By Brian Swanson

Fellow Bluebirders:

By the time this edition of the "Bluebird" reaches you, NABS 2007 will be history. I trust that I will have had the opportunity to meet many of you in person after communicating with you through this column and via email.

From the early years of NABS through the 2006 annual meeting in San Antonio, an affiliate produced and hosted the convention. This year a NABS committee with Helen Munro, Patty Gwalt, Pauline Tom, Lynne and Jonathan Ridgeway, Mary Jane Shearer, and others, developed the program, made the arrangements and handled the details such as registration. I want to publicly recognize their efforts on our behalf and thank them.

For 2008, NABS will be forming a partnership with Bluebirds Across Nebraska (BAN) to hold our annual convention. This is the second time NABS has worked with the great folks in the Cornhusker state. We are thankful for this generous offer by BAN and look forward to this adventure. As a member of the committee for NABS 2004 in Ithaca NY, I can attest to the good feeling of accomplishment when a successful convention has been held. If you have any thought that your affiliate is interested, please contact me through the NABS website.

As you start looking toward the next nesting season, please be sure you have sent your 2007 nesting data to your affiliate contact, Cornell, or whoever you report to. For those interested in reporting data to Cornell, the fee for submitting data has been dropped. Information can be found at: www.birds.cornell.edu/birdhouse/NABSmembers.html.

I hope that a successful 2007 nesting season has you looking forward to spring.

Brian Swanson
NABS Vice President for Affiliates
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 nectar-feeding songbirds worldwide. NABS wishes all state, provincial, and territorial bluebird organizations to become NABS affiliates in a collaboration of equals, all working together toward a common goal--a further participation in international bluebird conservation. Numb is associated with affiliating with NABS. You affiliated organization will be recognized:

Arizona
Central Arizona Bluebird Trail Society
Contact: Gary Lazour
PO Box 450
Canyon de Chisos, TX 79840
(915) 477-5073
Email: g66c70@txs.net
Baja California
La Tierra Azul Bluebirds Society
Contact: David Ackerman
PO Box 869
Los Angeles, CA 90001
(310) 625-2485
Email: data@bluebird.com

Maryland Bluebird Trails Conservation Society
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(301) 625-2485
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Ohio
Bluebird Society of Ohio
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(216) 392-5095
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Illinois
Habitat Bluebird Society
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Indiana Bluebird Society
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Bluebird Society of North Dakota
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(701) 773-5656
Email: bks@bluebird.org

Texas
Bexar County Bluebird Society
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San Antonio, TX 78222
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North American Bluebird Society

Fall 2007

FROM THE PRESIDENT BY J. RICHARD RIDGWAY

Greetings of peace.

The way people look at things can have a great effect on how they feel. In the light of great adversity, people who see problems are often more distressed than people who see opportunities. I believe that any improvements there have been in the NABS organization since I became its President in January derived from paying more attention to the bluebirds on our shoulders. Our team spirit has nurtured each of us and encouraged us to work together more in unison toward our common purposes.

Before this year, someone told the IRS we should not be tax exempt because we were behaving like a society, not a corporation for individuals’ personal gain. It certainly presented us with some exceptional opportunities. When the IRS sent us notification that they were going to assess us a half million dollars, that was almost as good as the call went out, we started receiving requested packages from Board members in Virginia, Indiana, Ohio, Texas, Massachusetts, etc., everyone pulling together. In my time frame was so short that even with so many hands, it was a major effort.

In sum, with the morning light we soon received notice that our tax exempt status was secure, for the time being. An examination of our submissions for the review showed that we had failed to record fiscal activity properly and it was recommended that NABS continue to record the financial transactions in a timely manner as we have been doing since the beginning of this year. Our true success was not merely that our practices had gotten so much better or that we were able to demonstrate that they had. The most important factor was how much better we were working together.

Why are we in better spirits? In less than a year we went from an oppressively negative cash flow to one that is inspiring and encouraging. Now financial decisions are consistently being made in concert with the full Board, which is comprised of members who are acutely sensitive to their fiduciary responsibilities. Management decisions, other than those relating to money, are also being made as a team. The entire Board actively participates in monthly conference calls which are maintained at a high level of professionalism, collegiality and efficiency. An agenda is sent out in advance and accurate minutes are distributed afterward for approval. Matters which pertain to select groups are regularly handled by their own individuals or smaller groups and calls are held in person. Committees are pulling their load and follow up is a regular practice. Progress and res Surgeance are easy to identify in a significant number of areas.

It is likely our Zeleny fund will reach its hundred dollar utilization threshold before the end of the year. Improvements in our AFA relations have been dramatic and our membership role is growing. It is amazing how much better our website has gotten and that we still have more to do. Our NABS 2007 convention is the most pressing issue on our horizon. It got off to a rocky start but appears likely that it is going to be a success. We are finally improving our overall design to plan a NABS 2008 event and anticipate beginning plans in the near future. We are looking forward with great excitement and anticipation to see what can be done after our forthcoming annual meeting.

NABS was founded as an advocacy organization with very clear and well defined principles which have varied since the beginning. Commitment, dedication and a lot of hard work by people all over the USA and Canada for three decades have made our bluebirds a poster child for endangered species recovery. One thing you can be sure of as death and taxes, no matter how clear it is that you stand for is right, it is worth much at all there will always be others who are just as sure you are wrong. Our aspirations of defending, protecting and promoting threatened and endangered bluebirds and other native cavity nesting bird species has earned NABS the admiration of all the factions who feel we violate natural evolutionary principles of survival of the fittest. If the bluebirds could not take care of themselves it was appropriate for them to become extinct. NABS could be viewed as an impediment to people’s economic right to produce and sell the most toxic pesticides or to clear and build houses or other structures for commerce and industry rather than hug a tree where birds might want to lay an egg. Surely some could call NABS bigoted for its prejudice against nonnative cavity nesters.

