



Bluebird

Summer 2006
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Journal of the North American Bluebird Society



Photos by Karen Martin

NABS 2006 Convention coverage starts on page 7

Index for Summer 2006 issue — page 3



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**

I want to thank the Texas Bluebird Society for hosting NABS 2006. Many of the attendees mentioned to me how much they enjoyed the convention. Unfortunately, my duties as president kept me busy with meetings and seminars, so I was unable to participate in the field trips and many of the presentations I would have otherwise attended. I hope to get back to Texas soon to see some of what I missed!

One of the duties I was privileged to have during this convention was to present the NABS Awards at the convention banquet. I want to congratulate all award recipients and again, thank them for their commitment to bluebird conservation. There are highlights of their individual accomplishments in this issue. If you get the opportunity, please be sure and take a few moments to thank and congratulate these dedicated bluebirders.

It is also my pleasure to thank David Cook, the NABS awards chairman for his years of good work on this committee, and introduce our new Awards committee chair, Greg Beavers. Greg is a dedicated bluebird and trail monitor, active in local conservation organizations, and always ready to teach and assist others. He will be looking for nominations for worthy award recipients to be awarded at next year's convention. Please see Greg's contact information elsewhere in this issue.

Thank you Greg for being willing to commit your time and energies to this important NABS committee.

If you are new to bluebirding, you will notice that many of the award recipients also started with one box or one trail and it was their passion to help the bluebird that motivated them and inspired others to exceptional achievement. It is also important to note that there is no "beginning" age

restriction on when you can begin contributing to bluebird conservation - one award winner did not become involved until she was in her 70s, while others learned at an early age.

Congratulations and thanks are also in order for our newly-elected NABS officers and board members. Elected (and some re-elected) at our Annual Meeting at this convention, these individuals are volunteering their efforts and time to continue the heritage and good work of NABS. We have a great crew this year and they have my sincere thanks and appreciation. Be looking for very good things from them!

It is a great time of year to watch fledgling bluebirds being fed by the parents and new nests being started! Continue to monitor your nest boxes and enjoy all of our native cavity-nesters. I wish everyone a productive and enjoyable nesting season!

*There is no
"beginning" age
restriction on
bluebird conservation*

To the editor,

I was born on a farm in Lewis County, Missouri in 1928; farmed for 26 years.

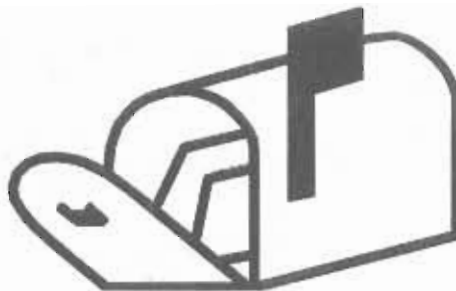


During the winter I worked for a chicken hatchery. We went to the farmers' chicken flocks and tested for New Castile Disease in the chickens. It was thought the disease was carried from one farm to the other by the common house sparrow. In the '40s also hog cholera was thought to be carried from one farm to the other by the house sparrow.

I have a 150-box bluebird trail(s). The biggest enemy to my bluebirds and other songbirds that use my boxes is the house sparrow. If you put up a bird box and don't monitor it and control you may be doing more harm than good, as you will be promoting the house sparrow.

Enclosed is a photo of my bluebird-house sparrow traps. I put up 12 boxes, one on every post around my yard and near my bird feeder platform. After dark I cover the box with my hand, lift the side and catch the male or female. The common house sparrow is not protected. Last summer approximately 500 sparrows were not hatched.

Now with the scare world wide of



To the editor,

This is a notice that Missouri has formed a Bluebird Society and is in the process of becoming a NABS Affiliate. The first state-wide meeting will be held September 9 in Jefferson City. Please contact the society at the following address for information: Missouri Bluebird Society, Attn: Jack Dodson, 3926 Old Hwy179, Jefferson City MO 65109; www.missouribird.org; jackdodson@missouribird.org.

*Jack Dodson
Jefferson City, Missouri*

bird flu, if it comes to America, probably the common house sparrow could be the carrier. I suggest all states promote house sparrow control. The method of sparrow control should be tested by experts and promoted by brochures in extension offices all across the country; and take their idea to other countries. I am told the house sparrow is in most countries.

*Russell Heindselman
La Grange, Missouri*

Inside this issue

- Why we get Goopy over bluebirds, **Bet Zimmerman**, pg. 4
- Hang your bluebird boxes, **Bob Walshaw**, pg. 5
- Awards given at NABS Convention, **Steve Garr**, pg. 7
- Research Roundup: Caribbean Cavity-nester Conservation, **Ben Leese**, pg. 10
- NABS 2006 Convention recap, pg. 12
- Rocky Mountain Blues benefits Idaho's state bird, **Dave Richmond**, pg. 19
- PROJECT PREVENT COLLISION, **Wild Bird Centers of America**, pg. 20
- Recent Literature: Competition for Cavities, **Ben Leese**, pg. 21
- NABS affiliates, pg. 23

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*Questions should be directed
to the NABS headquarters
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*The NABS web site offers
answers to many questions.*

Please go to www.nabluebirdsociety.org

**Editor: Karen E. Martin
PO Box 116
Griggsville IL 62340-0116
E-mail bluebird-editor@excite.com**

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Why we get goopy over bluebirds

By E. A. ZIMMERMAN

My husband and sister have both asked me, "Why do people get so goopy over bluebirds?" I think there are a number of reasons why we become fascinated and even addicted to this charming creature. Bluebirds are beautiful. Their leisurely and buoyant flight pattern offers a slow-motion view of cerulean blue feathers, making it seem as though the male "carries the sky on his back." (*Henry David Thoreau*)

Bluebirds are considered harbingers of spring. As W.L. Dawson penned in 1903, "How the waiting countryside thrills with joy when Bluebird brings us the first word of returning spring."

John Burroughs wrote in 1880, "The bluebird enjoys the preeminence of being the first bit of color that cheers our northern landscape."

Although they may overwinter in colder climes, they actively begin house hunting in February and March, signaling better weather ahead. Bluebirds are associated with hope, happiness and things we love. W.L. Dawson wrote "Reflecting heaven from his back and the ground from his breast, he floats between sky and earth like the winged voice of hope." They have probably appeared in more songs, poems and literature than any other bird.

In 1909, Maurice Maeterlinck published "The Blue Bird", a fairy tale about the bluebird of happiness. In 1934, tenor Jan Peerce made the "Bluebird of Happiness" a nationwide hit. It's hard not to smile when hearing about "Mr. Bluebird on My Shoulder" from the Disney



Photo by E.A. Zimmerman

film *Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah*. In 1939, in the movie "The Wizard of Oz", Judy Garland sang plaintively that "Somewhere over the rainbow, bluebirds fly."

One of the most famous WW II era pop classics was a song by Nat Burton: "There'll be bluebirds over the white cliffs of Dover, Tomorrow, just you wait and see, There'll be love and laughter and peace ever after, Tomorrow when the world is free."

Bluebirds are unique to North America. Despite the reference to England in Nat Burton's song, bluebirds are only found on our continent — thus we can call them our own.

Bluebirds remind us of simpler times. They were not only abundant in the tunes of our youth, but also in the countryside in the days before suburban sprawl. Most of us can clearly remember our first view

of that flash of blue. Because they have become less common, it is even more thrilling to see one now.

