Slalla means bluebirds. Hence the title of this journal. Technically, slalla is the Latinized, neuter plural version of the Greek word sialis, a noun meaning a “kind of bird.” Since the Eastern Bluebird was the first bluebird classified by Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778), he gave it the species name sialis, though he placed it in the genus Motacilia which is now reserved for the wagtails. It was William Swainson (1789-1855), who, in 1827, decided that the bluebirds needed a genus of their own within the thrush family (Turdidae). He selected the generic name Slalla which he simply adapted from the species name sialis which Linnaeus had used. Therefore, the scientific name for the Eastern Bluebird is Slalla sialis (pronounced see-ahl-ee-ah see-ahl-liss). Similarly, the Western Bluebird and Mountain Bluebird, the two other species within the genus, were named Slalla mexicana and Slalla currucoides (coo-roo-coy-dees) respectively. Their species names are descriptive of their locations. All three bluebird species are native only to the North American continent, although each inhabits different regions generally separated by the Rocky Mountains and by altitudinal preferences.

While the adult birds all show differing plumages, the young of all three species look remarkably alike, prominently displaying spotted breasts and large white eye rings. This similarly in plumage was the principal reason the Society chose the juvenile bluebird for its logo. Since bluebirds almost always choose to raise their young in small enclosed cavities, a young bluebird sitting near a nesting box seemed to symbolize our mission. The hope of any species resides in its young. Because of bluebird nesting preferences, the survival of their young may depend on the nesting box, especially since natural cavities, for a variety of reasons, are disappearing rapidly. The theme of bluebird young nurtured in man-made structures will be a recurring one in our art and literature. We hope that this theme will remind all about the plight of the bluebird, and will stimulate action which will allow this beautiful creature to prosper.

Slalla is published quarterly by the North American Bluebird Society, Box 6295, Silver Spring, MD 20906-0295. Subscription price is included in annual membership dues. Single copies: $2.50. Write for information about bulk quantities. Checks and money orders should be made payable to North American Bluebird Society and should be in United States funds. Issues are dated Winter, Spring, Summer and Autumn and appear approximately on the fifteenth of January, April, July and October respectively. Deadline for submission of material is three months prior to date of publication; dated items only, two months.
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Sialia welcomes the submission of articles, artwork and photographs for publication. Although this journal is dedicated primarily to the bluebird, material relating to all native cavity nesting species will be considered. Manuscripts should be neatly typed and double-spaced. All material submitted for publication is subject to editing or rewriting. Include a duplicate copy if you wish to proof the manuscript before publication. All manuscripts will be acknowledged. Black and white glossy photographs are preferred. Print the subject, names of individuals pictured, photographer and return address on back of each photograph. Before preparing tables, graphs or other display material, please check with the editor. Art is welcome and should be in black pen-and-ink. We do not assume responsibility for manuscripts, photographs or art submitted. The editor's address is 10617 Grae Loch Road, Laurel, Maryland 20707.

EDITOR
Joanne K. Solem

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
Lawrence Zeleny

ART EDITOR
Suzanne Pennell Turner

COVER
The cover drawing of a Tufted Titmouse is by Art Editor, Suzanne Pennell Turner. Two articles in this issue feature this attractive cavity nesting species.
Several people have asked me what became of Blueboy, the little or-
phan I wrote about in my last column.

Early in the autumn of 1981 Blueboy stopped coming to my hand
for raisins. He would come to a nearby branch and "talk" but would not allow
me to touch him. In order to be certain of his identity I had painted pink nail
polish on his leg band. Most of it had worn off except for the polish that had
sunk into the numbers. (I do not recom-
mand the nail polish for identification
for Blueboy pecked at it while it was
wet so that it was necessary to get him
to fly about in order to dry the polish. I
was afraid it would harm him if he ate
it.)

During the winter Blueboy flew
about me during my daily walks. In
April he and his mate built a nest in a
bluebird box in a field near my house
and by 15 May of this year there were
five beautiful blue eggs.

When three eggs hatched I
thought that, considering my close
relationship with the father, I would be
welcome when I peeked in to monitor
the nest. Not so! Blueboy would come
out of nowhere screaming and nearly
knock the top of my head off, so I
bothered them very little.

A few weeks after the fledglings
left the nest I was returning from a
walk when I heard Blueboy’s call and
looked up to a dead branch where he
and his mate were sitting with two
babies between them. One fledgling
was missing; I have no idea what hap-
pened to it.

Apparently the pair had only one
brood because they did not build in
the box again and I continued to see the
four bluebirds together nearly every
day. Often the gardeners told me that
Blueboy had followed them around
awhile during the morning hours. As
winter approached the family joined
other bluebirds.

Every time I hear the call of a
bluebird here at Gunston Hall I wonder
if it’s Blueboy or one of his offspring.

I look forward to meeting many of
you as well as renewing old acquain-
tances at our annual meeting at
Southern Pines. The fellowship
bluebirds have brought me through the
North American Bluebird Society has
been a happy and inspiring one. See
you there!

Bluebird Slide Show

The NABS slide show is available for
rental at $5.00 or purchase at $50.00.
The show consists of 141 collated
cardboard-framed 35 mm slides and a
printed script (no slide tray). If a
cassette narration is desired add $5.00
to the purchase price.

The show has been revised recently.
Nineteen slides have been substituted
to improve the quality of the show, an
audible sound now signals the speaker
to advance the slide tray, an inaudible
signal advances the tray when
automatic equipment is used, the nar-
ration has been slowed, and script let-
tering has been enlarged for easier
reading. There will be no price increase
for this revised show. Revision kits are
being prepared for past purchasers of
the show and will be furnished to them
at no charge.

To rent or purchase the bluebird
slide show, write to Dick Tuttle, NABS
Education Committee, 295 W. Central
Ave., Delaware, OH 43015.
Two Pairs of Bluebirds to Taiwan

Marilyn Guerra

As the winter sun rose over Washington, D.C.'s National Airport one morning last March, an employee of the National Zoological Park and a very sleepy representative of the government of Prince George's County, Maryland, met to witness the last chapter of a story that had been over a year in the making. Paul Tomasoni, Keeper, Department of Ornithology, and I were seeing two pairs of live Eastern Bluebirds off on their long trip to Taiwan.

In February of 1981, a memo arrived from my department head: County Executive Lawrence J. Hogan wanted to present some live bluebirds, our official county bird, to a delegation from Taiwan who would be touring the county in the spring. Horrors! Our free-spirited feathered friends spending the rest of their lives in a gilded cage in some faraway official's garden? Never! I wrote back immediately explaining the complications involved in collecting and exporting protected migratory bird species. Why not present bluebird prints, drawings or carvings? A later letter from Taiwan explained that the destination was really the Phoenix Valley Birds Park in Nantou County, a new publicly-owned aviary with a professional staff. Our fears allayed, we proceeded with the preparations.

Dr. Eugene Morton, a former NABS Board member, who is Curator, Department of Ornithology, at the National Zoo in Washington, was asked for advice and assistance. He arranged for the capture in the wild of two pairs of birds which were then reared at the zoo, Judith Block, Registrar for the zoo, obtained all the necessary permits and made the travel arrangements.

While the birds were not ready to ship during the Chinese delegation's visit during the first week of June, the 31-member group was able to see them and to meet Dr. Morton during a visit to the zoo.

Finally, in December Mr. Hogan sent a cable to Taiwan:

"We have available two pairs of Eastern Bluebirds (Sialia sialis). All four birds were hatched in the wild in 1981. We would like to ship as soon as possible. Please notify us as soon as the import permit is ready."

A reply was received right after Christmas:

"We are very grateful for your kindness to send us two pairs of Eastern Bluebirds, please cable us the time of arrival and the number of flight as soon as you load these birds in airplane so we can wait for their arrival at CKS airport."

On March 23, a final cable was sent:
郭先生，您好

我已将您的要求转告有关部门。望您满意。祝您身体健康，工作顺利。

敬礼

敬礼

124 Sialia, Autumn 1982
"Shipment four bluebirds, one crate arrives Taipei on Northwest Number 19, 2115 on Wednesday, March 31, 1982—please confirm readiness to receive."

So I was waiting outside the Northwest Orient terminal on March 31 when Paul arrived with the birds in a small crate. Accompanying them were detailed instructions, ("Observe birds and provide water as needed—Do NOT place in drafty or cold area—Do NOT place in direct sunlight," etc.), a supply of food and water for the trip, a health certificate, export permits and a recipe for their food.

On April 6, 1982, Mr. Hogan received the following letter from Mr. Liu Yue-Yas, Magistrate of the Nantou County, Taiwan Government.

"Thank you for your cable of March 24, 1982. We received the four bluebirds day before yesterday. The colors of their feathers are so beautiful. Besides, they are healthy, fresh and lovely. They may well stand for the harmony of the society and the friendliness of the people of my sister county.

"On behalf of Taiwan Provincial Government and the people of Nantou county I express my hearty thanks to you and your people. May we see each other in the near future!"

It is our fervent hope that these birds may thrive and reproduce and that sometime in the future their offspring will be successfully released to the wild in Taiwan, establishing another beachhead in their light for survival.

The Prince George's County Government
8400 D'Arcy Road
Forestville, MD 20747

Marilyn Guerra (l.) and Paul Tomasoni with crate containing two pairs of Eastern Bluebirds ready for shipment. These birds were a gift from the people of Prince George's County, Maryland, to the people of Nantou County, Taiwan.
Bluebird Diet at the National Zoo

1 pan 8" X 8":
1 tablespoon chopped apple
1 tablespoon chopped orange
1 tablespoon raisins
1 tablespoon bread and milk mix

2 tablespoons mealworms
1/8th cup chopped kale
2 tablespoons commercial bird of prey diet
2 tablespoons commercial soft-bill bird diet

Bread and Milk Mix:
Raisin water
Milk
Wheat germ and carrot oil
Linatone
Karo syrup
Vionate
Oyster powder
Caradee
Quintrex redaxanthin
Bread
Progest

Large container
1 cup
2 cans
2 tablespoons
2 tablespoons
1/2 cup
1 ounce
1 ounce
1 ounce
1 tablespoon
1 1/2 loaves
1/4 cup

ART EDITOR’S POSITION VACANT

Suzanne Pennell Turner, Sialia’s Art Editor, has submitted her resignation recently.

If you are interested in applying for the position of Art Editor, please correspond with Editor Joanne K. Solem, 10617 Graeloch Rd., Laurel, MD 20707. This position pays expenses only. The ability to execute original line drawings of birds and other nature subjects in pen-and-ink for four deadlines a year is essential. With a description of your background and experience, please include a minimum of three line drawings of varying sizes (at least one of a bluebird and one of a plant or portion thereof); maximum size 8 x 10 inches.

