Renew Today! Give a friend the gift of bluebirds!

Date: ____________________________

☐ New Membership  ☐ Renewal  ☐ A gift subscription from ________________ for:

☐ 1 Year  ☐ 2 Years  ☐ 3 Years  ☐ 4 Years

Household  ☐ Single Person

☐ Standard  ☐ $30.00  ☐ $20.00

☐ Supporting  ☐ $50.00  ☐ $40.00

☐ Contributing  ☐ $85.00  ☐ $75.00

☐ Guardian  ☐ $110.00  ☐ $100.00

☐ Life  ☐ $500.00  ☐ $400.00

☐ Organization  ☐ $50.00

☐ Small Business  ☐ $50.00

☐ Corporation  ☐ $125.00

☐ Additional Donation  ☐ $30.00  ☐ $50.00  ☐ Other __________

☐ "Friend of NABS" for current calendar year (does not include quarterly "Bluebird") $15.00

☐ Check enclosed (in U.S. funds)

☐ Visa  ☐ MasterCard

Card #: __________________________

Last 3 digits of code on reverse side: __________________________

Exp: __________  Signature: __________

How did you learn about NABS membership?

We do not share or sell NABS' membership list.

$10.00 of each annual membership is designated for subscription to "Bluebird," the quarterly journal. The remaining portion of payment is a contribution. Payment must be in U.S. funds. Mail to:

NABS, P O Box 43, Miamiville OH 45147

An on-line membership form with payment through PayPal is available online at www.nablsociety.org

BLUEBIRD  published by
North American Bluebird Society
P.O. Box 43
Miamiville, Ohio 45147

Spring 2008
Please Recycle

Index for the Spring 2008 Issue

Spring Message to our Affiliate Organizations…………………2

We've Brought Back the Bluebirds…………………5

NABS 2008 - Our Gathering in Kearney…………………7

General Information about Blouflies…………………9

Wen Guards to Deter House Wen Haroc…………………11

Did You Know …………………………………………14

Barn Owls: Nature's Cavity Nesting Rodent Control……16

Learning from the Bluebird's Instincts…………………19

From the President………………………………………3

Brought Back the Bluebirds - about the author ………7

Tree Swallow Competition……………………………8

Children's Bluebird Activity Book……………………..10

Saving the Bluebirds……………………………………13

Threat of Foreign Nesting Material……………………15

NABS Education Committee Needs Material …………18

2007 California Nestbox Trail Reports…………………20
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 territorial bluebird organizations to become affiliates in a consortium of equals where all working toward a common goal; a further partnership in international bluebird conservation. NABS is associated with affiliating of NABS. Your affiliated organization will be recognized and listed on the NABS website. If your organization has a newsletter, please forward a copy to our headquarters. To find out more about becoming a NABS affiliate, send the following information:

Notice. If you are listed below, please check listing to see if it is correct. If not, please contact nabsinfo@nabsci.org with correct information.

Affiliates of the North American Bluebird Society

Published by The North American Bluebird Society
P.O. Box 43
Miamisville, Ohio 45147

Questions should be directed to the NABS address shown above.

The NABS web site offers answers to many questions.

Please log on at: www.nabsci.org for membership and other useful information

Acting Editor: Bernie Daniel

Copy Editor & Printer: Dale Atkinson Atkinson Printing, Inc.
Wooster, Ohio

Bluebird/Sialia (ISSN 0890-7021) is published Quarterly by the North American Bluebird Society, P.O. Box 43, Miamisville, Ohio 45147

Subscription is included with membership in NABS. Write for information about bulk quantities. Make checks and money orders payable to NABS in US funds.

Issues are dated Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter and appear approximately on the fifteenth day of January, April, July and October.

The deadline for submission of materials is 3 months prior to the publication date.

Letters to the editor and articles in this magazine express the opinions and/or position of the authors. Letters may be edited for length and content. Published articles do not necessarily represent the opinions or positions of the Officers, Directors or other representatives of NABS.

SPRING MESSAGE TO OUR AFFILIATE ORGANIZATIONS

By Brian Swanson
NABS Vice-President for Affiliate Affairs

In the conservation and education world, partnerships are the glue that keeps us together and the engine that moves us forward. As an international player in this arena, NABS is involved in partnerships at several levels with various organizations and is actively seeking new opportunities. When this newsletter arrives, NABS will have just had a most successful partnership with Bluebirds Across Nebraska (BAN). BAN invited us to join their already scheduled Great Plains Sandhill Crane & Bluebird Festival, for our annual meeting and the celebration of NABS 30th anniversary. We are most grateful to BAN for this collaboration.

In addition, NABS has joined with a host of other conservation-minded organizations in expressing support for the U.S. House and Senate bills that would make permanent a change to the Internal Revenue Code enacted in 2006. In the action of 2006 amended the tax incentive for voluntary donations by individuals and corporations that relinquish development rights in order to protect significant wildlife, scenic, and historic resources. The change enables landowners to get a significant donation benefit for their land. It provides a monetary motivation for the preservation of millions of acres of land across the country for future generations.

We have supported the National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) System and their Refuge Birding Initiative. This exciting new program will seek to establish partnerships between NABS Affiliates and National Wildlife Refuges in their areas. The goal is to erect nestboxes in habitats suitable for Bluebirds and other cavity nesters. It would be an agreement that the Alliance would monitor the boxes, and we at NABS would encourage the collected data to be submitted to Cornell's Project Nestwatch. Funding for these trails can be negotiated between the Affiliate and the NWR.

In your own area we encourage you to form partnerships with parks, schools, golf courses, and various youth groups. Educating youth and adults keeps the conservation movement alive and growing. Young people are particularly susceptible to the excitement of watching the wonders of nature close up, the way it can be done in a nestbox.

The final partnership that I want to mention are those between individual members and NABS. Jonathan discusses this in his President's message and provides some specific examples where we need support from you, our members. As Affiliates you can now be part of the larger Bluebird network. We will be providing a way for each Affiliate to post the dates of your major events on the NABS website thus inviting others to join in your activities. NABS has now joined all of the Affiliates that had membership forms available. As a result, your newsletters will be available for our "Bluebird" editor to pursue for suitable articles to share with the larger community.

Partnerships are our life blood. Please join in at every opportunity you find.

Website: www.nabsci.org

Published by The North American Bluebird Society
P.O. Box 43
Miamisville, Ohio 45147

Questions should be directed to the NABS address shown above.

The NABS web site offers answers to many questions.

Please log on at: www.nabsci.org for membership and other useful information

Acting Editor: Bernie Daniel

Copy Editor & Printer: Dale Atkinson Atkinson Printing, Inc.
Wooster, Ohio

Bluebird/Sialia (ISSN 0890-7021) is published Quarterly by the North American Bluebird Society, P.O. Box 43, Miamisville, Ohio 45147

Subscription is included with membership in NABS. Write for information about bulk quantities. Make checks and money orders payable to NABS in US funds.