Bluebirds are family oriented. The courting male dotes on the female, waving his wings, enticing her to select a nest site and offering her treats. He courageously guards the box during nest construction. He delivers food to the incubating female, and participates equally in feeding nestlings and fledglings. Both parents will die defending their young from house sparrows.

After fledging, young birds tend to stay with their parents, begging for food, and sometimes altruistically helping tend to siblings in a second brood. Their song is enchanting. The velvety undertones are "...so soft and gentle; they sing to no one save themselves. Not loud and boastful like the mocker; not full of chatter like the purple martin. The bluebird song is a kind and personal 'I love you' that one must be close and quiet to hear." (*Kenny Kleinpeter*)

Clyde Todd (1940) said their song, "...like the gentle murmur of a flowing brook in soothing cadence, awakens a sense of well-being and content in each responsive listener."

Bluebirds are friendly. They seem to almost enjoy human company. They display no fear of nesting near human habitation. They tolerate monitoring of their nests as we peek in to see their fuzzy-headed hatchlings. They quickly learn an association, whether it be a whistle or a banging door, with a meal-worm feeder being filled, and instantly show up to investigate. If we do not fill the feeder in a timely manner, they may follow us around the yard, warbling away.

Continued on page 5

"Where tree limbs are available in suitable habitat"

Hang your bluebird boxes

By Robert M. Walshaw
Coweta, Oklahoma

After several years of extensive trials on my 80-box section of the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail, it is time to give hanging bluebird houses some publicity.

When I first tried hanging boxes several years ago, I was concerned about our Oklahoma winds, but the method works like a charm and is now my preference where tree limbs are available in suitable habitat.

Golf courses love hanging boxes because there are no posts to mow around, and the boxes are virtually

predator-proof. In several hundred nestings of bluebirds, titmice, chickadees and wrens, I have lost only one family where a snake apparently came down the hanger from the tree.

Relocating nest boxes is a snap, and the method is very inexpensive. All that is required is a 36"-long 3/16"-diameter metal rod with a hook bent into each end and an eye hook for the top of the box.

It may be a bit early to tell, but I believe that I am seeing a trend where birds on my trail prefer hanging boxes over those on posts. They may be recognizing the predator protection, or it may be that I now have a lot of adult birds that



have fledged from and imprinted on hanging boxes.

I encourage bluebirders to hang this year's nest boxes.

...goopy over bluebirds

continued from page 4

Bluebirds do no harm. In the days before pesticides, farmers put up nestboxes around their fields, as they were aware that bluebirds eat many insects, and the fruit they eat during the winter is not of the cultivated variety. While bluebirds will compete for nesting sites and defend their own abode, they do not maliciously attack other birds, eggs or nests.

Attracting bluebirds is a challenging hobby. Since the number of natural cavities has dwindled and

competition from exotic species like house sparrows and starlings is severe, bluebirds depend on humans to survive and thrive. Because of this, we feel an almost parental sense of ownership and satisfaction when we enable successful nesting.

Bluebirding taps into problem solving skills and creativity, scientific curiosity, and a love of nature and the outdoors. Bluebirds remind us of both the bad and good humans are capable of. Almost all impacts to bluebird populations, both negative and positive, have been directly associated with human activity.

On the negative side, there is the introduction of house sparrows and starlings, pesticide use and loss of open space. But on the positive side, grass roots conservation efforts by individuals and groups across the continent are a shining example of the power we all have to make a difference.

Next Bluebird deadline is July 31

The deadline for the Fall 2006 issue of *Bluebird* will be July 31. 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.

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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 to the address listed on the form. Please do not send renewals to the editor.



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NABS 2006 Awards

By Steve Garr
NABS president

GEORGE LOADES AWARDED THE "JOHN AND NORAH LANE" AWARD

George Loades of Calgary, Alberta was honored for his lifetime of dedication to Bluebird Conservation.

He set up 100 nest boxes on his Jumping Pond trail in 1985, along with his father Charlie. He soon added a second trail at Priddis and by 1990 he had built up his trail to over 300 nest boxes. By 1997 he was up to over 350 which he has maintained to the present. In 2003, 2004 and 2005 he loaned out 100 boxes to a Master's student to do a research project on "Predator Response of Mountain Bluebirds and Tree Swallows".

George has made 200 or more nest boxes each year which he gives out to other Calgary area bluebird trail monitors, allowing them to add to their trails or replace old boxes. He began banding soon after he began monitoring, and in most years bands over 500 each of mountain bluebirds and tree swallows. He attends the Sportsman's show in Calgary, annually, to give a demonstration on making nest boxes, and has given a number of presentations to schools about Bluebirds.

The John and Norah Lane Award is named in honor of a couple from Brandon, Manitoba who in 1959 organized the "Brandon Junior Birders" whose members took it upon themselves to build bluebird nesting boxes and set them out along roadsides. Eventually, various of these trails were joined together into a huge network. The



Photo by Jonathan Ridgeway

George Loades, recipient of the "John and Norah Lane Award" which is for Lifetime Achievement in the field of Bluebird Conservation, is presented the award by Steve Garr.

total length of the composite trail, including its numerous side trails, is approximately 2,500 miles; 7,000 nesting boxes have been mounted on the trail and in a typical year an estimated 5,000 young bluebirds and 10,000 young tree swallows are fledged.

RECIPIENTS OF NABS "BLUEBIRD CONSERVATION AWARD" FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION IN THE FIELD OF BLUEBIRD CONSERVATION:

**David and Phyllis Smith
of Dryden, New York**

Both David and Phyllis Smith's names were submitted together because they have worked as a team on their extensive bluebird trail, the bluebird and tree swallow banding research program for the

Cornell Lab of Ornithology, monitoring many bluebird booths and educational programs throughout the years, and Chairing the very successful 2004 NABS Convention in Ithaca, New York.

David has held the positions of treasurer and president in the New York State Bluebird Society, and initiated that society's "County Coordinators Program" that increased the bluebird conservation programs in each county. Not only a member of NABS and the New York State Bluebird Society, David is also an associate director of the New York State Extension Service at Cornell.

Since 1994 the Smiths have fledged a total of 1,340 birds from their trail, as reported each year in the



Photo by Jonathan Ridgeway

David Smith accepts a Bluebird Conservation Award on behalf of he and his wife, Phyllis.

NABS 2006 Awards continue on Page 8

Phone: 903-572-0201 or 866-517-4483

NABS 2006 Awards — continues on pages 8 and 9

survey reports in the NYS Bluebird Newsletter. David and Phyllis also have a special interest in tree swallows and have fledged up to 300 some years. The couple have been designated to participate in a banding research program that resulted in banding more than 710 bluebirds and over 1,551 tree swallows in 2004.

In addition, David and Phyllis' dedication to educating others in bluebird conservation is evidenced by the many programs, festivals and expositions in which they participate.

Elizabeth Withrow of Mexia, Texas

In 1986, Ms. Withrow started a bluebird trail at Fort Parker State Park (located between Mexia and Groesbeck, Texas). She organized the volunteers and maintained and monitored the trail for almost 20 years, until late 2005; she was 92 years old.

