



Bluebird

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Photo by Marcella Hawkins

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A Gift of Shelter

By Laurie Lomas

Nineteen blue bird boxes can be found in and around Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge in Liberty, Texas. These Bluebird boxes were a gift from the Friends of the Trinity River Refuge and the Lower Trinity Valley Bird Club. Installation of the blue bird boxes began in 1997 in hopes of attracting Eastern Bluebirds as well as Carolina Wrens, Carolina Chickadees, and Prothonotary Warblers. Over the years many migrants have taken up residence in our boxes!

The fledgling success ratio – the percentage of fledged bluebirds to the total eggs laid --had steadily climbed from 86% to 91% between 2002 and 2004, but has fallen in recent years. In 2005 the success ratio was 84% and has dropped again to 71% in this season (2006). Overall however, of the 401 Bluebird eggs counted from 1997 to 2006, 288 (72%) of them resulted in fledglings.

Some in this area may suspect Hurricane Rita for the recent decline in nest success; however, a greater force may be at work: drought. In east Texas, annual precipitation averages 61 inches per year. Conversely, only 46.84 inches of rain fell in 2005 and only 39 inches have fallen since January to July of this year. We are not sure what Mother Nature has in store for us weather-wise, but we will continue to provide a shelter for cavity-nesting migratory birds. There is nothing more delightful than encountering a quiet little nest holding 4-5 Bluebirds eggs or a noisy little nest of hungry, half-feathered Bluebird chicks!

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From the President

By BERNIE DANIEL

Hello, my name is Bernie Daniel and I am writing this column to you as the president of NABS. I suppose that statement is as much a surprise to you as it is to me. No doubt you have also noticed that there are many changes in the list of officers and trustees as well. I believe that the members deserve some explanation about these new personnel and as to what has taken place since the last issue of *Bluebird*.

To make a long story short, a few weeks after the NABS 2006 Convention in Texas the Executive Director, Gary Springer resigned in a letter citing an inability to work with the NABS executive committee. I do not feel it is my place to comment on the merits of Mr. Springer's position or on his decision to resign. This was his personal decision and I respect it. Shortly after the resignation the NABS Board directed President Steve Garr to hold a teleconference call to discuss the current situation and to decide how to deal with it. Following this meeting the executive committee of NABS opted to resign as well. Again it is not my intention to comment on the merits of any of these decisions. These are all personal matters. I will only say that, in my opinion, all of the individuals I know who have worked for NABS, in any capacity, have always had the best of intentions and have had the interest of the Society in mind. Simply said, there were strong disagreements among the Board and the Officers as to how best to proceed following the Executive

Director's resignation.

Subsequent to this meeting and acting within the NABS by-laws the Board appointed new officers and in addition, also in accordance with the by-laws, appointed some additional Board members. Several Board members and officers who had initially resigned later reconsidered and these persons were re-appointed to fill out their terms. If you look at the current list of trustees and officers I think that you will find a highly qualified and competent group of individuals serving NABS. I am certainly grateful for every one of them who stepped forward to volunteer to help run our Society during this period.

That is the situation at this time. I personally consider my appointment as NABS president an interim measure. I will serve in this capacity until the NABS 2007 conference when a newly elected executive committee can step in to continue the affairs of NABS. Under the by-laws Board members appointed to fill existing terms may complete those terms if they so desire

I can assure the members that all NABS assets are accounted for. The NABS Zeleny Fund is secure in a money account and is intact. The NABS banking accounts have been transferred to another division of the Charter National Bank (from Georgia to Indiana) and these accounts are being managed by the appointed treasurer, Mr. Dan Sparks of Indiana. Dan is also

maintaining the NABS catalog and he is sending out items as member request it. The NABS bank balance has grown substantially in the last few months and by the time the next *Bluebird* is published in the winter we will have developed a regular financial accounting system so as to keep the membership updated on all NABS finances in each quarterly publication.

NABS has a new mailing address in Miami, Ohio. We are proceeding slowly but deliberately in dealing with all outstanding matters. Some of our members may be unhappy with the pace we are making, but it is worth pointing out that we no longer have any salaried workers in NABS. At this time the business of NABS is being conducted by volunteer workers. Most of the officers and trustees are also full-time employees. If you are wondering whether we could use some help the answer is yes - - and it would be gladly accepted too!

The NABS web site is being managed by Vice President Kenny Kleinpeter of Louisiana. No doubt you have all noticed the very attractive redesign of the entire site. This re-refresh was accomplished single handedly by Kenny. He has also re-activated the Pay Pal account so now members can renew memberships and purchase items from the web page.

The spirit of cooperation among the leadership group is high and many of the traditional NABS operations are back in place. Mr. Robert

Benson (Massachusetts, NABS Board) has volunteered to run the nestbox approval program, Mr. Robert Barron (Virginia) is serving as the copy editor of *Bluebird*, Ms. Tena Taylor (Mississippi) is managing the membership data base. Ms. Helen Munro (Maryland) and Patty Gowaty (NABS Board) are working on setting up NABS 2007 in September 2007 at the University of Georgia. This event will be hosted for the first time directly by NABS.

Mr. Brian Swanson (Virginia, NABS board) is heading up a special effort to find ways for NABS to work in a meaningful and effective way with our affiliate organizations. We have explored ways in which NABS might work with the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. The members will be seeing a real effort on the part of NABS to understand how we can work cooperatively with the affiliate organizations in

the states and provinces. Certainly there must be things that NABS as a continental scale organization can do more effectively than the local societies. Likewise some things are best done at the local level. But if we all (both NABS and the affiliate organizations) are really to serve out stated missions – to help native cavity nesting species and especially our bluebirds -- then we must find a way to work efficiently and cooperatively not competitively. Let's work together to find the duties that each can best do and then craft a plan of action to make it happen.

The NABS membership committee including chairperson Pauline Tom (NABS Board), Phil Berry (Florida, NABS Board) and Tena Taylor (Mississippi) have just completed a very successful membership drive which has resulted in several hundred membership renewals to the Society. We are aware of some

errors in the membership data base and will work on it until all issues are resolved. No member will lose out in this process.

Since the Board meeting in question we have secured a new printer/publisher for *Bluebird*. In July of 2006, following the resignation of the sitting editor we had to totally restart *Bluebird* and generate new material. We very much need additional copy for *Bluebird* – if you are so inclined please send us your stories and articles.

In the next issue we will also present to you the summary minutes of the several teleconference calls that we have had in an effort to reorganize NABS.

Sincerely,

Bernie Daniel



North American Bluebird Society

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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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Nest Box Grids for Tree Swallows

By Dick Tuttle

For many bluebird conservationists across North America, efforts to help breeding bluebirds also attract nesting Tree Swallows. As an example, my nest boxes have raised more than 8,500 Eastern Bluebirds since 1968, and more than 17,000 of the white-bellied swallows have fledged from my trails in Central Ohio since their first nests appeared in 1977. After initial concern that swallows were going to dominate my trails at the expense of bluebirds, I learned to successfully manage trails beneficial to both species.

For a quarter of a century, I have practiced pairing boxes to lessen competition between bluebirds and swallows. Allen Prigge of Oregon first described the practice in *Sialia* in 1981. Pairing works because swallows, especially females, guard their nests against other swallows to a

distance of ten to 15 yards. Another nest box placed within a swallow's defended territory, will not (usually) host additional swallows, but will be available for another species, hopefully, bluebirds.

In habitats attractive to bluebirds, I pair boxes five yards apart, with one hundred yards between box pairs so bluebirds and swallows can nest harmoniously, usually after a small skirmish.

In tall-grass habitats not attractive to bluebirds, I do not pair boxes, but space them 25 yards apart to raise swallows. Swallows prefer wet habitats, especially those with ponds, open marshes, and poorly drained grasslands. Swallows enjoy clear glide paths around their nests so I avoid trees

when placing boxes for them.

Over the past two decades, my efforts have included lines of nest boxes 25-yards apart along shores, within bodies of water, and on land. Among the configurations have been five boxes in an ice-skating pond, fifteen boxes in a reservoir, and a trail



A tree swallow claims one nest box in a row of five. Five such rows make up a five by five nest box grid for Tree Swallows. Often an Eastern Bluebird pair will claim and nest in one box in a grid.

of nineteen boxes forming an oval in a grassy field. I have enjoyed walking, wading, bicycling and canoeing to monitor these boxes, all to attract Tree Swallows. During most nesting seasons, bluebirds shared the effort with their nests, sometimes even nesting over water.

Since 2001, I have promoted nest box grids where rows of boxes cross at right angles, a configuration researchers use to study Tree Swallows. Ornithologists saturate study areas with boxes spaced at 20 meters (one meter = 1.09 yards, 20 meters = 21.8 yards) in order to study avian dynamics. I space my grids at 25-yards (22.9 meters) since the measurement is most familiar to the public in my region.