On continued on page 4

North American Bluebird Society

Fall 2007
Nominations for 2008 NABS Awards

The North American Bluebird Society annually makes awards outstanding contributions to bluebird conservation. This year’s awards will be presented at our 30th Anniversary Dinner in Kearney, Nebraska during the NABS 2008 annual convention being arranged in cooperation with the Great Plains Sandhill Crane & Bluebird Festival which is being hosted by NABS Affiliate, Bluebirds Across Nebraska. December 14, 2007 is the deadline for nominations to be received.

If you wish to nominate an individual, a group, or anyone involved in research for an award, please contact NABS Awards Chairman Greg Beavers at awards@nablsociety.org. Please be sure to include your telephone number and e-mail address. Nominations which were submitted for 2007 and not selected will be reconsidered and there is no need for re-submission. If you wish to make a nomination but have no access to email, it will be acceptable for you to mail it to our regular address, NABS, PO Box 43, Mianusville, OH 45147, but be sure to send it in early. We will not be responsible for any delay of submissions by mail.

For individual awards, consider the ways in which nominee has publicized or aided bluebird/cavity-nester conservation. Examples might include speaking before groups; working with young people; obtaining publicity in newspapers, radio, or television; working at nature centers, workshops, or fairs; inventing or improving trap or box designs; designing or producing publications, plantings, etc. For nomination of a group, consider workshops offered, number of boxes maintained by group members, increase in bluebird production, methods of recruiting monitors, successful fledglings, etc. Programs must have been in place for a minimum of five years. For research awards, briefly summarize research completed (and in progress) involving bluebirds/cavity nesters, and include bibliographic citations of articles published about bluebirds or other North American cavity nesters (copies of articles or abstracts are desirable).

Continued from page 3

Getting involved in bluebird conservation is challenging and incredibly rewarding. But there is a down side. Nobody warns you that despite all the joy, there is bound to be some heartache. It can also get expensive and time consuming. You wait and wait for nesting season to start, searching the skies for that flash of blue. Maybe you see no bluebirds at all - one trail monitor waited 13 years before they had a successful bluebird nesting. Or bluebirds do check out your boxes, and then decide to nest elsewhere. They start a nest and abandon it for some unfathomable reason. A pair lays a nest full of lovely blue eggs, but not one hatches.

Although your first attempts are filled with anticipation, like all those who came before you, you will make mistakes. You probably don't know about the resources and experienced bluebirders out there who have already learned things the hard way and are happy to help you. If you are patient and willing to put the time in, you will be pleasantly surprised.

Bluebirding Blues

By E. A. Zimmerman

Bluebirds are a joy to watch in any season. They add color to the winter landscape and their song brightens the winter air. They are a welcome sight in the spring, and their nesting activity is a treat to see.

But bluebirding can also be frustrating. There are times when you feel like you are not making any progress. You spend hours setting up boxes and monitoring birds, but nothing seems to happen. Other times you feel like you are on the verge of success, but something goes wrong.

The key is to keep at it. Even when things don't go as planned, there is always something to be learned. You may not see any success this year, but next year you may have a successful nesting. And the year after that, you may have a successful nesting again.

So if you are thinking about giving up, I would encourage you to keep going. The rewards are worth the effort. Bluebirding is a great way to spend time in nature and make a positive impact on the environment. And who knows, you may even find yourself a master bluebirder!
to be the case. Because nests are a seasonal resource, a nest specialist snake species would not have a year round food source. Furthermore, snakes do not even appear to specialize seasonally in nests. A study in 2003 found that small mammals continued to be found in the diet of Black Rat Snakes throughout the summer. Although birds were added to the diet, there was no evidence of specialization. Snakes appear to prey on nests en masse, although it is possible that some individuals might specialize during the nesting season.

While snakes do not specialize in nests, they use both scent and sight to help them find bird nests. Scent might serve as a cue that some snakes use to find nests, but the fact that many bird species remove fecal sacs from the nest makes that cue seem less likely. Visual stimuli seem to be the most likely cues used by snakes, and such a pattern has been documented in the laboratory in the case of the Gray Rat Snake.

The use of vision to find nests also explains the observed pattern of nest site predation increasing as nesting activity continues. Alexander Skutch first proposed that hypothesis that predation risk increases during nesting because of increased parental activity around the nest; parents make more trips to the nest to bring food as the young continue to grow. Those more frequent trips appear to increase during nesting because that a snake or other predator will find the nest. Nest placement is a large factor in predation risk, but once that is controlled for experimentally, Skutch’s hypothesis seems correct. This risk based on feeding frequency at the nest also appears to be a major factor in controlling the number of eggs birds lay in a clutch.

While snakes are formidable predators, birds have a wide variety of behaviors that help lower the risk of predation. For instance, nests can be positioned where predation is less likely, as in the case of Acadian Flycatchers that prefer to nest in Nuttall Oaks to take advantage of the fact that snakes have difficulty in climbing its smooth bark. Red-cockaded Woodpeckers even modify their nests to create areas of sticky sap that often prevents snake predation. Some birds might even select nest sites that are thermally inhospitable to snakes, which cannot control their own body temperature. However, the question of how birds reduce predation risks remains a fruitful field for additional research. These recent studies have shed some light on snake-bird interactions, but much remains to be learned from careful studies of snakes and birds.

Literature used in preparation of this review:

Roughly 220 attempts and 140 successes. These figures represent the number of avian species whose nests have been adorned with an egg of a brown-headed cowbird and the number of species that have actually raised a cowbird, respectively. It is no wonder that when I pick up any given issue of a North American ornithological journal, there is a strong possibility that I will find an article on some aspect of cowbird biology. And 2006 was no exception.