Suzanne has been the Art Editor since the spring of 1980 and has made substantial contributions to the journal from the time the first issue appeared in January 1979. Her art has appeared on the covers of eight issues. She has provided numerous drawings to accompany articles, designed a number of logos for the journal and the Society, and executed the series of four bluebird paintings available from NABS. Because of her sizeable contributions to the cause of bluebird and cavity nester conservation through her art, it is with extreme reluctance that we accept her resignation. We hope that she will find it possible to continue to submit items, as time allows, in the months to come. As Editor I am particularly mindful of her considerable help to me personally and to the production of an attractive publication. I thank her and wish her well.

Submissions of art for use in Sialia are always welcome even if you are not interested in applying for the position of Art Editor.

Sialia, Autumn 1982
Nestlings Ejected from Nests by House Wrens
Edwin T. McKnight

The House Wren (Troglodytes aedon) is notorious for its habit of throwing out the eggs and nests of other hole-nesting birds in order to take over the nesting cavity for its own use. Much of this damage at the Maryland latitude is done in late April and early May when the wren first appears from migration and is particularly exuberant about locating a nesting site. However, such depredations are not limited to the few days after returning from the South, but may continue throughout the nesting season. Need for a nesting site is not the sole incentive, for an innate meddlesomeness seems to impel the wren to raid any unguarded nest. All is done by stealth, for the wren is no match physically in a fight with any of its victims.

The wren does not stop at throwing out eggs, but will throw out callow young. I once saw a wren throw a newly-hatched chickadee from a box located near several empty nestboxes at my brother-in-law’s place in Westmoreland Hills, a Maryland suburb of Washington, D.C. On the ground I found a second cold and clammy nestling that had been thrown out earlier that morning. These were put back in the box, survived, and fledged in due time.

Usually the evidence against the wren is circumstantial, particularly where nestboxes are inspected perhaps once a week, as is the case on most well run bluebird trails. No one sees the actual eviction; the box contains a nest with callow young bluebirds or chickadees at one inspection and a wren’s stick nest a week later. One might argue that a snake got the young, and the wren availed itself immediately of the opportunity to throw out the nest and bring in its sticks. But the sequence happens too often to be coincidence; furthermore, dead or live nestlings may be found on the ground. My brother-in-law once had a nuthatch nestling that mysteriously failed in the nestling period; one of the nestling’s bodies, several days old, was found in the yard a few feet from the nestbox. Our later experience of seeing the chickadee thrown out in this same yard suggested the identity of the culprit.

At one of my nestboxes near Gaithersburg, Maryland, during 1981, four young bluebirds were hatched on 15 June. Two evenings later the property owner wanted to show the young to an interested visitor but found the nest empty. A search of the ground within five or six feet of the mounting pole produced the four young: two were dead, and two were barely still alive. The latter were put back into the nest, immediately reclaimed by the parents, and duly fledged on 4 July. A chattering wren in the trees within a hundred
feet or so of the nestbox was in evidence when I examined the box a day after the young were thrown out. Wrens had been encouraged on this property for several years prior to the first appearance of the bluebirds, and are believed to have fledged young from a high nestbox in a nearby tree a short time before the bluebird ejection incident. In 1980, wrens had thrown out eggs or callow young from a bluebird nestbox at a slightly different location on this property.

The most surprising depredation on nestling bluebirds—surprising because of the size of the young—occurred at a nestbox near Beallsville, Maryland, in late June last year. The young hatched on about 20 June (date extrapolated from estimated age of young on 26 June). The property owner thought that there had been five young shortly after hatching. She reported that there were three young on 24 June. On 26 June when I examined the nest, there were two nestlings which I estimated to be about six days old. It was obvious there had been some turmoil at the nest. The two remaining young were resting on a thin flat remnant of the originally cupped nest. When I examined the box nine days later the young bluebirds were gone as was their nest, and a House Wren’s stick nest nearly filled the nestbox.

The evidence here is again circumstantial, but, in view of the abundant cumulative evidence from elsewhere, I believe that the wrens had thrown out the nestling bluebirds (plus most of the nestling material) over a period of several days. The last two bluebirds probably were ejected at the age of six days after I had made my inspection shortly before noon. No dead bodies were found on the ground, but the nestbox is near the barnyard end of the pasture where a flock of chickens and several Muscovy ducks have the run of the yard. Any “bugs” appearing on the closely cropped grass would be gobbled up instantly by these omnivorous creatures. The parent bluebirds were a timid unaggressive pair that apparently let the wrens intrude, even though the nestbox is on the protruding corner of a clean garden fence 60 feet or so from the brushy back of the garden.

The weight of six-day-old bluebird nestlings averages about 17 grams though it may be as low as 13 3/4 grams (Pinkowski 1975); that of adult House Wrens in June averages about 11 1/2 grams (derived from data in Clench and Leberman 1978). It would appear that, despite lighter weight, a wren is strong enough to carry, or more probably pull, such bluebird nestlings from near the floor of the standard nestbox to the entrance six inches above the floor. In this instance the nestlings may have been underweight due to continual harassment by the wrens.

I would welcome pertinent comments from readers as to the maximum age of bluebird or other cavity-nester nestlings that have been ejected by House Wrens.

Thanks are due M.K. Klimkiewicz of the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, MD, for making weight data available.

LITERATURE CITED:


5038 Park Place
Bethesda, MD 20816

Cornell Nest Record Cards

Individuals who have completed Cornell Nest Record Cards for 1982 should return completed cards immediately to Robert M. Schutsky, NABS Research Committee Chairman, Muddy Run Ecological Laboratory, P.O. Box 10, Drumore, PA 17518.
Three species of titmice breed in the United States. The breeding range of the Tufted Titmouse (Parus bicolor) is very similar to that of the Eastern Bluebird (Sialia sialis) except that it does not extend as far north reaching only the southern tip of Ontario (See Map 1). However, its range is expanding each year and it may soon reach other parts of Canada. In Texas the previously named Black-crested Titmouse, now considered conspecific with the Tufted Titmouse, occupies a breeding range farther south and west than that of the Eastern Bluebird.

Remarkable similarities in population densities are found throughout the breeding range. Like the Eastern Bluebird, the Tufted Titmouse prefers the Plateau and Rolling Hill country. Densities diminish gradually at lower and higher elevations.

A population distribution and density map (See Map 1) of the Plain Titmouse (Parus inornatus) indicates that they prefer the California Foothills of the Pacific Ranges in the Pacific Mountains physiographic stratification. According to published information Plain Titmice prefer the oak and pinyon-juniper woodlands at elevations from 5,000 to 7,000 feet from Oregon south and east to Texas and New Mexico (Scott, Evans, Patton, Stone 1977). While the breeding range of the Plain Titmouse overlaps that of both the Western Bluebird (Sialia mexicana) and the Mountain Bluebird (Sialia currucoides) nothing has been published to indicate competition for nest sites between the species. It is known, however, that like bluebirds, Plain Titmice will use nesting boxes when available (Wetmore 1964).

Unfortunately, not enough data have been collected on the Bridled Titmouse (Parus wolleberi) to establish population densities, but their range is known. They prefer the chaparral and pinyon-juniper habitat found at elevations from 5,000 to 7,000 feet along the Mexican border. Cottonwood trees adjacent to streams also provide nesting sites (Phillips, Marshall, Monson 1964). Published reports on the use of nestboxes have not been found, so any information along these lines would be appreciated.

In order to demonstrate the progress of the northward expansion of the Tufted Titmouse, Table 1 has been prepared with information derived from the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) compiled by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Sialia 1:79-87).

Tufted Titmice were breeding in Connecticut and New York when the BBS began in 1966. The following year they were recorded in Massachusetts and a year later in Rhode Island. New Hampshire didn’t have a BBS record until 1975 while Vermont had only one and that in 1977. Notice also that there are no dramatic population fluctuations as is the case with bluebirds. This is probably due to the resident status of the titmouse whereas the bluebird sometimes sustains large losses during migration.

Expansion is believed to be primarily a result of increased numbers of feeding stations being maintained by members of conservation and birding societies. Interest has grown to
Map 1. Breeding Season Distribution of the Tufted Titmouse and Plain Titmouse from Breeding Bird Survey Data.
the point where most New Englanders have followed the lead of the Massachusetts Audubon Society in setting aside the second weekend in February as Cardinal-Tufted Titmouse-Mockingbird Survey time. Increased participation in the survey has produced some interesting results. New Hampshire Audubon (Vol. 16, No. 3) reported 876 Tufted Titmice seen during the 1980 census, while the Audubon Society of Rhode Island (Vol. 16, No. 4) reported 297 seen during the count in 1979.

Members in Quebec should be on the lookout for Tufted Titmice; they are heading that way. Maybe a member of the Society will be the first to report a sighting. Titmice nests are generally difficult to find during the nesting and molting seasons (Gillespie 1930, Laskey 1957); however, many members of NABS have been delighted and fortunate in having titmice nest in one or more of their bluebird nesting boxes.

Being able to participate in bluebird conservation is rewarding in itself, but to witness the actual nesting of a secretive species such as the titmouse is one of many bonuses. Much can be learned about native cavity nesting species from observations made along a bluebird trail.

I wish to thank the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service BBS for use of the map accompanying this article and Danny Bystrak for his help.

LITERATURE CITED:


Table 1. Breeding Season Tufted Titmice per BBS Route in New England, 1966-1981.

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6002 Hunt Club Rd.
Elkridge, MD 21227

Volume 4, Number 4
Titmice Deserve Encouragement

Lawrence Zeleny

Titmice are close relatives of chickadees which were discussed in an earlier article (Sialia 2:136-138), but are somewhat larger and are easily distinguished from chickadees by their prominent crests. The three North American species of titmice are less widely distributed than the chickadees and are considerably more southern in their distribution.

The Tufted Titmouse (Parus bicolor) has the broadest geographical range of the titmice and is found throughout the eastern half of the United States except in the most northern areas. Southward its range extends into south-central Texas and northeastern Mexico.

The Plain Titmouse (Parus inornatus) is found along the west coast north to southern Oregon and east to central Colorado and western Texas.

The Bridled Titmouse (Parus wulweberi) is found in the mountainous areas of southern Arizona and New Mexico, and in north-central Mexico.

All of these species are essentially nonmigratory although some of them may occasionally wander outside of their normal range after the breeding season is over.