Issues are dated Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter and appear approximately on the fifteenth day of January, April, July and October.

The deadline for submission of materials is 3 months prior to the publication date.

Letters to the editor and articles in this magazine express the opinions and/or position of the authors. Letters may be edited for length and content. Published articles do not necessarily represent the opinions or positions of the Officers, Directors or other representatives of NABS.

Website: www.nabsci.org
Greetings of peace.

During the past 30 years NABS has conducted its annual meeting under the umbrella of a convention hosted by one of its Affiliates. Each host put a great deal of effort into reserving accommodations and organizing speakers and field trips. When all was said and done they all made a pretty nice income for their own coffers, at least as far back as we know about. Most of them were very generous to share a portion of their windfall with NABS. Before I joined the Board, NABS had gotten into very deep financial trouble so a decision was made to host our 2007 convention ourselves so NABS would get the whole windfall. This choice resulted in distracting attention from every other priority and in that context, was a very costly error in judgement. Even so, because of the excellent efforts of Co-Chairs, Dr. Patty Gowaty who was responsible for putting together an outstanding roster of world class academics who were no less entertaining than they were informative and, Helen Munro who managed the other aspects of the undertaking with grace, creativity and a great deal of industry and commitment, achieved a highly successful outcome. The attendance was far below what was anticipated but with the help of several generous sponsors, we even earned a modest amount of income.

I doubt that people who were not directly involved in the process can really appreciate how much the attention directed on that enterprise interfered with the rest of the NABS operations but while it laid before us I simply accepted it and referred to it as a milestone that we needed to pass before we would be able to elevate other priorities to the level they deserved. This is not intended to suggest that the 2007 convention was our only focus, merely that it stood before many real important needs and it is certainly in no way intended to diminish how well it turned out or how much we appreciated what Helen and Patty did for us.

In my opinion the highest level of gratitude during this period is due to Brian Swanson for his tenacity in the realm of Affiliate Relations and especially in his success in eliciting hosts for our future conventions. Brian, more than any other individual, is due the credit for convincing our friends at BAN to host our NABS 2008 in Kamey, NE, our friends at PBS to host NABS 2009 in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and our friends in the Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project to host NABS 2010 in Oregon. This is only one example of our efforts to develop longer range planning and it is a clear demonstration that we are beginning to earn a higher degree of confidence from our Affiliate organizations. I believe it is significant that none of these commitments were forthcoming until after NABS 2007 was behind us.

During the time we were preparing our event in Athens, GA, one critical object of our existence actually experienced an exceptional transformation from decline to meaningful growth. With her limitless enthusiasm, energy, dedication and creativity and with the help of hard working members of the Membership Committee, Pauline Tom managed to achieve some real magic. She sold the Board on the idea of sending Please Come Back letters to individuals whose memberships had expired and got Phil Berry to staff thousands of envelopes to people on the list. She and Tena Taylor began a program of sending notes to members who were due for renewal and had great success with both of those efforts. She suggested that we establish our new discounted "A Plus" (A+) membership category for people who belong to any of our Affiliates and then improved our forms and other printed materials to motivate more people to choose more expensive levels of membership, e.g., Individuals upgrading to Household and Subscribing members choosing to become Supporting, Contributing or Guardian members. The incentive she used to promote the growth in NABS revenues was, with Board approval, to tell people that portions of their payments will be allocated to NABS' Zeleny Endowment and ultimately be used for the benefit of bluebird conservation.

Pauline completed her 3 year term as a Board member as of the elections in Georgia and Sherry Linn is already proving herself to be quite effective as our new Membership Chair.

There is a special name for the particular class of workers, be they volunteers or paid employees, who accept any assignment without question and perform the task to the best of their ability. Bernie Daniel is just that kind of worker and that is why I refer to him as a "good soldier." Before I joined the Board, back at a time when nobody else would accept the challenge, Bernie took the mantle of President, or as he called it, interim President, and he was very much a stabilizing leader. He took on another interim assignment at the same time which he has been doing for almost a year and a half and has been asking for relief since before I took office. I have been telling him all along that nothing could be done until our convention in Georgia was behind us and that is the reason it has been so important to me to start seeking someone to replace him as editor of this publication. The process began a few months ago and according to the schedule that has been set, our new Bluebird Managing Editor is supposed to start in April and produce a first edition in the Summer. There is no way I can adequately express the gratitude I have for Bernie’s yeoman service in this area.

In any organization there are two jobs which are typically likened to carrying stones. One is the treasurer’s and the other is the secretary’s. The two people in these positions on the NABS Board are also good soldiers and great team players. Greg Beavers is our Treasurer. He is responsible for every penny that comes in or goes out. He receives and pays all the bills and manages all our money, our investments and our taxes. He enters every detail into a computer and prepares all the financial reports. He is the primary person responsible to prepare the budgets and submit them for approval. With Board approval, he actively participated in selection of a new accounting firm and arranged
for a change in our fiscal year.

The NABS Board could not be more proud than to report to you, our members, that after the NABS 2007 convention accounts were settled our Board voted to donate nearly $50,000 from our General Fund into our Zeleny Endowment, to bring its balance well above the $100,000 threshold which permits us to put these resources to use. Of course, Greg was the person responsible for managing this reallocation of funding, too.

To be perfectly clear, that $50,000 did not derive from the convention. It resulted from our various cost cutting and revenue generating measures but it would not have been prudent to transfer money into Zeleny before we knew if the convention would make a few dollars or lose a lot. We were fearful that we might have to pay a lot more for the committed level of attendance we did not realize.

My wife, Lynne, is the best organization Secretary I have ever known. She is compulsive about keeping records in good order, even those produced long before she became responsible. The minutes she distributes after every meeting accurately report the business that transpires without excessive commentary which does not contribute to the understanding. She is attentive to every detail that requires a timely followup. Lynne is responsible for so much that goes on behind the scenes that it would not be possible for almost any of the other players to do as well or as much without the added value of her effort.

The way she does it is usually so transparent and seamless that it usually occurs without being noticed.