One of the most intriguing studies on brown-headed cowbirds was published in the summer 2006 issue of the Journal of Field Ornithology by Justin Rasmussen and Spencer Sealy of the University of Manitoba, who wondered what happens to the fledglings of host parents that are seen feeding only cowbird fledglings. In other words, is it possible that the cost of cowbird parasitism goes beyond the nesting stage?

When a cowbird drops its egg into the nest of a host species, the host species, unless it has some defensive mechanisms, will instinctively feed and raise the hatched youngster, usually at the expense of its own reproductive output. Life is short for wild birds, and thus it is not a good thing to be raising someone else’s young.

Scientists are always attempting to quantify the cost of brood parasitism, generally by measuring the number of young that fledged from parasitized and unparasitized nests. But Rasmussen and Sealy take issue with this, arguing that such measurements may underestimate the cost. They compiled anecdotal observations of hosts feeding cowbird fledglings, restricting themselves to species known to fledge cowbirds along with their own young. They also included observations of host species feeding young cowbirds for which fledging success of host nestlings when fledging a cowbird was not known.

"We compiled 102 records of hosts, representing 45 species from 9 families, with fledging cowbirds in their broods," they wrote. "In 97 cases, only cowbird fledglings were being fed, and in 11 of these cases observers stated that no host young were being fed."

In one case the hosts never fed the cowbird fledgling. Most telling, though, 92 of the cases involved host species smaller than cowbirds. Cowbird hosts range from 10-gram kinglets and gnatchatchers to 150-gram meadowlarks. It is a known fact that 16 of the 17 hosts most frequently parasitized by brown-headed cowbirds weigh less than a female cowbird—yellow warbler, song sparrow, red-eyed vireo, to name the top three. Larger hosts are expected to be able to fledge at least some of their own young when raising a cowbird, and smaller hosts are not expected to raise any.

Here is their point. If the host’s own young die after leaving the nest because they are outcompeted by the larger cowbird in the nestling stage or early in the fledgling stage, then the reproductive cost to the host parents does not end when their young fledge from the nest. This would mean that the cost of parasitism has been underestimated in all those studies that gave estimates of such costs. Rasmussen and Sealy concede that their observations are anecdotal and that more research is needed to actually quantify the possible effect of cowbird parasitism on the survival of host fledglings.

Defenses
As mentioned, some potential host species have defensive mechanisms, including ejecting the cowbird egg immediately upon perceiving it. Some of the top “rejector" species

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include the American robin, gray catbird, western and eastern kingbirds, blue jay, brown thrasher, cedar waxwing, and Baltimore oriole.

Species that nest in cavities are often considered to be poor targets for cowbirds, because often cowbirds cannot fit into the holes to lay their eggs or for other reasons yet unknown, There are some notable exceptions. For instance, cavity-nesting prothonotary warblers are heavily parasitized by brown-headed cowbirds, and house wrens are frequent hosts to shiny cowbird eggs. Perceiving that little attention has been paid to antiparasitic behaviors of cavity-nesting species and that mountain bluebirds are known to eject cowbird eggs, Brian Peers of Western Illinois University and several colleagues sought to determine whether the eastern bluebird, a hole nester that is not only parasitized by brown-headed cowbirds but also capable of raising the latter’s young, also engages in cowbird egg rejection.

They added single plaster eggs painted to mimic those of cowbirds to 20 nest boxes containing bluebird eggs and replaced a real bluebird egg with a wooden painted version in an additional 66 nest boxes. They also kept track of the size of the entrance holes; some had larger than average holes, whereas others were smaller than average.

The results, published in the August 2006 issue of The Condor, indicated that the bluebirds ejected 16 of the 20 fake cowbird eggs, but accepted all of the bogus bluebird eggs. Cowbird “eggs” were ejected from 9 of 10 nests with larger openings, but only from 4 of 10 nests with smaller openings. Peer and associates suggest that the higher success of rejection in the boxes with the larger openings was due to the fact that more light was let in to allow the bluebirds to detect the strange egg. Alternatively, they hypothesized that maybe it is essential for the bluebird parents to eject cowbird eggs out of larger entrances.

To their knowledge, this egg ejection frequency is the highest recorded for any cavity-nesting host. It may well be that previous investigators reporting on this phenomenon in eastern bluebirds may have missed cases of cowbird parasitism because the host parents had already dumped the unwanted egg.

Cavity Entrance Size

The importance of the size of the cavity entrance to brown-headed cowbirds could not be better demonstrated than by the observation published by David Zuwerrink and James Marshall of Ohio State University in the September 2006 issue of The Wilson Journal of Ornithology.

Unlike its close cousin, the black-capped chickadee, the Carolina chickadee is an uncommon host species for brown-headed cowbirds. The fact that the Carolina chickadee covers its eggs during the laying stage may help protect against nest parasitism.

On June 5, 2003, Zuwerrink and Marshall discovered a Carolina chickadee nest cavity “from which most of a dead female brown-headed cowbird’s tail was protruding.” The cowbird looked to be of normal size, but definitely appeared to be cramped in the cavity. The nest cavity was freshly excavated in a dead branch and the nest inside was intact. It was surmised that “the cowbird had died after laying the egg because she had no room to move inside the cavity and remove herself after entering the nest.”

Most likely the small entrances of chickadee nest cavities preclude most cowbirds from even attempting to parasitize their nests. According to past studies, a 1 1/2-inch hole was the smallest that a brown-headed cowbird could voluntarily exit. In short, they might be able to get into the cavity to lay their egg, but the difficulty of being able to exit from the nest is enough to dissuade them from trying. Now, if only we could train Kirtland’s warblers, an endangered species highly victimized by cowbirds, to nest in cavities with small holes!