The number of rows and the

number of boxes in each row describe the size of a nest box grid. For example, my first grid was a nine-box, three by three square grid on the grounds of a wastewater treatment plant. Two years ago, I established another three by three-grid in Delaware State Park and I helped Girl Scouts establish a grid of the same size on an education farm. Before the past nesting season, I plotted a 16-box four by four-grid in Gallant Woods Preserve in Delaware County. Also, at their request, I helped the City of Delaware plot 20 boxes at their wastewater treatment facility so that eight boxes surround an overflow pond while the remaining 12 boxes form an irregular grid.

My most exciting grid trails are located on the Delaware Wildlife Area managed by the Ohio Division of Wildlife where hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing are

the recreational uses. For the last two years, the wildlife area has been home to two 25-box grids. Both grids are in natural wetlands where I walk through head-high cattails to check some of the boxes. The first row in each grid runs parallel and 20 yards from the road. One grid occupies the corner of a field with rows of 2, 6, 6, 5, 4, and two boxes, respectively, making its shape irregular. During the 2006 season, all 25 nest boxes raised swallows for a grid total of 132. Interestingly, eight of the nest boxes raised a second brood for a 32 percent rate, an unheard of occurrence of second broods for this species.

Even though all of my grids

Continued on page 6...

have raised bluebirds in the past, I did not expect bluebirds to nest in a habitat with tall wetland vegetation. I was surprised when bluebirds claimed two grid nest boxes with first eggs laid on June 18 and 22, when 14 of 25 boxes had active swallow nests. Most surprisingly, the nests were 71 yards apart (two diagonals in the grid). Both nests fledged bluebirds. The parents hunted in different territories that included a paved road and a mowed access trail along a wooded lakeshore.

The second wildlife area grid is my favorite for promoting the grid concept because it is perfectly square with five rows of five boxes each. "Each side is as long as a football field," a phrase I quote when I teach at the site. This grid raised 127 swallows from 22 boxes with four boxes fledging second broods. One additional box raised two families of bluebirds.

Since the grids are on public land, I make sure the boxes are neatly painted and numbered and four-inch PVC baffles thirty inches long protect the nests from climbing predators. I even painted the baffle caps to match the boxes. All of the boxes have floor areas of twenty square inches or larger to accommodate large swallow families. All boxes have footholds below the entrance on the inside surface of the front panel so weak and starving adult swallows can bat-climb to the entrance following early Spring cold spells. In other words, none of my boxes are swallow traps!

Each grid on public land has its own interpretive sign with the agency's logo and an image of a Tree Swallow in flight. The printed message is the same, however:



An interpretive sign explains how a nest box grid for Tree Swallows works. Frozen floodwaters had compressed the vegetation in this grid before the 2005 season. By the season's end, scattered stands of cattails had grown head-high.

Swallows

Breeding populations of TREE SWALLOWS can be concentrated when nest boxes are spaced 25 yards apart in NEST BOX GRIDS. Originally called white-bellied swallows, Tree Swallows historically nested in tree cavities above beaver ponds. They sweep the air within forty feet above open wetlands, ponds, and moist soils to catch extremely small flying insects, including flies, mosquitoes, leafhoppers and midges. Parents feed 6,000 insects a day to their nestlings.

Tree Swallows inspect nest boxes in March, first eggs appear in late April, and nestlings are fed from mid-May through July.

Since Eastern Bluebirds occupy larger territories, only one pair will nest within this grid.

If a grid is laid out with rows crossing at right angles, boxes also line up diagonally, making for an eye-catching concentration of nest boxes. Two measuring tapes 100 feet long, chalk line, and calculations using the Pythagorean Theorem were used

to plot neat, effective nest box grids for Tree Swallows. In the next issue of Bluebird, I will describe the fine points of grid management, interpretation and education.

In the meantime, plan to welcome swallows to your trails, even in the southern states. My hypothesis is that this species is using our nest boxes to reclaim its ancestral range, the same range shared over four hundred years ago with *Castor canadensis* -- the North American Beaver.

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Introduction to the paper by Bay and McGaha.

Bernie Daniel, Ph.D.

In its early day your journal, *Bluebird* was called *Sialia*. It was thus named for the genus name that the three bluebird species share: (the Eastern bluebird, *Sialia sialis*; the Mountain bluebird, *Sialia currucoides*; and the Western bluebird *Sialia mexicana*). In those earlier times *Bluebird* (or *Sialia*) was much more like a technical or scientific journal than the more topical publication that it is today.

In fact, it is not hard to find a scientific studies conducted by university researchers working on bluebirds that cite articles published earlier in *Sialia* in just the way they might cite a research paper published in an ornithological journal. The exact reasons as to why *Sialia* changed its name to *Bluebird* and why the content shifted to a less technical format are, no doubt related to the fact that most NABS members are bluebird enthusiasts who happen to put up nestboxes, not research scientists or ornithologists,.

Thus, the less technical format served a valid purpose and we do not propose changing *Bluebird* back to a journal of only scientific studies on cavity nesting bird species. However, as NABS looks forward

to redefine its future, many of us believe that it might be wise to consider our past and use the rich history of NABS to help us chart a new path forward.

Therefore, in the spirit of looking to our past, the reader will find below a reprint of a research paper on bluebird ecology published in the Oklahoma Academy of Science by Michael Bay and Hope McGaha in 2000. This paper studies the prey items that Eastern Bluebird parents bring back to the nest and also measures the growth rate of the nestlings. This study demonstrates how scientists apply systematic data collection and analysis techniques to increase our knowledge about the birds that we are working with...

You will note the use of scientific names for the insect and other prey items observed in the study. To assist our readers, I offer the following information: The term, Orthoptera, derived from the Greek "ortho" meaning straight and "ptera" wing, refers to the parallel-sided structure of the front wings of the phylogenic Order that includes grasshopper-like insects such as Acrididae (grasshoppers), Tettigoniidae (katydids),

and Gryllidae (crickets). Lepidoptera, the name of the Order that includes butterflies and moths, derived from the Greek words "lepidō" for scale and "ptera" for wings, refers to the flattened hairs (scales) that cover the body and wings of most adult butterflies and moths.

Other insects mentioned in this article as bluebird prey are: Homoptera (cicadas), isopoda (sow bugs), Coleoptera (beetles), Diptera (flies), Hymenoptera (bees and wasps), and Diplopoda (millipedes). In addition, Arachnida (spiders) represent a very important non-insect prey item for Eastern Bluebirds. The authors discuss the similarities and differences in the prey items found in a similar study conducted in Michigan.

This paper is a good example of how researchers carefully apply scientific methods to document details about the ecology and natural history of the birds we are assisting. If you find scientific papers like this one to be of interest, please let us know. Likewise, if you would prefer not see article of such technical nature, let us know that too. This is your Society and your journal.

Notes on The Ecology of Nestling Eastern Bluebirds Occupying Nest Boxes in Pontotoc County, Oklahoma

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Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) nestlings were monitored from nest boxes during the 1996-97 breeding season in Pontotoc County, Oklahoma. Growth was calculated to have an asymptotic weight of 26.0 grams and the

mean fledgling age was 17.8 days. Primary food materials delivered to nestlings were grasshoppers (Order Orthoptera), moths and butterflies (Order Lepidoptera), and spiders (Class Arachnida). © 2000 Oklahoma Academy of Science

INTRODUCTION The Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) is one of several cavity nesting species in Oklahoma that readily use man-made nest boxes. Current interest in this species is widespread due not only to its aesthetic

beauty but also to concerns about population stability resulting from competition with other species for cavity sites (1). Perhaps because of its willingness to accept man-made nest cavities, knowledge about the natural history and ecology of the Eastern Bluebird and other *Sialia* species has been enhanced (2-5). However, little has been published from the east-central part of its breeding range. Because the nestling period is usually the most crucial time in a bird's life, new

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information relative to growth, development and food preferences in different parts of the breeding range is important to a further understanding of its ecology.

METHODS

During the 1996-97 breeding season, we monitored bluebird nest boxes mounted on posts distributed on approximately 190 ha of partially grazed pasture land in Pontotoc County, Oklahoma, approximately 8 miles northeast of the city of Ada. Nestboxes were placed at the edge of a pasture, 2.5 m from the edge of a woodland consisting of various species of oak (*Quercus*) and hickory (*Carya*). Nestboxes were checked daily for the duration of the breeding season (May-July) in 1996-97. Nestling weights and measurements were recorded daily at approximately the same time in order to ensure a 24-h time lapse between measurements. After weighing nestlings, a wire ligature was tied around the throat to prevent swallowing. These were removed after food items had been collected for 1-1.5 h (3,6). We also observed the boxes from a distance using a spotting scope to determine materials brought to the nest. This allowed us to determine the food material of older nestlings because nest disturbance at that time might lead to premature fledging. We also were able to collect remains of some items that

were not swallowed and had fallen into the nest. A water displacement method was used to determine the comparative volumes of various types of food.