A difficulty I face at this point of the writing of this message is that I am afraid I may run out of adequate superlatives to properly describe the efforts of any of the other members of my team on the NABS Board. Each and every one of them has made significant contributions. Dan Sparks operates our website storefront and receives our general phone calls. Several months ago Jimmy Dodson became Chairman of our Speakers Bureau. He is doing hard work to improve the manageability of the records and make plans for programs during the upcoming nesting season. Bob Benson is very effective with the Hotline and actively works to improve the standards of the Nestbox Approval Program. New Board member, David Rutherford and others, Dick Tuttle and John Schuster stand ready whenever assignments are directed their way. They are conscientious in their participation in monthly Board calls. Another new Board member, Walter Mugdan, Esq., accepted the Chairmanship of the newly formed Law Committee and is already working on a variety of concerns we have. Maynard Sumner who is not on our Board, Chairman of our new Photography Committee, is working to assemble an inventory of the pictures we have in our collection or which are available to us and to record any copyright permissions or restrictions that are associated with each of them.

And now that I mentioned everyone on the Board and others on our team and how much they each do it is imperative that I mention another essential participant, our webmaster, Jim McLothin, an IT professional who donates vast hours and commitment to our needs. The most significant obstacle standing in the way of making so many of the improvements we requested is our own inability to provide the directions we want him to follow. Much more of our membership process could be automated as could so much of our Affiliate and Speakers Bureau or other educational services, if only we would make the choices. Those choices are too important to make haphazardly and yet we do not have the time now to make them deliberately. All of this leads me to the reason for this particular message I am writing.

I told you that we have developed into a very great team comprised of some very great players and even a number of superstars. I told you the primary responsibilities of most of the players without mentioning that some of them are actually chairmen of three or more committees or members of every committee. I alluded to the fact that the people I mentioned are all volunteers but I feel it is important that I come right out and say it. I did not mention a single name in this message of a person who gets any compensation or reward for the generous contribution of time, energy and dedication they gladly donate to NABS and purposes of bluebird conservation. I told you how much so many of these people are accomplishing and how diligently they fulfill their responsibility. I am hard pressed to believe that any of them could be expected to take on more. Therein lies the problem. There is so much more to be done.

So now as you read these last few words on this page, I call on you to give careful consideration to this question. Is there anything you are willing and able to do that can help NABS to become an even greater, more important entity serving the interest we share, bluebird conservation? If there is, I respectfully urge you to take action at your earliest opportunity or in consultation to me personally or any other member of your Board, and let us know how you want to help. Our Board of Directors needs at least 3 more team players. We need to establish a Grants Committee to develop goals, standards and procedures, review applications and make recommendations as to how we may distribute funds to achieve meaningful scientific, educational and conservation objectives.

It may be useful to add more members to our Education Advisory Committee. It is intended as a roster of folks with advanced degrees or from enhanced backgrounds who can be called upon to consult with the Education Committee, Speakers Bureau or other committees. One of our most important committees, our Education Committee, needs a chairman, someone to provide the primary leadership to completely review and modernize our educational materials and to create and produce a new set of educational presentations including one or more PowerPoint presentations, all in cooperation with the Board and a variety of other committees. Our Website Advisory Committee needs to prioritize the enhancements we want to make to the website and provide the ideas to make it better serve our audience. These are but a few of the areas where we have needs and we would welcome your help in many other areas as well. Thank you for your consideration.

Yours in peace, Jonathan Ridgeway, NABS President

---

North American Bluebird Society, Inc.
Officers, Board Members and Committees
The North American Bluebird Society is a non-profit conservation, education and research organization dedicated to promoting the recovery of bluebirds and other cavity-nesting bird species.

Founder - Lawrence Zeleny, Ph.D.
Executive Director Emeritus - Mary D. Jamieson

Officers
President, Jonathan Ridgeway
First Vice President, Brian Swanson
Second Vice President, Phil Berry
Treasurer, Greg Beavers
Secretary, Lynne Ridgeway

Board of Directors
Bob Benson
Berne Daniel
Jimmy Dodson
Sherry Linn
Walter Mugdan
David Rutherford
John Schuster
Dan Sparks
Dick Tuttle

Finance
Greg Beavers - Chair
Berne Daniel
Jimmy Dodson
Dan Sparks

Leg
Walter Mugdan, Esq. - Chair

Journal Editor/Selection
Brian Swanson - Chair
Berne Daniel
Walter Ridgeway
Lynne Ridgeway

North American Wildlife Society
Region of Expertise
Bob Benson - Chair
Barbara Ehrig - Chair
Sandy Flowers - Chair
Walter Mugdan - Chair
Sherry Linn - Chair

North American Bluebird Society
Bob Benson - Chair
Berne Daniel - Chair
Sandy Flowers - Chair
Walter Mugdan - Chair
Sherry Linn - Chair

Webmaster
Jim McLothin
The 2007 California Nestbox Trail Reports

Extracted from the Bluebirds Fly, the Journal of the California Bluebird Recovery Program

Our Spring issue of Bluebirds Fly contains the nestbox results for the 2007 nesting season. This year our report covers 22 California counties, and involves the work of 128 dedicated trail-monitors who took the time to send their statistics to us. It might be noted that the number of monitors reporting was the lowest we have had in twelve years.

Notably, the number of chicks fledged compared to the number of eggs (68%) was very consistent with previous years. This statistic indicates that with the continued care our trail monitors provide, a hatching had an 89% chance of fledging on our trails. This is an impressive number.

With 1,293 nestboxes and 5,612 (5,212 WEBL) fledglings, Orange County once again is the top cavity nesting county and produced the most Western Bluebirds of those counties reporting in the state (Table 1). A primary reason for this remarkable result is effectiveness of the nearly vandal free hanging boxes that have been placed in parks, golf courses, cemeteries, and urban gardens across Orange County. Very few of these locations could be considered native habitat. In fact, many of these areas are actually man-made habitat that would never attract a bluebird except for the artificial cavities provided by dedicated bluebirders of the county. Orange County fledged 5,212 WEBL, almost twice the number of the other twenty one reporting counties combined. Hats off to Orange County!

In summary, we note that 2007 was a below average year (Table 1). The percentage of nestings per number of boxes (69%) was the lowest since 1997. Correspondingly, the comments from the field confirm that bluebirds got a relatively late start due to the cold weather we experienced in the spring of 2007. This late start also translated into a reduced number of second nestings.

However, there is also some good news in these numbers.

---

Table 1 - A Comparison of Calif. Western Bluebird Production Statistics over 12 Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th># of Trails</th>
<th># of Boxes</th>
<th>Total Birds Fledged</th>
<th>WEBL Fledged</th>
<th>% WEBL</th>
<th>Avg. WEBL per Box Offered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1,293</td>
<td>5812</td>
<td>5029</td>
<td>89.9%</td>
<td>4.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merced</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>76.5%</td>
<td>2.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Clara</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>886</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>838</td>
<td>735</td>
<td>87.4%</td>
<td>5.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>70.9%</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ventura</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kern</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Luis Obispo</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monterey</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 - California 2007 Trail Production by County

The first requirement for a nestbox is good placement. Place it in a good habitat. This makes low mowed yards, cemeteries, golf courses, and pastures ideal. It needs to be no closer than twenty feet to a tree or bush and not farther than 100 feet as that is the distance most fledglings can fly. It needs to face the tree or bush. When the babies fledge, they fly directly to the tree or bush. They stay in the trees for about a week, being fed by their parents until they are taught to drop to the ground and feed themselves.