This article was first published in the May-June 2007 issue of Bird Watcher’s Digest and is reprinted here with permission of that journal. The author, Dr. David M. Bird, is a professor of Wildlife Biology and Director of the Avian Science and Conservation Center at McGill University in Montreal, Quebec. He has published over 115 scientific papers on birds of prey, supervised 30 graduate students, and written and/or edited seven books on birds and bird conservation issues. With numerous contacts around the world, Dr. Bird is a past president of the Raptor Research Foundation Inc. (an international organization devoted to birds of prey), past-vice-president of the Society of Canadian Ornithologists and the elected Canadian representative of the International Ornithological Committee and a regular contributor to the Bird Watcher’s Digest.

Snakes are a common predator at bird nests, including artificial cavities. Until recently, most nest predation studies focused on identifying predators at the nest, usually in hopes of minimizing predation events. However, recent research turns that equation around and instead presents insights about the snakes themselves and predation as a selective force on birds.

Recent work has identified some basic patterns of snake predation on nests. Stake and colleagues studied predation through video observations on four open cup nesting species. They reported that all species in their study, except the Texas Rat Snake, preyed upon nests mainly during the day. Predation events ranged all the way from consuming eggs to even pinning and consuming the brooding parent. Snake predation also caused force-fledging in some instances. For at least one third of the nests, snakes returned to the site after the initial visit. Most of those visits happened within one hour after the initial predation, presumably in an attempt to capture adults or force-fledged young from the nest. The researchers also found that the rate of snake predation increases with the nesting period.

Another important question involves whether or not nest predators are opportunistic or specialized in preying upon nests. While snakes are common nest predators and one might expect to see at least some species to specialize in nests, that does not appear...
**Sparrow Spooker Protects Bluebirds**

By Linda Crum

"Without question the most deplorable event in the history of American ornithology was the introduction of the English Sparrow." — W.L. Dawson, *The Birds of Ohio*, 1903

Bluebirds have made a remarkable recovery in this country due to people like you who have put up nestboxes to house bluebirds. Secondary cavity nesters, bluebirds are unable to make their own cavity. They rely on natural cavities, old cavities carved out by woodpeckers or on nestboxes provided by you.

Providing a nestbox is only the first step in assuring that the bluebird will nest successfully and fledge their young. Many predators are known to prey on bluebirds—snakes, raccoons and cats. Proper mounting and installation of a predator guard on the nestbox is necessary to protect the birds. It is better to put up a nestbox at all than to put up one that leaves bluebirds vulnerable to predators. [http://www.nabirds.org/official.html](http://www.nabirds.org/official.html)

Bluebird landlords have learned that there is another predator that arrives by air that is a very aggressive competitor—the House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*, aka HOSP). These birds were introduced into the United States in the mid 1800's and often evict native birds from the nestbox. They not only break and remove eggs but also kill both adult and nestling birds. Bluebirds are defenseless against the powerful beak of the HOSP. [http://www.nabirds.org/hospattacks.html](http://www.nabirds.org/hospattacks.html)

HOSP are non-native, invasive birds and federal law allows removal and destruction of their nests, eggs, adults and nestlings. Passive and active HOSP control methods are available. One of the most popular and effective passive methods of protecting the box against HOSP is the sparrow spooker. Properly installed on the nestbox, the spooker is virtually 100% successful in deterring the HOSP.

Photo courtesy of www.sparrowtraps.net

House Sparrow from entering the nestbox.

Installation of the sparrow spooker on the nestbox is done immediately after the first egg is laid. It will not discourage bluebirds from entering the nestbox once the first egg is laid. However, it will "spook" the HOSP and none will enter the box. The spooker must remain on the box until the bluebird young fledge. It is removed immediately after fledging to encourage a second nesting by the bluebird and also to lessen the possibility of the HOSP becoming so familiar with it that they are no longer "spooked."

There are other effects of the sparrow spooker. In addition to spooking sparrows it can serve as an "icebreaker" between neighbors. This was the case for Texas Bluebird Society member Vanessa Voisinet. She got acquainted with her neighbor when he said, "What's that?" The spooker also helped Vanessa and her husband, Richard, educate their neighbors about proper techniques for mounting nestboxes. Vanessa said, "It is hard to believe a stick with shiny ribbon attached to a pole on top of a bird box brought two people together."

What is a sparrow spooker? Thought you would never ask! They are available commercially or can be easily made. They consist of the following materials:

- Vertical post made from a dowel or pipe about one foot long. Two horizontal extensions that project parallel to the nestbox roof and long enough to extend to the front edge of the roof. These horizontal extensions are used to hang three to six strips of reflective material, such as Mylar. The reflective material needs to be flexible enough to flutter in the wind and should be long enough to just brush to top of the roof.

Sparrow spookers are available from [http://www.sparrowtraps.net/spookers.htm](http://www.sparrowtraps.net/spookers.htm). All materials needed to attach the spooker to the nestbox are included. Homemade sparrow spookers are easy to make and effective. The materials can usually be found at any hardware store. The cost for materials will be less than $5.00. (South Dakota)

"Feeding live insects to the wild birds in my yard has helped me build a special bond with individual birds."

— Julie Zickefoose

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"Feeding live insects to the wild birds in my yard has helped me build a special bond with individual birds."

— Julie Zickefoose
A Bluebird Summer
By Howard E. Kulin

In early May of 2006 I became totally absorbed in the comings and goings of a bluebird pair as they assiduously fed their young from dawn till dusk. The nesting box was only 40 - 50 feet from our house, set on a slope which encompassed almost the entirety of their feeding area. Binoculars made the iridescent whirr of blue more defined, the feeding male could be recognized, the fecal sac easily visible, and the sex of the transporter clearly identified. While I didn’t time the interval between box visits they were typically every 4 - 5 minutes or less. The female was the most arduous in bringing food, but she seldom removed any of the fecal material. Sunshine made the colors dance, particularly in the typical hovering mode over the grass before a grasshopper or small spider was nabbed. What devotion and incredible parenting to behold even if the actions are the result of powerful instinct. This little bit of nature was mine for the asking, set in a theater of my own, but accessible through the nearest window or door.

