since bluebirds will tolerate humans in close proximity to their nests, the ASP nest boxes are located in areas where park visitors can easily observe them. Most importantly, the nest boxes are close to the park's roads so physically challenged people can view birds from the comfort and convenience of a vehicle. During the 2005 nesting season the ASP nest boxes produced 18 bluebirds and five Carolina chickadees. Bluebirds or other bird species used 70% of nest boxes to raise young. Regrettably, there were two nesting failures — a clutch of four bluebirds and a clutch of five tree swallows. Cause is unknown but such failures are not uncommon occurrences in the bird world, and these events underscore the fragility of songbird reproduction. Since bluebirds may exhibit some degree of nest box fidelity (returning to the general vicinity of a natal nest box), it is hopeful that surviving adult bluebirds will return to ASP next spring and continue boosting the park's population.

CONCLUSION

In summary, during the 2005 nesting season, total number (LBL, LBSRP and ASP combined) of eastern bluebird fledglings for Project SOS was 1,310. There were also 46 Carolina chickadees, nine tufted titmice, 25 tree swallows,

five prothonotary warblers and four Carolina wrens fledged from the combined nest boxes. A milestone was achieved this season as the cumulative number of bluebirds fledged from nest boxes that have been monitored by the volunteers surpassed 15,000.

The goal of Project SOS is to maintain a core population of bluebirds to counter-balance severe seasonal conditions, particularly winter seasons comparable to the winters of 1977 and 1978. Furthermore, since birding is one of the most prevalent recreational activities in the United States, and eco-tourism has become a driving force in the recreational pursuits of millions of Americans, the economic benefits of Project SOS are immeasurable. For that reason, in future years, the project should continue to be a valuable enhancement for Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area, Lake Barkley State Resort Park and John James Audubon State Park.

Bluebird trails at Land Between the Lakes and Lake Barkley State Resort Park are registered as a part of the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail (TBT) and the Trans-Kentucky Bluebird Trail (T-KBT). The TBT, developed by the North American Bluebird Society, is a network of bluebird trails stretching across the United States and Canada that will eventually provide thousands of nest boxes for bluebirds and other cavity-nesting species. The T-KBT was developed by the Kentucky Bluebird Society, and the organization's goal is to eventually have a registered bluebird trail in every county of the state. Bluebird trails monitored by the volunteers at LBL and state parks cover a 4-county area (Trigg, Lyon and Henderson in Kentucky, and Stewart, Tennessee). Nesting data in this report will be shared with the USDA-Forest Service, Lake Barkley State Resort Park, John James Audubon State Park, Land Between the Lakes Association, North American Bluebird Society, Kentucky Bluebird Society, and other governmental or ornithological organizations.

“Speakers’ programs are beneficial to the conservation of bluebirds”

By **RON KINGSTON**
Charlottesville, Virginia

At the end of each year questionnaires are sent to members of the NABS Speakers’ Bureau. The speakers are asked for a summary of the past year’s programs, a few questions about what worked and what didn’t, and at the end of 2004 they were asked “Had they had any indications that their programs were an effective means of bluebird conservation?”

In this review of the past presentations given in 2004, we hope the following information will inspire everyone. All the speakers are doing an outstanding job but because of space constraints not all comments could be printed. I hope new and tried ideas of communicating to the public about bluebirds and other cavity nesters will increase an awareness of the conservation of the bluebirds across North America; thus, more bluebirds for today and tomorrow. 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.

Comments made by some of the speakers which were of interest follow:

Raymond Briggs, New York: The programs must be effective because of the good size of attendance and many questions at the end of each meeting. I always repeat each question so that all attending can hear.

Fred Comstock, Connecticut: By using slides and my book I’ve been

giving programs for 16 years and by the number of telephone calls with additional questions my programs are effective.

James Berry, Arkansas: The word about helping the bluebirds has gotten out here in Arkansas for I have found a great deal of local interest in bluebirding and have assisted whenever I could.

Joan Harmet, Illinois: There is, throughout the area, a continued interest in bluebirds. We often have a successful bluebird workshop and outdoor bluebird trail work. The interest is still out there and we are getting results.

Kevin Berner, New York: Bluebird conservation is illustrated in that people locally are using advance nestbox management and placement techniques. They are aware of blowfly problems, nestbox alternatives, proper placement, and how to handle orphaned young, etc.

Jean Rutan, Ohio: Programs have to be an effective means of conservation for some people have little knowledge of birds — especially cavity-nesters; they mount nestboxes on trees, put up fancy nestboxes, mount them too close together and usually near their homes, etc. Some people don’t want to control house sparrows. On the other side, some are going in the correct direction and are monitoring nestboxes and producing bluebirds if they have received the correct information through some speaker program.

Richard and Marlys Hjort, Minnesota: Our programs help set

up many trails and the folks are adding to their numbers. Also, when we started very few knew about bluebirds — now they know their birds.

Ron Howe, New York: My programs get repeat requests and nesting sites have grown because of my programs. I distributed 15 teachers kits, sent promotional letters to schools, sold 511 nestbox kits and had six news articles in newspapers last year.

Ken Jankowski, Indiana: I had people call me from programs past to tell me how they are doing with bluebirds and how glad they were to have come to my program. My programs are effective because I just tell it as it is and have many stories of what has happened on my trail over the last 30 years.

Mary Penn-Soranno, Virginia: The people that come to programs know more about the cavity nesters in general and the more they want to help them. I see this all the time.

Evelyn Rifenburg, New York: My programs are helping bluebird conservation because people asked important questions and commented on success stories. Some requested my husband show them where to place newly purchased boxes and they kept in touch with their monitoring. I use NABS brochures, as well as, New York State brochures, two videos, nest boxes, predator guards, photos, magazines and various information.