In our part of the country, poles should have predator guards, either a "stovepipe" guard or a metal or plastic cone guard. These guards work to keep all climbing predators off the nestbox. Those with Starling predation need a 2½ " wooden fence guard on the hole.

The poles should have a petroleum-based grease applied in a four inch band at least twice during the nesting season to keep ants from invading the nest and killing the nestlings or causing the pair to abandon the eggs. The band of grease should be wide enough to prevent the ants from "piggybacking" across it and climbing the pole.

One very good way to attract Bluebirds to your yard is to have a clean birdbath or mister in your yard. I love to run water on the ground in the yard and watch them splash in the puddles. They will come to fresh water whenever available in ditches and puddles.

In 1978, the late Lawrence Zeleny had a vision to "Bring Back The Bluebirds" which were teetering toward the endangered species list. In some states, they were already on the "threatened list". He and his wife, Olive, were very passionate about their endeavors. He enlisted many of his friends to start a Bluebird
Learning from the Bluebird’s Instincts

By Jay K. Brindo

Eliot Paine, past director of The Holden Arboretum, once told me that monitoring a Bluebird box reminded him of opening a gift on Christmas morning. I knew when he made that statement he truly had experienced box monitoring in a personal way.

Interacting with nature and the surprises that come with it are certainly a few of the experiences I also enjoy. As I pursue my interest in Bluebirds each summer, I particularly look forward to the new learning experiences I’ll encounter from being out on the trail. From these practical “hands-on” encounters, I’ve concluded that no matter how many more years my legs will carry me, I’ll never possibly become an expert in Bluebirding. Just when I think I’ve got Bluebirds figured out, they fool me. In my ignorance and lack of being mindful toward nature, I keep forgetting things, but will not be too quick to intrude by altering my findings. I’ll use what I’ve learned in 2007 and save this kind of egg moving activity for emergency only. I’ll also be less anxious about such things and be mindful of the bird’s ability to follow instinct. By golly, this sounds like less worry and more fun already. Happy trails everyone.

In 2008 I will still be out on the trail, still be experiencing Christmas morning each time I open a nest box. It just keeps on, and on.

This article was originally published in the Ohio Bluebird Society’s Bluebird Monitor. Jay Brindo is the Ohio Bluebird Society coordinator for Geauga County and writes frequently about his experiences with bluebirds and bluebirding.
In addition to barns and other buildings, Barn Owls will nest in tree cavities and hollows. The nest may be up to 60 feet off the ground but artificial nest boxes mounted from 8 – 15 feet high are readily accepted and used successfully by Barn Owl pairs. They will also nest in old buildings, caves and well shafts.

Putting up a Barn Owl nest box, benefits the owls in several ways. First it provides a place to roost when the leaves drop off the trees in the fall and secondly it offers a safe place to nest and raise their family of owlets (5 to 7 per box) in the spring. In return the owls will provide you with 365 nights of clearing rodents from your fields every year. They will never call in sick or demand a raise; you don’t have to pay workers’ compensation.

Nor worry about any liability if they get injured on the job. All in all it is a deal you cannot afford to refuse.

The only maintenance you have to perform for the owls once the box is installed is to clean it out once a year. It is advisable to wear a dust mask when cleaning out the boxes and be sure to wash your hands when finished. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via telephone or email as my assistance is always free.

John Schuster is a professional musician and he has opened concerts for many nationally known groups including Bob Dylan. He is a member of the Board of Directors of NABS and a contributor to Cornell Lab of Ornithology as well as being a member of the Sonoma County Grape Growers Association. He is a regular guest on radio programs in the California area providing expertise on gardening, agriculture, and wildlife. He is a strong advocate for all native cavity nesting species.

John is the founder and owner of WildWing Company, manufacturers of a wide variety of quality made in the USA cavity-nesting boxes for Barn Owls, Screech Owls, American Kestrels, Bluebirds, Violet-green Swallows and Tree Swallows. In addition WildWing Co. provides control technologies for mosquitoes and crop-damaging moth larvae, and traps for controlling exotic pest bird species.

John can be contacted at wildwing@earthlink.net.

NABS 2008 - Our Gathering in Kearney
By Brian Swanson and Jonathan Ridgeway

They all gathered in Kearney, Nebraska in early March. More than 250 Bluebirds along with 60,000 Sandhill Cranes and up to 2,000,000 geese. The Bluebirds came to hear nationally known speakers like Julie Zickelcofe, Bill Thompson III, and Al Batt. The Sandhill Cranes came in family groups to prepare for the long flight north and the time when their youngsters from last year are sent off on their own. Like the cranes, the geese came to find corn left in the fields from last year’s harvest. With the abundance that the mechanical harvesters leave, they are able to gain enough weight to sustain them as they migrate to the northern tundra. With that many large birds in the area there was skeln after skeln in the sky all day long.

Our hosts, Bluebirds Across Nebraska, had not only scheduled wonderful speakers and workshops, but also provided multiple opportunities for attendees to visit the crane viewing blinds at dawn and dusk. For those who were interested there was a birding field trip and a prairie culture tour. While the 70° temperature deterred the prairie chickens from performing their ritual displays, it was only a minor detraction from the tour and left some people saying it would be the reason they would have to return to Kearney again in the future. The closing banquet was a celebration of NABS 30th anniversary with awards to several well deserving individuals, a state of NABS overview by NABS president, Jonathan Ridgeway, and entertainment by Ron Cisar.

What were the earmarks of NABS 2008? More so than some of our recent conventions, the interpersonal relations between the NABS and host organizations were filled with the spirit of love, respect, cooperation and team work. There was a mood of cooperation rather than competition. As an incentive to encourage convention participants to join NABS, BAN offered two nestboxes with poles to everyone, regardless of whether they signed up as new NABS members or renewed current or expired memberships. More than 30 individuals and families took advantage of the offering and additional memberships continued to be received after the events were over. Many of them chose to pay for multiple years or contribute more than the minimum amount due. Several individuals agreed to serve on various NABS committees including renowned speakers and educators, Julie Zickelcofe and Bet Zimmerman on the Education Committee, and Bet also agreed to become a member of the NABS Board of Directors. Several other people there are being considered for positions on the NABS Board but the announcement of potential appointments is currently premature.