8.2 d compared to 9.0 d for Michigan nestlings studied by Pinkowski (2). The mean fledging age in Pontotoc County was 17.8 d (SD=0.75 days; n=31) for late spring and summer broods, whereas Pinkowski (2) reported 18.63 d. Pinkowski (2) noted that in Michigan, the fledging period was longer in spring than in summer possibly due to cooler conditions and reduced food sources. In our study, no significant difference in growth rate occurred between the two periods ($t=1.33$, $df=22$, $P>0.05$). The faster growth rate and shorter fledging period for Oklahoma nestlings may

be related to warmer climatic conditions at a lower latitude and perhaps a more favorable food supply.

Food Habits: Orthopteran insects composed the greatest percentage (41.7%) of nestling food, which included the families Acrididae (18.6%), Tettigoniidae (16.6%) and Gryllidae (8.2%; mostly *Gryllus pennsylvanicus*). A variety of spiders (Class Arachnida; especially Family Lycosidae) were the second most common prey item (24.7%), with lepidopterans (primarily larvae) third (17.5%). Less frequent prey included homopterans (4.9%, primarily cicada nymphs), isopods (4.9%), coleopterans (2.1%), dipterans (2.1%), hymenopterans

TABLE 1. Weight and tarsal length of nestling Eastern Bluebirds in Pontotoc County, Oklahoma, 1996-97.

age= days after hatching	sample size	weight (g)			tarsal length (mm)		
		M	SD	R	M	SD	R
0 (hatch day)	31	2.5	0.2	2.0-3.0	0.49	0.02	0.4-0.5
1	47	3.8	0.6	3.1-4.8	0.58	0.06	0.5-0.7
2	43	5.3	0.9	2.9-7.1	0.70	0.08	0.5-0.8
3	53	8.0	1.2	3.4-10.7	0.88	0.09	0.7-1.1
4	48	11.0	1.5	7.0-13.5	1.1	0.12	0.7-1.5
5	46	13.9	2.0	8.9-18.5	1.3	0.19	0.8-1.8
6	35	6.8	1.8	12.1-20.5	1.5	0.12	1.3-1.8
7	41	20.0	2.0	17.3-23.7	1.8	0.13	1.6-2.1
8	23	21.3	1.7	16.1-22.5	1.9	0.12	1.7-2.2
9	38	24.0	1.9	19.4-26.0	2.0	0.12	1.8-2.2
10	52	25.2	1.7	21.4-28.5	2.1	0.12	1.9-2.3
11	44	25.3	1.4	22.3-27.9	2.1	0.11	1.9-2.3
12	35	25.6	1.3	22.9-28.1	2.1	0.06	1.9-2.2

M=mean, SD=standard deviation, R=range

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Nestling Growth: Table 1 shows the growth pattern from hatch day (Day 0) through Day 12 of the nestling period. The overall growth rate or rate index (K) was calculated using the logistic pattern as described by Ricklefs (7). For bluebird nestlings in this study, the asymptotic weight was 26.0 g and the growth rate index or weight gain of 65 nestlings (16 broods) was 0.513. Pinkowski (2) calculated the growth rate for bluebird nestlings in Michigan at 0.488 which was 1.05 times slower than that of Oklahoma nestlings. The time

interval for growth from 10% to 90% of the asymptotic weight was

(1.0%), and diplopoda (0.5%). Similar types of prey have been reported from other regions with some variation in frequency. For instance, Pinkowski (3) found that lepidopterans were taken in greatest quantity in Michigan, with orthopterans second and arachnids third in importance.

Unusual vertebrate prey items have been reported in the literature, e.g., snakes (8), tree frogs (9) and shrews (10). In this study, we had one instance of a ground skink (*Scincella lateralis*) tail delivered to nestlings; however, it was not swallowed. Bay and Carter (11) reported that during several breeding seasons in the same study area skink tails and entire bodies were delivered to bluebird nestlings, but most were unswallowed and were recovered at the bottom of the nest boxes. Lizard prey has been reported by others (12,13), but with the exception of shrikes, Family Laniidae (14) this must be a rare food item for passeriform species.

Spiders and lepidopteran larvae were the most frequent prey delivered to nestlings 0-5 days old in Michigan with orthopteran insects being the primary food of older nestlings (3). Results from our study were similar (Table 2), except that we found little difference in prey diversity delivered to recent hatchlings (0-5 days old) compared to older nestlings ($H=2.2$ in both cases) (Shannon Diversity

TABLE 2 Frequency of prey items fed to Eastern Bluebird nestlings in Pontotoc County Oklahoma, 1996-97

Prey	Nesting Age (days)					
	0-5		6-10		>10	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Lepidoptera						
larvae	24	20.6	24	13.6	7	12.9
adult	3	2.6	0	—	0	—
Arachnida	33	28.6	29	16.4	6	10.2
Orthoptera						
Arididae	13	11.3	37	21.0	11	36.6
Tettigonidae	20	17.3	36	20.4	7	18.9
Gryllidae	7	6.0	13	7.3	3	8.1
Homoptera	4	3.4	21	11.9	1	2.7
Isopoda	5	4.3	5	2.8	1	2.7
Coleoptera	4	3.4	2	1.1	1	2.7
Hymenoptera	1	0.8	2	1.1	0	—
Blattaria	0	—	1	0.5	0	—
Reptilia	0	—	3	1.7	0	—
Diptera	1	0.8	3	1.7	0	—

n=115 for 0-5 days, n=176 for 6-10 days, n=37 for >10 days

Index) however, our sample size was considerably smaller than Pinkowski's (3).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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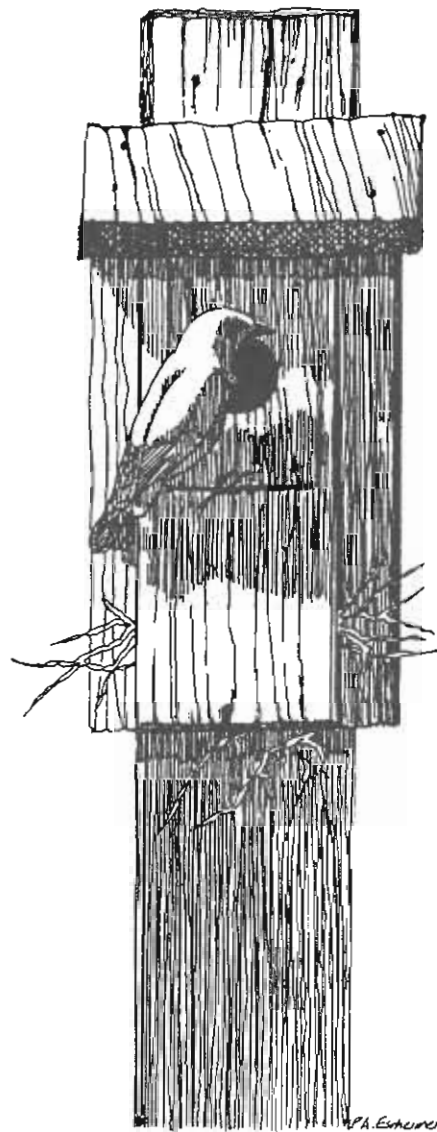
Staying Relevant

We are at a crossroads at the North American Bluebird Society. Recent organizational changes, instead of being a negative development, present us with the unique opportunity to reinvent ourselves as a national organization. We are looking at where we came from, what we are now, and where we need to be in the future to promote Bluebird and other cavity nester conservation.

We need to be able to adapt to change. In our relatively short history, we have come from using books, the US Mail, the library and telephones to learn and spread the word about Bluebirds to our current wired world where constantly evolving methods of communication exist. Now, almost everything anyone would ever want to know about Bluebirds can be found on the internet. However, much false, biased or inaccurate information is available. We have an opportunity to be a source of valid information and to sponsor research to add to our knowledge base.

Modern scientific methods like DNA analysis have shown that our previous attempts to phylogenetically group different species by physical characteristics haven't always been correct. We've learned that convergent evolution doesn't always lead back to a common ancestor, i.e. Rose Breasted and Evening Grosbeaks aren't very closely related even though they appear to be very similar. Much of what we have assumed is true about Bluebirds is now worth questioning. Providing members with new scientific data will keep us all better informed and keep us looking to NABS as a source of cutting edge information.

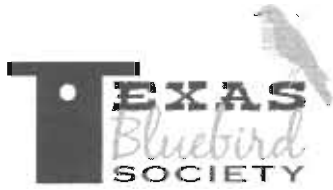
We need to be looking at broadening our horizons. We have always been a diverse organization with a membership base that ranged from scientists to people who were happy to see beautiful, friendly blue



birds visit their yard. Our founder Larry Zeleny provided a vision that none of us should ever forget. As the demographics of North America change, we need to change with them, while staying true to our mission of assisting with and promoting the conservation of Bluebirds and other native cavity nesters.