I had noticed activity in the nestbox just a few days after my 69th birthday on the 2nd of May, 2006. If anyone were then to ask me what I did with all my retirement time, I should have quickly replied, “I watch bluebirds.” For me, in those weeks, a more important activity was not needed, a more valued endeavor not to be found.

I do not number among the serious of bird watchers, but I do count myself among those who appreciate and enjoy this important corner of the natural world. My experiences and the planet watching birds have been enriching and meaningful. I have occasionally derided those who are far more serious in the endeavor, keeping accurate records of their sightings, and traveling together with similar enthusiasts. I consider myself a sort of closet birder, enjoying the sightings but not directing my life by a constant need for increasing a “life list.”

May 18, 2006: At 5:45 A.M., the sun is just up and there is plenty of bluebird activity. First light just enters the box hole. As the male perches on the top of the nestbox, he quickly becomes visible. A worm is presented and the adult bird goes inside to retrieve a fecal sac. The female seldom lights on the roof of the box before presenting her catch to the hungry brood. Feeding appears to take place every 3 - 4 minutes but I need to time accurately. The bluebird habit of nesting in open fields makes the process particularly easy to observe.

May 20, 2006: I have changed my primary observation post to the deck just over our swimming pool, a good deal closer to the box. The adult birds are quite fearless of my presence, frequently lighting on nearby branches and deck railing. The young beaks are very visible in the box opening. We are well into the second week of age for this brood; I should guess 10 to 12 days of age at the least. Despite much rain the bluebirds all seem in good health. Iris and wild geraniums around the pool are beautiful touches to the scene, as are the white bloom of the locust on the land beyond. The expenditure of energy by the parents is quite phenomenal. Being a home naturalist in my bathtub is just fine.

On the other side of the house, also in an open field, is a nesting pair of tree swallows. I carefully opened the box and observed the young, maybe only one, however. With closer observation the parents were making regular trips to the nest, but infrequently. And they remain inside the box for several minutes or more. Now there are 2 stage shows to watch.

May 24, 2006: The nestlings are clearly on the move, eying the outside world with.

An Amazing Life...
By Lauri Kunzman

This spring, Charlotte Elder, one of my monitors, found a dead female bluebird when first checking the nestboxes on her route. While we don’t usually “advertise” the death of our bluebirds, this bluebird had a very interesting life, and we thought our readers would want to know more about her.

In 2003, this female was banded as an adult in a box located on a power pole (right of way) on Tooele Road in Sherwood. During the summer of 2003, this female bluebird and her mate had two clutches with ten eggs laid, and nine chicks fledged that summer.

In the spring of 2004, a huge main natural gas line was laid. The 12 inch pipe was being trenched within one foot of this power pole, and this female and her same mate had already established a nest with eggs in it. Hurriedly, on a Saturday morning, Ron Kunzman, Charlotte Elder and I took a new 4x4 pole and, with the landowner’s permission, planted the pole and moved the box (with nest and eggs) 200’ inland off the road right of way. A lot of heavy equipment continued to work along this right of way.

However, this pair never missed a beat, and during the summer of 2004, they had three clutches with fourteen eggs laid and all fourteen chicks fledged.

In 2005, she and the same male returned to this box and had two clutches with ten eggs, and nine chicks fledged. And in 2006, she and the same male moved one box over and had two clutches with eleven eggs laid. Eight chicks fledged.

This is an amazing history and one of the reasons it is so important to our banding program that every effort is made to recapture the adult female lack. This female laid a total of forty-five eggs with forty successful fledges.

Needless to say, Charlotte Elder enjoyed four years of watching and monitoring this pair. They knew her soft whistle and would eagerly await her treat of mealworms. This beautiful bird is to be honored for her strength and beauty. Interestingly enough, she was found early this spring up on the same hill but not in a box where she had nested.

The article first appeared in the Prescott Bluebird Recovery Program (Oregon) Newsletter and is reprinted with their permission. Lauri Kunzman is the treasurer of PBBP and also a bird bander. She is a prolific writer with frequent articles on all aspects of bluebirds and bluebirding.

About the Cover

Jonathan Morgan is a wildlife enthusiast and fine-arts photographer who finds solace in spending many hours roaming the forests, fields and waterways to observe wild birds. He has managed nestbox trails for Eastern Bluebirds and other cavity nesters, plus explored a wide array of Midwest species including Sandhill & Whooping Cranes, warblers, chickadees and titmice, and many of the vanishing grassland birds.

His interests include collecting bird books, connecting people to habitat projects, and getting his iconic artwork into both galleries and publications. These days he uses his workhorse Nikon D-80 with various lenses, a Vanguard tripod and maybe a filter. Often he can be found (or not found if he is wearing his camouflage gear) on land or in-stream (in his kayak) getting into the most impenetrable spots, always anticipating that one great shot. He “shoots” birds year-round in all weather and in any place his adventuring takes him. Jonathan is a Field Conservation Steward at the Kalamazoo Nature Center, a Licensed Wildlife Rehabilitator, and lives up to his handle “Friend of Birds” giving birding seminars and donating his wildlife images to worthy charities for fundraising. His website may be viewed at www.jonathannfriendofbirds.com.
Continued from page...8

interest and suspicion. They would take turns occupying the box hole, whole bodies in view, and two feet firmly planted on what was now an exit not an entrance. I witnessed three of the young leave between noon and 1:00 P.M., soaring high up on nearby trees on this maiden flight.

Parental feeding at the box then appeared to stop, and I assumed there were only three birds in the brood. But a late afternoon inspection revealed a fourth nestling, cowering in a corner. Feeding by the adults then resumed and this lone occupant seemed quite ready to join his sibs in the big world.