All titmice are cavity-nesting birds and will often use bluebird nesting boxes for their nests, particularly if the boxes are close to their favored wooded areas. European Starlings (Sturnus vulgaris) and House Sparrows (Passer domesticus) are not serious enemies of the titmice since titmice are quite willing to nest in the woods which are shunned by these foreign species. Also, titmice can readily enter a cavity or nesting box with a 1½ inch opening, much too small for starlings although still accessible to House Sparrows. Thus titmice, like chickadees, have a big advantage over bluebirds in the competition for foreign birds for nesting sites, since bluebirds insist on nesting in at least partly open locations and there are very few natural cavities that bluebirds can enter where they will be safe from starling and House Sparrow intrusion.

Titmouse nests are quite easy to distinguish from bluebird nests. They are made of a wide variety of plant material including dead and often partly decomposed leaves, mosses, strips of bark, etc., and are usually lined with any available animal hair. These birds are so anxious to obtain sufficient hair to line their nests that they will often extract it from live animals, including human beings. An interesting account has been written of a Tufted Titmouse that cautiously approached a Red Squirrel from the rear, then quickly and expertly extracted hair from the squirrel’s tail for its nest. This must surely have required lightning action since few animals can move as quickly as a Red Squirrel. Like their cousins, the chickadees, titmice seem to take great pride in workmanship and may labor a week or more in the construction of their nests.
Titmice usually lay from four to eight white eggs more or less speckled with reddish-brown. The female titmouse is most devoted to her task of incubating and protecting her eggs. During the incubation period of about 12 days she leaves the nest infrequently and only for short periods. Much of her food is supplied by her mate while she remains on her nest. If a human Intruder peers in at her she nearly always remains on the nest and will often assume a threatening posture and utter vicious snake-like hissing sounds in a brave effort to frighten the intruder away.

Titmice are frequent visitors to winter feeding stations where they are particularly fond of sunflower seed and peanuts. They are very trusting little birds and with a little patience can be persuaded to eat from one’s hands.

Although they are generally considered to be birds of the woods, they will often nest in bird boxes close to homes even in the residential areas of cities. Some years ago a pair of Tufted Titmice nested in a bluebird nesting box only six feet from my back porch.

Titmice are delightful little birds with no “bad habits” and deserve all the encouragement we can give them. If they use some nesting boxes intended for bluebirds, additional boxes can be provided nearby. Bluebirds and titmice are quite compatible and are willing to nest close to one another.

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Material in the foregoing article was extracted from one first published in Nature Society News, August 30, 1972, and is reprinted with permission.

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Two Successes in Foster-Parenting Bluebirds

Wagoner County Oklahoma

Charlotte Jernigan

On 27 April, 1982, about 10:00 a.m. my telephone rang. My neighbor, Lorena, was calling for help for bluebird nestlings that had hatched the previous day. She had been talking on the telephone when she saw the neighbor’s cat pass by the window with a mouthful of blue feathers. An immediate investigation confirmed her fear—the cat had killed the female bluebird. The young birds needed brooding which the male could not do, so the best hope for the nestlings was to find another bluebird nest with young of about the same age into which they could be moved.

I was thankful that we had been monitoring our trail every day so that we were aware of the different nesting stages existing in our boxes. There were two boxes on the trail that were the best possibilities for her four birds. The box in my yard had one newly-hatched bluebird and four eggs so I knew the ages of the two broods were compatible. Dr. Zeleny had mentioned in his book that one should be careful not to overload the nest with more than six nestlings. Anxious to do the right thing I called Mary Janetatos and she, in turn, got Dr. Zeleny on the line. The dry weather and plentiful supply of insects seemed to be factors in our favor so Dr. Zeleny suggested that we put seven young in a nest even though that is a larger than normal brood for Eastern Bluebirds. It seemed preferable to take the risk of overloading than to discard a healthy nestling (which I could not have done anyway).

I quickly called Lorena with the news. She took a plastic dish pan and a thin tea towel to her box. She removed the nest containing the four nestlings, placed it in the pan and covered all with the towel. Lorena, her dog,
and the baby bluebirds arrived at my house in her truck in record time. We carefully picked up two tiny bluebirds and gently placed them in their new home beside the single naked hatching. By the time we got back to the truck the parents were sitting on a little dead limb waiting to check their nest. The urgency of the situation compelled us to leave without further observation as we headed for another part of the trail to place the last two young in a nest with four nestlings and an egg which turned out to be infertile. There was no hesitation on the part of the parents in accepting the additional baby birds.

We opted not to check the boxes any more that day. The next day the nesting box in my yard was a busy place for it now contained seven naked little birds. I never knew which nestlings were the orphans in either nest. For us, the suspense-filled drama was over. The curtain had gone up on a new act, and Mother Nature had assured us that we need not walk the floor any longer. All was well.

We enjoyed watching the progress of the brood in our yard although occasionally it was difficult to account for the seventh bird. On the seventeenth day, at about 7:00 p.m., I was shocked to find that five of the brood had fledged without so much as a twittered good-bye. I have not been able to see all seven in the yard at the same time; however, on the sixteenth day after fledging, the female started building another nest in the box which had been thoroughly cleaned and sprayed with pyrethrin.

I assume that all went well with the second set of foster parents. We did not see the brood fledge, but surely someone is watching them as they teeter on the high lines or dip and flutter in a bird bath. The last time I monitored them they were old enough to leave. I must admit that I experienced a feeling of emptiness when I monitored this box after they had fledged—my very first vacated nest. On the way home my own tail feathers dragged a little bit. An empty nesting box is just no fun!

Route #2, Box 404A
Wagoner, OK 74467

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**Howard County Maryland**

Mark Wallace

**On 17 May, 1982,** I was given the Dorosz's address by Eva Sunell, a fellow bird club member, and told that they had bluebirds.

**18 May**—Mrs. Dorosz found feathers of an adult female bluebird on the ground in front of the box. One young bird was found on the ground; ants were attacking it. She picked up the nestling, cleaned off the ants and put it back into the box. I arrived and called Dr. Zeleny who told me to wait to see if the male was feeding the brood. The young in the box appeared to be about three days old, although I was told that they had hatched on 13 May. One hour after Mrs. Dorosz’s original discovery the male was seen feeding the brood. One House Sparrow was observed.

**19 May**—At approximately 8:00 a.m. I received a call from Mrs. Dorosz. The young bird that she had found on the ground the day before had died and she had removed it. The male was not displaying as much interest in the brood as before. A little after 9:00 a.m. Jo Solem and I went to the Dorosz’s house. Mrs. Dorosz had taken the box down because she had seen a House Sparrow go into it.

The two remaining nestlings still appeared to be three days old and were clammy. I put the young (still in their nest) in a small cardboard box. Jo and I drove to Zern's about a 20 minute drive away where I had several boxes, at least one of which had young of about the right age for foster-parent-
ing. The Dorosz's two young bluebirds were placed in a box with two nestlings of about the same age. Three infertile eggs were removed from the nesting box. Both adult bluebirds of the pair were in the area protesting. 21 May—All four young appeared to be five days old and healthy. Adult bluebirds were in the vicinity of the box protesting. 27 May—I banded all four young: nos. 127136391, 92, 93 and 94. Numbers 91 and 94 appeared to be slightly older than 92 and 93, but I had no way of knowing if they were the Dorosz's birds. The first three numbers were female, 94 a male. 3 June—Young have fledged. Used nest cleaned out. Adult female in box vicinity protested. 11 June—Pair of adult bluebirds seen; at least one immature female seen. 10537 Martellini Dr. Laurel, MD 20707

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Our Special Friends

Our bluebird friends returned on 20 January, 1981, and, after finding that we had not increased the rent on their home, began nest building on 9 April. By 20 May five beautiful babies made up the flight graduation exercises. Just three days later a new nest was under construction and by 4 June, five more lovely blue eggs had been deposited. On the afternoon of the 19th we observed a great deal of commotion near the box involving the male and female but were unable to figure out the problem. The next day we did a bed check only to find that three nestlings had disappeared: four-legged predator? heatstroke? snake? The remaining two birds fledged on 1 July. The very next day a new nest was being built and by 10 July there were five more eggs. Hatching and feeding were uneventful until the night of 3 August.

While I was watching TV after supper, a thunderstorm was building. Above the rumbling I heard distress calls and furious scolding. After this persisted for several minutes I got up to see what was causing the commotion. A glance revealed the adult bluebirds furiously fanning their wings in the vicinity of the bird house. A closer look disclosed a large black snake on the side of the tree slowly undulating toward the opening of the box.

I ran outside. As I approached the snake it moved quickly into the entrance hole. About a foot of snake had moved inside the box when I grabbed its tail and pulled—letting go promptly! The snake then started back into the hole. When once again pulled out a foot it slithered back in. The last grab I made was more secure and none too soon for only about five or six inches of the snake's tail was available for purchase. I grabbed and yanked, more securely this time, and out came a full four feet of snake almost 1 1/2 inches in diameter. The snake was quickly flung to the lawn where it coiled, but soon it started moving back toward the bird house. I shouted upstairs toward the bathroom where my wife was taking a shower, "Ann, get my gun. Come quick! Get my gun. Come quick!"

Ann, resplendent in a towel, leaped to the gun and came downstairs three steps at a time. I grabbed the gun after kicking toward the snake to prevent its exit into the shrubs, cocked the gun and fired seven shots. The bluebirds continued their excited scoldings until the snake was removed from their sight. After about a half hour the "cherubs" and their parents went back to bed and a sound sleep.

The young fledged successfully on 8 August.

Arthur L. Markel
2700 River Oaks Drive
Midlothian, VA 23113

Arthur Markel is the captain of the deep diving exploration submarine Aluminaut.
He notes that "although we cherish black snakes here, we could not risk losing 'our special friends'."
Would pressure-treated lumber be satisfactory for constructing a bluebird box?

Robert H. Pettit
Louisville, Kentucky

Chemical wood preservatives such as those used in pressure-treated lumber, as well as those applied by the user to untreated lumber, greatly increase the useful life of the lumber when it is exposed to the weather. These chemicals effectively inhibit the destruction of the wood by fungi and insects; however, most or all of these chemicals are more or less toxic to birds and other animals. Whether or not significant amounts of these substances can be absorbed by birds nesting in treated boxes either by direct contact with the wood or by volatilization is not known for sure. We do know that bluebirds have often used treated nesting boxes without any apparent harm either to the adult birds or the nestlings. But we cannot be sure that some hidden injury to the birds may not be done, even of a type that would become apparent only in future generations. Until more is known about this subject I consider it prudent to use decay-resistant woods such as cedar, cypress or redwood for nesting boxes rather than risk any possible harm by the use of lumber treated with preservatives.

Bluebirds usually do not nest in marshes. However, if there is dry, open land close by they might use a nesting box on your property.

We have two small dogs. Should any nesting boxes or feeders be placed outside the fenced portion of our yard? Would bluebirds be frightened by the barking?