Like many other volunteer organizations, even a group of people with a common interest in Bluebirds soon reaches a point of competency that they feel comfortable with. Feeling that they have all the knowledge necessary to be good Bluebirders, many individuals have trouble seeing any value in belonging to organized Bluebird groups, whether at the county, state or national level. Our challenge is to continue to provide our membership with a reason to stay involved. New scientific information about Bluebirds, other cavity nesters, and broader environmental issues are some ways we can stay relevant and be valuable to Bluebird groups at all levels.

Looking at the future of Bluebird conservation, it is obvious that in some ways we are the victims of our own success. The hard work and efforts of so many dedicated volunteers have brought Bluebirds back from the brink. They are doing well and it seems like everyone knows about them. Our mission has changed from bringing Bluebirds back to maintaining their improved status. Many of the dedicated people responsible for this success unfortunately aren't getting any younger. Our challenge is to get more young people trained and involved in leadership roles. To do this, we may have to broaden our scope and direction and explore other ways of communicating, meeting, and keeping members involved.



- Inn Above Onion Creek, Kyle • Loomis Austin • SparrowTraps.net
- Rio Frio Lodging & Nature Tours • Morning Star Ranch - works

Thank you!

Texas Bluebird Society extends gratitude to those who took time away from their lives (and bluebird trails) to join us at the San Antonio Airport Hilton, April 26 – 30 for “NABS 2006.” You honored us with your presence. It was our pleasure to provide to you an experience we hope you found memorable

Tribute and honor and praise belong to the volunteers who helped create, prepare and present NABS 2006:

These members and friends of Texas Bluebird Society made the trip to NABS 2006 *just to work*, paid their own way, and made additional contributions through purchases. Some put in hundreds of hours in the months and years beforehand:

- LeAnn & Anthony Sharp: Right Hand to the Chairperson; Executive Team, CORE Team; Preliminary Planning Weekend; Advance Preparation Trips, Field Trip Leaders, TBS Store Managers
- Linda Crum (and Fred): NABS 2006 Registrar, handled all registrations keeping a spreadsheet with 94 “fields”/columns related to each registrant (contact information, meal & event selections, auction purchases, etc.)
- Dan Hanan: NABS 2006 Treasurer (for a full year); he made dozens of predator baffle kits for the TBS Store and other auction items, and he helped with errands all through the week
- Charles & Jackie Post: CORE Team; Preliminary Planning Weekend; NABS 2006 Booth at NABS 2005; manned Red, White & Bluebirds NABS 2006 Booth; prepared registration packets
- Norm Shoemaker: provided color labels and rubber stamps; drove van throughout the week, day and night, for errands and field trips; arrived early and stayed late
- Dick & Chris Park: provided advance support & counsel; picked up auction items; managed on-site registration table; served as hub for problem solving
- Jennifer Fleming (and Johnny): hand-addressed post card invitations, accepted “lead position” for multiple responsibilities during the event; worked in the TBS store
- Ron Tom (my beloved helpmate): NABS 2006 Booth at NABS 2004 and NABS 2005; Advance Preparation Trips; anything and everything that needed to be done behind the scenes
- Lysle Mockler: Site Selection Trip; NABS 2006 Booth at NABS 2005; Hand-addressed postcard invitations; Field Trip Leader
- Mindy Mitchell & Michelle Rider: Auction Co-Chairs, solicited auction items and handled every aspect of on-site auctions (Thursday silent auction, Saturday silent auction, and Saturday live auction) from set-up to sales. Mindy also served as Sponsorship Chair, and helped develop the sponsorship package.
- Phillip Walker: Auction Assistant (covered conservation-related entities); Opening Session “Host”, coordinated trip to Bracken Cave
- Maren Phillips: Vendor coordinator and logistical assistance
- Ricky Walker: Ironed flags; provided field trip sandwiches; and helped with miscellaneous errands
- Lee Haile: Provided “Texas flavor” as he told stories, played guitar, sang songs; assisted with field trips
- Bain Walker: Assisted with field trips; provided security; van driver
- Marsha Winfield: many errands
- Patricia Peacock: van driver
- Rob Barron from Virginia: gave two weeks of his time to drive from Virginia to San Antonio, obtain the materials; and, handcraft the flag stands and hand paint the flagpoles for the flag display that he installed on the rear edge of the stage to provide visual impact of the bluebird conservation effort that expands with width of the continent

Thanks, too, to the membership and friends of Texas Bluebird Society (not in attendance) who played major roles in the planning and preparation:

- Joan Stanley, Graphic Services: designed and prepared the 24-pp convention brochure and served as NABS 2006 webmaster
- Ann Thames, Shipping and Print Services Liaison: prepared and mailed registration packets to each registrant; priced, ordered, couriered, and distributed printed materials; assisted with planning

- Tim & Lynne Warfield, Flag Project Coordinators: accepted delivery of flags, expressed gratitude; and, kept records to track the progress of the project
- Joan Goodkin, Auction Services: solicited auction items; registered auction items shipped in the weeks and months before NABS 2006; and, maintained auction spreadsheet
- Kimberley Perez, Public Relations Coordinator
- Doug & Karen Rohde: TBS' NABS 2006 Booth at NABS 2004, assisted with creation of budget and provided invaluable advice
- Jimmie & Benni Konvicka: Preliminary Planning Weekend; NABS 2006 Booth at NABS 2005
- Cheri Layton (BluebirdNut.com), wrote lyrics to convention theme song, "Blues in the Heart of Texas"
- Lana Sumpner, created the NABS 2006 logo

A special word of thanks goes to the Chairpersons of recent NABS Conventions (and those teams) who provided advice, answered hundreds of questions, and gave encouragement:

- Helen Munro, North Carolina Bluebird Society: NABS 2005
- David Smith, New York State Bluebird Society: NABS 2004
- Bill & Sandy Seibert, Bluebirds Across Nebraska NABS 2003
- Greg & Terry Tellier, Southern Interior Bluebird Trail Society (British Columbia): NABS 2002
- Robert Niebuhr, NABS Convention Committee (during NABS 2006 formative months)

Thank you, too, to those whose names were inadvertently omitted as these words of gratitude were being prepared.

And, thanks to the North American Bluebird Society for providing these four pages of space for our words of gratitude and recognition. (Pre-convention ads, brochures, and registration forms were purchased by Texas Bluebird Society.)

Pauline

Pauline Tom, Chairperson
NABS 2006 Convention
(Created, prepared and presented by the Texas Bluebird Society)

**THANKS to sponsors, donors & contributors
(of time, money, product and services*):**

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- Kalmbach Publishing • Tim & Lynne Warfield Lodge at Creekside (Wimberley) • Julie Zickefoose • BirdWatcher's Digest
- Geoffrey Goodkin • Linda Walker (Gainesville VA) Carol Schock • Sunshine Mealworms • Field Vineyards • Audubon Texas
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- Evelyn Cooper • Kenny Kleinpeter • Joan Harmet • Michelle Rider • Mindy Mitchell • Wild Birds Unlimited • Ann Thames
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- Steve Ollis • Patricia Johnson • Priscilla Johnson • Leslie Galloway • Lana Sumpner • Karen Segall • Melane Bower
- Six Penny Graphics (Debra Tremper) • Debra Scheurmann-Home • Kim Hyunwo • Sara Gibbs • Stuart Gibbs
- Chelsea Berkely • Hill Country Sun • Don Iarussi, • Wine Seller, San Marcos (Brian Montgomery)
- Jenny Leonard • Patricia Johnson • BluebirdNut.com • Dolores Unique Designs • Driftwood Wildlife Assoc
- Fermatta • Heard Natural Science Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary • Heavenly Wings 'n Things
- Wildlines Flora and Fauna (Maren Phillips) • Morning Star Ranch-Works (Body-Works)
- Morning Star Ranch—Works (Craft-Works) • Purple Martin Conservation Association • San Antonio Audubon Society • Van Ert Enterprises



* Also, many unrecognized individuals dropped off items for the auction after registering at NABS 2006

Thanks to those who provided state/provincial flag for display on the NABS 2006 stage:

Judy Lietzau
Ron & Veronica Reist
Judy Derry
Leon Wehmeyer
Marion Linn
Marion Linn
Howard & Jean Rathlesberger
Kevin Corwin
Mary Jane Shearer
John Meyer

Greg Beavers
William Freels
Evelyn Cooper
Maynard Sumner
Mary Ellen Vetter
Tena Taylor
Erv Davis
Derry Wolford
Jonathan & Lynne Ridgeway
Helen Munro

Bernadine Abberman
Patrick Gallagher
Nancy Putt (Doris Hoffman)
Pat & Gerald Martin
Ron & Pricilla Kingston
Mary Beth Roen
ixoreus@gbis.com