By mid-morning of the next day I was alarmed to see a house wren perched on my box roof. With inspection no bluebirds were present and I removed the old nest, thereby making way for a second brood. But concern for wren occupancy was real.

May 28, 2006: Still no bluebirds in sight and the wrens are being very persistent in setting up house. This is all part of the frustration in promoting successful bluebird breeding. In fact, we have had few observed nestings since our first year on the property in 1991. So by May 30th of 2006, when the adults were again in evidence, I was very concerned that a failed second brood was forthcoming. The young bluebirds from the first brood were fed by the parents and even trying to forage on their own. In desperation, on June 4th, I placed another nesting box on the slope, some 50 feet from the original one. Within a few days it was bluebird grand central, with parents and young going quite crazy around the new box. Despite entries by the adults no nest building was apparent. But at least the bluebirds were successfully lighting attempted takeovers by competing tree swallows.

We were away from home for a week beginning June 10. But inspecting the box on June 19, I was delighted to find a nicely made nest and a clutch of three bluebird eggs. As of June 21 we were traveling once more for two weeks. But observations on July 8, just after our return, showed young were being fed in the new box; the second brood had made it! Then a heat wave started on July 17 as temperatures climbed into the high 90s. I put out an old patio umbrella to provide some shade, and the birds took the change in stride.

On July 19, 2006 at 7:45 in the evening I witnessed the first young fledge from this new brood. And by noon of the next day the remaining two little ones were gone. The antics were the same as before; the young viewing the outside world with great suspicion before making the leap for life. How to foster conditions for a third brood, and how to keep the wrens and others away was the key question remaining.

Unfortunately, the situation was more complicated than just keeping the competition away. Over the next two weeks bluebirds were frequently sighted but not with nesting intent. On August 3rd there was a great flurry of activity as the parents and the three fledges from the second brood spent a great amount of time around the box from the second brood. In fact, the young birds even entered the box. Monitoring revealed not a trace of serious nest building. Hopes for a third brood began to dissipate; and by the end of the first week in August there was little likelihood of such an event. During those days the five members of the second brood would gather at the box in the early morning and late afternoon. By the second week in August there were only rare bluebird sightings.

On August 14 we left for travel abroad. But I had had a bluebird summer for sure, a very special time indeed. Sitting out on the deck with binoculars had become a new ritual for me as the sun began to rise, a new way to begin a good day.

Kulin is a 70 year old, retired academic pediatrician who has lived in rural PA for over 35 years. He has been a rather passive birder until recently when nearby nesting bluebirds brought out latent enthusiasm. He now refers to this period of his life as "The bluebird years" and considers himself a novice but avid bluebirder.
Six Orphaned Bluebird Nestlings
By Janice Petko

I would like to preface this article by saying that I monitor 18 bluebird boxes in Stark County, Ohio and 56 boxes in Carroll County, Ohio. Fifty of the 56 boxes in Carroll County are at the Algonquin Mill Farm Complex, which is owned by the Carroll County Historical Society and is located 4 miles south of Carrollton, Ohio.

It all began in June 2007 when a friend of mine Denny Lesko from North Canton called to tell me she had an Eastern Bluebird nest and four eggs in a nesting box in her back yard. She was very excited. All four eggs hatched on June 15 or June 16. Denny left on vacation June 23 when the nestlings were approximately one week old. She asked her neighbor Ric Thompson and me to “keep an eye” on them while she was away. I checked on them the afternoon of June 23, and all of them were doing fine.

On Monday afternoon, June 25, I got a call from Ric saying that there was something wrong with Denny’s bluebird nestlings. He told me he had been gone all morning; when he returned home early in the afternoon, he watched the bluebird box for a couple of hours to see if there was any activity. When he didn’t see either parent come to feed the nestlings, he became very concerned and looked in the box. He found one dead baby, which he removed, and said the other three looked like they weren’t going to make it. I told him I would be there in five minutes.

When I arrived, Ric told me that the day before he had seen the adult female bluebird fly to the entrance hole of the box but would not go in. He said he had seen a male House (English) Sparrow sitting on top of the mouth begging for food. Ric showed me the dead baby he had removed from the box earlier. It had head injuries, which is typical of a House Sparrow attack. Since he hadn’t seen the parents feeding the nestlings and the remaining ones did not look healthy and were begging for food, we concluded that the House Sparrow had frightened off the parents.

I suggested that he call *Sanders Center of Wildlife Rehabilitation, which is part of Stark Parks, in Stark County, Massillon, Ohio. Ric talked to one of the rehabilitators at Sanders and explained the situation. She said to bring the nestlings in immediately, which he did. Sadly, one of them died en route. Sanders took the other two and said they would do their best to save them.

I called Sanders Center on Tuesday, June 26, to see how they bluebirds were doing. The rehabber said they had made it through the night, but the next few days would be a critical period. When I called back later in the week, I was told that the nestlings were doing fine. I was also told that they had received four other orphaned bluebird nestlings on June 27. The lady who brought in these four said she had found the adult male bluebird dead early on in the nestling period. He was also

Continued from page . . . 10

the victim of a House Sparrow. Since the female was now a “single mom”, the lady began supplementing Mama Bluebird’s food supply for the nestlings with mealworms. She said the female flew in almost immediately whenever she put out the mealworms. However, on the morning of June 27, the female didn’t show up for the mealworms. She thought something had probably happened to her. She was very concerned so she called Sanders and was told, just to be sure, to give the female another couple of hours to see if she returned to the box. A couple of hours passed and the female never came back, so she took the four nestlings to the Sanders Center.

Now, Sanders had a total of six bluebirds to rehabilitate. I would check on them periodically during the weeks that followed and was told that they were all doing well. They were eating mealworms, insects, and berries. They were moved to the songbird flight cage where they could practice their flying skills and also stretch their wings to strengthen their flight muscles so they would be in the best of shape when they were released.