There appeared to be a general sense of optimism about the future of NABS and its role in the bluebirding community. Many people were eager to hear the discussion about plans for NABS 2009 in Pennsylvania and NABS 2010 in Oregon, saying how enthusiastically they were looking forward to attending. Unfortunately most of the talk was about the things that needed to take place during the official Annual General Membership meeting. The subjects were mentioned in some detail but the attendance was light and in fact there were not even enough people to meet the requirements for a quorum. For that reason, the uncontested election was not able to be conducted. Fortunately that circumstance will not present any problem because the Bylaws provide that Officers and Directors are to serve until their replacements are elected or appointed. Rather than the same individuals beginning new terms they will simply continue in an extension of their previous terms. There will be a concerted effort to see that the same thing does not occur again next year.

We’ve Brought Back the Bluebird
About the Author

The author, Evelyn Cooper, is the founder and past president of the Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society and has long been a voice and a force for bluebirding in her part of the country. This article was first published in the April 2007 (Spring Edition) of the Home Construction & Renovation magazine. Photography in the article is the work of Wendell Long, Waynesville, Ohio and Don Palmer, of Kentucky. This article is provided to give readers of Bluebird an idea of the kind of article that can be written to inform a wider audience about the joys of bluebirding and need to become involved in this worthy cause.
The number of tree swallows trying to nest in my bluebird nest boxes has increased dramatically in the past 10 years. (They also seem to be more aggressive and organized in their territorial defense sometimes calling in 3-4 buddies to help fight the pair of bluebirds).

As recently as 5-10 years ago I would observe a pair of tree swallows contest with a pair of bluebirds to claim the nest box, if they lost to the bluebirds, the rest of the season the bluebirds would have the box. The last few years the swallows return again and again trying to displace the bluebirds that have already nested. (Sometimes they add a few feathers to the bluebird nest and start laying their eggs, sometimes they push the bluebird eggs down into the nest cup, so the female cannot incubate them, sometimes they break the bluebird eggs in the nest and sometimes they even succeed in taking the box away from the bluebirds after the chicks have hatched, causing the death of those chicks.)

I believe the increased numbers of tree swallows can be attributed to two factors:

1) Too many nest boxes installed too close together.

In my first year I also did that, installing as many as 25 single boxes on 5 acres. I think now that 3 or 4 would have been plenty. I thought that more boxes would increase my chances of attracting a bluebird pair; instead I attracted more and more tree swallows. Of course the more swallows that are fledged, the bigger the problem for future years.

I believe tree swallows live longer than bluebirds compounding the problem. A colleague of mine, Forrest Lind, is a federal bird bander and he has banded all of my bluebirds and tree swallow chicks before fledging for many years. We caught a tree swallow that was 7 years old, nesting in the same box she fledged from. The oldest bluebird we have ever recaptured was 2 years old and was in a box about 1 mile from the nest box he fledged from.

Currently, my bluebird trail is several miles long. The maximum number of boxes I install in a mile ranges from 5 to 10 boxes (either 5 or pairs 5 singles). With this spacing, I have had bluebirds nesting in every location. If one of these locations fails to attract a bluebird pair for 2 consecutive years or if it only attracts tree swallows it is removed.

2) Nest boxes placed by or in wetland areas and by water (lakes, ponds, rivers etc).

This type of habitat is made or ordered for tree swallows, because of all the flying insects for food. As result I never install nest boxes in these areas, but many times sportsman organizations, youth groups and well meaning individuals do.

If those boxes are along my existing trail I will seek permission to take them down and explain why. My best habitat for bluebirds is short or mowed grass, on high ground, and about 300 ft from trees. It is best if the trees have no brush under them.

I like overhead wing and single post nesting fencing for perches so bluebirds can find insects for food.

In the past all my paired boxes were spaced about 10 ft apart (for the pair). However over the past 2 years I have experimented with single boxes too. I do find that my bluebird occupancy rate is significantly higher in the paired boxes. I often find that if the tree swallows nest first (and will build a nest) in one box that they will then put feathers in the second box. To counter this I take the feathers out every day till they stop putting them in. In this way only twice have I had tree swallows nest successfully in my paired boxes 10 ft apart. So pairing does permit raising bluebirds in this way.

Hope to see you all in Medford, Minnesota on April 12th for the 2008 Bluebird Conference. The registration form is in this newsletter.

Keith Radel lives in Faribault, Minnesota and he has been a bluebird "fanatic" for over twenty years. He is a member of the Minnesota Bluebird Recovery Project and currently serving on their Board of Directors. He is also the state director for the BBIP's County Coordinator program as well as serving himself as the Coordinator for both Rice and Steele counties in southern Minnesota. He has done numerous workshops over the years in Minnesota and Nebraska on bluebirds. In 2007, 300 bluebirds were banded in the 63 pairs of boxes that comprise Keith's trail in and around Faribault.

In 1997-98 a study of Barn Owls' diet in California focused on what the owls were feeding their young during the eight week period from hatching to fledging. The study showed that 42% of the prey items brought to the nest were pocket gophers, 30% meadow mice or voles (Microtus californicus), 17% deer mice (Peromyscus maniculatus), 6% house mice (Mus musculus)

and 5% other prey. So this means that a single Barn Owl may eat, on average, 155 gophers per year or 53 pounds of gopher steak. So if you had only 48 Barn Owl nest sites in your area, with a family of Barn Owls in each, they would consume 12,653 pounds of Pocket Gophers or 63 tons of pocket gopher prey per year.

At Merced High School, where my colleague Steve Simmons, developed his Raptor Works program, they've been manufacturing Barn Owl boxes from agricultural waste that was headed for a landfill. Over the years they have produced thousands of Barn Owl nest boxes, along with Wood Duck, American Kestrel, Screech Owl and Bluebird boxes. Proceeds from their nest box sales are used for Barn Owl research such as the diet study mentioned above and banding research. On average, Steve bands over a thousand (in 2003 nearly 3,000) Barn Owls every year.

Barn Owls are not seasonal breeders and can lay eggs at nearly any time in the year, if adequate prey items are available. The courtship pattern in the male uses to attract the female includes a series of short screeches and hoarse chatterings that are often heard well before the female is around a potential nest site. He will also beat his wings together to make a clapping sound and offer the female a food item. If successful, a female will be drawn in to examine the site.

The eggs are elliptical shaped being about 1.75 inches on the long axis and 1.25 inches around and are white in color. A typical clutch is from 3 – 6 eggs which are laid over a period of 8 – 10 days. The incubation period is relatively long ranging from 30 to 35 days and the new chicks, like many other birds, are covered in white down. They are brooded for about 10 – 15 days and then fledged in about 50 to 55 days after hatching. The young owls will remain within the area of their nest for a week or two leaning their survival and hunting skills and then they venture out on their own to establish new territories. The fledged owls will often begin breeding within 10 months to a year after fledging.