She fell in love with the bluebird at



Photo by Jonathan Ridgeway

Elizabeth Withrow was in her 70s when she fell in love with the bluebird. She started a bluebird trail and successfully monitored it until she turned 92 last year. She still looks after the trail occasionally.



Photo by Jonathan Ridgeway

Pauline Tom, chairperson of NABS 2006 and president of the Texas Bluebird Society, accepts an award honoring her for her Outstanding Contribution in the Field of Bluebird Conservation from Steve Garr.

first sight, and when she learned that bluebirds needed our help, one of her goals in life became doing whatever she could to "bring back the bluebird."

After Liz started the bluebird trail at the state park in 1986, many other people followed her example by putting out bluebird boxes on their own property. As a result, eastern bluebirds have become a familiar sight on utility wires and fences in the surrounding area. Liz very reluctantly gave up her bluebird trail at the age of 92, only after finding someone she knew she could trust to carry on her legacy. She still takes turns monitoring the trail when she can get someone else to drive for her.

Pauline Tom of Mountain City, Texas

Pauline is president of the Texas Bluebird Society. It started with a dream — Pauline repeatedly said to friends, "If only we could start miles away and bring them in." She saw a future where many people could be reached for bluebirding and involved in conservation, and when bluebirds would eventually populate lots more counties in Texas because countless individuals installed and monitored "one nest box."

Like her, a significant percentage of the Texas organization's members install their nest box before they see a bluebird; and, quite a few have not seen a bluebird after several years. The journey of growth of the Texas Bluebird Society involves novice bluebirders with a dedication and vision for "Bluebirds Across Texas" that began with her small step... a small step with great dedication and vision, and one giant leap for bluebirds!

The lives of many individuals have been touched by bluebirds and the thousands of bluebirds that have fledged "across an ever-growing expanse of Texas" in the past five years because of Pauline Tom.

Lum and Merriam Bourne of Westerville, Ohio

Each week Lum and Merriam depart their Westerville, Ohio home and make the 150-mile journey to Liberty, Indiana to monitor their nest boxes. They monitor 312 boxes on six trails in Union and Franklin counties in Indiana. These trails include three Department of Natural Resources properties, including Quakertown

State Recreational Area, White-water Memorial State Park and Mounds State Recreational area. They also have a trail at the Liberty Country Club Golf Course.

To date, this team has fledged the following: 6,122 eastern bluebirds, 4,514 tree swallows, 191 Carolina chickadees, 15 Carolina wrens, 570 purple martins.

Lum has constructed over 1,500 bluebird boxes and held several workshops in eastern Indiana. Lum and Merriam's commitment to bluebirds has been the focus of several articles published in Indiana and Ohio newspapers.

The Bournes are proud recipients of the following awards:

- 2000 Ohio Bluebird Society Blue Feather Award for bluebird conservation.
- 2001 Indiana award for "Bluebirder of the Year".
- 2001 Indiana State Parks and



Photo by Jonathan Ridgeway
Above (L-R), Steve Garr, award winners Merriam and Lum Bourne, and Greg Beavers who nominated them for the Outstanding Contribution in the Field of Bluebird Conservation award.

Reservoirs "Volunteer of the Year".

also been a great source of help and education for many novice bluebirders in the states of Ohio and Indiana.

Lum and Merriam Bourne have



Photo by Jonathan Ridgeway
NABS 2006 chair Pauline Tom is shown accepting a "Plaque of Appreciation" from NABS on behalf of the Texas Bluebird Society for hosting the 2006 NABS Convention. Pauline is joined by many of the Texas Bluebird Society members that worked on the convention committee.

Research Roundup

Caribbean Cavity-nester Conservation

By Benjamin E. Leese

BAHAMA NUTHATCH IS A DISTINCT SPECIES

Until recently, the brown-headed nuthatches on Grand Bahama Island were considered a subspecies of the continental Brown-headed Nuthatch (*Sitta pusilla*), but new taxonomic work suggests that it should be considered its own full species, the Bahama Nuthatch (*Sitta insularis*). The researchers base that conclusion on both comparisons of body measurements of the island and mainland population and the detection of a unique warbling song among the Bahamian birds. Recognition as a distinct species would make the Bahama Nuthatch one of four birds species endemic to the Bahamas, found there and nowhere else in the world. Another bird species endemic to the Bahamas, the Bahama Swallow (*Tachycineta cyaneoviridis*) is also a cavity-nester with "near-threatened" status.

A survey by the same researchers suggests that only 1,800 of the Bahama Nuthatches might remain. The species faces threats from competition from introduced species (the House Sparrow and European Starling), non-native predators, and most of all from the loss of its unique habitat in forests of Caribbean Pine, which has been sold for timbering and development.

Literature used:

Hayes, W. K., R. X. Barry, Z. McKenzie, and P. Barry. 2004. Grand Bahama's brown-headed nuthatch: a distinct and endangered species. *Bahamas Journal of Science* 12(1):21-

28. accessed online at <www.birdlife.org/news/news/2005/02/bahama_nuthatch_paper.pdf>.

Allen, P. E. 1996. *Breeding biology and natural history of the Bahama Swallow*. *Wilson Bulletin* 108(3): 480-495.

THE PUERTO RICAN PARROT AND OTHER PARROTS OF THE CARIBBEAN

A wide variety of parrots live on the islands of the Caribbean, and many of these species are found on only one island. A large number of these cavity-nesting species are endangered, and another eight species of psittacines are considered extinct by BirdLife International. All of the twelve species that are of concern nest in cavities. Two of the species, the Cuban Parakeet (*Aratinga euops*) and the Hispaniolan Parakeet

(*Aratinga chloroptera*), are also known to nest in termitaria, which are arboreal termite nests (see the article by Brightsmith listed below for more on this interesting phenomenon). A conservation plan has recently been released for another of the species, the St. Vincent Parrot (*Amazona guildingii*), but many other species are in equal need of conservation efforts. More information about these species is available at <www.birdlife.org> and at <www.loroparque-fundacion.org>.

Of particular interest among those species is the critically endangered Puerto Rican Parrot (*Amazona vittata*), a secondary cavity-nester that is endemic to Puerto Rico. After the extinction of the Carolina Parakeet (*Conuropsis carolinensis*), the Puerto Rican Parrot is the USA's only living native parrot. Only 200 Puerto Rican Parrots remain in the world, with only 30 of those in the wild in Caribbean National Forest in the east of Puerto Rico. With such a small population surviving in the wild, the Puerto Rican Parrot conservation effort relies heavily on a captive breeding program in two aviaries. The captive breeding program is getting a boost this year with the construction of a new aviary in Rio Grande.

The aviaries provide protection for the species against the possibility that the wild population could be wiped out by disease or hurricane. The captive breeding effort also produces birds that are released into the wild, using methods that



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Puerto Rican Parrot

were first researched with the Hispaniolan Parrot (*Amazona ventralis*). Although released birds have a less than 50% survival rate, at least one released male paired with a wild female and fledged two young in 2004. Conditioning birds to avoid raptors while still in captivity appears to be improving survival rates of released birds.

Besides releasing captive raised birds to bolster the wild population, other activities are also underway to help this endangered species. For instance, the Forest Service removes swarms of bees that sometimes usurp parrot cavities. Scientists have also used artificial cavities, constructed primarily of PVC pipe, to provide for the nesting needs of the species. Those sites have very deep cavities in order to reduce the chances of predation by Pearly-eyed Thrashers (*Margarops fuscatus*).