John Rogers, New York: I believe my programs are an effective

means of bluebird conservation, because I have had many people tell me that the information I included in presentations helped them to get successful bluebird nestings. I use brochures from NABS, nestbox plans and the "Getting Started" brochure from NYS Bluebird Society.

Ray Harris, Alberta, Canada: By the audience questions and people wanting to speak to me after the presentations, I know that programs are an effective means of bluebird conservation.

Frances Sawyer, Georgia: I gave programs in many classrooms this past year and my audiences are always enthusiastic and happy to learn more about bluebirds so I can tell that programs are an effective means of bluebird conservation.

Dorene Scriven, Minnesota: The programs do get volunteer monitors; people become aware of differences between exotic, introduced species and native birds; people find the joys of bluebirding and later will thank you.

Marci and Brian Swanson, Virginia: Our programs give people in our retirement community a more understanding of the need to monitor nestboxes and makes them more committed to monitor their own nestboxes and the nestboxes that the community has erected.

Robert Walshaw, Oklahoma: My programs are an effective means of bluebird conservation, because of increasing calls for information, more newspaper publicity, more personal recognition in the area, and increasing orders of nestboxes. In the programs I explain the "why" and "how" of bluebirding, show important parts of a NABS nestbox, house sparrow traps, snake traps, etc.

Kathleen Woods, Maryland: Years after the programs I get telephone calls about bluebirds. As a wildlife rehabilitator, people contact me regarding monitoring sites, problems and house sparrows.

Donald Yoder, California: The programs here in California are effective because my neighbors report that they are seeing bluebirds regularly as they walk the neighborhood and the golf course. Our monitors' reports cover hundreds of nestboxes with significant numbers of birds.

Tena Taylor, Mississippi: The programs must be working for I spoke to a garden club last February, and

up nestboxes and nestbox design and have shown an interest in going to the NABS web site. Some have had me make nestboxes for them. At the Kids' Earth Day, and in other places, people tell me each year of their successes after hearing/seeing earlier presentations, thus the programs must be having some effect on the bluebird conservation here in South Carolina.

The following speakers stated that their programs were an effective means of bluebird conservation, because more and more nestbox trails were being established, annual bird counts were finding more bluebirds; and that bluebirders were calling and asking for

An average of nearly one a day
In 2004 a total of
362 programs were given
by the Speakers' Bureau!

found to my pleasant surprise that most had bluebird nestboxes up. But they needed correct information!

Elaine Crossley, New York: My programs were an effective means of bluebird conservation since they get more people setting up nestboxes and/or trails which has to be helpful for the bluebird population. People let me know when they are successful and they call with problems and questions which usually can be solved. The major problems are English sparrow and blowfly larvae control, bad weather, and nestbox competition with wrens and tree swallows.

Barry Whitney, South Carolina: Many have inquired about putting

advice: **Evelyn Cooper, Louisiana; Art Jefferies, Indiana; Diane Allison, Pennsylvania; Lorna Beasley, Florida; Fred Benson, North Carolina; Bob Bodine, Pennsylvania; Ricky Bruce, New York; Peggy Chaney, Georgia; Elsie Eltzroth, Oregon; Lillian Lund-Files, Massachusetts; Joseph Giunta, New York; Robert Hammond, Virginia; Loren Hughes, Illinois; Jerry Humefeld, Indiana; Donna Legare, Florida; Theodore Morus, Pennsylvania; Kathleen Krum, Indiana; Helen Munro, North Carolina; Jerry Newman, Maryland; Bob Niebuhr, Montana; Sam Phelps, New York; Anthony Piccolin, Pennsylvania; Charles Post, Texas; Howard Rasmussen, Wisconsin; Richard Wells, New York; and Lloyd Wilson, Illinois.**

All the Speakers in the Bureau have one thing in common in that 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 nestbox should be a very good start. I've seen Dr. Larry Zeleny show a few slides and hold a nestbox while he talked, and had a few brochures

to hand out. He was always well received.

The following individuals from 29 states and one province returned their 2004 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, as well as, other cavity-nesters. A total of 362 programs were given by the Speakers' Bureau in 2004.

CANADA (Alberta)

Ray Harris
Myrna Pearman

ARKANSAS

James Berry
James Janssen

CALIFORNIA

David Cook
Donald Yoder

CONNECTICUT

Frederick Comstock

FLORIDA

Lorna Beasley
Bill Davis
Donna Legare

GEORGIA

Emory Brooks
Peggy Chaney
Lyn Davies
Frances Sawyer

IOWA

Pat Schlarbaum

ILLINOIS

Joan Harmet
Loren & Gretchen Hughes
Lloyd Wilson

INDIANA

Jerry Hunefeld
Ken Jankowski
Arthur Jeffries
Kathleen Krum

LOUISIANA

Evelyn Cooper

MARYLAND

Jim Gephardt
Jerry Newman
Kathleen Woods

MASSACHUSETTS

Lillian Lund-Files

MINNESOTA

Dale Aden
Richard & Marlys Hjort

Dorene Scriven

MICHIGAN

Maynard Sumner

MISSISSIPPI

Tena Taylor

MONTANA

Ervin Davis
Bob Niebuhr

NEBRASKA

Steve Eno

NEW HAMPSHIRE

David Eastman

NEW JERSEY

Ken Karnas

NEW YORK

Kevin Berner
Raymond Briggs
Ricky Bruce
Elaine Crossley
Joseph Giunta
Ron Howe
Sam Phelps
Eveiyln Rifenburg
John Rogers
Barb Treiber
Richard Wells
Carl Zenger