In years with abundant prey a pair of Barn Owls can often successfully fledge several broods a season. Barn Owl populations tend to follow the prey availability and during times of high rodent counts the Barn Owl population often increases in concert.
Chicks toddling and turning in the nest get their feet tangled and they die a gruesome death of starvation— unable to leave the nest. Adult birds are trapped, as well, as they carry the strings through the twigs and branches during nest construction.

At Easter time many people take Easter baskets with plastic grass to parks. The strings get spread all over the lawns and the birds readily gather it.

I would encourage all readers to pick up every string left by someone who may not be aware of the danger. It will prevent birds from adding dangerous material to their nests. Park goers may not give birds a second thought, but their melodious songs and fits of color through dappled sunlight unconsciously combine into the rich tapestry of sights and sounds that let us know we have spent a wonderful day in the park. PICK UP ALL STRINGS; ALWAYS.

This article first appeared in the California Bluebird Recovery Programs journal Bluebirds Fly! Susan Bulger is an active bluebirder in California and frequent contributor of articles on bluebirds.

General Information About Blowflies

Bird blowflies are common bird nest inhabitants. Bird blowflies include two genera, Protocalliphora, and a close relative, Trypocalliphora. They are true flies, order Diptera, and members of the family Calliphoridae. Bird blowflies are bloodsucking parasites of nesting birds. In nature they only infest the nests of birds with nestlings which take several days or weeks to develop. The larvae stage of most bird blowflies live in the nest and periodically suck the blood of nestlings. One species, Trypocalliphora braueri, is subcutaneous and spends its life as a larva under the nestlings skin.

Bird blowflies are common in the nest of many birds including bluebirds, starlings, swallows, chickadees and wrens. Research shows that heavy infestations can make nestlings anemic and severe infestations may be lethal. Under ideal conditions blowflies may have little impact on nestling success. The extent of damage done to the nestlings depends on the number of larvae feeding. A heavy infestation of the nest box can lead to severe blood loss, while only a few larvae may do no noticeable damage. An equally important factor is the general health of the nestlings that depend on the weather. Cold, wet weather usually means less insect food for the young, making them much more susceptible to the effects of parasitism.

Blowfly Life Cycle
Nestling birds become infested when adult bird blowflies lay eggs directly on nestlings or on nest material of the nestlings. The female blowfly will lay 50-200 eggs usually when the nestlings are first hatched. More than one blowfly may lay eggs in the nest. The female dies after the egg laying process. These eggs are tiny and may be laid individually or in clusters. Fly eggs hatch within 24-48 hours after they are laid into tiny tan colored larvae that grow to 3/8 inches long and they must feed immediately. In most species larvae spend 15-45 minutes feeding on nestlings and then return to the nest. Larvae attach firmly to nestlings with the aid of mouth hooks. After hatching, larvae need at least three blood meals to reach maturity. Mature larvae can consume a large amount of blood in a single feeding and pose the greatest hazard to nestlings, because they consume much more blood than when they are young. If there are many larvae near maturity at the same time, the impact on nestlings can be severe.

The larvae attach to the nestlings feet, legs, underside of wings and beaks, and draw out the blood and body fluids. They primarily attack the nestlings at night and hide in the nest material during the daylight hours. The larvae avoid being eaten by the adult bird during the day, and feeds only after dark when the helpless nestlings are easy prey. The larvae feed on the feedings for approximately 8 days and then go into a dormant stage for 3 days becoming lethargy pupa dropping down to the floor of the nest box.

The pupal period usually lasts 7-14 days, after which the adult fly emerges. Pupation usually occurs.

Barn Owls: Nature’s Cavity Nesting Rodent Control System
By John Schuster

The Common Barn Owl (Tyto alba) has been around for the last 26 million years and is a widely distributed species found not only throughout North and South America but in the Old World (including Europe, Africa, India, and Australia) as well. In fact, the bird was given its current common name by an Italian scientist in 1796. Before that name “stuck” however it was known by many names mostly related to its secretive nocturnal behavior, or its prominent round white face, or because of its tendency to nest in human structures such as barns, lofts, and church steeples.

Historically the Barn Owl has been referred to as the Monkey-faced Owl, Ghost Owl, the Church Owl, the Rat Owl or the Hissing Owl. Barn owls are indeed considered a cavity nesting species but they are quite open-minded about a cavity as regards its size and the amount of enclosure it provides and often a “cavity like” corner of a barn loft will suffice. It is certainly much larger than the typical cavity nesters most bluebirds provide for as well.

Like most raptors the female tends to be larger than the male but often the size difference is less obvious with this species than hawks or other owls for example. A female Barn Owl may be up to 15 inches in length, with a 43 inch wing span and will weigh up to 1.25 pounds. A male is typically around 13 inches long and weighs about a pound. The adult birds are light grey with buff color over all with prominent of their plumage.

Fig. 1. Female Barn Owl on its nest (photo by John Schuster).

- Suggested Sample Letter - EASTER GRASS KILLS NESTING BIRDS
As a volunteer with a bird conservation program I have seen the deaths caused when birds use strings to build their nests. They are readily attracted to discarded pieces of Easter grass, fishing line, frayed blue tarp strings, kite string, gift wrap ribbon, and strings of all sorts.
after the nestlings have fledged. After adult flies emerge from the pupa, they mate and the female searches for a new bird nest to repeat the 3-4 week life cycle. The incidence of blowfly infestation usually increases in the second and third nestings as the summer progresses. Adult flies that emerge toward the end of the nesting season will overwinter and infest nestlings the next spring.

This article was reprinted from the Spring 2008 issue of Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania journal, Bluebird Trails and Tales

Figure 2. Examples of blowfly larvae removed from chicks. Photo by Kevin Berner of New York.

Children’s Bluebird Activity Book
Published by Mountain Bluebird Trails

The Mountain Bluebird Trail’s (MBT) mission statement contains several goals but one of its most important ones is the educating of people about the preservation of bluebirds and other cavity nesting birds. Many programs are put on each year by MBT members throughout Montana, Idaho and Wyoming and one of the key groups asking for more information and programs were grade school teachers. So when MBT received a generous donation from the Thomas and Stacey Siebel Foundation in the spring of 2007 the MBT board decided to use those funds to create a book filled with information targeted specifically for children in grades 2 through 6.

Myrna Pearman, the author of the Mountain Bluebird Trail Monitoring Guide, and Pauline Mousseau, a graphics designer were contracted with to produce this wonderful tool to educate children. Both ladies live in or near Red Deer, Alberta in western Canada.