Although the Puerto Rican Parrot

is still one of the rarest birds in the world, with intensive management and captive propagation, the call of this bird may one day again be common in the rainforests of Puerto Rico. More information about this species and recent news releases are available at <www.fws.gov/southeast/prparrot>.

Literature used:

Brightsmith, D. J. 2000. Use of arboreal termitaria by nesting birds in the Peruvian Amazon. *Condor* 102: 529-538.

Collazo, J. A., T. H. White Jr., F. J. Vilella, and S. A. Guerrero. 2003. Survival of captive-reared Hispaniolan Parrots released in Parque Nacional del Este, Dominican Republic. *Condor* 105(2): 198-207.

Culzac-Wilson, L. 2005. *Species Conservation Plan for the St. Vincent Parrot Amazona guildingii*. Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife: Loro Parque Fundación. Accessed online at <www.birdlife.org/regional/caribbean/pdfs/st_vincent_parrot_action_plan.pdf>.

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From the field: Artificial nest cavities for *Amazona* parrots. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 33(2): 756-760.

White, T. H., Jr., J. A. Collazo, F. J. Vilella, and S. A. Guerrero. 2005. Effects of hurricane Georges on habitat use by captive-reared Hispaniolan Parrots (*Amazona ventralis*) released in the Dominican Republic. *Ornitologia Neotropical* 16: 405-417.

EASTERN BLUEBIRD RESEARCH IN BERMUDA

The Conservation Services Department of the Bermuda Ministry of the Environment, along with the Bermuda Audubon Society, is searching for researchers to conduct more investigations of the bluebird population in Bermuda.

Bermuda is the only place outside the continental North America that has a self-sustaining population of Eastern Bluebirds, and the population may represent a distinct subspecies. This group of Bluebirds faces similar problems to its mainland conspecifics, but is also plagued by the difficulty of being an isolated population. If you are interested in applying to research this threatened population of bluebirds, please contact: The Director of Conservation Services, 17 North Shore Road, Flatts, FL03, Bermuda or email: <info@audubon.bm>.

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How to submit a NABS award nomination for outstanding contribution in bluebird conservation

NABS president, Steve Garr, encourages anyone wanting to nominate individuals they feel are deserving of a NABS "Bluebird Conservation Award" to get in touch with the new Awards Chair, Greg Beavers by simply sending an e-mail to him at: <gbeavers@poetworld.net>. Be sure to include your name and contact information as well.

NABS 2006

An overview of the NABS convention held in Texas

Accompanying photos are courtesy of Jonathan Ridgeway

A grand convention experience

By Pauline Tom
*Texas Bluebird Society president
NABS 2006 host and
convention chairperson*

In Texas, the convention was larger than ever before — just with presenters we had over 20, sometimes three simultaneously. Instead of two field trip options on Friday, we offered something like eight; instead of one or two birding trips on Sunday, we offered five.

There were two bat emergence excursions (one with a 12-hour Texas Hill Country Nature Tour at the beginning of the five days and the other to close-out the conference on Sunday night), plus a trip to a military reservation to see two



endangered bird species and more.

We offered a 3-session "Building a Strong Non-Profit" seminar presented by an outside professional.

Lee Haile, a story-telling, song-singing harmonica- and guitar-playing cowboy, stayed with us the entire five days; six authors signed books.

There were two silent auctions plus a lively, entertaining auction with an auctioneer.



Perspective is beginning to return after our whirlwind week in Texas

By David Smith
NYSBS president

The facilities were spacious, attractive, clean and orderly hour after hour during the entirety.

The parade of flags was an awe-inspiring opening ceremony — what a great idea. The program was solid from top to bottom. The opportunity to pursue personal interests in the sub-sessions was very positive.

David Luneau and Gary McCracken proved outstanding choices for keynote and banquet speakers. The Texas "homespun" presentations portrayed nicely some of the Texas culture.

...All of this to express the satisfaction felt by those of us from New

Continues on page 13



hosted by the Texas Bluebird Society

York State with the "Red, White & Bluebirds" convention. Please [accept] the appreciation of NYSBS board and members to the Texas Bluebird Society committee, board and membership, and to your colleagues on the NABS board for a memorable convention.

NOTE: David and his wife Phyllis received a "Bluebird Conservation Award" for their outstanding contribution in the field of bluebird conservation during the NABS 2006 convention. Since 1994 the Smiths have fledged a total of 1,340 birds from their trail. See page 7.



In an area where wildlife abounds, guests of the "Red, White & Bluebirds" NABS 2006 convention were offered a variety of activities and treated to exquisite sights and sounds while participating in field trips, birding trips, etc.





*May you enjoy
visiting or
remembering NABS
2006 via these
wonderful photos
graciously shared by
Jonathan Ridgeway*



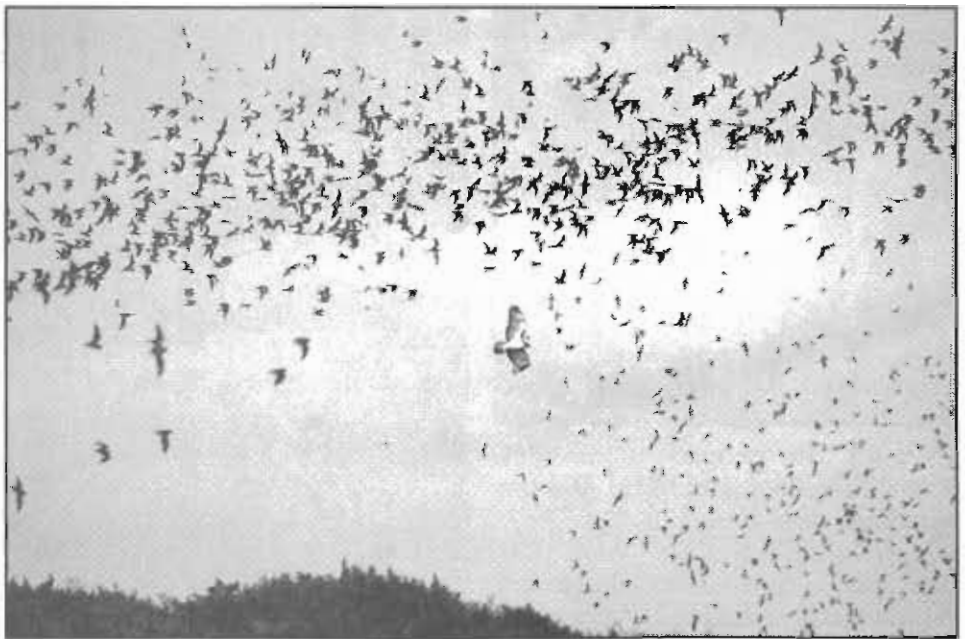
Texas hospitality was first class all the way

By Jonathan and Lynne
Ridgeway

*Ulster County Coordinators of
the NY State Bluebird Society*

NABS 2006 and our week in Brownsville that followed it, were brilliant demonstrations of the overwhelming capacity that the folks in Texas have to display their hospitality. Every stranger we met treated us like family or lifelong friends. Our hosts from the Texas Bluebird Society were certainly no exception.