NORTH CAROLINA

Bill Abbey
Fred Benson
Chuck Bliss
Helen Munro
Catherine Traylor

OHIO

Janice Petko
Jean Rutan

OKLAHOMA

Robert Walshaw
Kevin McCurdy

OREGON

Elsie Eltzroth

PENNSYLVANIA

Diana Allison
Bob Bodine
Theodore Morus
Anthony Piccolini

SOUTH CAROLINA

Barry Whitney

TEXAS

Charles Post

VIRGINIA

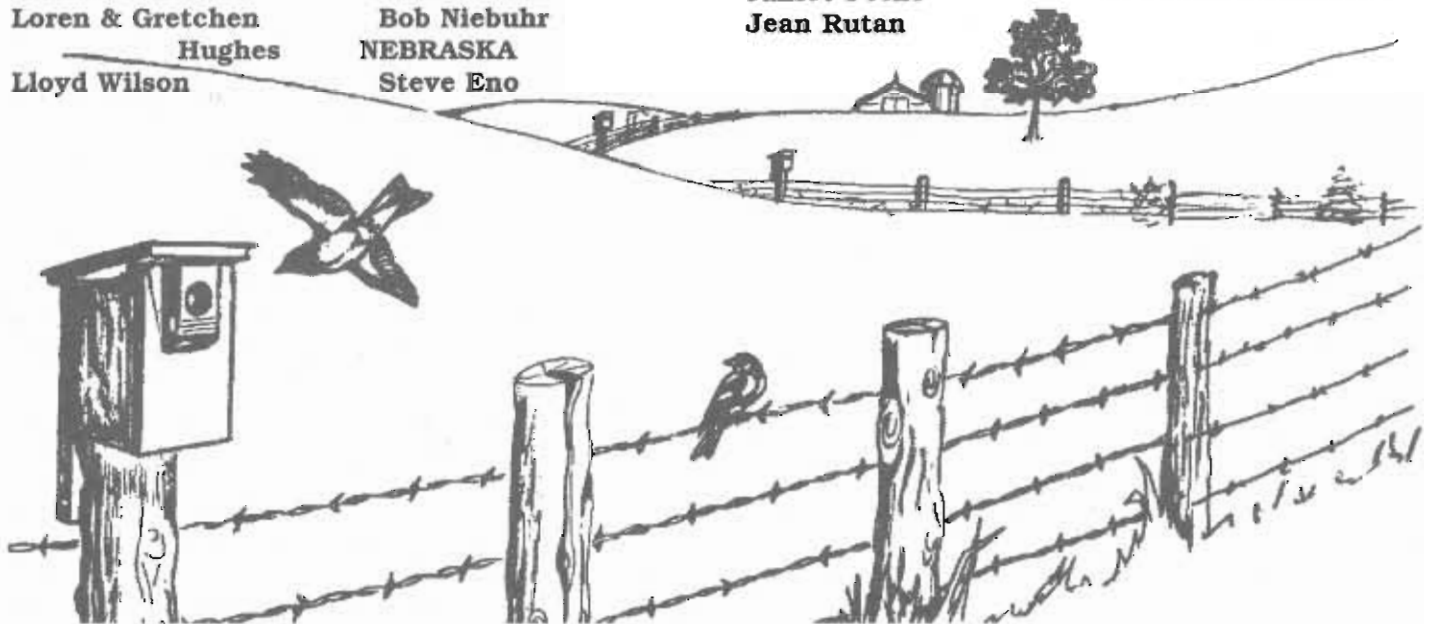
Robert Hammond
Julie Kutruff
Mary Penn-Soranno
Brian & Marci Swanson

WASHINGTON

Bill Ryan

WISCONSIN

Howard Rasmussen



Members of the North American Bluebird Society,

There is no doubt in my mind that conservation of what remains of this wonderful, intriguing, life sustaining planet and the individual plants and animals that inhabit it is the unqualified most important work in the history of humankind.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to devote my energy to help you in this most important work.

The first condition that must be met before a person enrolls their support for the conservation of wildlife and natural habitat is awareness. Awareness is often the result of bonding with a wild animal or the habitat itself.

Unfortunately, in a culture where every meal comes from a restaurant or grocery store and very few people ever see the living animals or plants they must eat to survive, most people don't have an opportunity to establish a bond with a wild animal, the habitat, or, to develop an awareness of our dependence on the natural world for survival.

The American Bluebird, one of the most endearing and compelling ambassadors of the natural world, an ambassador to which most citizens of the most influential nation in the world can readily assist, befriend and forge a relationship with in many of our backyards, we as custodians of these birds have a unique opportunity to create in people awareness that will grow into effective conservation at many levels.

We have an opportunity, indeed, in my opinion, we have an obligation, to take full advantage of this opportunity by continuing the work of visionary and NABS founder, Lawrence Zeleny, which is to promote the success of not only the three species of bluebirds but all primary and secondary native cavity nesting avian species.

Most North Americans don't know what a bluebird is. Nor do they know that birdhouses are an effective part of conservation. And, most probably don't know the difference between an elk and a caribou, a mallard and a wood duck, or a wild turkey and a turkey vulture.

But, Ducks Unlimited, The Elk Foundation, and the National Wild Turkey Federation are making huge conservation strides by making these wild animals ambassadors to the cause of conservation.

These and many other conservation organizations are growing stronger and creating awareness in people who in turn make donations to the conservation effort. Some of these donations are used for preservation of wild animals and habitat. And, some are used to increase awareness in still more people.

In my opinion, the bluebird is an even more effective ambassador of the natural world than are ducks, elk or turkeys.

NABS has strong support from not only bluebirders but from all other national birding, wildlife and conservation organizations, writers, scientists and a broad range of educational and government agencies.