Patricia Nagy
Carnegie, Pennsylvania

Unless the fenced portion of your yard is quite small the dogs would probably not bother the birds very much. In fact, they might be helpful in keeping cats and other predators away from the birds. Your nesting boxes and feeders should be high enough to be out of the dogs’ reach. Most dogs ignore birds feeding from the ground. If yours do not, it would be better to move your feeders outside the fenced area since some of the feed always falls to the ground. Birds soon become accustomed to barking and are then not frightened by it. Dogs are the greatest threat when young birds just out of the nest are on the ground and unable to fly.

We live on the marsh in Charleston. Is this a suitable place for bluebirds?

Sue Lawley
Charleston, South Carolina
Experimental Design

House Sparrows Shun This Nesting Box

James R. Baxter

I have had a bluebird trail for eleven years. The most productive year was 1981 when the trail fledged 131 Eastern Bluebirds and 46 Tree Swallows from 37 boxes. Most of the boxes are similar to NABS' recommended plan but with 5 x 5 inch inside dimensions.

We have tried most of the innovations in box design suggested in Sialia—usually with poor success. As an example, experiments with the open-topped boxes have not been encouraging. In February of 1979 I placed a deep floor, 4 x 4 inch open-topped box with a raccoon guard over the entrance in a good location and had no takers all year. In succeeding years Tree Swallows used the site nesting in a standard 4 x 4 inch box.

I have used open-topped (screen-covered) 5 x 5 inch boxes at three other locations. In the first case the location had been competed for by House Wrens, House Sparrows and bluebirds for seven years. The first year the box was used by Tree Swallows—the first time that they had used that location. At other sites the boxes were unused until removable covers were made and nailed over the open tops. These were removed if sparrows began using the box, but in only one case did bluebirds use the uncovered box successfully.

At least four years ago a box appeared on my trail which bothered me. A farmer placed it on a metal fence post between his orchard and a hay field. This site was within 150 feet of his house and within 150-200 feet of two houses across the street. In my wisdom I had always passed up this site as a potential bluebird box location due to the likelihood of competition with House Sparrows. The box was located approximately 3½ feet above the ground, had inside dimensions of 3½ x 4 inches, and had a 2 inch-plus entrance hole which had been covered by 1/8 inch masonite-like material to reduce the opening to a 1 ¾ inch diameter. The distance from the bottom of the hole to the floor was 3½ inches. Thus, any bird nesting in it which built a nest of any thickness at all was sitting practically level with the entrance in a very cramped box.

For several years I ignored the box since I had not erected it and it required a walk in from the road of over 100 feet. I had even considered removing it as it was obviously a deathtrap for bluebirds or Tree Swallows as there were many cats in the area; however, Tree Swallows were using it successfully on the few occasions that I did monitor it.

In 1980 I observed bluebirds using the box so, reluctantly, I added the box to my trail. Bluebirds successfully fledged seven young in two nestings that year and four young in 1981 in a first nesting. The second nesting in July was unsuccessful with five eggs laid and four eggs abandoned.

I feel it is significant that I have been unable to band an incubating female at this box the past two years. Despite quiet approaches to the box, the female, sitting high in front of her large "picture window" entrance, always left before I could cover the entrance with my hand. It seems significant to me, also, that this box experienced no House Sparrow problems while several of my conventional boxes nearby, placed in more open areas and farther from the homes, were often bothered by them. The sparrows seemed to realize that this box was too small and too low for successful nesting. In two of the three successful bluebird nestings the large young were still present in the nest the week following their banding, making them 15-19 days old. In the other case the birds were not banded until they were
15-16 days old; thus, premature fledging from the low opening didn’t seem to be a problem. Why starling predation has not been a problem I do not know, but the box is too small for them to consider using as a nest site.

I remember an earlier case of a nesting box of similar dimensions along my trail. This box was nailed to an upright railroad tie alongside a driveway within 100 feet of a house. This box was used by bluebirds on at least one occasion. I did not monitor the box because it could not be opened for cleaning or inspection; besides, in my wisdom, I was sure it was in a poor location anyway.

It will be interesting to see if “small is better” in the search for a bluebird box that House Sparrows will not compete for. House Sparrows build bulky deep nests—an impossibility in small houses. Research on the blowfly problem seems to indicate that bulky bluebird nests contain many more of these pests than thinner nests, so using smaller boxes may indirectly help this problem also.

While I am not recommending as a general rule the use of bluebird boxes similar to the dimensions I have described, smaller boxes might have a use in areas where House Sparrows are a problem providing that they can be mounted so as to discourage predators.

1150 Pine Tree Drive
Girard, PA 16417

Editor’s Note: One of our greatest needs is for a nesting box that will discourage House Sparrows and, at the same time, be acceptable to bluebirds. Sialia will publish, aperiodically, the experiences of our readers with unconventional boxes that appear to show some promise in meeting this need. Such publication will not constitute an endorsement of these boxes except for experimental purposes.

In regard to Dr. Baxter’s observations, it is known that restricted floor space and low mounting of nesting boxes both have some tendency to discourage sparrows. The box described combines these two factors plus a third factor, namely shallow depth. Perhaps by thus combining these three factors sparrows can be discouraged more effectively.

It is hoped that some of our readers will construct a few boxes similar to the one described by Dr. Baxter and mount them about three feet from the ground in sparrow-infested areas that would otherwise be good bluebird habitat. Results should then be reported to the Society. It is recommended that the entrance holes in any such boxes be 1 ½ inches in diameter. In some areas it would also be advisable to attach “raccoon guards” (small pieces of wood 1 ½ inches thick with 1 ½ inch holes) to the boxes, so that the holes will coincide exactly with the entrance holes in the boxes. These guards will reduce the danger of predation and starling interference to which these boxes would otherwise be quite vulnerable.
ATTENTION BLUEBIRD TRAIL OPERATORS

Do you have a bluebird trail of 50 boxes or more? Has it been in existence at least 3 years?

The North American Bluebird Society is planning to publish a directory of bluebird trails in Canada and the United States. If you can answer yes to the above questions and would like to be listed, please send us this necessary information:

- 1. Location of trail (state, county, and city or town)
- 2. Name(s) of operator(s), address(es), and telephone number(s).
  State any instructions concerning time you can be reached.
- 3. Number of boxes on trail
- 4. Age of trail
- 5. Willingness to escort observers on your trail
- 6. Interest in answering telephoned questions from individuals in your area
- 7. Additional comments

Please send the above information to the following address:

Bluebird Trail Directory
North American Bluebird Society
Box 6295
Silver Spring, MD 20906-0295
Mounting Nesting Boxes
Hubert W. Prescott

A good way to protect nesting bluebirds from cats is to mount the nesting boxes on metal pipes. Perhaps the most usual way of doing this is to screw a metal flange to the bottom of the box and then screw the pipe into the threaded receptacle of the flange. This is the method I used for many years until I discovered a much better and much cheaper method. That method is to fasten the pipe to the back of the box with ordinary pipe clamps or hangers as shown in Fig. 1. These cost from 10 to 15 cents each as against from $1.40 to $1.80 each for the metal flanges. They can be purchased to fit various pipe sizes at almost any store that carries plumbing supplies.

In addition to serving admirably for mounting nesting boxes on pipes, they do equally well, with a little practice, for attaching boxes to the top section of metal fence posts (that portion of the post which protrudes above the fence wire). To do this, screw the clamps part way on, placing them from five to six inches apart, on the back of the box. Then slip the clamps over the top of the post. When the box is in proper position turn the screws down the rest of the way until the posts are fastened firmly to the back of the nesting box. A little testing will be required to determine the clamp size needed for the metal post because some types are of heavier construction than others.

Figure 2 shows how I suspend a bluebird nesting box from a tree limb. It is not necessary to modify the box for this purpose since I drill a small hole in each side about 1½ inches below the roof on all of my nesting boxes no matter what method I use for mounting. If they are nailed to a post then the two holes serve for extra ventilation. The holes also provide the option of suspending the box from a tree limb by running a length of nylon cord, plastic-covered clothesline, or wire through the holes as shown in the sketch. The holes are slanted slightly upward to prevent rain from running into the box. They are placed slightly more toward the back of the box in order to give the box a slight forward tilt. Even though the suspended nest-
boxes may sway in the wind, the bluebirds do not seem to mind.

It is my feeling that the suspended boxes reduce predation from cats, raccoons and opossums. In some instances where the boxes have to be suspended high enough to be out of the way of farm machinery, they are a bit difficult to reach for checking and servicing unless one takes along something to stand on.

When hanging nesting boxes intended for bluebirds it is necessary to put them in trees that provide open shade. Dead limbs or dying sections of trees adjoining open areas are preferred to leafy situations. Bluebirds do not like dense shade or heavily forested areas.

13505 S.E. River Road
Portland, OR 97222

Editor's Note: Because fig. 2 is an experimental mounting, please advise the Research Committee of breeding results if you use it. Instances of predation (or the lack thereof) are particularly needed.
PLANTINGS FOR BLUEBIRDS AND OTHER WILDLIFE
A Tolerant Dogwood
Karen Blackburn

In his last column in *Sialia* (3:100-101), George N. Grant brought to our attention the many virtues of the Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*) but noted that, for all its beauty and tremendous value to wildlife, it is not considered hardy north of Zone 5. This may be an unfortunate fact of life for those of us in the northern states and Canada, but nature has provided us with other members of the dogwood family which are a bit more tolerant of our often severe winters. Though generally not as showy as their ornamental relative, these dogwoods, which include several thicket-forming species, offer fruit as the main attraction while providing the added protection of good cover. This group of shrubs includes the Silky Dogwood (*C. amomum*), the Alternate-leaf Dogwood (*C. alternifolia*), the Gray Dogwood (*C. racemosa*) and the subject of this column, the Red-osier Dogwood.

**Red-osier Dogwood**  
* (*Cornus stolonifera*)

**Native Range**—From Newfoundland to Yukon south to Maryland, W. Virginia, Great Lakes region, to New Mexico and California.

**Hardiness**—From Zones 2 to 8.

**Habitat**—In lowlands, swamps, along riverbanks as well as drier sites in fields and forest borders. Soil pH of natural sites ranges from 3.2 to 8.0.

**Habit**—Under favorable conditions, a fast-growing shrub to 10 or 15 feet. Habit of forming thickets by means of stolons (runners) and layering occurs most often on wetter sites. In grasslands (and under cultivation) large, single plants are usually produced.

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**Fruit and Flowers**—Small white flowers appear in flat-topped clusters from May to June, often followed by a second period of bloom in late summer. One-quarter inch white fruits ripen from July to early fall.

**Landscape Value**—Ornamental with white flowers in late spring, white fruits and red foliage in fall, and decorative red branches throughout the winter. Well suited for planting along streambanks and in wet areas where other plants may fail.