Vermillion, scissor-tail and ash-throated flycatchers were special treats when Le-Ann accompanied us to her ranch, and we could not stop laughing when Lee tried unsuccessfully to catch the



armadillo we saw.

Out of the more than 30 species we saw on our trip to Lost Maples, we found the painted buntings, blue grosbeaks, olive sparrows, black-crested titmice and cave swallows which we had never seen before most exciting, as well as the indigo buntings, summer tanagers and

broad-winged hawks we had seen previously.

There is no way we will ever forget our experiences at the Frio Rio and Bracken bat caves either, especially watching the emergence of the bats, red-tailed hawks (and snakes) harvesting some of them, the rainbow and the magnificent sunset.

The Texas barbeque with hay ride, cattle feeding, boat ride and great country music was a real taste of Texas.

Of course, the schedule did not permit us to do everything but the events we attended were excellent. June Osborne's touching slide presentation, Keith Kridler's pictures, David Luneau's accounts of actually seeing an ivory-billed woodpecker and Dr. Gary McCracken's free-tail bat lecture were truly first rate features.

Barry Silverberg's management class on nonprofit organizations provided a lot of useful information and ideas, and the Bluebird-L breakfast was a terrific opportunity

Continues on page 16





to meet the people on the list. Even the raffles, and silent and live auctions were great fun.

The parade of the color guard and member state flags was a great idea for the NABS business meeting.

Like the convention itself, the day-long tour of San Antonio was too short, and we would have especially liked to spend more time at the Alamo.

The Imax film contributed a fine understanding about the March 1836 events when nearly 200 heroic Texas patriots made the ultimate sacrifice for liberty, their last stand against the overpowering odds of the army of Mexico's dictator, General Santa Anna.

The best part of NABS conventions



is always the personal relationships we build, seeing old friends and meeting new ones, a sense of being together with family, some of whom we only see once a year or less.

Pauline Tom, together with all the help she got from her husband, Ron, and her most enthusiastic team, put on a NABS convention that will always be remembered as one of the best.

If one aspect will color our memory of it more than any other, it will have to be the Texas hospitality.



Predators and problems on the bluebird trail

Pages 17 and 18 are courtesy of the Minnesota Bluebird Recovery Program

It would be great if all we had to do is put up a bluebird house and presto! — at least six weeks of pleasure watching a loving bluebird family, and pride in helping to increase bluebirds. But — tragedies do occur. Here are some clues to trouble and some well-tried solutions by experienced bluebirders.

THE PERPETRATORS

A = ants	E = English (house) sparrow	MI = deermice	RS = red squirrel	TS = tree swallow
B = blowflies	GN = gnats or blackflies	P = pesticide	S = starling	W = wren
CT = cats	H = hypothermia	RN = raccoon	SN = snake	

(bb = bluebird)

CLUES

NEST

- Clue: Little sticks in box, often up to top, maybe over bb nest: **W**
- Clue: Feathers (usually white) on top of bb nest: **TS**
- Clue: Debris, paper, weeds along with grass nest, often circled high over hole: **E**
- Clue: Shredded bark, leaves etc. filling box: **RS**
- Clue: Shredded milkweed, seed and coneflower seed heads: **MI**
- Clue: Coarse grass mixed with green weeds. Eggs robin-size but lighter blue: **S**

Note: Nests with moss and fur-lined (chickadee); large grass with bits of shed snakeskin (crested flycatcher); shreds of inner bark, fur, feathers, hair (nuthatch); should be welcome if there are boxes enough.

EGGS

- Clue: bb eggs suddenly disappear, nest undisturbed: **W, E, SN**, possibly **RN**
- Clue: bb eggs disappear, nest partially pulled out of hole: **RN** or **CT**
- Clue: bb eggs shattered on ground or in nest: **W, E, RS, Chipmunk**
- Clue: Tiny holes pecked in eggs: **W**

NESTLINGS

- Clue: Nestlings gone, nest intact, parents still around: **CT, SN, E**
- Clue: Nestlings gone, nest partially pulled through hole. Grass below may be trampled, feathers around: **RN, CT**
- Clue: Nestlings dead outside box, sometimes 1/day: **E**
- Clue: Nestlings suddenly dead in box, bodies unmarked, stomachs full, parents still around: **P**
- Clue: Young nestlings dead in wet nest: **H**
- Clue: Nestlings dead in nest, emaciated: **Predator got both parents**
- Clue: Nestlings dead in nest, little blackflies around, red welts on bodies, especially under wings: **GN**
- Clue: Nestlings dead in nest, large red welts over bodies, black pupae or gray maggots under nest: **B larvae**
- Clue: Nestlings mutilated in nest: **E**, or possibly **MI, RS**
- Clue: Female dead in box, head feathers and/or eyes pecked out: **E**

Please turn page for solutions...

Some solutions

- A = Ants.** Slip a paste or liquid ant poison under nest. Or staple a Q-tip soaked in liquid ant poison under nest and bottom of house. Spray with Flys Away II.
- B = Blowflies.** If small black cigar-shaped pupae or gray maggots are found near bottom of nest, lift nest out with young and shake out as many insects as possible. Brush off floor. Spray inside of box with Flys Away II. If nest is wet and highly infested, construct a new one of dry grass and replace nestlings.
- CT = Cats.** Usually leave some feathers around. If cat is known and cannot be confined during nesting period, trim front claws. Trimmed and de-clawed cats can still climb. Use cat/coon guards on box, inverted cone on post. Dispose of itinerant cats.
- E = English (house) sparrow** — bluebirds' worst avian enemy! Will kill adult bluebirds and nestlings. Must be eliminated. Let sparrows start to nest, then trap with sparrow trap. Destroy nest and eggs. Where feasible, use baited ground trap.
- GN = Gnats or blackflies (tiny).** Use Flys Away II for heavy swarms and infestation. Spray inside of box regularly until nestlings are 12-13 days old.
- H = Hypothermia.** Check nest boxes after heavy, slanting rains. Replace wet nest with new dry grass. Young nestlings may die if left in wet nest. Dampness also attracts blowflies. Extended rain with cold endangers both tree swallows and bluebirds.
- MI = Deermice.** Often nest over winter in closed boxes. Leave boxes open during winter if they become a problem. Continue to throw out.
- P = Pesticide poisoning.** Usually a problem at second nesting only. Try to determine if poisons will be used nearby by farmer, groundskeeper, gardener lawn-care company; close boxes to prevent use. Take freshly-dead nestlings to nearest DNR Nongame Specialist for autopsy. Do not put boxes near lawn-treated areas.
- RN = Raccoon.** Use separate smooth metal posts if possible, or smoothly-wrapped tin on wood posts; try cone guards on post, cat/coon guards on box.
- RS = Red squirrel.** Keep nest boxes sealed in winter, or leave open. Climb-proof posts as above and keep away from trees and saplings squirrels could leap from.
- S = Starling.** Use starling trap. Eliminate. Be sure box entrance hole is minimum size for bluebirds. (1-3/4"x2-1/4" or 1-1/2" round).
- SN = Snake.** Climb-proof separate posts or heavily grease.
- TS = Tree swallow.** Pair boxes 25'-30' with 300' between pairs. Remove used bb nests promptly for maximum nesting opportunities.
- W = Wren.** Keep sticks removed. Move bb boxes away from brush, trees, at least 200'-300' if possible. Do not try to solve problem with putting up wren boxes. This only produces more wrens who eventually will go further into open areas to take bluebird boxes or prey on eggs and young.