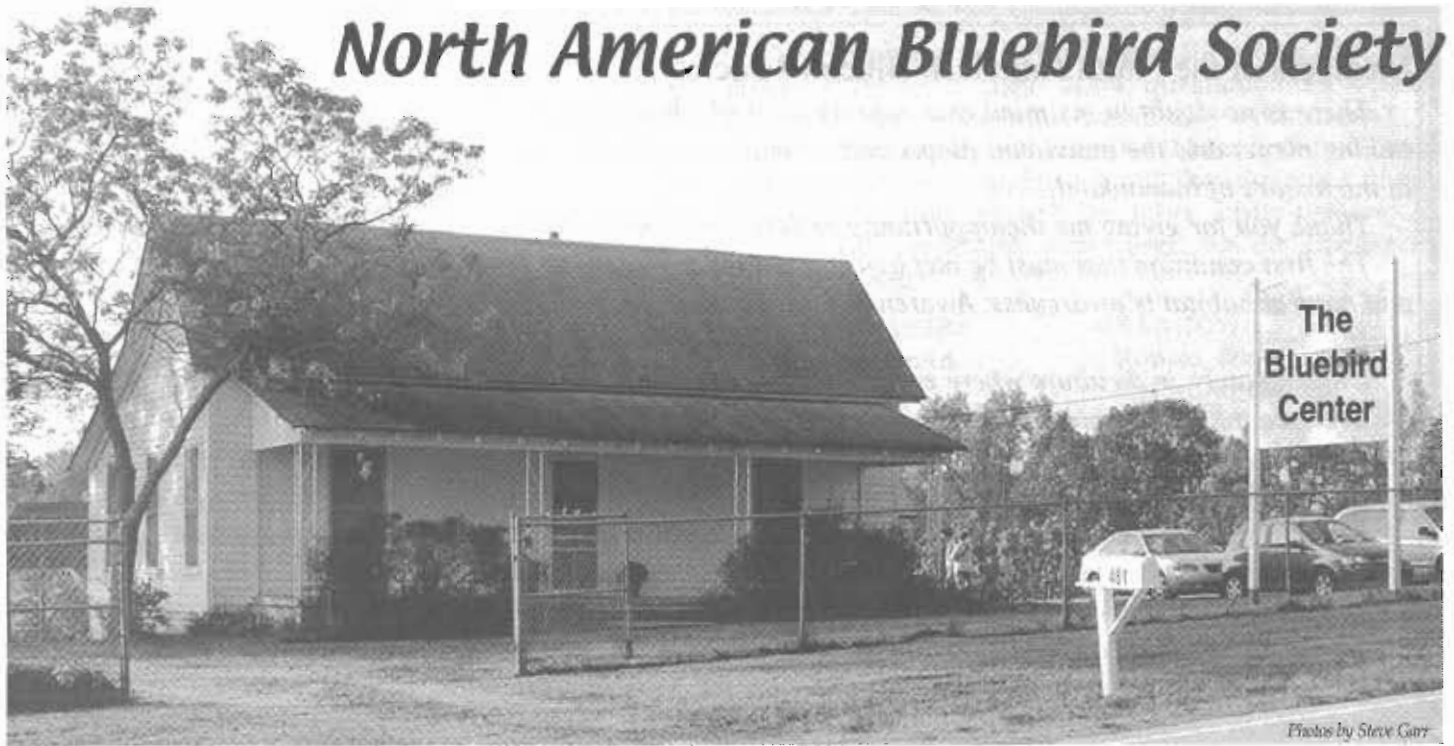
This support transcends the people who founded and lead the North American Bluebird Society. Though a visionary and a crucial pioneer in Bluebird Conservation, Lawrence Zeleny was also a lightning rod for the support of Bluebirds, support and love that will exist as long as the memory of the bluebird exists in the mind of humans.

This strong support for the bluebird and what I call "birdhouse conservation" is what causes me to believe that we need to set our sights higher and implement the necessary organizational structure and business principals to strengthen NABS and enroll more people in our work so we can make a larger contribution to protecting what remains of this wonderful, intriguing, life sustaining planet and the individual plants and animals that inhabit it.

I look forward to working with you in this important work.

Gary Springer, executive director

North American Bluebird Society



By Steve Garr
NABS president

The North American Bluebird Society headquarters recently migrated to a permanent location in Royston, Georgia. The new location will become the center of information and education about bluebirds and other native cavity nesting North American birds.

Established in 1978 by Lawrence Zeleny and other dedicated bluebird enthusiasts, the North American Bluebird Society (NABS) became known for their effective conservation and their grass roots approach for saving the dwindling population of bluebirds. The Eastern, Mountain and Western Bluebirds are all part of the original bluebird conservation effort.

NABS encouraged proper nest boxes and monitoring to help stabilize and hopefully restore the population of bluebirds to numbers that existed before the introduction of the English house sparrow and the European starling. The population of bluebirds, along with other

birds, was also drastically effected by the insecticide DDT, used until the 1970s.

The NABS conservation effort along with thousands of volunteers helped restore the population of Eastern Bluebirds and has helped stabilize the population of Mountain and Western Bluebirds.

One of the first calls for help came from Bluebird articles published in Nature Society News by columnist, Lawrence Zeleny. He answered questions on "Where have the bluebirds gone?" from readers. His answers included information on how to help the bluebirds with detailed data on nesting requirements and habitat. Soon man-made nest boxes were replacing abandoned natural cavities, made by woodpeckers, as homes for bluebirds. This was important because many of the natural cavities became permanent residences for non-native, more aggressive house sparrows and starlings.

The new man-made boxes with a 1-1/2" entrance hole restricted the larger European starling and

the routine monitoring helped deter the more aggressive house sparrow.

Success did not occur overnight, it took years of work by bluebird groups led by NABS to offset the population explosion of the non-native starling and house sparrow. Dedicated volunteers all over the continent working with NABS erected thousands of boxes and monitored them as a way to control problems and help our bluebirds and other native cavity nesters.

Bluebird monitors were becoming experts on the behaviors of bluebirds and began sharing their experiences and solutions to problems with readers of Nature Society News and "Sialia" the "Bluebird Journal".