**Culture**—Prefers moist, even saturated, soils but does well on drier sites. Adapted to many soil types from poorly drained muck to sandy upland soils. Best growth in full sun. Propagate by stem cuttings, layering or division of suckers. Seeds collected for fall planting should be soaked in water until soft. If seed coats are too hard, germination may not occur until the second year after planting. The seeds should be sown 1/4 inch deep in ordinary garden soil.
Wildlife Value—Provides dense summer cover for nesting birds. 93 species of birds are known to use the fruits of Red-osier Dogwood, but those for which it is a favorite include the Wild Turkey, Ruffed Grouse, Common Bobwhite, Downy Woodpecker, Eastern Kingbird, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Eastern Bluebird and Cedar Waxwing. Among the mammals which make use of the foliage, fruit and wood are deer, Elk, Black Bears, Beavers and various cottontail rabbits.

Related Species—The introduced Cornus alba sibirica is very similar and more often commercially available. It is possible that the two are simply geographic variants of the same species.

P.O. Box 110
E. Hampstead, NH 03826

This hardiness map was developed by the Agricultural Research Service of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture. The hardiness zones 1-10 are based on the average annual minimum temperature for each zone and divide the United States and Canada into areas where specific plants are winter hardy. Many factors such as altitude, length of growing season, exposure, moisture, soil types, etc., can create variations within zones, but adhering to your specific zone will generally give you the best results.
We Saved Our Baby Bluebirds

Lois J. Canora

“They’re right here, Mom. They’re right here.” My son, Ned, tried to get his message across as I stood on the ladder lamenting the fact that the bluebird box contained an empty nest.

It was Friday, 3 July, 1981, a rainy but warm morning. At 8:00 a.m. I had seen a House Wren enter the box and busily begin throwing dry grass out of the entrance hole. All morning I worried and watched. The male and female bluebirds had come back into the yard, but they spent much time perched on the back of the box fiercely driving away a small band of starlings. It was not unusual to see the male perched on the box, but the female had been busy incubating her four eggs. It was unusual for her to spend so much time outside, especially if she had tiny young which should have hatched the night before.

The male did not enter the box while she was incubating. He would, instead, hang from the entrance hole and check the yard after offering his mate some tasty morsel. Once the eggs hatched, however, he could be seen frequently entering the box with food and removing the white fecal sacs, jobs he shared equally with his mate. Late Thursday afternoon I had seen him enter the box so I felt quite sure the eggs had hatched.

Finally, I got my son’s message and cautiously stepped down. There, in the grass, directly under the spread-open feet of the ladder were three bald baby birds. Only one showed the slightest hint of a tail feather. They must have been lying there for almost three hours. I picked up the two that were closest together, thinking for one fleeting moment of the joy of having a “pet” bluebird, and then gently laid them in their nest. I did the same with the third one, marveling aloud to Ned that we had neither stepped on them nor crushed them with the stepladder. We checked quickly to find the fourth baby bird for we knew the female had been incubating four eggs. When we could not find it after a brief search, we replaced the top of the box and went inside our house.

Now there was a further worry. Would the parents return to their brood? Within five minutes the male was perched on the back of the box. He checked inside. His next stop was the dead branch of the ash just outside my kitchen window. The box was clearly visible from the kitchen with the entrance hole at eye-level fifty feet across the lawn. The female was nowhere to be seen.

In our zeal to attract the bluebirds we had seen in the area, we had carefully chosen the site for this second box. The initial box, down the hill by the garden, was too often taken over by wrens, but this was the fourth year that the kitchen box had attracted a pair of bluebirds. They usually arrived to
check it out by mid-May, but then did not move in until early June. This year the pair had a young female with them when they came, so I was quite certain that our yard had been chosen for the second nesting. In the past we had brought tragedy to the nest by trying to protect it from a neighboring cat by playing a gentle spray of water at the base of the post. When the water pressure varied the nest was inundated, the female left, and the wren entered and destroyed the eggs. Now the box is protected by a flat tin baffle part way up the pole which has worked well. A pair of bluebirds last year raised five young, all of whom were banded at about twelve days by Kaye Anderson, Naturalist for the Saw Mill River Audubon Society. We had planned to call Kaye again this year if we had a successful nesting.

Suddenly, from the direction of the kitchen, we could hear the familiar warble of the male bluebird, but it was ten times louder than normal. He flew nervously again to the entrance hole and immediately back to the ash. For twenty minutes he flew back and forth, sometimes perching for a minute on the back of the box, nervously fluttering his wings. Always he returned to the ash and called loudly. Finally, the female appeared at the box, hung at the hole for a minute and then entered. We were ecstatic! Unwilling to disturb them, we did not know if all three young had survived. On Saturday we finally reached Mrs. Anderson for advice. Although the female appeared to be brooding and both parents seemed to be feeding, could we be sure that everything was all right? She advised me to look so that we could clean out the nest if any of the young had died. A quick peek told us all was well. We decided that this trio had had trauma enough so we did not have them banded.

We watched carefully for the next sixteen days, however, as male and female went about raising them. It surprised me that, while activity was fairly constant, it was not as frantic as I had always imagined. On a warm afternoon both parents would leave the immediate area to forage for themselves for up to half an hour. At dusk, activity seemed to pick up and the female could be seen still feeding in the last light of the day.

Right after church on Sunday, 21 July, a small, spotted fluff-ball appeared at the entrance. Often we had seen their heads peeking out at the world but this was the whole body. The baby perched there for almost ten minutes giving my husband and me time to arrange grandstand seats in a corner of the yard. Then the young bluebird launched herself. She flew steadily across the yard, up over the lilac bush,
past the ash—and crashed into the house. Were we now going to lose another of the young we had tried so hard to protect? The parents seemed not at all disturbed. Father took up his favorite spot in the ash. Mother joined him on a lower branch and warbled softly. The fledgling was on the ground just under the dining room windows. By carefully raising the screen I could hover over this small bluebird protecting it from some sudden predator. The female, meanwhile, found a butterfly and landed close to the young bird. Now the stunned youngster began to take some notice of her surroundings, sat up tall and looked all around. When she lunged for the bug, the adult flew off. The young bird took two or three tentative hops; again the mother approached with her prize. This time the young bird was fed and flew to a small pine. Now the parents called to another nestling and, without further incident, the other two were fledged.

Our efforts were more than rewarded by this trio. They stayed in sight until mid-September foraging, feeding and bathing every day. One cold August morning they could be seen huddled on top of the nesting box as if asking Mom, busy with a new brood of four, to let them back in for some warmth.

RR 3, Skytop
Katonah, NY 10536

Electric Companies Cooperate

Two Pennsylvania Utility Companies Aid Bluebirds

William J. Johnson

One sign that spring has arrived is the familiar sound of birds singing. For many years, however, one bird’s voice was heard only rarely in southern Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

The Eastern Bluebird, a small creature named for its blue wings, back and tail, was once a common sight throughout the area. But lack of natural nesting areas—particularly tree cavities—and competition from other birds for those few nesting spots have caused an alarming decline in the bluebird population.

For the last five years, though, the bluebird has been increasing in number in Pennsylvania—in large part because of the role two electric utilities have played in helping one of America’s best-loved birds make its comeback.

Philadelphia Electric Co. (PE) and Pennsylvania Power & Light Co. (PP&L) have developed nesting programs at their facilities in the lower portion of the county. PE initiated its program in 1977 at its Muddy Run Recreation Park in Holtwood. The same year, PP&L installed its first nesting boxes east of its Holtwood power plant.

Today, both companies boast bluebird nesting trails. Simple wooden boxes fastened to the top of short poles are placed along the trails about 100 yards apart. This ensures each bluebird family adequate nesting privacy.

Through 1982, PP&L’s Holtwood program has fledged 235 bluebirds in 22 nesting boxes. Birds also have been fledged at PP&L’s Montour Preserve near the company’s power plant in Washingtonville, Montour County. Nesting boxes were installed last year at Susquehanna Riverlands, a nature area near PP&L’s Susquehanna nuclear plant under construction outside Berwick, Luzerne County.
A nestling bluebird is shown by Ben Lefever, Pennsylvania Power & Light Co. Holtwood property and recreation aide.
PE has fledged 416 birds in 66 boxes at Muddy Run. The company offers workshops and nature walks to promote conservation efforts with the hope that more people will become interested in building bluebird boxes.

Why have two utilities with adjacent properties worked to bring about a return of a healthy bluebird population in southern Lancaster County?

"We believe in helping the wildlife on the land we own," says Mark Arbogast, PP&L coordinator of recreation projects. "The Holtwood area was recognized as a good place for bluebirds to thrive and we're happy we've been able to develop it."

Arbogast says the nesting program is a good example of how utilities can assume a responsible land stewardship role at a relatively low cost. For example, he says, nesting boxes cost less than $10 each to build.

"We have the right habitat for bluebirds here," says Dave Ellenberg, Muddy Run superintendent. "We have the open fields and grasslands the bluebird needs.

"The program here has exceeded our expectations, partly because we underestimated the success of the nesting boxes in attracting the bluebirds, and also because PE has made such a serious commitment to helping the bluebird."

Ellenberg says PE, in addition to offering bluebird programs at Muddy Run, last year promoted the program at the Philadelphia Flower Show. The company's message apparently has been heard.

"People call us to say they've seen bluebirds in their backyards for the first time in years," says Ellenberg, "and they want to know how to get them to nest."

Getting individuals interested in building boxes is important, both Arbogast and Ellenberg say, because natural nesting cavities are scarce throughout the East. The bluebird is important not only because of its popularity in American folklore and literature, but also because it helps control insects.

After such a cold winter, how healthy were the bluebird populations at Holtwood and Muddy Run, where the climate usually allows the birds to spend the winter?

Both Arbogast and Ellenberg say that as early as the first week in March—as they were checking the nesting trails—they spotted males flying up to the boxes and beginning their mating calls.

"PE and PP&L have proved that man can work to improve his habitat," says Arbogast, "by providing the bluebird with a refuge similar to the natural type that has become so scarce."

Pennsylvania Power & Light Company
Two North Ninth St.
Allentown, PA 18101
SUCCESS WITH MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRDS

Lawrence Zeleny

The article "Our Success Story" by Jess and Elva Brinkerhoff (Sialis 2: 143-145) has stimulated an unusual amount of interest in the Mountain Bluebird (Sialis corrucoides) as well as some controversy. The Brinkerhoffs maintain a bluebird trail of some 800 or more nesting boxes mounted on fence posts through an area of about 150 square miles near Bickleton in south-central Washington. Virtually 100 percent of their boxes are occupied by bluebirds—mostly Mountain Bluebirds with a few Westerns (S. mexicana) thrown in for good measure.