SUMMARY: Always place boxes high (5'-6') on separate posts; never on trees or on fence lines. In cat/raccoon areas, use cat/coon guards around holes; wrap wooden posts high with smooth tin or, preferably, use smooth narrow metal posts. Grease posts regularly or use inverted cones. Flys Away II is a natural insecticide (pyrethrin) made to spray on open wounds of horses. It has been tested extensively on small birds.

Rocky Mountain Blues benefits Idaho's state bird

From *Windows to Wildlife*, Fall 2005 issue, a publication of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.



Contributed by **Dave Richmond**

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRDS captured the attention of David Richmond after he moved from California in 1993. After reading about this unique species declining due to habitat loss related to logging practices and land use, he joined forces with the world renowned Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology and the North American Bluebird Society in working to provide artificial nestboxes for these magnificent birds. Naturalists from the eastern U.S. and Canada had previously shown that eastern bluebirds, a closely related species, could benefit from human intervention when natural nest sites were not available.

Although many native Idahoans had admired mountain bluebirds and provided nestboxes over the years, there was no organized effort in central Idaho to monitor or recover these birds. Along with a small number of nature lovers, Richmond formed Rocky Mountain Blues and developed a registered bluebird trail in and around Challis, Idaho. Along this trail he and his helpers erected specially designed boxes at specific intervals in appropriate habitat to attract the "Blues".

Since 1998 Rocky Mountain Blues has participated in "citizen science" studies conducted with ornithologists at the Cornell Bird Lab in an effort to better understand the life history needs of this species. "We're doing what we can to improve the chances of mountain bluebirds returning to Idaho for our great grandchildren," said Richmond.

Over the years, the number of nestboxes monitored by Rocky Mountain Blues has increased from seven to 50, with encouraging results. Nest productivity increased from a paltry 21 mountain bluebird eggs laid and six birds fledged in 1998 to 151 eggs laid and 87 young bluebirds fledged in 2005, despite cold and rainy spring weather that caused the abandonment of 33 bluebird nestlings. Great success has also been achieved with other cavity-nesting birds, including the mountain chickadee, a species vital to the health of conifer forests. Another "Blues" beneficiary is the tree swallow, a bird highly prized for its proclivity for eating mosquitoes and other flying insects, as well as for its beauty and acrobatic flight.

This activity keeps Richmond busy building and repairing boxes and monitoring his trail twice weekly during the nesting season. In addition, he has developed a technique to prevent bears from damaging boxes and consuming the contents. For information or to get involved,

<u>Year</u>	<u># Boxes</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u># Eggs</u>	<u># Fledge</u>
1998	7	MOBL	21	6
		MOCH	10	4
		BCCH	5	3
		HOWR	15	14
1999	14	MOBL	21	18
		MOCH	30	19
2000	23	MOBL	40	14
		MOCH	40	35
		HOWR	8	8
		TRES	10	10
2001	24	MOBL	37	16
		MOCH	55	27
		HOWR	5	4
		TRES	11	8
2002	19	MOBL	54	45
		MOCH	34	25
		HOWR	7	5
		TRES	14	11
2003	42	MOBL	107	60
		MOCH	48	29
		HOWR	12	8
		TRES	39	34
		VGSW	4	4
2004	49	MOBL	112	85
		MOCH	52	40
		HOWR	19	11
		TRES	63	37
2005	47	MOBL	151	87
		MOCH	47	32
		HOWR	15	5
		TRES	53	38

contact Dave Richmond at:
<fowest@custertel.net>

Attention NABS affiliates

NABS recently elected VP for Affiliates, Kenny Kleinpeter, is updating affiliate contact information. Please visit the NABS web site www.nabluebirdsociety.org, click on "Affiliates" and check to see that your organization's information is correct. If not, please contact Kenny at <web@nabluebirdsociety.org>.

A call for help — PROJECT PREVENT COLLISION

Wild Bird Centers of America, Inc. is proud to sponsor **PROJECT PREVENT COLLISION**, an international study designed to reduce the number of collisions at your home and in your neighborhood. Beginning spring 2006 and continuing through winter 2008, this research project asks citizen scientists to report past and current window-bird collisions, and to describe architectural features of one's home and the landscape that surrounds it. By compiling information from thousands of participants we will be able to develop recommendations for how to make our homes safer for backyard birds. You can begin today by becoming a citizen scientist for **PROJECT PREVENT COLLISION**, and your participation may help save a bird's life!

HOW SERIOUS IS THE PROBLEM?

Window-bird collisions are a substantial source of human-caused avian mortality. In the United States, it has been estimated that between 100 million and 1 billion birds die in collisions with windows every year, and on average 1-10 birds die per building per year. Collisions are not limited to birds of a particular age or sex, and approximately 25% of the bird species in the United States and Canada including residents and migrants have experienced fatal collisions.

WHERE WINDOW-BIRD COLLISIONS OCCUR AND WHY?

Window-bird collisions are not limited to a particular type of building, windows can be large or small and facing any direction, and collisions occur during all seasons and dur-

ing all times of the day. Birds that are in the vicinity of windows can become victims of a collision.

Clear window panes and those with high reflectivity may not be recognized by birds as barriers, and birds subsequently fly into them. Specifically, daytime collisions can occur in several ways. First, birds may not recognize glass as a reflective barrier and attempt to fly to the habitat that is being reflected. Also, birds may not be able to recognize a corridor of windows as a barrier. For example, birds may see through the sides of a bay window or see through glass corridors, and attempt to fly to the other side. Finally, during the breeding season, territorial males often see their reflection, and repeatedly attack the perceived intruder.

SOLUTIONS

There are several steps that one can take to reduce the number of

daytime window-bird collisions.

For pre-existing homes, moving bird feeders to within three feet of a window has been shown to eliminate fatal collisions that are a result of bird feeding activities. Placing decals (e.g., hawk silhouettes) on the outside of windows can also reduce the number of collisions. Multiple decals will be needed on large windows, and decals should be placed no more than four inches apart vertically and two inches apart horizontally to be most effective. Other possible solutions include adding physical barriers to the windows such as awning and netting.

For homes to be constructed, angling windows downward at 20 or 40 degrees can reduce the number of window-bird collisions. In addition, birds are more susceptible to collisions with larger window panes (> 6 sq. ft.).

Window kills solution

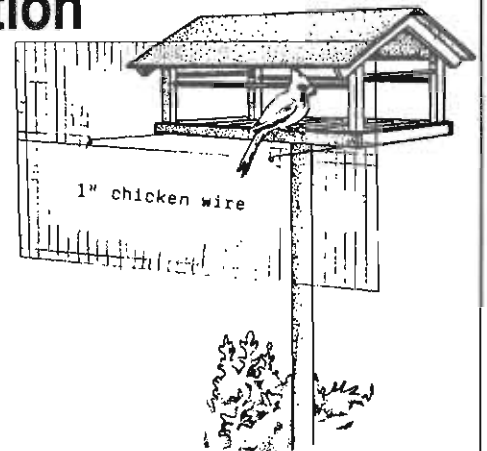
Reprinted with permission from the Nature Society News.