As more and more regions of the U.S. and Canada became involved in bluebird recovery new and different nest box plans were tried and shared throughout the bluebird community with innovations to deter predators. Dick Peterson and his Peterson Bluebird Box with its sloped roof helped

headquarters migrated to Georgia



The valley behind The Bluebird Center (above) is a landscape artists love to paint and where wildlife can flourish

deter raccoons.

Wayne Davis and the Kentucky Slot Box that was designed from scraps of wooden pallets showed from research that box location, and not necessarily design, was often the best way to solve sparrow problems.

Many other innovations were also named after their inventors like the Huber Sparrow Trap designed by Joe Huber or the Krueger Snake Trap designed by the late Harry Krueger a former member of NABS.

Bluebirders have always been eager to share what has worked for them hoping what they have learned will help others bring back the bluebird, and Nature Society News has always been there to spread the information to its readers. NABS and Nature Society also share research from T. E. Musselman who not only helped design the first bluebird boxes but also was instrumental in the designs used by Nature House and their purple martin houses.

On November 5, 2005 the

NABS board met at the new headquarters in Georgia for training and end-of-fiscal-year reports. This was the first time the NABS Board had a chance to see the new headquarters. It only took minutes at the new site (with its country setting, large 4-room one-story farm house with hardwood floors and a hilltop view of a valley behind the center) before board members started talking about the enormous possibilities that lay before NABS because of the new headquarters and the enthusiasm of our new executive director, Gary Springer.

The board is now talking about planning for the future, not just tomorrow or next year but looking ahead and putting plans and dreams in process for years to come. One board member even mentioned "NABS needs to start preparing now for the next 20 years because NABS now has a home." A very appropriate and easy to remember name "The Bluebird Center" was chosen for the new headquarters.

So a call for help is going out

again to those who are interested in helping bluebirds and other native cavity nesters. Join NABS! Help us continue the never ending battle against the English house sparrow and European starling. Our research proves that when you control these non-native cavity nesters our native birds (like bluebirds) can thrive.

For information about NABS and information on how to help bluebirds, visit our web site at: www.nabluebirdsociety.org

NABS has proven conservation works and will continue its 28-year conservation effort; its results are experienced each time someone sees or hears a bluebird.

As current president of NABS, I wish to thank *Nature Society News* and its editors for the years of support and shared information they have given NABS since its beginning in 1978. Just as Nature Society members led the way to save the purple martin, NABS has been the continent-wide link for

Continued on page 16 →



On the top three shelves in photo above are some of the original NABS approved bluebird boxes on display in The Bluebird Center. On lower shelves are back issues of "Bluebird" (formerly known as "Sialia"), the official publication of the North American Bluebird Society.

bluebird conservationists, and the origin of involvement for many bluebird enthusiasts.



Steve Garr (left) and Gary Springer each holding one of the bluebird prints recently donated to NABS Bluebird Center.



Photos by Steve Garr

The North American Bluebird Society has a new home in Royston, Georgia, "The Bluebird Center" (shown above) will include an education room where not only posters and other pertinent material will be on display but free pamphlets will be available as well. Plus, also on display in the education room, the NABS archives which will allow visitors to learn more about the North American Bluebird Society's origin, purpose and accomplishments. A mixture of the old, new and forthcoming.

It is certainly obvious that Nature House, Nature Society and North American Bluebird Society (NABS) share a sincere concern for ALL native cavity nesting birds.

We thank Nature House for their generous donation to our new headquarters of the MSS-12 martin house safety system, and Nature Society for the two Richard Sloan bluebird prints. The bluebird prints — one of the Eastern Bluebird (Sloan - Plate 2) and one of the Mountain Bluebird (Sloan - Plate 10) — will be proudly displayed at the NABS office and also taken "on the road" to be displayed in the NABS Booth at trade shows and conventions. The martin house and bluebird prints are treasured gifts from special friends! Thank you.

Gary Springer,
executive director of NABS
Steve Garr,
president of NABS



Steve Garr and Gary Springer with installed MSS-12 martin safety system, a gift from Nature House.

Legacy of a bluebirder



One of my most treasured possessions is a handwritten letter that I received in 1991. Although I do not currently have it secured in a safe deposit box I have seriously considered doing so. It's not that the document has any great monetary value — I seriously doubt that it has any. However, to me, the letter is valuable beyond measure because it exemplifies an important part of the wildlife conservation movement commonly known as bluebirding. The letter is a reply to several questions I had posed to the author about eastern bluebirds. At the time my wife and I were beginning a 16-year love affair with bluebirding and, as complete novices, we had many questions. Of course today we probably have more questions than answers but we suspect that is true of most people who decide to help these beautiful and fascinating birds.

At the time I did not expect a personal reply to my queries so I was surprised and elated when I received the letter from the late Dr. Lawrence Zeleny, founder of the North American Bluebird Society (NABS). We were extremely grateful that Dr. Zeleny took his valuable time to help us, and his personal interest in our project motivated us to continue our work with bluebirds. In our minds the letter demonstrated that he was just as altruistic as the bluebirds he described in his 1976 groundbreaking book, "The Bluebird: How You Can Help Its Fight for Survival."

Unfortunately we never had a chance to meet Dr. Zeleny. Although we were able to attend the annual meeting of the NABS in 1993, Dr. Zeleny's health problems prevented him from attending that year and he died in 1995.* Nevertheless, despite the lost opportunity to meet him, his influ-

ence has continued to this day and we think of him often as we monitor and manage our bluebird trails. As a testament to the impact of his letter, over 15,000 eastern bluebirds and over 1,200 baby birds from six other cavity-nesting species have fledged from the nest boxes that we have monitored and maintained during our tenure. The 200 nest boxes on our bluebird trails are located in western Kentucky and Tennessee, at Land Between the Lakes (a 170,000-acre National Recreation Area managed by the USDA-Forest Service), Lake Barkley State Resort Park (Kentucky state park), and John James Audubon State Park (Kentucky state park). Although eastern bluebirds were not rare when we started our volunteer work with them, they certainly were not as common as we find them to be today, and we feel very fortunate to have been a small part of their recovery.