Next, the rehabbers at Sanders had to decide when and where to release them when they were ready. Because I monitor 50 nesting boxes at the Algonquin Mill, I volunteered to release them at the Mill. They liked the idea of releasing them on a bluebird trail and told me that would be fine. It was decided that since all of them were healthy, eating on their own, and flying well, they could be released on July 21. They would be approximately five to six weeks of age by then.

Denny, Bernardino Akkerman, and I arrived at Sanders around 8:30 a.m. on July 21 to transport the young bluebirds to the Algonquin Mill to be released. Seeing the six healthy bluebirds was an incredibly inspiring experience. After I banded them, they were placed in brown grocery bags for their trip to the Mill and were taken back into the wild.

When we arrived at the Algonquin Mill, Mike Mangan, the manger of the Mill, joined us. He suggested that we release them in the area near the old, steam powered sawmill that the Carroll County Historical Society had purchased in 1979. As we let them go, they flew into the nearby trees; we could hear them chirping to each other. When Bernardino and I finished checking the boxes on my trail, we went back to the release area. We no longer heard them chirping and we didn’t see them. We hope they will stay around the Mill, but they may move on to other areas. We may never see them again, but thanks to the dedication of the wonderful people and the expert care they got at Sanders Wildlife Center, they have been given a second chance at life.

The Sanders Center of Wildlife Rehabilitation has a long running standard for care and rehabilitation of native Ohio species. They receive and treat more than 1,000 orphaned and/or injured wildlife patients annually. Their mission is to provide each patient with the proper food, housing, and medical treatment necessary to return them to their natural environment.

Janice Petko is a member of NABS, the Ohio Bluebird Society (OBS), and the Stark County (Ohio) Bluebird Club. She is a coordinator in Stark County for OBS where she shares her passion for bluebirds by speaking to open garden clubs, church groups, and anyone else who will listen to her. She also reports her nest box results each year to OBS.

Class of 2011 List of Candidates for NABS Board and Officers

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<th>Position</th>
<th>Candidate’s Name</th>
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<td>President</td>
<td>Jonathan Ridgeway</td>
<td>New York</td>
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<td>First Vice-President</td>
<td>Brian Swanson</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
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<td>Phil Berry</td>
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<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>Greg Beavers</td>
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<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Lynne Ridgeway</td>
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<td>Trustee (Class of 2011)</td>
<td>Bob Benson</td>
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<td>Phil Berry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trustee (Class of 2011)</td>
<td>John Schuster</td>
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NABS Bylaws specify that the membership be notified of candidates for office prior to the Annual Meeting (NABS2008 Convention).
Hotel/Camping Information
Host Hotel - Holiday Inn, 110 2nd Ave., Kearney, Neb., exit 272 off Interstate 80. Their number is (308) 237-5971. Other hotels in the immediate area (sharing parking lot with the Holiday Inn and within a short walking distance) are the Wingate Hotel, (308) 237-4400, and the Hampton Inn, (308) 234-3400. Blocks of rooms are being held in all three hotels. For room reservations, call direct to the hotel of your choice. Due to the popularity of this area at this time of the year, the demand for hotel rooms is extremely high. RESERVE EARLY AND ADVISE THEM YOU ARE WITH THE GREAT PLAINS SANDHILL CRANE & BLUEBIRD FESTIVAL. Room rates at all three hotels are $72.95 for one to four people per night.

RV Camping - Fort Kearney State Recreation Area, South Highway 10 and 44, (308) 865-5305. Complete hookups are available, $2.50 per day, per vehicle.

Join the Migration to Kearney, Nebraska!

Great Plains Sandhill Crane & Bluebird Festival
March 6-9, 2008

Holiday Inn Hotel & Convention Center
Kearney, Nebraska

More than 10 million waterfowl stop in the rainwater basin each year.
The largest concentration of Sandhill cranes in the world - more than 500,000.

Nebraska Environmental Trust
NEBRASKA possibilities...endless

Convention Speakers
Julie Zickeloose is a widely published natural history writer and artist. She became a magazine and book illustrator and then began to illustrate her own stories, gleaned from experiences with wild birds and animals. Her illustrated book, "The Bird-friendly Backyard: Natural Gardening for Birds" has sold more than 40,000 copies and "Enjoying Bluebirds More," a bluebird landlord’s handbook, has sold more than half a million copies. Julie can be heard as a regular commentator on NPTV’s "All Things Considered."

Bill Thompson, III, is the editor of "Bird Watcher’s Digest." He is the author of the best-selling book "Bird Watching For Dummies" and he has written several other popular books and booklets for backyard bird watchers. He is the lead author of "Identify Yourself: Birding’s 50 Most Common ID Challenges," which is illustrated by his wife Julie Zickeloose.

Kevin Bernet of Richmondville, New York, is an associate professor of wildlife biology at State University of New York (SUNY) at Cobleskill. He served for over 12 years as the Research Director for the North American Bluebird Society. Kevin has received numerous awards for his outstanding conservation contributions and is known internationally for his bluebird and bluebird nest box research.

Keith Radel is an experienced and enthusiastic bluebirdr from Faribault, Minnesota. He is an active board member of the successful Minnesota Bluebird Recovery Program and serves as coordinator for two large counties. Keith has garnered a wealth of knowledge from over 20 years of personal hands-on experience on his own plot and shares it in a way that inspires and motivates novice and veteran bluebirders alike.

Keanna Leonard is the Education Director at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary near Gibbon, Neb. The sanctuary is in the heart of the central flyway and home of the largest concentration of Sandhill cranes in the world. With a B.A. in biology, a love for the outdoors, and a passion to share nature with others, Keanna excels in administering and conducting approximately 200 nature-based educational programs yearly.