General Session I, Thursday

- Master of Ceremonies: Philip Walker, TBS board member
- *Flag Presentation*
 - Choreographer & Pianist: Kenny Kleinpeter (Baton Rouge LA)
 - National Flags Presentation: Color Guard of Brooks City Air Force Base
 - Presentation of State Flags (in 1800's Texian costumes) Anthony Sharp & Lee Haile
 - Announcer: Ron Tom
 - Vocalist (National Anthem of USA and Canada): Marty Raiser VanErt (Carson City, IA)
 - *Opening Essay*: Ruth Beasley
 - *Presidential Greeting* (read by Philip Walker): President George W. Bush
 - *Welcome from NABS President*, Stephen Garr
 - *Opening Address*: "Treasures of the Texas Hill Country," June Osborne

Post-session "Tea with Texas Authors" (book signing)

- June Osborne
- Jan Wrede
- Lee Haile
- Mark Klym
- Keith Kridler

"Big 'ol Texas Barbeque," Friday night at Rio Cibolo Ranch

- Music by Bill Smallwood & The Jazz Cowboys
- Entertainment by Bain Walker & Lee Haile
- Hayride Tours and River Barge Tours: Rio Cibolo Ranch personnel

General Session II, Saturday

- *Featured Presentation*: David Luneau, "The Ivory-Bill: King of Cavity-Nesters"
- Post-session Book Signing: Terri Luneau

General Session III, Saturday

- Featured Presentation: Keith Kridler "Bluebird Tales of Texas"

Bluebilación, Saturday evening banquet

- Musical Interludes: Lee Haile
- NABS Award Presentations: Steve Garr, TBS VP
- Mistress of Ceremonies: LeAnn Sharp
- Keynote Address: Dr. Gary McCracken "Bats Attack Insects over Texas: Billions Perish"
- Live Auction: Caddo Sanders (assisted by Mindy Mitchell, Michelle Rider, Lee Haile and Bain Walker)

Break-out Sessions:

Wednesday

- "Build Your Own Nestcam," Norman Shoemaker
- "Drawing in the Field," Maren Phillips
- "House Sparrow Control," Bet Zimmerman, assisted by Floyd Van Ert

Thursday

- "Building A Strong Non-Profit" (3-part seminar,) Dr. Barry Silverberg
- "Choosing & Using a Field Guide," Jan McClintock
 - "Using Your Binoculars," Lee Haile, assisted by Anthony Sharp
 - "Chimney Swift Conservation," Paul & Georgan Kyle
 - "Bluebirds: Elementary Education," Karen Lippy
- "Bluepardy, an audience participation game show," Bet Zimmerman, assisted by Doug Zimmerman and Keith Kridler
- "Using Your GPS," Craig Scofield

Saturday

- "Purple Martins," Louise Chambers
- "Bluebirds, Not Just for the Country," Stephen J. Garr
- "History of Bluebirds & Bluebirding," Bet Zimmerman
- "The Role Brown-headed Cowbird Control in the management of Black-capped Vireos and Golden-cheeked Warblers at Fort Hood TX," Rich Kostecke
- "HeatShields for Your Nestbox," David Shiels
- "Hummingbirds of Texas," Mark Klym

Birding/Natural History Field Trips:

Wednesday

- Bluebird Hill at Indian Blanket Ranch and sunset bat emergence at Frio Cave: LeAnn & Anthony Sharp; Georgina Schwartz, Billy Walker; Bain Walker

Thursday

- Fort Hood Army Base, Killeen (for endangered species). Rich Kostecke and Gil Echrich of The Nature Conservancy

Friday

- Schaezler Ranch, hosted by Don & Susan Schaezler; Brent Ortego, bird banding; Sandy Wheeler, logistics
- Bamberger Ranch Preserve

Sunday

- Medina River Park. Georgina Schwartz
- Lost Maples State Natural Area: Mitch Heindel, Lee Haile, Bain Walker
- Mitchell Lake Audubon Center. (Center's docents)
- Bracken Cave: Dr. Gary McCracken



Red, White & Bluebirds

RUTH BEASLEY created this essay for the Opening Session.

Our apologies to her and to the audience for problems with the audio equipment

It's a thrill and honor to be in one room with so many bluebirders! My name is Ruth Beasley, and I write a little thing called "Learning the Birds." As the name implies, I don't pretend to be an expert. Having only recently begun my study of birds, I have the fervor of the newly converted, but I have no credentials worth mentioning.

I do inhabit a specific niche, a microhabitat, if you will, in that I preach largely to the unconverted. My audience tends to be those people who are bird people, deep down, but who haven't quite acted on the urge yet.

If we can only hold their interest, well, surely interest can lead to things like involvement, action, and even conservation.

One doesn't have to be an expert to love the bluebirds. They have long occupied our continent and our history, they grace our analogies, and inhabit our fondest dreams. Long before the white man came, the red man honored the blue birds. Pima legend has the bluebird bathing in a magic lake to get its color, while Longfellow's bluebird piped in thicket and meadow. Blue is the color of the North, or the East, depending on the legend, and it has long been associated with serenity and creative expression. And happiness, of course!

The colonists that landed at Plymouth Rock were notably fond of the bluebirds they found, and called them "blue robins." My oldest bird book, a *Birds of America* published in 1936, calls them simply American Bluebirds.

Red, White, & Bluebirds is an accurate description as well as a clever allusion to several famous flags, Old Glory and the Lone Star Flag among them. But in welcoming our NABS neighbors to the north and south, I've been thinking about their flags, too, and trying to make the slogan fit.

For the Canadian flag, we simply imagine the red & white maple-leaf with a bluebird flying right in front of it — and you get red, white, & blue. Mexico is a bit trickier — there's some green, for one thing, but green is said to mean hope, a hope we share for the future of our continental red, white, and bluebirds, so that's OK. There is also an eagle on a cactus holding a serpent, and perhaps room for a small imaginary bluebird there, as well.

There are several different birds that could fit our slogan. Kingfishers wear a blue-gray bathing costume with red and white stripes. In certain lights, the black in a Red-headed Woodpecker can appear to be blue, which accounts for several antiquated nicknames including (speaking of flags) Flag Bird, Tricolor, and the Patriotic Bird. Another bird in tricolor is the Harlequin Duck, at least the male is, when in breeding season.

All these birds could well fly under our banner, but the only true blue birds that live up to the name are the Eastern and Western Bluebirds — with feathers of genuine blue, accessorized in red and white.

Except for the fact that blue feathers are not really blue, but that's an entirely different conversation. The bluebirds in question do have feather hues of three different types: the red ones are drenched in actual pigment, the white feathers reflect light; and the blue ones refract it. So, we could say drenched, reflective, and refracted — but red, white, & blue is clearly better.

The blue we perceive in a bluebird is not American-flag-blue, or even Lone-Star-flag-blue. Spine-tingling blue is how I'd describe it, but indigo, cerulean, turquoise, campanula, and cobalt also work.

Come to think of it, the red in a bluebird is not flag-red, either, but closer to brick or rust. I'm still learning the difference between ruddy and rufous, sooty and slaty, mottled and splotched. In Bird World, nothing is ever simple. White, however, is still white, so an accurate description of our tricolored bluebirds would be something like rufous, white, and campanula.

No matter how you say it, color helps galvanize us into action, for we are naturally moved by beauty. But the more I learn about bluebird trails, the more I think of Johnny Appleseed. Trails and orchards both brought into being by conservative initiative. It doesn't take an expert to see that this proud spirit is kept alive by bluebirders like yourselves.



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The Bluebird: How You Can Help Its Fight for Survival

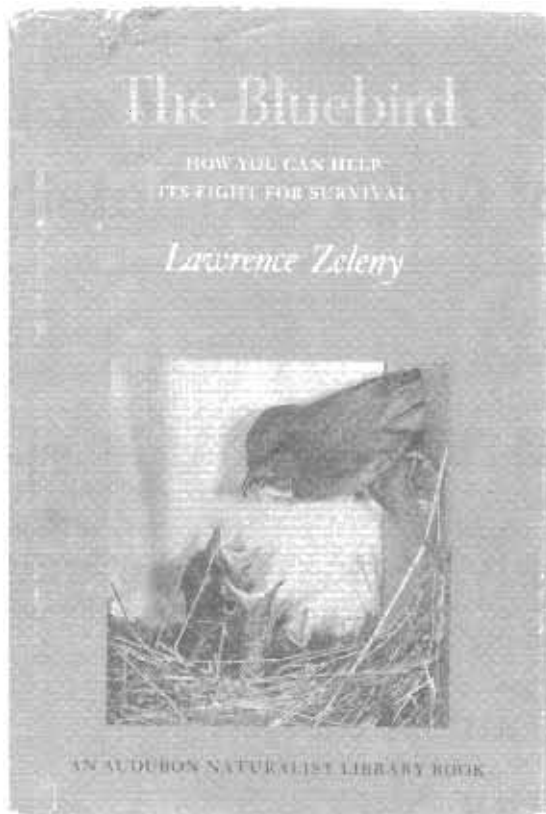
Dr. Zeleny's Book Revisited

By Kenny Kleinpeter

Thirty years ago, the founder of the North American Bluebird Society, Dr. Lawrence Zeleny, wrote his only book entitled above. Preened from over 150 articles he wrote for various journals and magazines during his career as a biochemist with the United States Department of Agriculture, his book became the *de facto* standard for professor and amateur birder alike after it was published in 1976. Not long after the publication of his landmark book, Dr. Zeleny founded NABS. The 2006 Board of Directors thought it fitting to revisit the book that started it all, and note of what has changed or remained the same.