If one researches the history of bluebirding one would find that there were other individuals who preceded Dr. Zeleny but he is arguably the person who has had the greatest overall impact on the bluebird's recovery. I do know that he has been an integral part of our dedication to bluebirds and I am sure there are many thousands of people who could say the same thing. In addition to the letter that I have described, I also have two other treasures: the June 1977 National Geographic magazine article that Dr. Zeleny authored, and the Parade magazine article (November 25, 1979) that included quotations from him about the bluebird's plight. The articles stimulated and inspired countless numbers of bird conservationists, helped assure the founding of

NABS in 1978 and generated the volume of memberships that breathed life into the organization.

All things considered perhaps Dr. Zeleny's most important legacy will not be entirely about the bluebirds. That is, maybe it will be the fact that this successful, grass roots environmental movement called bluebirding will help instill a feeling in people, especially young people, that there are many beautiful things in our natural world that deserve assistance and protection. And, maybe Dr. Zeleny's compassionate, benevolent attitude will become a much more common occurrence in our modern world, as bluebirders continue to help other people protect and preserve these magnificent creatures. In theory and in practice, his bluebirding philosophy could certainly be described as "each one teach one," and I truly believe that the survival of bluebirds will be dependent upon our ability to transfer his knowledge and passion to the next generation of young people. All individuals who work on bluebird trails and those who dedicate themselves to the task of helping America's most beloved bird, must remember that the future of bluebirds is dependent upon the passing of a torch... a torch that Dr. Lawrence Zeleny handed to us.

[I am a] member of the North American Bluebird Society and the Kentucky Bluebird Society.

*Respectfully submitted by,
Bob Peaks
Henderson, Kentucky*

*www.nabluebirdsociety.org (NABS' web site) has a biographical article and obituary for Dr. Zeleny.

A decorative border of cherry blossoms and birds frames the text. At the top, two birds are perched on a branch with blossoms. At the bottom, two more birds are perched on a similar branch. The sides of the page are lined with a continuous vine of cherry blossoms and leaves.

Please help NABS keep the \$20 membership level

By GARY SPRINGER
executive director

So we can keep from raising the lowest membership dues above \$20, we're asking for a Supporting Membership of \$40 or larger donation from those of you who can comfortably afford to contribute to bluebird conservation at that level.

Because of inflation, for each \$20 membership contribution you make in 2006, NABS is able to invest \$4 less on bluebird conservation than was possible with just a \$15 membership contribution in 1987. And, after subtracting the costs of publishing, printing, mailing and other costs associated with putting four issues of the quarterly Bluebird journal in your hands, a \$20 membership payment helps NABS contribute to bluebird conservation about as much money as the cost of one large McDonald's hamburger and one large milk shake.

On the other hand, when you join at the \$40 Supporting level, NABS is able to contribute to bluebird conservation about as much money as the cost of five similar trips to McDonald's instead of just one trip. That's five times as much help for bluebirds for just \$20 more! Please consider contributing more than the minimum \$20 membership level so NABS can contribute more to bluebird conservation. Thank you for supporting the conservation of Bluebirds and other cavity nesting songbirds!

Research Roundup

By Benjamin E. Leese

BLUE IS BEAUTIFUL ON FEMALES TOO

A number of recent studies showed the costs and advantages of bright blue color on male bluebirds (see the Summer 2005 issue of Bluebird), but apparently blue matters on females too. A recent study shows that the brightness of the blue of female Eastern Bluebirds serves as an indicator of quality. The researchers first conducted aviary experiments to determine if the intensity of blue color depended on the birds' physical condition. Female birds whose food intake was limited during the molt had duller blue rump feathers than on females

whose diet was not restricted. The color of the chestnut breast did not vary with food intake. That result suggests that blue plumage serves a visual signal of relative physical condition; brighter blue means better physical condition.

The researchers also studied bluebirds in the field. They found that females with brighter blue plumage tended to be better parents than duller blue females. For instance, females with brighter blue feathers tend to lay eggs earlier, feed offspring more often, and have heavier fledglings. The study also detected that bluebirds pair assortively based on tail coloration; brighter blue males tended to have brighter blue females as mates.

This suggests sexual selection for both male and female ornaments in this species. It seems that both sexes of the bluebird show off their quality as mates through the blue of their feathers.

The full report of the study is: Evidence for sexual selection on structural plumage coloration in female Eastern Bluebirds (Sialia sialis). 2005. Lynn Siefferman and Geoffrey E. Hill. Evolution 59(8):1819-1828.

NEST PREDATOR:

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER

Although not often thought of as a predator of other birds' nests, the Red-bellied Woodpecker might be a more important nest predator than previously thought. Researchers working in southeastern hardwood forests witnessed the woodpeckers preying on the nests of Acadian Flycatchers, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and Indigo Buntings. Acadian Flycatchers harassed invading woodpeckers, but generally were not able to protect their nest. Red-bellied Woodpeckers have also been recorded preying on the nests of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, House Wrens, Carolina Chickadees and Eastern Bluebirds, among others. The Red-bellied Woodpecker is a relatively common species, and so it may be a significant nest predator.

The full paper is: Common, but commonly overlooked: Red-bellied Woodpeckers as songbird nest predators. 2004. Kirsten R. Hazler, Dawn E. W. Drumtra, Matthew R. Marshall, Robert J. Cooper, and Paul B. Hamel. Southeastern Naturalist 3(3):467-474.