When the Brinkerhoffs add new boxes to their trail each spring prospective bluebird tenants seem to be waiting impatiently for them and often occupy a box within seconds after the last mounting nail is driven! Such success stories seem almost incredible but they have been fully confirmed to our complete satisfaction by competent, impartial observers. The area of the trail evidently has all the elements of nearly perfect bluebird habitat except for an acute shortage of natural cavities for bluebird nesting sites. Also, there are almost no birds of species that compete with bluebirds for nesting sites, and practically no predators. Under these ideal conditions, almost unknown in most parts of the country, a bluebird population explosion is evidently occurring as a result of the Brinkerhoffs' efforts in supplying the missing ingredient—nesting boxes.

Early in their work, the Brinkerhoffs became convinced that the bluebirds on their trail often could not or would not enter the 1½ inch diameter entrance hole ordinarily recommended for all bluebirds. So, they increased the size to 1 5/8 inch in all of their boxes. This seemed to solve the problem; but it raised the question as to whether a hitherto unrecognized race of larger Mountain Bluebirds might exist or whether a substantial proportion of the population is larger than normal in the area of the Brinkerhoff trail. Elsewhere 1½ inch entrance holes have been used regularly for years and Mountain Bluebirds enter them with ease.

Then came a report from Alfred Perry of Boise, Idaho, who operates a 238 box bluebird trail which he says has 100 percent bluebird occupancy. He, too, claims that his success was attained only after increasing the entrance hole size in his boxes from 1½ inch to 1 5/8 inch. Thus it appears that if larger individuals of Mountain Bluebirds do exist, this situation may be more widespread than originally thought.

Unfortunately, 1 5/8 inch entrance holes will permit starlings to enter. These pests have not yet invaded the Brinkerhoff or Perry trails but no one knows how soon this may happen. In an area where starlings are abundant any bluebird trail with 1 5/8 inch hole boxes would almost surely become a complete disaster in a short time. Starlings will nest in almost any kind of enclosure that they can enter, even in open-end vertical steel pipes, hopper-type livestock feeders at ground level, and in light fixtures hanging high above busy city streets.

There are, undoubtedly, many areas in the West as well suited for bluebird trails as those of the Brinkerhoffs and Perry. All that is needed is human help by supplying and monitoring proper nesting boxes. We recommend that anyone planning to develop trails in these areas be alert to the possibility that entrance holes larger than 1½ inch may be needed. Wherever this may prove to be the case 1 9/16 inch holes should be thoroughly tried before adopting the 1 5/8 inch hole. The 1 9/16 inch hole appears to be the largest size that will exclude starlings and the chances seem very good that it will prove to be large enough for all bluebirds. Research is urgently needed to determine whether a larger race of Mountain Bluebirds does in fact exist, or whether a proportion of
the population is substantially larger due to age, sex or other characteristics. If these larger birds can be documented, then it must be determined if they can negotiate entrance holes that will still exclude starlings.

In the meantime our hats are off to Jess and Elva Brinkerhoff and Alfred Perry for the outstanding work they are doing in behalf of the Mountain and Western Bluebirds and for calling our attention to an important problem. In our long years of experience we have never before known of any sizable bluebird trail as successful as either of theirs.

A Bluebird Winter

The day after the conclusion of the Fourth Annual NABS Meeting (18 October 1981) was blustery and cold with snow flurries here in northeastern Ohio. Surely it was time to fill the bird feeders. We heard at the meeting that in winter bluebirds in Georgia like a corn meal-peanut butter mixture along with raisins. These were placed in the feeders with the usual sunflower seeds. The bluebirds soon came to the feeders, but they ignored their special food. Instead, they went through their annual ritual: pick up a sunflower seed, think about it a minute, drop it.

That first brief taste of winter was followed by a lovely fall. After Thanksgiving the bluebirds deserted their perches near the house but could still be observed almost daily in the fields. Christmas morning was bright and sunny with several bluebirds fluttering to the ground from small trees as if it were April. On 2 January six bluebirds flew from the telephone lines to some gray dogwood bushes giving their soft "cheery" call as I walked to the mailbox. On 6 January seven or eight bluebirds were fluttering around the house chattering in a way I’ve never heard before.

The following weekend a cold front arrived bringing real winter weather. The ground was covered with several inches of snow, the temperature fell below zero, and chill factors of -50° were mentioned on the weather reports. The next weekend was even worse, a record -22° was recorded. The final day of January delivered another low blow, freezing rain on top of the now solidly frozen ground. Fortunately for the birds, a warm wind that night thawed the ice on the trees and bushes.

Could the bluebirds possibly survive? Sure enough, on 2 February I observed six bluebirds quietly eating the now raisin-like berries of the gray dogwoods. On the morning of 8 February a bluebird chorus from the rooftop filled the air when my son opened the door to leave for school. Later the same day three bluebirds were checking nesting boxes and picking around in clumps of grass sticking through the ice. I watched the bluebirds at the first nestbox on our trail; next they flew to the second nestbox for a while; then they flew directly to the location of the third nestbox. The third box had been removed, however, in early October for repairs. It was apparent that these bluebirds had been here before.

During February we saw bluebirds once or twice a week, but only one or two at a time. The flock seemed to be breaking up. In early March winter still had us firmly in its grip, but American Robins and Red-winged Blackbirds had arrived. On 10 March I glanced out the window and saw a flock of robins in the grass among the patches of snow. As I stopped to watch, a pair of bluebirds flew to the nesting box near our house. The male went in followed by the female—a truly hopeful sign of spring. The bluebirds near our home never did eat anything we put out for them, but they did manage to survive the unusually severe Ohio winter.

Norma Smith

4574 Industry Rd.
Ravenna, OH 44266

Sialia, Autumn 1982
My Experiences with Bluebirds in Quebec

Graham Patriquin

My acquaintance with Eastern Bluebirds began in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley and has continued in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, with limited dramatic incidents but a steadily deepening joy. I first saw them in 1918—a fleeting glimpse of a male and female on a venerable apple tree, the only survivor of an orchard planted by Grand Pré Acadians more than two centuries earlier. My father urged me to keep an open eye for these birds whose endangered existence, even at that time, was a matter of serious concern. Thirty years elapsed before I saw them again, and periods of eight and then twenty years without a sign of them passed between our three triumphs in peddling homes to breeding pairs. The tedium of waiting for their return has always been set right by their eventual presence.

Our experience with nesting bluebirds dates from 1937 when, with some optimism, I put up two houses made to specifications in a Canadian Wildlife Service booklet. Every spring from our home in Lennoxville, Quebec, we eagerly watched the houses, but never a bluebird showed. It was after eleven years of unfulfilled hopes each April that we welcomed a nesting pair in 1948. Tragedy struck just before the nestlings were able to fly. A pair of Red Squirrels ransacked the house, tossed the young ones to the ground and set up their own menage in the rifled shelter. I wrought vengeance upon the rodents but no bluebirds came near my houses in the years to come, although I replaced and added to the original two.

Seven years later we moved, a short distance only, to a location with more open fields. Immediately I put up several new houses, and we were pleased but none too hopeful to see a pair of bluebirds on and in one of them on April Fools' Day, 1956. On 20 April, however, they returned and raised a brood of four. Next year, another successful nesting, but that was it.

Neighbors a mile up Moulton Hill (we lived at the base of it) reported a nesting in 1958 and again in the next two years. Other residents in the higher locality enjoyed nestings during the following decade. Wistfully we climbed the hill every summer, watched the bluebirds on telephone wires and apple trees, but had to be content that our community was still in favor with breeding pairs and that we were notified by their enthusiastic landlords.

In 1972 we moved to our retirement home, a century-old farmhouse. Windows on three sides face open spaces with abundant natural and man-made perches. By 1974 I had erected on our property more than a dozen houses suitable for the birds I wanted—and the sparrows I resented. As Tree Swallows came in growing numbers, I began to supply some of the nearby residents with my constructions. The neighbors, tyros in birding but happy to talk of their tenants, frequently reported having bluebirds. I checked out each report at once and each time I found those handsome, blue-backed swallows to be the mistaken species.

In September 1976, a southbound flock of six bluebirds came out of the riverside cover and took stock of four bird houses bordering my garden. They perched on each roof and entered as prospective tenants, apparently, of suitable housing. I hoped that they were giving advance notice of occupancy in 1977.

My hopes were realized on 16 April 1977. A pair investigated a 1976 Tree Swallows' house for a good half hour before a flock of the latter appeared and evicted the intruders. Fortunately, I had set a new house on a post only
feet away from our sun-porch. Bluebirds occupied this house two
days later and during the next few days we observed their moving in. The nearby
swallows ignored them after a few
indecisive passes.

Eager to share our good fortune, we notified members of the local Field
Naturalists Club and attracted a substantial pilgrimage to vantage
points around our house. All forty-six signatures in our visitors' book be-
 tween 12 May and 11 July represented
positive sightings. On 25 June a young
Québécois spotted a second nesting
in another house ten yards distant from
the first. We were certain of three
young in the second family for a total
of seven for the season.

Small gatherings of adults and
juveniles were noted on 17, 19, 27
September and lastly on 6 October.
These appeared to be farewell parties: in high spirits, the birds perched on
the birdhouses, the clothesline, our rooftop and even on the tomato stakes
in the garden. We wished them a safe
journey south and planned more
houses for 1978.

Of the twenty houses available on
18 April 1978, a pair selected a new one
as remote as possible from the
swallows. The bluebirds favored the
south peak of our house and the tele-
vision and phone wires. The first
overlooked their own house; the latter
gave them full view of the lawn and its
insect activities. We observed them
almost daily until they disappeared.

Arrival in 1979 was late—27 April;
summer disappearance on
schedule—2 July. Nestings were
reported in several locations within a
nine-mile radius of ours; we hoped that
they were relatives of our occupants.
Tree Swallows seemed to be more ag-
gressive, but our parent bluebirds
hatched and raised four young suc-
cessfully.

Our bubble of enthusiasm burst in the spring of 1980. Once, in April, we
heard a bluebird song, briefly, but
never had a sighting. Our only satisfac-
tion was in the reported increase of
nestings all around us, though never
within a mile of our house. As winter
approached, I adopted a new design
for 1981 houses and resolved to erect
them along the riverbank that is the
western boundary of our property. I
made them with 18 inch backs, at-
tachable in seconds to a tree or a post.

Early in April 1981 I nailed up three
of the new models and waited for the
first sound or sight of a bluebird. We
heard the song on 17 April, and five
days later a pair examining one of the
new houses confirmed their return. I
speedily put up three more along the
riverbank. The following day a pair oc-
cupied the most visible of the houses.
Tree Swallows made a show of opposi-
tion but were worsted in sharp en-
counters. On 30 April we began to
record the exact time of the day's first
viewing. It was an absurdly simple
chore. Almost on schedule male and
female began to gather waterlogged in-
sects in the wet grass.