For his only book, this treatise on bluebirds is well-organized, fluid and always interesting (even for this bluebirder who *thinks* he knows it all). There are plenty of illustrations and even several full-color photos, one of which was taken by the author himself and graces the masthead of NABS' current website. As NABS webmaster, that one photograph makes the book priceless (though I understand that the negative is in NABS' files). The caption tells it all: "orphaned eastern bluebirds raised by the author, shown here at 93 days". Dr. Zeleny has a chapter devoted to the account of his raising of these delightful little nest mates that eventually had their own young that reverted back to the wild.

The Good Doctor dedicated the book to his wife, Olive M. Lowen. She had to be the proverbial "woman behind the man" not



only editorially, for this book, but emotionally and intellectually, since they actually *met* in an ornithology class at University of Minnesota. I haven't met a woman yet who doesn't love bluebirds more than a man.

The book's introduction comes from the pen of the distinguished ornithologist, Dr. George E. Watson, then-curator of birds at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. He invokes the names of great birders who were surely inspirations for the Good Doctor, the likes of Seth Low,

Tom Musselman, Amelia Laskey and Jon Lane. Talk about name dropping! He wisely professes the control of starlings and house sparrows as the solution to bluebird conservation. Please allow me to lift one paragraph of Mr. Shelter's foreword that "says it all":

"The story told within these pages is far more than a story of a species of bird. It is the odyssey of one man, a gentle and learned man, in lifelong dedication to a cause – a crusade to rescue a species in nature from the threshold of doom. A layman's ode to environmental concern, it is a testament to the communion of amateur and professional in the struggle to preserve the quality of our natural estate. It also is a blueprint for the practical union of natural history and conservation, and a primer for grassroots action. Natural history studies are the beginning of wisdom in all environmental matters. Zeleny's book embodies the spirit of popular natural history study, the ever-growing national pastime epitomized by the 75-year-old Audubon movement."

While the book is no longer in print, I bought a used copy in good condition from Amazon.com for 88¢ (plus \$3.84 shipping) and received it in a week. It was produced with the assistance of the Audubon

Continued on page 17...

Naturalist Society of the Central Atlantic States, Inc. (ANS), one of the strongest environmental groups in the country. I'm somewhat disappointed that their "Audubon Naturalist Library" book program that was inaugurated with this book is no longer in existence.

Dr. Zeleny's book continues to be the most comprehensive and accurate reference for bluebirders ever printed. Since 1976, when it was published, there is scant evidence of outdated or unproven advice or facts. All three Bluebird species are covered, though emphasis is on the Eastern Bluebird. Every aspect of the bluebird's life is covered also. This little, 170-page book was read in three hours and was not easy to put down.

The chapters are arranged in logical order as we learn about bluebirds, why they were in decline; what we can do for them; building nestboxes; where to put them; how to monitor

them; about trails; predators and competitors; his personal "orphan children" and finally, the future. He ends with the promise of "the bluebird of happiness" for our efforts.

Dr. Zeleny's discussion of still-controversial issues such as pesticide use in and around the nestbox and use of chemical wood preservatives are handled with the proper warnings and urging of common sense. Use of nestboxes made from recycled plastic jugs though economical, are labeled "experimental" and treated as such. He also delves into the "grey area" of moving orphaned eggs about with great care and reservation, though few of us would consider such a practice today. Other than these several issues, the information, practices and nestbox designs are still the de facto standard for today's bluebirder. In this reviewer's mind, Dr. Zeleny was not just a man before his time; he was and

continues to be timeless.

His nestbox plans are still recommended by NABS (along with others) and his predator cone guard is rarely beaten. Timelines, cycles, monitoring schedules, management techniques, box placement, behavioral cues and clues, they're all here and I can promise that in working my 200-box trails, the man knew what he was talking about!

As NABS approaches its 30th anniversary, I hope that all of us revisit this beautiful book. If you don't have one, get one and place it next to your journals and references. Let it remind you that we just want the "bluebird of happiness."

Kenny Kleinpeter serves on the NABS board and is from Baton Rouge, LA where, this year he manages 200 nestboxes. He can be reached at affiliates@nabluebirdsociety.com.

NABS Current Assets Snapshot

Bank Balance Forward (July 01, 2006)	\$8586.92
Funds received:	
Membership fees (7/1 to 10/1).....	\$16,176.49
Catalog Sales (7/1 to 10/01).....	\$ 770.78
PayPal Account (10/01).....	\$1642.09
Expenses Paid (7/1 to 10/1).....	\$7159.30
Zeleny Fund (10/01).....	\$63,803.24
Total Assets (10/01).....	\$83,820.22

Information from NABS treasurer, Daniel Sparks

The Bluebird Partnerships - Plans for the NABS 2007 Convention

Bluebird Partnerships come in all shapes and sizes. The initial one is the bond between male and female bluebirds that produces those treasured clutches of bluebird eggs. The second one is between the monitor and the bluebird couple as the number of these eggs, chicks, babies and fledglings are recorded. The North American Bluebird Society's annual meeting should also be looked upon as a very important piece of this partnership cycle as it brings together the citizen-science of the monitors and the investigative-science of the researchers.

Dr. Patricia Adair Gowaty was the

keynote speaker at the North American Bluebird Society annual convention in Ithaca, New York, July, 2004. To quote the internet "Patricia Adair Gowaty, Professor of Ecology, studies the evolution of

social behavior, especially among Eastern Bluebirds, and is among the leading scholars in behavioral ecology. By boldly asking questions from a feminine perspective, Dr. Gowaty has overturned many fundamental assumptions about social interaction, mate selection, monogamy, two-parent care of nestlings, and other social behaviors that determine reproductive success. For example, she has shown that two parents are not required for bluebird nesting success, that female bluebirds are not monogamous – up to 50 percent of their nests contain young sired by multiple fathers – and that one-fifth of nestlings are sired by fathers other than the one raising them. Based on her landmark findings, other scientists have looked for and found

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evidence of extra-pair paternity in more than 90 percent of the 100 or so species investigated" Source: *24th Annual Research Awards Program (2003)*

There is no question as to why Dr. Gowaty is interested in bluebirds as a research tool. They cooperate by putting their nests in the boxes provided for them. Her questions to the monitors is "Why are you interested in the bluebirds?" The monitors, of course, cite the beauty of the bird, the opportunity to help the cavity nesters and then, of course, the birds nest in the boxes provided for them.



The North American Bluebird Society annual meeting in 2007 will bring together these two components, the monitors (citizen-science) and the researchers (investigative-science) so that we can share what the bluebirds have to teach us about their world.

This meeting will be held on the historic campus of the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. Sleeping rooms will be available at the Georgia Center, a beautiful facility dedicated to Continuing Education. Rooms for meetings, vendors, exhibits and the silent auction will be conveniently located in this building. The speakers are currently being selected from bluebird researchers as well as from scientists investigating related topics.

The dates for this wonderfully informative and socially fun convention are Thursday, September 29 through Sunday morning, September 23. A pre-conference trip (Wednesday, September 19) will travel to Atlanta's breathtaking new aquarium and the Cyclorama, a 380 degree painting of the Battle of Atlanta. A post-conference trip (Sunday, September 23) is planned for Stone Mountain to see this magnificent monolith and the carvings depicting General Robert E. Lee and other Confederate leaders. Stone Mountain includes a railroad, museum and many other things to see and do. These pre and post conference

trips will depend on the number of people signing up for them.

Thursday will include the NABS Board Meeting, four afternoon speakers, a NABS Reunion Dinner and an Affiliates Meeting. Friday will have a Bluebird L- breakfast, field trip to the Georgia Arboretum, a picnic lunch and a tour of historic Athens. Friday night's dinner

will be at the Georgia Arboretum in the Conservatory. Saturday will find everyone listening to the scientific experts tell the secrets of the bluebirds. Arrangements will be made for a local guide for a bird walk on Sunday morning.

This schedule has been planned for a full and fun meeting, not only showcasing our beloved bluebirds, but the great Southern Cities of Athens and Atlanta as well. Please remember that a convention is only as good as its delegates, and that you are part of this partnership.