FEMALE TREE SWALLOWS "GET AROUND" BEFORE LAYING EGGS

Before laying eggs, female Tree Swallows tend to roost away from their nest. Researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee attached radio transmitters to female swallows just before their

Continues on page 20



nests were completed. The swallows showed a remarkably wide range of movement, sometimes spending more than three hours foraging miles away from their nest box. The swallows also roosted far away from their nest boxes, and even changed roost sites between nights. By roosting away from their nests at night allowed, these females presumably came in contact with males besides their own mates. The females probably copulated with some of those other males at some point, probably in the early morning. Although extra-pair fertilizations (those not by the male sharing the nest) are common in this species, extra-pair copulations in this species are very rarely observed at the actual nest site. So, evening roosts just before egg-laying probably account for this species' high number of extra-pair young.

The research appeared in: Radio-tracking of female Tree Swallows prior to egg-laying. 2005. Peter O. Dunn and Linda A. Whittingham. Journal of Field Ornithology 76(3):259-263.

TREE SWALLOWS ARE INCOME BREEDERS

Ecologists describe at least two kinds of breeding strategies. Some species, called capital breeders, rely on stored fat to support them in making a breeding attempt. Other species, called income breeders, rely on food intake near nesting time. Recent research suggests that Tree Swallows are in the latter group. As part of the work, researchers experimentally reduced foraging efficiency of female swallows by trimming three feathers from each wing and four from the tail. Females treated in this way laid eggs later than control females and fledged young of less weight. Variation between the years of the study in insect biomass and temperature was unpredictable, suggesting that swallows would not be able to time their breeding for the peak of food abundance. Instead, in Tree Swallows, breeding efforts must wait until food resources and temperature allow females to ac-

hieve an adequate body condition to begin the breeding effort.

The research appeared in: Effects of food abundance, weather, and female condition on the reproduction in Tree Swallows (Tachycineta bicolor). 2005. Jacqueline K. Nooker, Peter O. Dunn, and Linda A. Whittingham. Auk 122(4):1225-1238.

BLOWFLIES CAN'T TAKE THE HEAT (OR COLD)

While most research into blowflies and other nest parasites seeks to document birds' responses to the parasites, very little is known about what factors actually affect levels of occurrence. A recent study explored temperature as a factor by artificially heating some Tree Swallow nests and then comparing blowfly infestation levels in treated nests with those in control nests. The researchers removed nests to count parasites after the nestlings had fledged, but carefully monitored temperature in the nestling period. Through their study, they found that blowfly larvae infestations were heaviest in nests that averaged 25°C. Nests on either side of that temperature had lower infestations. The optimal temperature for blowflies, 25°C, was about 3°C higher than the control group. The researchers suggest that predicted climatic change might cause an increase in blowfly infestations. Applied to nest box enthusiasts, these results suggest that designing boxes to stay cooler not only helps maintain a good environment for the chicks, but can also help in reducing blowfly infestations.

The full research report is at: Effects of experimental variation in temperature on larval densities of parasitic Protocalliphora (Diptera: Calliphoridae) in nests of Tree Swallows (Passeriformes: Hirundinidae). 2005. Russell D. Dawson, Kristy K. Hillen, and Terry L. Whitworth. Environmental Ecology 34(3):563-568.

EVALUATING A KESTREL NEST BOX PROGRAM

A variety of organizations sponsor relatively large nest box programs that rely on volunteers to monitor boxes and collect data. While

groups are busy collecting data, they often do not take the time to evaluate the efficiency of their conservation program. In an analysis of their Kestrel nest box program, researchers at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Pennsylvania found that they could probably decrease the size of their nest box network by 25% while still maintaining about the same population of Kestrels. They reached this conclusion because almost 50% of fledglings came from only the 25% of nest boxes that were used most often. The least used 25% of the boxes produced only 7% of the fledglings in their 10-year dataset. Thus, in a situation of limited conservation resources, the authors argue that they could remove those least productive boxes or monitor them less frequently and still have virtually the same conservation impact. They noted that removing boxes might increase competition for the remaining cavities, but that effect remains unstudied.

This study serves as an important reminder to groups and individuals who manage large networks of nest boxes for cavity nesting birds. Spending the time to evaluate the productivity and efficiency of the program, perhaps every five or 10 years, could go a long way to ensuring the long term viability of the work. By carefully recording the number of young produced from each box, decisions can be made to remove, replace, or reduce monitoring of the least used boxes – and thus improve the efficiency of the conservation effort. Especially on large nest box systems, adaptively modifying a nest box program can be an important conservation tool.

Managers of large nest box networks should take the time to read this important article, found in: Results from a long-term nest-box program for American Kestrels: implications for improved population monitoring and conservation. 2005. Todd Katzner, Sue Robertson, Bob Robertson, Jim Klucsarits, Kyle McCarty, and Keith L. Bildstein. Journal of Field Ornithology 76(3):217-226.

Are house sparrows "evil"?



One perspective...

By E. A. Zimmerman

People who want to attract bluebirds (*Sialia sp.*) often have to deal with house sparrows (*Passer domesticus*, or HOSP). HOSP may attack and kill adult bluebirds, sometimes trapping and decapitating them in the nestbox and building their own nest on top of the corpse. They may destroy eggs and young. At a minimum, they often harass native birds, especially more timid species like chickadees, into abandoning nestboxes.

Here are some typical accounts of experiences repeated all too often:

- "If you ever happen to see a bluebird enter a nestbox, followed by a house sparrow, you might experience what I did minutes later — holding a beautiful male bluebird in your hands, bloodied and blinded by the attack, taking his last dying breaths."
- "I pray that you never have to experience the shock of opening

a nestbox to find a nest full of babies, mutilated and dying..."