The year's bonus was in the con-
stant visibility and song of the blue-
birds. They flew up the forty yard slope
to our garden, perched and sang on the
clothesline posts, the shrubs, the
leaves of our house, and hunted insects
amongst the vegetable rows from
dawn till dusk.

We saw them take insects daily
throughout May, but their hunting
reached a festive climax on 13 June
when, from 7:15 to 7:45 p.m., the
parents and four youngsters swooped
from the three flanks of the lawn upon
incautious insects below, while we
watched from the verandah, joyously
approving the family lesson in
purveyance.

Our departure for a visit outside
the province in mid-September reduced
observation of the birds' farewell
gatherings to a single occasion. We
regretted the shortened season, but
three new houses for springtime
posting should extend the riverside
habitat's appeal to migrating bluebirds
another year.

R.R. 2
Lennoxville, Quebec
Canada J1M 2A3

Sialia, Autumn 1982
In some cases, it can be said that the beauty of a bird is only feather deep. Not so with the bluebird! Our experience and observation has persuaded us that *Sialis* is true blue, through and through.

We had erected a 16-unit martin house, but it was attracting no Purple Martins. Instead, the House Sparrows and starlings had to be continually reminded that the house was not for them. This went on for a while, until one morning, lo and behold, Mr. Bluebird appeared on the power wire adjacent to the martin house! Rain or shine, he was there a good deal of the time for several weeks. He and his mate had decided that the best was none too good; they would live in patrician splendor in this avian mansion.

The nesting was successful and it produced five young without interference from other species or other serious problem. After the fledglings had left, things were quiet around the martin house for several weeks. One morning in early October, however, we had the thrill of seeing it again come alive with bluebirds! Seven of them were tramping around on the little "porches" nosing in and out of the openings. We like to think this was the whole family, parents with the young grown to maturity, come back to the old homestead before heading south.

This was our first experience with bluebirds and it spurred our interest to the extent that we started making nesting boxes—lots of nesting boxes. These were placed mostly on fence posts along the west line of our hilly back acre. There are woods on the south and east sides and unused pasture behind the fence to the west. On the downhill or north side is our summer refuge, a converted barn. Geographically we are located in the Hills of Hebron, between the Taconics of Vermont to the east and the New York Adirondacks to the west.

On the high ground toward the back of this acre is a putting green with a standard golf flag standing in the cup. For several years now, the favorite perching spot for any current bluebird tenant on the fence line has been the tiny knob atop this flag staff. The closely mowed green makes insects easily visible and provides a happy bluebird hunting ground.

Our 26 fence post boxes, plus a few more scattered here and there, were carefully made "by the book." Knowing a little about the territorial nature of the bluebird, we naturally did not expect to have more than one, or at most two, bluebird occupants at one time on our little acre. We have been fortunate each summer for the past several years in having had at least one family. But what about the rest of those nesting boxes? This is where the Tree Swallows enter the picture.

We find these useful and busy little insectivores to be entertaining neighbors as they gracefully swoop, glide, flit, and dive in their quest for mosquitoes and other insects on the wing. More than once we have seen them frolic in a game of their own invention. It involves a white feather which one swallow carries aloft. He drops it and it is caught in air by another who carries it upward and releases it for the next player to catch; and so the droll performance goes on till they tire of the sport.

There are considerably more Tree Swallows than bluebirds, but it is our experience that, in general, the two species get along without serious conflict. However, we did observe one interesting exception.

Having fledged one brood last summer, Mr. and Mrs. Bluebird were in a mood to repeat the performance in a new house along the fence line. The box they chose happened to be some 20 feet from that of a Tree Swallow family that had fledglings in training. The swallows took exception to having such close neighbors at this time. They made diving passes at Mr.
Bluebird atop his newly-claimed home, but he held his own. He ducked several times and finally, tired of this harassment, took off after the persistent swallow leader and engaged him in vigorous mid-air combat. This assertion seemed to end the episode. The Tree Swallows, adults and fledglings, soon departed and the bluebirds went about the business of nesting and breeding.

In the process, Mrs. Bluebird made many trips to our garden where she picked up beakfuls of clean lawn clippings placed there for mulch. Each trip was a cycle of nestbox, to top of beanpole tripod, down into the garden to gather grass, then back to the box. At one point in this oft-repeated cycle, Mr. Bluebird joined her on the beanpole perch and their beaks touched as he seemed to say, "You're doing great, Sweetheart." We'd love to have had a camera shot of that little scene.

While House Sparrows and Tree Swallows brazenly copulate whenever and wherever the spirit moves them, bluebirds seem to be more decorous in this egg-fertilizing ritual. The same kind of spirit seems apparent in the matter of nest sanitation. In the first place, the nest is tidily constructed; furthermore, it is as clean at the end of a hatching as it was at the beginning.

Nature cooperates in that the feces of the nestlings comes in handy capsule form. The adult birds are seen carrying fecal sacs away from the nesting box and depositing them in some distant spot.

From our 1981 bluebird season, two scenes, other than the beanpole kiss and the great aerial battle, remain indelibly fixed in my mind. One was the training of the last fledgling of the second brood. He was perched atop the home box while Papa was about 40 feet away on his usual flag pole perch: patient, paternal, protective, and pedagogical; somehow wafting encouragement and instructions to the fledgling. This went on for some time, until finally the youngster mustered enough courage to fly to a nearby bush and thence to the low branches of a tree.

The other vignette was a repeat of the martin house roundup. This time there were eight bluebirds! Progeny of our original family—or just coincidence?

For our next project, we hope to involve some friends in a modest bluebird trail. Today, one acre; tomorrow, the neighborhood.

317 Hibiscus Dr., Box 306 Indian Lake Estates, FL 33855

ATTENTION WISCONSIN BLUEBIRD NESTBOX TRAIL OPERATORS

Steven Kruger, wildlife biologist intern, and Kim Mello, fisheries/wildlife biologist, at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, would like to know of your presence. Steve is conducting a research project on the status of bluebirds in Wisconsin for his master's degree at the UW-Stevens Point. Major concerns of the study include documenting competition between the bluebird and House Sparrow, and habitat preferences of the bluebird in Wisconsin. The data will be used in conjunction with data collected by Kim Mello during the past two breeding seasons on Fort McCoy. Thus far the information obtained at Fort McCoy has included competition with avian species (House Sparrow, House Wren, and Tree Swallow), nest predation, parasitism and nesting success. A continuation of data collection at Fort McCoy and a thorough census of nesting bluebirds in Wisconsin may show trends which could be useful for developing future management plans for the bluebird in the state. In order to complete the study, it will be necessary to sample bluebird populations in as many regions of Wisconsin as possible. Your help in this matter is important if the project is to be a success. Data collected will be closely coordinated and shared with trail operators. If you or anyone you know operates a bluebird nesting box trail in the state or has other information on bluebirds (especially House Sparrow competition), please contact Steven Kruger or Kim Mello at the following address or phone numbers. Thank you for your help.

Phone—608-388-2252 (office)
608-372-2859 (home)

Address—Commander, Fort McCoy
ATTN: Kim Mello (LMB)
Sparta, WI 54666

154
Sialla, Autumn 1982
Should NABS Issue Bluebird Conservation Stamps?

The following letter was received by President Jeanne Price.

Dear Mrs. Price:

As a NABS member I’ve read in Sialia of your efforts to persuade the Stamp Advisory Committee to approve a set of bluebird stamps. Though “State Birds and Flowers” is a beautiful series and does include bluebirds, I’m sure that those of us who supported your campaign were all disappointed to learn that bluebirds would not be the subject of a special issue.

In this regard I am wondering if NABS has ever considered the possibility of designing its own “Bluebird Conservation” stamps—much in the way that the National Wildlife Federation promotes conservation through its wildlife stamps. If such stamps could be distributed with each new membership and/or offered for sale along with the Society’s other items, then at least bluebirders could help to spread the word.

Karen Blackburn
Sandown, New Hampshire

The NABS Board of Directors discussed this suggestion at its August meeting and thought it should be pursued.

If you are an artist and have a finished color portrait of one (or more) of the three bluebird species that you would like to have considered for reproduction as bluebird conservation stamps, please advise Mary Janetatos, Executive Director, North American Bluebird Society, Box 6295, Silver Spring, MD 20906-0295. The deadline is December 31, 1982. Do NOT send the original art work. We will not assume responsibility for unsolicited material. A working sketch, photocopy or photograph would be appreciated.
Dear Editor:

I monitor a seven box bluebird trail on a golf course near Grafton, OH. Our problem is the House Sparrow exclusively. In the 1981 breeding season we lost two complete bluebird broods of five each and one adult male to sparrow battles. So far this year we have lost one adult male in a nestbox dispute, probably with a sparrow. This season’s incident is worth noting, however, because it involves a dead male bluebird found in an experimental box with a plexiglass top. This particular nesting box was in an area that had become infested with House Sparrows the previous year to determine if a clear plastic top was a deterrent to them. They didn’t seem to like the clear top design because no nest was started so why shouldn’t they let another species use the box? Even after I removed the dead bluebird the sparrows never attempted to build there.

I tried the Trio sparrow trap with good results last fall but so far this spring the Huber nesting box traps are the best. Last year our two pairs of bluebirds fledged only seven young but we hope with our sparrow trapping program underway this year that the totals will be better.

Philip Fruner
Elyria, Ohio

Dear Philip Fruner:

A trapping program should pay off with more fledged bluebirds. Keep after those House Sparrows!

Dr. George Hurst forwarded the following letter he received detailing bluebird activity in northern Mississippi.

Dear George:

During the last few months Soil and Water Conservation Districts, SCS, Forest Service, Cooperative Extension Service, school groups and various civic clubs have pooled efforts in an attempt to provide additional nesting sites for the bluebird. Five non-game management workshops, with special emphasis on bluebirds, have been conducted in Grenada, Eupora, New Albany, and Oxford. Attendance at the meetings ranged from 35 to 90 people.

The SCD’s in Lafayette and Union counties have purchased enough materials to construct 1,600 nesting boxes. An additional 600 boxes have been constructed in the other areas. The 2,200 boxes have been provided to interested people at no cost in most cases. Approximately 400 boxes were sold to recover cost of the materials. The four counties mentioned above have decided to promote and participate in this activity on an annual basis.