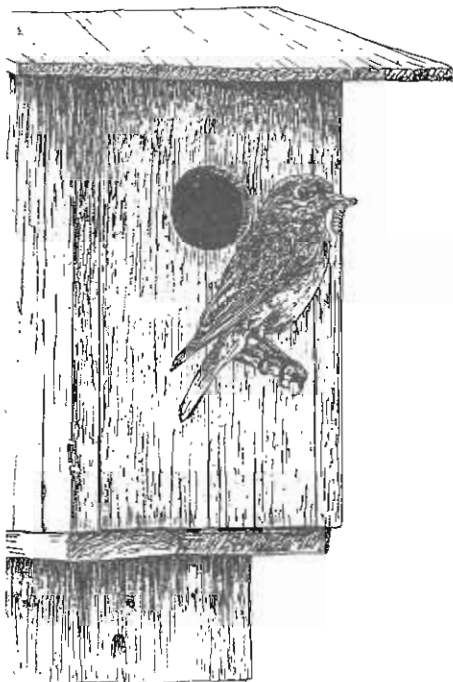
These are the plans. Dr. Gowaty will be contacting the speakers and each NABS members is invited to not only
Web site: nabluebirdsociety.org

attend, but to contribute by volunteering to do a job. All the Affiliates have been notified regarding their help, financial sponsorship and patronage. Individuals are also invited to make a donation to NABS 2007. These monies will help NABS with the overall cost of the meeting space as well as per diem's for the speakers.

In addition, gather up bluebird memorabilia or that pair of extra binoculars and donate them as either a door prize or a silent auction item. Perhaps, you know of a vendor that would be interested in this gathering. Share this information with them.

This is your convention. The bluebirds are, of course, the excuse, but you are the reason. Come, learn and share in this Bluebird Partnership.

Helen S. Munro, NABS 2007 Chair
 E-mail: hsmunro@aol.net
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DR. LAWRENCE ZELENY

An Odyssey of Love

Jon Boone

A few weeks after Muhammad Ali lost his heavyweight title in February, 1978, I spent a few days visiting with my brother Bob, at his home in Hagerstown, Maryland. The snow and the extreme cold of this western Maryland city conspired with the specter of an aging Ali to deepen a growing sense of my own mortality. Perhaps realizing this, my brother suggested we take in the sights of a rather magical land 12 miles west of the city known as Polecat Hollow.

Polecat Hollow and I have become good friends over the years. My brother Dan placed a number of bluebird trails there. On this particular day, the ice and snow melded together the mountains, lakes, meadows and sky, creating a stained glass window into a more perfect world. We saw a deer, then two, finally a half dozen moving slowly down the slope of a nearby mountain toward a partly frozen stream. I stopped the car engine so as not to startle the deer. Time slowed as the 22 degree temperature inside the car rushed to mate with the arctic air outside. The steam from our breathing caused a mild haze to settle around us. As the vapors cleared, our eyes fixed upon movement along a fence row not ten feet away. The movement ceased, revealing five of the most exquisite bluebirds I have ever seen. The blue and russet colors shone like precious gems against the backdrop of white and silver and gray.

For nearly one-half hour we watched silently as the birds and the deer struggled successfully for survival in this harsh terrain. Then a passing automobile careened by and the bluebirds were gone. Bob and I left soon thereafter, our lives somehow different and renewed, it is a vision forever imprinted on my mind, a portent of good things to come: It was a good year. Ali regained his title. Then Larry Zeleny, who was undoubtedly responsible for those bluebirds in Polecat Hollow, founded the North American Bluebird Society.

This prologue seems a fitting introduction to Larry. For the past dozen years he has been the champion for the cause of bluebird conservation. His trail in Beltsville, Maryland is a living monument to that cause. The hundreds of articles he has written on the subject, culminating in his book, *The Bluebird: How You Can Help Its Fight For Survival*, have motivated and counseled thousands of people across the continent. Perhaps he has lectured hundreds of times on his favorite subject, giving informed answers with patient enthusiasm. However, although he is indeed a forerunner, a leader in the field of bluebird preservation, his fondest wish is to have others become leaders. His book's subtitle gives him away. He wants us to find our own Polecat Hollows, to establish our own trails, to monitor those trails, to experiment with prudence and, he hopes, to appreciate the beauty of the bluebird and its struggle to endure in our own way.

Larry was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota on April 30, 1904. He was second of two sons born to Anthony and Mattie Zeleny. As a professor of physics with the University of Minnesota, Anthony was hardly wealthy. But he gave his family a fine home on the bank of the Mississippi River, a beautiful garden and a legacy of community service and intellectual curiosity, all of which has served Larry well for the last 75 years.

However, when he was 14 months old, a diet of raw milk almost claimed Larry's life. The family physician prescribed plenty of fresh air and sunshine as remedy. Consequently, Larry spent much of his second summer in the backyard, confined to his baby buggy, watching for movement anywhere. His interest in birds may well have been the result of this experience. On the other hand, his interest in raw milk disappeared.

Minnesota's moderate summers compensate for their very long, very cold winters. At that time Minneapolis was not a large industrial center and there were open spaces and fields aplenty along the river. The automobile was a rare sight; in fact, Larry decided that horses were better because "they didn't make as much noise." Larry tilled the soil along with his father, and in his early teens won a city-wide competition for cultivating the best garden. He enjoyed the outdoors as much as possible.

When he was nine years old, Larry's Sunday school teacher announced a contest. The child who could identify the greatest number of birds would be awarded Chester A. Reed's classic pocket field guide. Characteristically, Larry won easily, despite the fact he submitted two lists; one for the birds he saw in the city zoo, the other for those he saw in the field.

With his Reed field guide and his father's old Zeiss binoculars, Larry became more than passing fair as a young naturalist. And even as a child, Larry learned from his "mistakes." For example, in grade school, Larry crafted an immaculate nesting box for wrens and received a grade of A for his labors. A neighboring classmate threw together a few boards in loose fashion and received a "gentleman's D" for his nesting box. The next spring, both boys



hoisted their boxes. Needless to say, the wrens chose the shanty house, while Larry's box went unoccupied. To this day, he recommends that nesting boxes need not be artfully constructed.

Like many other bluebird conservationists, Larry doesn't know what sparked his love for the species. During his youth, bluebirds were "always there," nourished by the Mississippi. Other people had bluebird boxes in the neighborhood, with bluebird tenants. By the time he entered high school, Larry, using a Department of Agriculture bulletin, was building his own bluebird houses. However, in one of his first boxes, Larry attracted the House Sparrow, which in turn was increasingly attracted to the area by Minnesota's ubiquitous granaries. Disturbed by this interloper, Larry wrote Joseph H. Dodson for a deluxe, six-dollar sparrow trap. He used the trap effectively for one year. He got bluebirds regularly afterward.

In high school, Larry's academic progress went as expected for the son of a physicist. He graduated in January, 1921, after being moved ahead several grades. He immediately entered the University of Minnesota's spring term, intent on majoring in mathematics. Before his graduation in 1925, three events occurred which irrevocably affected the course of Larry's future.

First he changed his major to chemistry, a compromise which allowed him to combine his respect for science with practical applications. Secondly, Larry took a course in ornithology from Professor Thomas S. Roberts, author of the magnificent two-volume *The Birds of Minnesota*. The administration of the University at first adamantly opposed having its curricular offerings tainted with the subject of ornithology. But Dr. Roberts, a wealthy retired physician, was determined to teach such a course. He presented the administration with an offer they couldn't refuse: he would teach the course for nothing.

The class was set. Larry enrolled. He felt right at home. He enjoyed the field trips, often to the best country clubs, trips which Dr. Roberts financed himself. But he especially enjoyed the long hours of consultation with Dr. Roberts.

Finally, there was a girl enrolled in that class, a science education major named Olive Lowen, and pretty Olive had an eye on Larry. She finally made the shy Zeleny kid notice her, and Olive and Larry soon became a team. They relaxed in each other's company, having many common interests in wildlife conservation. Today, Olive insists she endured some of those long field trips more because of her interest in Larry than for the birds she might have seen.

Both Larry and Olive received their Bachelor's degrees the same year. Olive began her career as a teacher and Larry started graduate school at the University. He earned his M.S. in 1927 and his Ph.D. in biochemistry in 1930. Throughout these years the two stayed close. As soon as Larry completed his final degree, they married on June 19, 1930, six days after their engagement. For Larry, it was a veritable whirlwind courtship. For Olive, well, she claims Larry is a very practical man.

Larry had a fellowship with Northwest Paper Company and was an agent for the U.S. Forest Service, studying the chemistry of coniferous seeds. But the great depression had taken firm root and Larry went nine months without work. Finally, he returned to the University for Post-doctoral Work. In 1933, a biochemistry professor mentioned that Minnesota Valley Canning Co. (now Green Giant) needed a chemist for its operation in Le Seuer, a small town west of Minneapolis. Larry applied for and got the job. He and Olive and their daughter Nancy, born in 1931, left for Le Seuer. Minnesota Valley paid Larry a lofty 150 dollars a month, which allowed the Zelenys to live as royalty, renting a magnificent house and retaining a maid to help while Olive gave birth to their second child, Bill, in 1934.