The Children’s Bluebird Activity Book is now posted on the MBT website www.mountainbluebirdtrails.com and they hope other bluebirders will not only take a moment to read through it, but talk to teachers and educators in your community about where to find it. Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs should also find the book useful. This colorful book is 40 pages long and 1 page or the entire book can be printed right off the website at no cost. The book is filled with: **Fascinating Facts**

**Pictures**

**Puzzles**

**Stories**

**Pictures to Color**
The book is written at the 4th grade level, but teachers working with younger children can read the book to them. Because the Mountain Bluebird is the predominant species in the intermountain region it is the featured species in the book which is not true with most bluebird material available to educators. That being said, the vast majority of the material pertains to all 3 species. Information on other cavity nesting birds is also included.

You should also find this information useful when talking to your own children or grandchildren about what you're doing on your bluebird trail.

The Threat of Foreign Nesting Material -
A Real Danger at Easter

By Susan Bulger

While checking a nest box last season, I noticed one of the two bluebird chicks was smaller than the other, and the father was not around. Wanting them both to survive, I decided to bring mealworms over the next ten days or so until they fledged.

A friend agreed to take turns delivering the mealworms for the mother bird to feed the chicks. Fledge day came for one bird, and the second remained in the box for several more days. Sometimes we could hear cheeping in the box. Knowing one was smaller I expected it to stay inside longer.

When it appeared that the birds were gone, I checked the box and was saddened to find the chick dead. Its foot was tangled in a four inch piece of fishing line which was entwined with some grasses. I was amazed! There is no place to fish anywhere around!

I monitor bluebird boxes at several parks. Two are urban regional parks with fishing lakes. Fishing line segments, sometimes with hooks attached, are left on the ground every day. On Easter, many people bring Easter baskets with plastic grass and it gets spread all over the lawns. Birds just love to include these 'pretty/useful' materials in their nests. The bluebirds are the lucky ones because I can examine their nests and correct the situation. But the open nesters build high in the trees where no one can reach them and no one is checking them.

A robin is tangled in a long piece of monofilament high in a silk oak tree. It is hanging upside down with wings outstretched. What a gruesome death. A crow is dead with wings outstretched tangled in fishing line high in a sycamore. I once saw something fall and an oriole flying down after it. Her nest fell out of the tree since the monofilament fishing line would not properly attach to the tree.

People have no idea that these things happen and so are very careless with litter. If they knew the danger, most people would pick up every piece.

Let's spread the word about this threat. If each reader of this article would send the following sample letter to the editor of their local and large regional newspaper, the whole
along the edges of the boards to make sure they are aligned right. Satisfied, he drills the first nail hole. “You probably never see anyone working in the dark,” he says chuckling. Sparrer hammers confidently, needing only six to seven strikes to drive the first 2-inch-long nails into the adjoining boards. He then clamps the boards to even up the sides before drilling more holes.

“I missed it,” he says, reaching inside the box to feel where the nail came out. Still not satisfied the box is aligned properly, he uses a wooden wedge to force the sides out so they meet up perfectly. “Feel that, it’s not even,” he says, guiding a visitor’s hand inside the box. “I don’t think the bluebirds would mind if it wasn’t exactly close,” he says. “But, you mind, right?” says a visitor. “Yep,” he answers, still working to get the sides where they should be. “You’ve just got to be smarter than the wood, that’s all.”

Sparrer’s unique pattern for making bluebird boxes means he crafts two at a time. The pair is pieced together at the bottom. When everything is finished, except adding the hangers, he makes a table saw cut down the middle to separate them. He’s only cut himself once, slightly on the thumb last May. A heavy fishing weight hangs on the saw’s flip switch to ensure it doesn’t accidentally come on, which it did once. He uses a precut block of wood to make sure the saw’s blade is angled the way it should be. “I use it to do a lot of measuring when I’m by myself,” he says about the wood block.

His arms and hands are steady as he makes the cut, going only partially through the wood. Then he puts the still-joined boxes in a vise and uses a handsaw to finish the cut.

“Now I’m going to see how close I am to getting them even,” he says. “Oh, it’s about a sixteen off. That should do. I don’t think the bluebirds will notice that.”

Now that spring and bird nesting season is here, Sparrer has partial and completed boxes stacked on his work bench. It’s his favorite time of the year - birds are hunting for homes and the weather is warm enough for him to hang out daily in the workshop. During winter, he pretty much stays put at home.

“When my hands get cold, I can’t see anything,” he says.

This article first appeared in the Newport, Virginia paper, Daily Press, on Saturday, April 30, 2007 and later in the Bluebirds Across Nebraska journal Banner and is re-printed here with permission.

Nestboxes filled to bursting with sticks and twigs? Missing eggs, or pierced/broken eggs in the nest or on the ground with no other signs, even though you have a predator guard, and haven’t seen House Sparrows around? It’s probably a House Wren (Troglodytes aedon or HOWR).

House Wrens are small, brown, conical birds with a cheerful song (although it can become grating when repeated at second intervals, day in and day out). They are prolific, curious, and aggressively territorial during nesting season. Some bluebird trail monitors wish to deter HOWR from using their boxes because of the havoc they can wreak, and because unlike other cavity nesters, HOWR can nest in trees and shrubs. However, BE ADVISED that the House Wren is a native bird, and it is illegal to harm them in any way or to interfere with active nests.

Male House Wrens have a vexing habit of filling up available nestboxes with sticks (called "dummy nests") to attract females or prevent competition. Althea Sherman reported that House Wrens destroyed eggs of 29 different birds. I observed a HOWR removing an entire chickadee nest with eight eggs in a matter of hours. In one study in eastern Massachusetts, 20% of Black-capped Chickadee nests were destroyed by House Wrens. HOWR have also been observed filling a red-naped sapsucker nest with sticks while the sapsucker chucks were still in the nesting cavity.

Nestboxes filled to bursting with sticks and twigs? Missing eggs, or pierced/broken eggs in the nest or on the ground with no other signs, even though you have a predator guard, and haven’t seen House Sparrows around? It’s probably a House Wren (Troglodytes aedon or HOWR).

House Wrens are small, brown, conical birds with a cheerful song (although it can become grating when repeated at second intervals, day in and day out). They are prolific, curious, and aggressively territorial during nesting season. Some bluebird trail monitors wish to deter HOWR from using their boxes because of the havoc they can wreak, and because unlike other cavity nesters, HOWR can nest in trees and shrubs. However, BE ADVISED that the House Wren is a native bird, and it is illegal to harm them in any way or to interfere with active nests.

Male House Wrens have a vexing habit of filling up available nestboxes with sticks (called "dummy nests") to attract females or prevent competition. Althea Sherman reported that House Wrens destroyed eggs of 29 different birds. I observed a HOWR removing an entire chickadee nest with eight eggs in a matter of hours. In one study in eastern Massachusetts, 20% of Black-capped Chickadee nests were destroyed by House Wrens. HOWR have also been observed filling a red-naped sapsucker nest with sticks while the sapsucker chucks were still in the nesting cavity.