Harvey Huffstatler
Biologist, SCS
Tupelo, Mississippi

Between the efforts of the Soil Conservation Service in northern Mississippi and R.B. Layton’s Jackson Audubon Society project in the south-central part of the state, bluebirds should be thriving in Mississippi. Imagine the positive impact on native cavity nesting species in general and bluebirds in particular if most other states had similar projects!
Dear Editor:

I increased the number of bird houses I put out this year since last year a chickadee “stole” the house my bluebird had used for several years. A bluebird, a wren and a chickadee occupied the houses this year. Each time the nestlings leave I clean out the used nest. The bluebirds always build another nest but so far the wrens and chickadees have only raised one family each year. Should I continue to remove the used wren and chickadee nests? Do they usually raise one family per nesting season?

Your assistance will be appreciated because, while bluebirds are special, I want these other wonderful birds also.

Margaret M. McCracken
Anderson, South Carolina

Dear Margaret McCracken:

Do continue to clean nesting material from boxes immediately after young have fledged. That way the box becomes available for any cavity nester that wishes to use it later in the season. Wrens nest several times a season while chickadees most often have a single brood; however, either species may choose a different box or natural cavity for a subsequent nesting.

Dear Editor:

We saw our first bluebirds in October of 1979. My neighbors and I put out nesting boxes in the spring of 1980 but didn’t see any bluebirds that year. Last spring (1981) I saw a pair again. They flew back and forth among the nesting boxes and finally built in one—the one we never expected to get bluebirds in. It had been used by sparrows and Tree Swallows other years. It was 5 x 5 inches by 9 inches with a 1½ inch hole and an old rusty spoon handle for a perch. Much closer to homes than is recommended with lots of activity all around.

We live in a mobile park but our home is on the edge next to open fields and wild grasses. We have planted trees and shrubs to attract birds.

Mrs. Neil Blanchette
Lake Elmo, Minnesota

Dear Mrs. Blanchette:

You are doing a great deal to create an attractive environment for many bird species. How nice to have attracted bluebirds along with Tree Swallows. Perches on boxes are not necessary and may only encourage House Sparrows; neither bluebirds nor swallows need a perch near the entrance hole.

Dear Editor:

My trail is a great success in its second season. Last year I had just one pair of Western Bluebirds. This season I have nine pairs of Western and at least three pairs of Mountain Bluebirds. Especially exciting are five pairs of Western Bluebirds nesting in areas in Washington where bluebirds have not nested in years. Three pairs of the same species are nesting in the vicinity of the Rose Creek Nature Preserve belonging to the Nature Conservancy. It seems clear that bluebirds can be brought back to the Palouse Hills.

Rusty Scalf
Pullman, Washington

Dear Editor:

I ordered and received two nesting boxes from you the first part of April this year. I put them up on a Friday afternoon and the next morning by 10:00 a.m. there was about 5 inches of nesting material in one. About 8 days later there were 5 little eggs. About 13 days later there were 5 little bluebirds. I’ve never had such gratifying success with any project in my life!

W.A. Fenner
Hopewell, Virginia

Dear W.A. Fenner:

Aren’t you fortunate! Wish we could guarantee that kind of experience with every nesting box we sell.

Volume 4, Number 4
BLUEBIRD TALES
Mary D. Janetatos

Where have all the bluebirds gone? Well, there are some in Charlotte Jernigan's Wagoner, OK, back yard and front yard. Roni Lampmann of Great Falls, VA, also boasts the same, but she has just 1½ pairs (the male is doing double duty!) George Cherry, Jr., near Raleigh, NC, delayed a move into his house while a nest of five bluebird eggs hatched in an empty electric meter box. Cherry, an insurance manager for a mortgage banking company said, "I just wonder what rate of interest I can charge those birds for nesting in my house." Marcia Booth of Burke, VA, watched in amazement as a pair took over the beautiful variegated begonia hanging on her porch and raised one bluebird. In Columbia, MD, bluebirds raised two broods in a nestbox which had been set out by Alice Grant on the public library grounds. The box had been watched by a whole army of bluebirders, including the founding editor of Sialia, Jon Boone. And then a pair of bluebirds built a nest and raised four young where they hadn't nested in ten years—inside the interstate highway which encircles Washington, DC (popularly known as the Capital Beltway). This happened when Lt. Gen. Arthur S. Collins, Jr. and William Bryant set out several boxes on a seminary campus in Alexandria, VA. Also inside the Capital Beltway, Ron Kingston discovered that a pair had built a nest in a box he had placed at the garden plots where he works in Suitland, MD, but the eggs didn't hatch. You never know where bluebirds will turn up next!

Cat and sparrow predation continues to be very high. Methods of foiling both are the subject of much speculation and discussion. On Larry Zeleny's bluebird trail, the use of plastic jugs as nestboxes (see The Bluebird, 68) seems to have completely eliminated sparrow competition. To all who live in "Sparrow City" we heartily recommend putting out the properly prepared gallon jugs and reporting the results to NABS. In another approach, Fran Hanes of Utica, NY, reports much success with Joe Huber's sparrow trap inside the nestbox itself (Sialia 3:95-96).

Cats present a more difficult problem. Aware bluebirders put two bells on any of their cats which they allow to wander freely outdoors. If neighbors would do that, we wouldn't have to resign ourselves to the fact that some bluebirds will just end up as the cat's dinner!

Meade Flinn, veteran bluebird promoter of Alberta, VA, sent a clipping which appeared in The News Leader describing the area's phenomenal bluebird nesting success as reflected by the 1981 census taken by the Northern Neck of Virginia Audubon Society. In 292 bluebird nesting boxes registered with the NVNAS 640 eggs were laid, 538 hatched, and 517 bluebirds were fledged. On this basis, the NVNAS official estimated that birds fledged from the 2,000 boxes distributed by the society since 1974 increased the bluebird population by 3,400 through last year. Christopher Burke of St. Peter, MN, writes that he has been interested in bluebird conservation for 15 years and he is glad that there is a NABS. He enclosed snapshots of himself and of his impressive number of bluebird collectibles. His cleverly crafted envelope using NABS' logo which he had hand-tinted gave me a chuckle. This shows the predilection (or perhaps fever which many of us share: surrounding
ourselves with reminders of the ob-
ject of our affection.

A nesting box of a new design sur-
faced recently as reported in the Min-
neapolis Tribune. Richard and Violet
Peterson are shown with the more than
150 houses they put up this spring.
This house is tapered from a width of 6
inches at the top to 3 at the bottom.
The roof slopes at a 30 degree angle. 
Peterson claims that it foils cat preda-
tion.

Betty McIlwain of Brevard, NC, 
Charlotte Jernigan, of Wagoner, OK,
and Paulette Badman of Gaithersburg,
MD, have all been putting up
nestboxes and getting local 
newspaper coverage of their efforts. 
Bob Schutsky’s bluebird workshops for
fifth graders in Downingtown, PA, have
yielded a bluebird trail of nestboxes
made by 115 youngsters. As a spin-off
of Bob Schutsky’s bluebird work at
Muddy Run, Michael Gori of Bethlehem,
PA, has adopted a bluebird
project to help him attain his Eagle
Scout rank. Assisted by Mike Ruhn they
erected a trail in the Louise W. Moore
Park, Northampton County in nor-
eastern Pennsylvania. As a native of
northeastern Pennsylvania, I fondly
cheer them on!

As we look toward winter once
again, maybe we can plant some berry-
bearing shrubs, cultivated ones like
pyracantha and hawthorn, or native
like American Holly (male and female)
and sumac. Also good for attracting
birds is open water kept thawed by
means of an electric heating element.
These methods are generally helpful
for attracting bluebirds in winter, or
you can be really adventurous and put
out the food mixtures recommended in
previous issues of Sialia. My own suc-
cess doing this has been zero (except I
found it does attract Northern Mock-
ingbirds). Refer to Sialia Vol. 1; Nos. 1
and 2.

As we enter the reflecting and
planning portion of the bluebirding
year again, maybe we’ll settle down
and read some of the books offered by
NABS. Joining our other fine books
(Chimney Swifts and Their Relatives,
Bluebirds Seven, The Purple Martin, 30
Birds That Will Build in Bird Houses,
and the classic The Bluebird: How You
Can Help Its Fight For Survival), we
have four new ones. How To Control
House Sparrows by Don Grussing, At-
tracting Birds and Other Wildlife To
Your Yard by William J. Weber, Joan
Heilman’s Bluebird Rescue, and the
poetic Saga of the Bluebird by
Katharine Braun can all give happy
hours of information and diversion to
our bluebird reflections.

Those fortunate enough to have
nesting native birds of any kind to
observe know the calming link it can be
with our natural world. The Creator is
truly in charge, inspiring us with such
love for His creation that we seek to
aid it when human error has marred it.
As to helping bluebirds, Gen. Collins’
words used in the Washington Post
story, “Bluebirds Bring Happiness to
Beltway Birders” sum it all up: “I’ve
lived a long time and I can’t think of
another thing that’s given me more ex-
citement or satisfaction. It’s been a
thrill, I can’t tell you!”

Readers, send me your bluebird
tales of joy or woe so that they can be
shared with other bluebirders. A
postcard is sufficient.

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Numbers 1 and 2 are particularly need-
ed. Mail back issues to headquarters:
North American Bluebird Society
Box 6295
Silver Spring, MD 20906-0295
The Bluebird Migration

We see them as they fly the sky, and hear
    Them calling to each other as they near;
Just one brief moment, then they pass from sight:
    A myriad of bluebirds in their flight
To warmer climes. They fly without a care
    To lands where sun shines bright—where all will bare
The beauty of reflected azure-blue;
    And all who see them will again renew
The hope and courage they had lost, and know
    The bluebirds that they see have made it so.

Oh, lovely creatures, we will miss your song—
    Your quaint, "Pure, Pure"—and know that we will long
For your return; But Nature calls again;
    You’ll bring the Spring to us once more, and when
We see reflections of your lovely blue,
    We’ll thank, again, the Good Lord who sends you!

Katharine M. Braun
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Founded in 1978, THE NORTH AMERICAN BLUEBIRD SOCIETY is an incorporated non-profit organization determined to increase the populations of the three species of bluebirds on this continent. Inasmuch as the populations of these birds have diminished due to the maladroit actions of human beings, as well as other natural disasters, the primary objective of the SOCIETY is to educate all who will listen about the importance of preserving these singular creatures in their native environment.

Toward this end, the SOCIETY will work, within the bounds of effective conservation, to study those obstacles impeding bluebird recovery; to publish results of those studies; to promote ideas and actions which might reduce the effect of those obstacles; and to obtain a more complete knowledge about bluebird ecology, in the hope of learning more about the ecology of humankind.

Membership: Students (under 21) and Senior (over 60), $7.50; Regular, $10; Sustaining, $30; Supporting, $50; Contributing, $100; Corporate, $100; Donor, $250. Amounts over $5 are tax deductible.

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