I recognize that some people enjoy HOSP. They are popular birds in Europe (where bluebirds do not exist). Some find them clever, cute and comical. People appreciate the fact that HOSP are familiar and friendly towards humans. They enjoy watching HOSP at a bird feeder or in a city environment, where they tend to be ubiquitous because they are so hardy and competitive.

However, many people who are serious about enabling bluebirds or purple martins to survive and thrive are also serious about HOSP control. I maintain several bluebird trails in northeastern Connecticut, and employ both passive and active means to manage house sparrow (HOSP) populations. Does this mean that I think HOSP are bad or even evil?

It is tempting to anthropomorphize animals. In an attempt to understand them, we draw parallels between animals and humans. They provoke emotional responses

in us. In return, we may ascribe human characteristics to them. People may experience anger, horror, disgust, anxiety, disappointment and/or sadness upon witnessing the results of a HOSP attack. This can motivate a desire to take action or retaliate. In part to justify our actions and assuage guilt or discomfort, or even to feel morally superior, we may tend to demonize HOSP as vicious or spiteful "murderers."

There is debate on whether animals experience what we call emotions such as anger; (94% of pet owners think they do, according to a 2004 survey by the American Animal Hospital Association). We do know that different species display different behaviors. This behavior may be genetically selected for (like a built-in "behavioral template") enabling one species or strain to survive.

An example is the territorial or possessive behavior exhibited by birds such as the house sparrow and house wren. Both these species commonly attack the nests and eggs of other cavity-nesting birds. HOSP will also attack adults, perhaps out of an instinctive drive to reduce competition for nesting sites or food. Supporting evidence for this theory would be instances where HOSP drive other birds away from a nestbox, even though the HOSP already have an existing nest nearby, or when they then do not choose to occupy the box they have "liberated." One bluebirder reported "I had a bluebird pair nest in my purple martin house. Given 11 other compartments to choose from, the house sparrows still killed the nestlings."

However, HOSP, which are actually members of the communal weaver finch family, do not typically attack each other's nests, although they may kill another HOSP when con-

fined together in a trap. Unlike birds like blue jays that actually eat eggs and nestlings, HOSP aggression is not directly motivated by pursuit of food.

Scientists (e.g., Moyer, 1968 and Paul Brain, 1979) have identified other types and motivations for aggression, such as:

- predatory aggression — induced by stimuli instead of hunger
- inter-male/dominance/social aggression — competition for reproductive success which may be influenced by hormones
- fear-induced or self-defense aggression (e.g., reaction to being confined/cornered)
- irritable aggression, and
- protective/maternal defense.

Not all HOSP will always behave the same way. Behavior may be influenced by sex, age, environment, residency, competition, season and climate. Individuals have different temperaments or dispositions. Some individuals or populations are more tenacious or aggressive than others. Different birds may protect different size territories. It's possible that reduced HOSP populations may reduce intra-species competition, resulting in less-hostile HOSP. HOSP have been observed threatening and attacking 70 species of birds that have come into their nesting territory.

HOSP may nest in evergreens alongside robins and mourning doves, apparently without conflict. There is more visible aggression and possessiveness associated with nestboxes, possibly because of desirability (protection from elements etc.), supply and demand, and confined space.

Aggressive behavior can be reinforced via learning through experience or observation. HOSP are considered intelligent (in the sense

that they can learn quickly) and adaptable, which has probably aided their proliferation.

Individual birds also occasionally exhibit abnormal behavior which could be associated with what we characterize in humans as mental illness. For example, captive parrots raised in a barren environment may exhibit abnormal behavior such as plucking out all their own feathers.

So do I think HOSP are evil? No. The term "evil" generally implies morally bad, wrong, wicked or acting out of anger or spite. It is a term applicable to humans. I do NOT believe that HOSP, either as a species or as individuals, are "bad" and bluebirds are "good." I believe HOSP behaviors have evolved or are learned as an effective means of self-preservation for individuals and the species. They are doing what comes naturally, and cannot be held to some "humane" human standard.

I do know that:

- Bluebirds are native. Their populations have been seriously impacted by human activity (habitat loss, pesticide use and introduction of HOSPs and starlings). HOSP are not native to the U.S. They were deliberately introduced in multiple locations in the late 1800s and are now established throughout the lower 48 states.
- Bluebirds' impact on human crops, if any, is positive as their diet is primarily insects and non-crop fruits. In part because of sheer numbers, house sparrows can significantly damage crops, livestock food and water, etc.
- Bluebirds only nest in cavities (natural or nestboxes). HOSP may prefer cavities, but will also nest in other protected places like gutters, signs and evergreens.
- Some HOSP may ignore other birds; others may simply harass

them to prevent successful nesting, while others will kill. Aggressive HOSP behavior can cause injury and destruction to native birds. It can significantly impact bluebird survival and reproductive success.

As noted above, in some areas HOSP and native cavity nesters appear to peacefully coexist. This may be due to a less aggressive population, or HOSP that have not become accustomed to using nestboxes. I wonder whether this situation would change when HOSP populations increase or if HOSP learned to utilize nestboxes which offer better protection from weather and predators.

In closing, I do not "hate" HOSP, although I am very concerned about their impact. I try to be objective about HOSP, but I am not dispassionate about conservation.

The bottom line is that I have made a personal choice to help bluebird populations increase. I do not believe HOSP require such assistance. Humans were responsible for introducing HOSP to this continent. I think it is necessary to try to restore a degree of balance to the ecosystem which has been upset by this human intervention.

I am motivated by a sense of responsibility associated with attempting to attract bluebirds to my area. Thus, I feel compelled to do what I can to protect native birds that may want to nest in my boxes. As Bruce Burdett of the New Hampshire Bluebird Con-spiracy has said "I guess everyone must decide for himself the lengths to which he will go to protect his bluebirds."



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