By Dick Hjort

WHEN BIRDS become startled while feeding, many times they simply turn and fly as hard as they can... right into windows of your house. To cut down on the chance of this happening (more often than we'd like to admit) it may be necessary to change their flight pattern from the feeder.

The simplest solution is to turn all feeders so instead of the open sides being to and from your house, have feeders so the birds will fly towards an open area.

But for those feeders that are permanently mounted, or for some other reason that makes it impossible to move their direction, here's an idea that works.



Put a hanging mesh barrier in front of these feeders (this also works for tube feeders, etc.) as illustrated. In order to aim for windows they must make a sharp turn, slowing them down considerably.

In a year's time, we went from 12 to 16 window kills to only one.

Recent literature: Competition for Cavities

By Benjamin E. Leese

Bluebird trail monitors often observe evidence of competition for cavity nest sites between various species that use nest boxes. Such competition appears to be a main cost of the adaptation of using cavities as nest sites. In other words, cavities are a more limited resource than are sites at which to build open-cup nests, and therefore cavity nesters must compete more for nest sites than do species with different nesting strategies. Three examples of direct interference competition for cavities have recently appeared in the literature. Another recent paper reported interspecific nest sharing, which probably occurred as a result of competition for the cavity.

Two researchers in Oregon reported a red-naped sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus muchalis*) usurping the nest cavity of a red-breasted nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*). The incident happened in the spring of 2003, when a male sapsucker enlarged the opening of the nuthatch cavity and removed the nesting material and eggs, which were near hatch-

ing. The nuthatches exhibited scolding behavior, but did not physically try to drive off the usurper. The sapsuckers attempted nesting in the usurped cavity, but the attempt failed.

A group of researchers from Texas reported multiple attempts by wood ducks (*Aix sponsa*) to usurp a cavity excavated and used by pileated woodpeckers (*Dryocopus pileatus*). In the spring of 1996, the researchers watched as pairs of wood ducks (at least four pairs in the area) attempted to usurp the cavity from the nesting woodpeckers. On 11 observed occasions, a female wood duck flew at the cavity, and 10 of those times, the duck was intercepted by the male woodpecker. On two occasions, a female actually entered the cavity while it contained nestlings. The male woodpecker successfully dislodged the duck on both occasions. After the pileated woodpeckers fledged, a pair of wood ducks continued investigating the cavity, but the researchers did not report if they successfully raised young there. The incident suggests that competition may be especially high for

large cavities, which in North America are only excavated by pileated woodpeckers and the few remaining ivory-billed woodpeckers (*Campephilus principalis*).

In Montana, two researchers recorded that a mountain bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*) likely usurped a nest box from tree swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*) in June 2002. The bluebird did so by killing two nesting adults, one male and one female. Four eggs were already in the tree swallow nest when the bluebird built their own nest over the swallow bodies and their nest. The bluebirds subsequently laid six eggs in the nest box. While the two species are known to compete for nests, the authors believe that this is the first instance of double interspecific killing between these two species in order to usurp a nest cavity.

The most recent paper on competition for cavities documented not interference competition, but interspecific nest sharing. The researchers from British Columbia reported that in May and June of 2004 they discovered one cavity that contained two red-breasted

Continues on page 22 →

Chicago, New York and Toronto lead in protecting birds

IN A RECENT AP story carried by newspapers throughout the country, it was reported that Chicago now has a bird hospital devoted to treating and rehabilitating birds that have been injured from window collisions. The hospital is operated by a group that has for years, literally walked the streets of Chicago snatching up dazed and wounded birds that have fallen to the ground after hitting windows in tall buildings/sky-



scrapers, before the birds could become a victim of a predator, stepped on, or hit by traffic. They individually helped the injured

birds to mainstream back into the wild. With the aid of the new bird hospital, many more birds will be able to be treated and returned to the air.

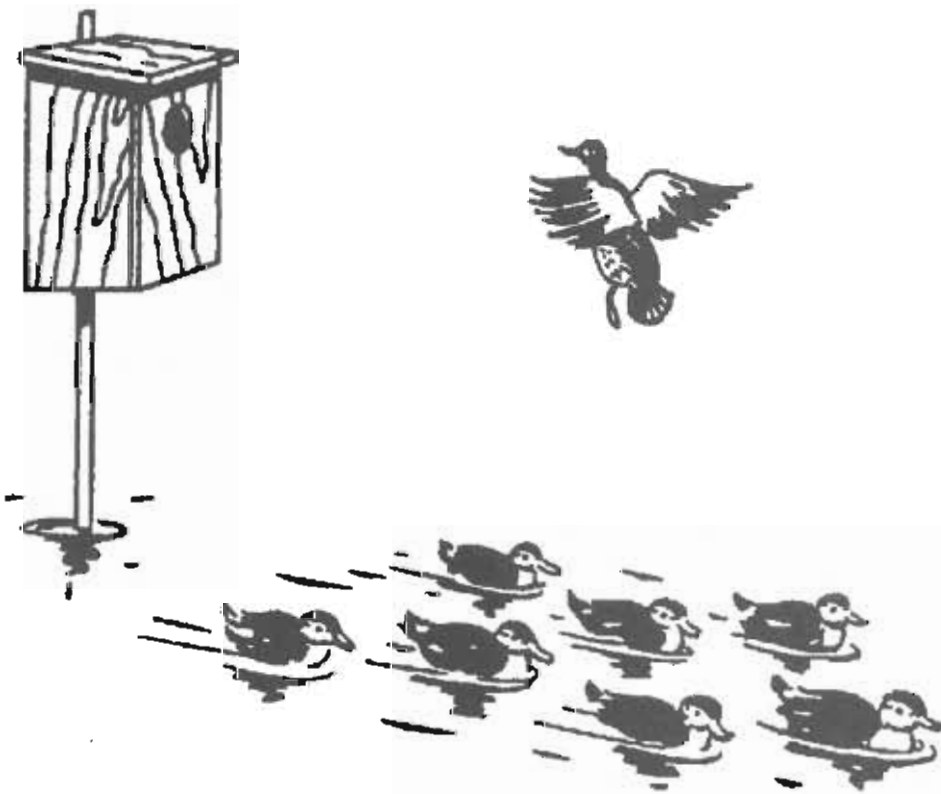
Chicago, New York and Toronto have a dedicated "lights out" program that requires high-rise buildings to turn off lights at night during the migration season. This has saved thousands of winged migrants from an untimely death by window collision.

nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*) and three mountain chickadee (*Poecile gambeli*) nestlings. The nest was attended by two adult chickadees early in the nestling period, but only by a female nuthatch later in the nestling period. The nuthatch continued to feed the chickadee nestlings, even after the nuthatch chicks had fledged. While there are examples of one species raising young of another for a variety of reasons, but this example seems to be a rare report of actual nest sharing including cooperative feeding of both species of nestlings by both species of parents. Competition for the cavity may have been a large factor in causing this nest sharing situation.