Did you know . . . . that you can now legally free trapped birds
By Bernie Daniel

Did you know that heretofore you had to have a federal permit to remove native song birds trapped in a building? Yes, I’m serious. Up until just recently all birds covered under the federal Migratory Bird Species Act could not legally be removed from buildings that they happened to become trapped in without a permit! Hard to believe but it was true. If everyone had followed the law and sought a federal permit before removing a Carolina Wren that happened to get trapped in our garage I doubt many would have been saved. Well good news. A long time OBS friend and supporter, Kendra Wecker (Wildlife Diversity Coordinator for the Ohio Division of Wildlife) sent us the following note just for our information:

“Just passing this along, but interesting to know that in October, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) published the Final Rule changing the regulations governing handling of birds trapped in buildings. The change allows removal of migratory birds (other than federally listed threatened or endangered species, bald eagles, and golden eagles) from inside buildings in which the birds may pose a threat to themselves, to public health and safety, or to commercial interests - without a Federal permit. This should simplify handling of such problems by the public and limit harm to trapped birds. If you have any questions about this new rule you can contact George T. Allen at 703-358-1825 or via email: GeorgeTAllen@fws.gov.

I wonder what far-sighted persons first crafted such a regulation in the
as wide or a little wider than the box front on both sides. The guard basically obscures the hole from view. It may work because House Wrens tend to perch on the roof and then enter the box, or fly in from short distances.

Ideally the guard should be made of the same material as the box. In a pinch you can even make a Tree Swallow nestboxes. It may take a bird minutes to hours to accept it. This is why it is generally best to put it up while eggs are still being laid, so you do not interrupt incubation. When I put one up on a BCCH box after eggs had been laid, it was accepted in less than one minute. Another person reported 24 attempts by a chickadee until it actually entered the hole.

For the parents to feed without the guard in place.

**Monitoring.** It is harder to monitor the box with a guard installed if it has a front-opening door. A bendable connection to the roof (like a piece of tin) will allow it to flex when you open the door for monitoring.

**Construction.** You will have to make your own wren guard, as they are not commercially available, in part because boxes are so variable.

**Materials:**
- 1 precut piece of aluminum step flashing (costs about 20 cents).
- A box of white cedar shim shingles (costs about $1.20).
- 6 very short screws, plus 3 slightly longer screws (to attach guard to roof.)

**Instructions for Wren Guard attached to nestbox rooftops:**
1. Bend the flashing at a 90 degree angle in the middle.
2. Cut two pieces of shim shingles - #1 to secure the guard to the roof, and #2 to hang in front of the entrance hole. #2 should be slightly wider than the box, and extend just below the hole.
3. Using two short screws, attach the flashing to the inside of piece #1. Predrill holes so you don’t split narrow wood. Make sure screw ends don’t poke out.
4. Measure guard on box, to ensure that the distance between piece #2 and the front of the box will 2.5” for bluebirds, or 2.0 to 2.25” for smaller birds like chickadees.
5. Screw #2 to flashing (flashing on inside, facing box, wood side facing out).

**Timing.** Put up the guard after the first egg (or two or three) of the desired-cavity nesting has been laid. Bluebirds tend to be relatively tolerant of box changes, and it may be wise to put up the wren guard as soon as the bluebirds start a nest, since once the House Wren finds the box, the guard is less effective at deterring them. I tried a wren guard after a House Wren began removing a chickadee nest from a box. The wren flew right underneath the guard and tore out the nest. You may wish to remove the guard when hatchlings are about 4-7 days old, as it could conceivably interfere with fledging. It is also probably somewhat easier for the parents to feed without the guard in place.

**Reports of wren guard effectiveness are mixed - some have found them very successful. In 2007, I used the guards to successfully protect every single BCCH nest from House Wren attack, even though several boxes were located in marginal habitat. Some people are experimenting with other variations of guards, I hope they will share both their successes and failures with the rest of us trying to deal with the House Wren Challenge.**

**Saving the Bluebirds**

*By Kathy Van Mullekom*

Jimmy Sparrer is a bluebird's best friend. During the past 35 years, he's built about 3,000 nesting boxes for the brilliant bluebirds he never sees. Blind since a hunting accident in 1953, Sparrer, now 84, crafts bluebird nesting boxes in a lean-to style workshop next to his home in Seafood. He uses power equipment - table saw and drill press - and a hammer to assemble the boxes. His hands guide his every move.

"You'll look but don't talk to me," he says while visitors watch him put together boxes. "I like to concentrate when I'm meaning around these tools." Sparrer, who "reads" publications such as National Geographic magazine on tape, says his motivation to make the nesting boxes started when he learned bluebirds were in trouble. "At one time, bluebirds were almost extinct because they didn't have a place to nest," he says.

When Sparrer isn't in his wood shop, he listens to books and magazines and lunches on his favorite barbecue or chicken salad sandwich at the nearby Seafood Country Market. "Since I've been blind, I don't know the thousands of books I've read by tape or disc," he says. "I can read Braille but I've never read enough of it to read fast."

Sparrer retired in 1989 from the photography lab at NASA Langley Research Center in Hampton, he says. Before he lost his sight, he was a model maker at the center. He and wife Kay have been married 54 years; their son, Preston, is a pathologist living in Williamsburg.

The woodworker says he would be lost without his bluebird boxes, which he gives away free or in return for a few dollars to buy nails to build more. "It gives me something to do," says Sparrer, who also occasionally makes picnic tables and small furniture pieces for family and friends.

His shop, which measures about 8 feet wide and 30 feet long, is cluttered with boards of pressure-treated lumber he uses for the bird boxes. It looks unorganized, but he knows where every nail is kept and each handsaw is hung. "Where did my block go?" he says. Because he can't see increments on a measuring tape, he uses precut blocks of wood to measure spacings on the boxes. Sparrer works at a long wooden table while Beethoven plays over a public radio station. He admires Beethoven more than any other composer, even Mozart, whom he also likes.

"The greatest achievement by man was Beethoven when he wrote Symphony No. 9 while he was deaf," says Sparrer, smiling and looking toward the radio that keeps him company. Buckets under his worktable are filled with parts for boxes. He cuts outs dozens of A-shaped roofs, box bottoms and hangers at a time. "As muddled as it is, I know where everything is," he says. "See I've got a pocket full of nails. When I put this nail in my mouth, I know where it is." Holding a couple of nails in his mouth, Sparrer begins to assemble a box.

His hands locate two pre-cut boards and a drill that he uses to start each of 23 nail holes needed to hold the boxes together. Drilling the holes makes it easy for him to know where to start and hammer the nail. But, first he runs his fingers...