Ron Cisar has been actively involved in environmental education with groups of all ages for over 30 years. As an accomplished singer/songwriter, Ron shares a variety of environmental messages in the power of lyric and song through his "Earn Music" program. He has received numerous awards in the area of education including the first Education Award presented by the Yellowstone Grizzly Foundation for his "creative and inspirational approach in sharing his knowledge and appreciation of nature. . ."
**Festival Itinerary**

**Wednesday, March 5**
4:45 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. Sandhill Crane Viewing Blind Trip

**Thursday, March 6**
5:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m. Sandhill Crane Viewing Blind Trip
8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. Registration
Sandhill Crane Viewing Blind Trip
4:45 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. Sandhill Crane Viewing Blind Trip

**Friday, March 7**
5:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m. Sandhill Crane Viewing Blind Trip
6:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. Birding Tour Field Trip (limited to 100 people)
8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. Registration
9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Prairie Culture Tour Field Trip
3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. Workshop
4:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. Workshop
5:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. NABS Board Meeting
6:00 p.m. Casual Social Gathering with buffet and cash bar
Entertainment by: Julie Zicklue, Bill Thompson III and Al Batt

**Saturday, March 8**
8:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. Registration
8:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. NABS General Meeting
8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Exhibition and Silent Auction Areas Open
9:00 a.m. - 5:00 a.m. Festival Program and Lunch. Raffle items will be awarded throughout the day
6:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. Social Hour (cash bar)
7:00 p.m. Banquet and Awards Presentation. NABS Birthday Celebration
Entertainment by Ron Cisar

**Sunday, March 9**
5:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m. Sandhill Crane Viewing Blind Trip
*(The above schedule is subject to minor changes prior to the start of the festival.)*

For more information contact: Bill Seibert (402) 334-8691, wseibert@cox.net, or Steve Eno (402) 783-3011, clerio@cox.com

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1. **Birding Tour** - This tour will begin at 6:00 a.m. with a trip to Prairie Chicken Lek or "booming" grounds. Male prairie chickens arrive before dawn and quickly begin their unique courtship display, characterized by stomping feet, towering leaps and resonant booming calls created by inflated yellow-orange air sacs found along both sides of their neck. Fights often break out between males, feathers fly and battles can be fierce.

The next leg of this tour will take you to Rowe Sanctuary. This 1,290 acre wildlife sanctuary is operated by the National Audubon Society to provide habitat for Sandhill cranes, whooping cranes and other birds. It is staffed by naturalists, bird watchers and crane enthusiasts. You will have the opportunity to walk the nature trails, enjoy the education facility and shop at the gift shop which features crane and nature related items.

The tour will end with a visit to Rainwater Basin viewing areas. More than 10 million ducks, geese, and shorebirds visit the Rainwater Basin every spring. Some viewing is outside of the vehicles so dress for possible cold weather and bring your binoculars and a field guide. Breakfast and lunch are included in the cost of this field trip. (Because weather is unpredictable, changes are very possible to this field trip.)

2. **Prairie Culture Tour** - This field trip will begin at 9:00 a.m. with a tour of the Museum of Nebraska Art. You will experience the beauty of one of America's outstanding collections of wildlife art by John James Audubon. In addition, visitors also have the opportunity to view a collection which includes 175 years of American art from the great 19th century artist explorers of the frontiers to the masters of the 20th century.

You will then travel south to Minden, NE to tour the Minden Opera House. This historic masterpiece was built in 1891 and completely renovated in 1999-2000. The theater features a spectacular mural on the ceiling of early rural life of the region. You will enjoy a catered lunch while being entertained by a local entertainment troop.

The last stop of the trip will be at the Great Platte River Road Archway which stretches over Interstate 80. "History comes alive" as you trace the history of communication and transportation beginning with the days of the mountain men and Native Americans. You will travel along the Oregon, Mormon and California Trails, ride with the Pony Express and Stage Coach, listen to the rumble of Iron Horse, traverse the Lincoln Highway and watch a Drive-In Movie before observing the traffic passing beneath the bridge.

3. **Sandhill Crane Viewing Blind Trip** - The trips to the Audubon Society’s Rowe Sanctuary begin at either 5:00 a.m. or 4:45 p.m. Be a witness to one of the “birding wonders of the world.” Between late February and early April, a half million Sandhill cranes descend to the Platte River valley in central Nebraska. The gathering of Sandhill cranes on the Platte comprises more than 80 percent of the world’s population, and is the largest gathering of cranes anywhere in the world. All trips are guided by experienced staff and volunteers and last 2-3 hours. Dress warmly as the blinds are not heated, and bring your camera and binoculars. There are chemical toilets at each blind. The incoming and evening experiences at the blinds are completely different so you may want to make this trip at both times. Must provide your own transportation or carpooled. Space is limited. First come/first served.

**Workshops** - Julie Zicklue will present “Personal Habitat: Creating a Haven for Wildlife (and Yourself).” This is the story of an artist’s love affair with a piece of land and the birds, animals and plants that inhabit it. Simple habitat enhancements can take a backyard from bland to bustling with wildlife.

In this slide talk, artist/writer Zicklue shows how she and her husband have transformed their 80-acre abandoned farm into a wildlife sanctuary and observatory—a perfect personal habitat. 

**Donations**: $1,000 = Major Sponsor
$500 = Supporter

**BAN is also looking for items to be donated for the silent auction and raffle.** All profits from the Great Plaines Sandhill Crane & Bluebird Festival go to Bluebirds Across Nebraska’s recovery efforts for bluebirds and other cavity-nesting birds.

**Registration Form**

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**Complete this form and return with full payment to:**
Bill Seibert, 2115 South 114th Street, Omaha, NE 68144. Checks should be made payable to Bluebirds Across Nebraska.

**Refund Policy:** 60 days prior to the festival = full refund. After 60 days prior = 1/2 refund (includes weather related)

**Festival Fees**

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**Total Enclosed**

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Websites: nabbirdsociety.org