The depression had a profound effect on Larry. He has many poignant stories to tell of suffering, of sacrifice, of people helping other people survive, one day at a time. Then came the New Deal, offering people new hope, and things did get better. At least fewer people starved or scavenged for a piece of coal. The imagery of the depression is a common thread in Larry's writings about the bluebird and perhaps explains his cautious optimism that people can come together with sufficient force enabling their common goals to triumph.

In any case, Larry carried on, and in 1935 came to Washington, D.C. as an associate chemist to work for the Department of Agriculture for a starting salary of \$3,200 per year. The Zelenys drove their tightly packed 1929 Chrysler from Minneapolis, rented a house in Takoma Park, Maryland for a little over three years, and then, in 1939, moved to their present address in University Park.

Larry held various scientific and administrative positions with the Department of Agriculture, culminating in the position of Branch Chief of the Grain Division from 1943 until his retirement in 1966. During that time he authored or coauthored 62 technical papers in the general field of agricultural biochemistry. He helped develop internationally recognized procedures for evaluating the quality of cereal grains and oil-bearing seeds. In 1960, he was one of six members of a United States cultural exchange team invited to the Soviet Union, traveling 6,000 miles of Russian territory in little more than a month. He is a past president of the American Association of Cereal Chemists (1956-1957). He has received numerous professional awards and rightly so. He led a most distinguished professional career.

Today, his children are successful members of the community. His son, Bill, is a university educator in Monterey, California; his daughter, Nancy Zeleny Kuhn, works for an insurance firm in Rockville, Maryland. They have given Larry and Olive four grandchildren. The Zelenys live modestly, but graciously. At any given time, expect to find two or three prize-winning poodles guarding their front door.

Expect to find numerous birds around his large back-yard complete, yes, with garden. And, of course, expect to find reminders of bluebird activity throughout, from his basement workshop where he continually tinkers with building a better nesting box, to the Richard Sloan autographed print, "Eastern Bluebird," he received from the Griggsville Nature Society. To a bluebirder, Larry's home is the North Pole on Christmas Eve.

How did it all start? The clues abound. He came from a marvelous family; he met T. S. Roberts; he married the right girl (their golden anniversary is

less than six months away); he survived the great depression; he saw triumph in adversity; he became a respected scientist; and, he is a very practical man. But probably the best answer is that he is doing just what he would have been doing had he been independently wealthy. For this society has not chosen to subsidize heavily those working for bluebird conservation.

With the Department of Agriculture, Larry occupied an office for nearly 25 years on the grounds of the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center. There were quite a few bluebirds at the Center until 1950. But then came an invasion of Starlings and the bluebirds disappeared. Larry was concerned, but the press of business precluded his personal intervention. In 1955 he did place a nesting box on a pole outside his office window and monitored it constantly. Bluebirds became permanent tenants. But they were exceedingly scarce elsewhere on the spacious grounds of the Center, graced with habitat which should have been full of bluebirds.

With his retirement, he inherited that most-precious of all commodities; time. He asked the Center's director for permission to place 13 nesting boxes around the area for the 1967 nesting season. Permission granted. At the same time he personally bought 144 nesting boxes and asked that they be placed around the state's parks. Permission granted. From his correspondence with Dr. T. E. Musselman, among others, he developed what he thought was a good nesting box design, with attention given to cavity size, insulation, ventilation and drainage. That design, with little modification, endures to this day.

The parks project was aborted due to human vandalism. The Beltsville "trail," which had the official sanction of the Audubon Naturalist Society of the Central Atlantic States as a research project, successfully fledged 20 bluebirds in its first year. As a result, Larry increased the trail twofold the following year and fledged more than 80 young.

In this same year, 1968, Larry learned about a newly formed group, The National Association for the Protection and Propagation of the Purple Martins and Bluebirds of America. He joined the organization, and then journeyed to Illinois for a meeting with the group. The folks there put him in charge of bluebird protection, at which time Larry proposed to write a booklet about the subject of Bluebirds. Again, he secured approval and the result was a beautifully rendered handbook, which Olive entitled *Bluebirds for Posterity*. It sold thousands of copies and is now out of print. It should be brought back.

With *Bluebirds for Posterity*, Larry established his potential. Later in 1969, Larry took over Dr. Musselman's popular column in the *Purple Martin News* (now the *Nature Society News*). He has since written 124 columns for that publication, in the process developing a correspondence with thousands of people. Col. B. J. Walrath exemplifies the response: "Your writings were solely responsible for awakening my own interest in bluebird conservation."

One step after another followed rapid fire. He was elected President of the Maryland Ornithological Society. He became a member of the Board of Directors of the Audubon Naturalist Society. He serves as a consultant for Camp Fire Girls, Inc., etc. All of these positions demonstrated his popularity. More importantly, they gave him a forum to reach larger numbers of people. He became convinced that bluebirds could be helped only by many people, tens of thousands, working in small groups or as individuals, each informed as to the nature of the bluebirds' problems, and armed with a general plan for coping with them. When he writes or talks about bluebirds, he does so in the simplest language possible, making sure that everyone understands his message, cutting through age and class distinctions.

People received his message on local radio and television programs. They picked it up in newspaper articles, in magazines ranging from *Living Wilderness* to *Exxon*, U.S.A. They have it from his book, published in 1976. Then in June 1977, *National Geographic* featured his article "Song of Hope for the Bluebird," punctuating it with the stunning bluebird photographs taken by his good friend Michael L. Smith. The volume of mail he received attendant to that article was overwhelming, even for Larry.

He called in a few friends to discuss the situation and—the North American Bluebird Society came about.

There is much to say about this remarkable man, and not nearly enough space. In *Who's Who in America*, he lists himself as "wildlife conservationist and writer." He is that; but so much more. He has awards for his conservation work from numerous organizations, most notably from the Patuxent Group of the Sierra Club and the Audubon Naturalist Society. He has his family and legions of genuine friends. A few miles up the road he can visit his beloved bluebirds just about any day of the year. He takes no money for his conservation work and donates receipts from the sale of his book to the Society.

Those of us who have personal knowledge of Little Brother and Little Sister—even those who have read his account of these hand-raised bluebirds—know that his love for bluebirds is real. He uses the word love a lot. It is not a word that comes easily from men in this culture. When asked about his courtship with Olive, he responds with a simple explanation: "We fell in love." He dedicated his book to Olive, hearkening back to their ornithology class in Minnesota, "where we fell in love with birds and with each other."

When Larry and I discussed the text for the Society's color brochure, "Where Have All the Bluebirds Gone?" Larry wanted the first sentence to read, "We celebrate the beautiful bluebird as a symbol of love, hope and happiness." Because I thought the sentiment a bit maudlin, I deleted the word "love." It was a mistake.

From the beginning, it was the reason this decent and learned man is involved.

Reprinted from *Sialia*, winter issue, 1980

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 <kenny@nablukebird.org> with correct information

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Alberta
Calgary Area Bluebird Trail Monitors
c/o George Loades, 167 Canterbury Dr SW
Calgary, AB, Canada T2W 1T3
bluebirds@creb.com
Ellis Bird Farm, Ltd.
c/o Myrna Pearman, Box 5090
Lacombe, AB, Canada T4L 1W7
myrna@ellis-birdfarm.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; jhdanard@mts.net

Ontario

Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society
Contact: Marion Laing
4381 Glanaster Rd
Mt. Hope, ON, Canada L0R 1W0
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UNITED STATES

Arkansas

Bella Vista Bluebird Society
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27 Britten Circle, Bella Vista AR 72714
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California

California Bluebird Recovery Program
2021 Parmigan Dr. #1
Walnut Creek CA 94595
925-937-5974; fax 925-935-4480
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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
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Louisiana

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New Hampshire

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603-763-5705; bluebirds@tds.net

New York

New York State Bluebird Society
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499 W Richmondville Rd
Richmondville NY 12149 518-294-7196; bermark@cobleskill.edu

Schoharie County Bluebird Society

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Richmondville NY 12149 518-294-7196; bermark@cobleskill.edu

North Carolina

North Carolina Bluebird Society
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Jackson Springs NC 27281
910-673-6936; hsmunro@car.net
Rutherford County Bluebird Club
Contact: Christopher Greenc
PO Box 247, Ellenboro NC 28040-0247

Ohio

Ohio Bluebird Society
c/o Bernie Daniel
9211 Solon Dr, Cincinnati OH 45242
ohio@bluebirdaccnjnc.net

Oklahoma

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

Oregon

Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project
Contact: Patricia Johnson
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email@prescottbluebird.com

Pennsylvania

Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania
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zebraswallow@ajc-juno.com

Purple Martin Conservation Association

Contact: Louise Chambers Edinboro
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dhayes@cumc.com

Tennessee Bluebird Trails

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Texas Bluebird Society
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512-268-5678
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Fredricksburg VA 22401
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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
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