These four recent observations highlight the importance of competition for nest sites as a selection factor among cavity nesting birds. In a natural situation, species using cavities benefit from a site that is safer from predators, weath-

er, and temperature changes than open nests. However, the principle costs of cavity nesting, according to the literature, are increased risk of hypothermia in nestlings, increased vulnerability to nest parasites, and fierce competition for nest sites (especially for the safer, higher sites). In fact, one researcher reports that 90.5% of all nest usurpations reported in the literature involve cavities. Interference competition may be lower in artificial cavities than in natural cavities, because they can be provided at a higher density. However, competition for particular sites remains intense, as demonstrated by the example from Montana. Competition for nest cavities, its frequency and its role in selection pressures for cavity nesting species, remains poorly understood and merits further research and careful observation of all such interactions.

(*Benjamin E. Leese is from Spring Grove, Pennsylvania.*)



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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 recog-

nized 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 Kenny Kleinpeter at <web@nablubirdsociety.org> with correct information.

CANADA

Alberta
Calgary Area Bluebird Trail Monitors
c/o George Loades, 167 Canterbury Dr SW
Calgary, AB, Canada T2W 1H3
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
PO Box 401 Stn Main
Lethbridge, AB, Canada T1K 3Z1
403-553-2780

British Columbia

Southern Interior Bluebird Trail Society
Contact: Terry Teller, Box 494
Oliver, BC, Canada V0H 1T0
t.teller@shaw.ca

Manitoba

The Friends of the Bluebirds
c/o Barry Canard, Box 569
Killarney, MB, Canada R0K 1G0
204-523-8258; jbdanard@mts.net

Ontario

Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society
Contact: Marion Laing
4381 Glancaster Rd
Mt. Hope, ON, Canada L0R 1W0
905-679-3297; jm.laingsimpatico.ca

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 Ptarmigan Dr. #1
Walnut Creek CA 94595
925-937-5974; fax 925-935-4480
cbrp@value.net

Colorado

Colorado Bluebird Project
Audubon Society of Greater Denver
9308 S. Wadsworth Blvd.
Littleton CO 80128
303-973-9530; fax 303-973-1038
bluebirdproject@denveraudubon.org

Georgia

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

Idaho

Our Bluebird Ranch
152 N 200 E., Blackfoot ID 83221
208-782-9676; pjbarnes@micron.net
Rocky Mountain Blues
c/o David Richmond
HC 67 Box 680, Clayton ID 83227
208-838-2431; fax 208-838-2685
fowest@custerter.net

Illinois

JoDavies County BBRP
c/o Grace Storch
431 Stadel Rd, Elizabeth IL 61028
bluebird@naturalareaguardians.org
East Central Illinois Bluebird Society
c/o Loren Hughes
1234 Tucker Beach Rd, Paris IL 61944
217-463-7175; suziq@comwares.net

Indiana

Indiana Bluebird Society
c/o Ken Murray
P.O. Box 134, Rensselaer, IN 47978-0134
ibs@indianabluebirdsociety.org
The Brown County Bluebird Society
c/o Dan Sparks
P.O. Box 660, Nashville IN 47448
812-988-1876; fax 360-361-3704
b4bluebirds@yahoo.com
American Bird Conservation Association
c/o Merlin Lehman
59980 CR 35, Middlebury IN 46540
274-825-2619

Iowa

Johnson County Songbird Project
c/o Jim Walters
1033 E Washington
Iowa City IA 52240-5248
319-466-1134; james-walters@uiowa.edu
Bluebirds of Iowa Restoration
c/o Jadyln Hill
2946 Ubben Avenue
Ellsworth IA 50075-7554
515-836-4579; bluebird1@netins.net
Iowa Bluebird Conservationists
c/o Jerad Getter
PO Box 302, Griswold IA 51535
712-624-9433; jgetter@hotmail.com

Kentucky

Kentucky Bluebird Society
c/o Bob Ivy
PO Box 3425, Paducah KY 42002
270-898-6688; bobivy@centurytel.net

Louisiana

Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society
c/o Evelyn Cooper
PO Box 983, Delhi LA 71232
318-878-3210; emcooper@bayou.com

Massachusetts

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

Minnesota

Bluebird Recovery Program
(Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis)
c/o Mary Ellen Vetter
PO Box 3801, Minneapolis MN 55403
mevetter@mninter.net

Mississippi

Mississippi Bluebirds
c/o Tena Taylor
192 CR 457, Calhoun City MS 38916
Day 662-628-6611; fax/night 662-628-1625
ccbluebirder@tds.net

Montana

Mountain Bluebird Trails, Inc.
c/o Robert Niebuhr
600 Central Ave Ste 320
Great Falls MT 59401
406-453-5143; 406-453-3840
blubrdbob@prodigy.net

Nebraska

Bluebirds Across Nebraska
c/o Derry Wolford
705 9th Ave, Shenandoah IA 51601
derrywolford@hotmail.com

New Hampshire

New Hampshire Bluebird Conspiracy
c/o Bruce Burdett
PO Box 103, Sunapee NH 03782
603-763-5705; blueburd@tds.net

New York

New York State Bluebird Society
c/o Kevin Berner
499 W Riehmndville Rd
Richmondville NY 12149
518-294-7196; bernerkl@cobleskill.edu
Scholarie County Bluebird Society
c/o Kevin Berner
499 W Richmondville Rd
Richmondville NY 12149
518-294-7196; bernerkl@cobleskill.edu

North Carolina

North Carolina Bluebird Society
c/o Helen S. Munro
22 Bobolink Rd
Jackson Springs NC 27281
910-673-6936; hsmunro@ac.net
Rutherford County Bluebird Club
Contact: Christopher Greene
PO Box 247, Ellenboro NC 28040-0247

Ohio

Ohio Bluebird Society
c/o Bernie Daniel
9211 Solon Dr, Cincinnati OH 45242
OHBluebird@sssnet.com

Oklahoma

Oklahoma Bluebird Society
c/o Mark Weathers
PO Box 269, Tulsa OK 74101-0269
918-241-2473; fax 918-699-3358
sialia@worldnet.att.net

Oregon

Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project
Contact: Patricia Johnson
PO Box 1469, Sherwood OR 97140
503-245-8449
email@prescottbluebird.com.

Pennsylvania

Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania
Contact: Shirley Halk
RD 1 Box 6630, Grantville PA 17028
717-865-2650
zebrasallowtail@juno.com
Purple Martin Conservation Association
Contact: Louise Chambers
Edinboro University of Pennsylvania
Edinboro PA 16444
814-734-4420; 814-734-5803
info@purplemartin.org

Tennessee

Benton County Bluebird Society of Tennessee, Inc.
David Hayes, president
680 Clifty Village Ln, Paris TN 38242
Day 731-584-8201; night 731-644-2541
dhayes@unimin.com
Tennessee Bluebird Trails
c/o Sarah Dunn
5007 Palace Ln, Knoxville TN 37918
865-689-2445; tnbtc@comcast.net

Texas

Texas Bluebird Society
c/o Pauline Tom
PO Box 40868, Austin TX 78704
512-268-5678
info@texasbluebirdsociety.org

Virginia

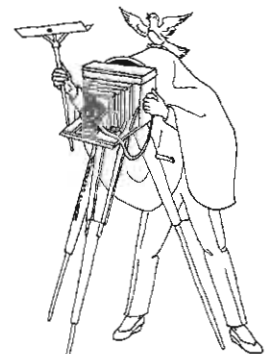
The Virginia Bluebird Society
726 William St
Fredricksburg VA 22401
540-373-4594; vbs@virginiabluebirds.org

Washington

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

Wisconsin

Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin
c/o Patrick Ready
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