Sialia means bluebirds. Hence the title of this journal. Technically, *sialia* 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 *Motacilla* which is now reserved for the wagtails. It was William Swainson (1799-1855), who, in 1827, decided that the bluebirds needed a genus of their own within the thrush family (*Turdidae*). He selected the generic name *Sialia* which he simply adapted from the species name *sialis* which Linnaeus had used. Therefore, the scientific name for the Eastern Bluebird is *Sialia sialis* (pronounced see-ahl'-ee-ah see'-ahl·iss). Similarly, the Western Bluebird and Mountain Bluebird, the other two species within the genus, were named *Sialia mexicana* and *Sialia 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 similarity 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.

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CONTENTS

President Points .......................... 42
Historical Population Changes of Eastern Bluebirds in Northwest Tennessee ........... 43
T. David Pitts
Reenforcing Nest Boxes with Galvanized Wire Cable ....................... 48
Robert R. Cohen
Prothonotary Warblers Accept Bluebird Box .................................. 50
John Findlay III
1983 Nesting Box Report .............................................. 51
Defes C. Dupree
Prothonotary Warblers Use Bird Boxes .................................... 54
Lawrence H. Walkinshaw
Why and When Should Bluebird Boxes Be Monitored? ....................... 55
Lawrence Zeleny
Mountain Bluebirds in Saskatchewan ........................................ 57
Mary H. Houston
Bluebirds and the Sages of Concord ...................................... 60
Lillian Lund Files
Plantings for Bluebirds and Other Wildlife: Sassafras ....................... 62
Karen Blackburn
Question Corner ................................. 64
Of Bluebirds and Snakes ............................................. 65
Dirk de Waard
Eastern Bluebirds Nest in Boot ......................................... 68
Improved Design for Experimental Nesting Box ............................... 70
Ira L. Campbell
1:17 .............................................. 71
Jack and Marykay Weinmann
My Bluebird Story ........................................... 73
Frederick W. Comstock
On the Trail ......................................... 75
Bluebird Express ........................................... 76
Bluebird Tales ........................................... 78
Poetry ............................................. 80

Sialia welcomes original articles, art and photographs for publication. Although this journal is named for the bluebird, material relating to all native cavity nesting species will be considered. Manuscripts should be typed neatly and double-spaced. All material submitted is subject to editing or rewriting. Submit the original manuscript plus a duplicate copy if you wish to proof the material before publication. If the article has been submitted elsewhere (or previously published) that fact must be stated at the time of submission. All manuscripts will be acknowledged. Black and white glossy photographs are preferred. Print the subject, names of individuals pictured, photographer and return address on the back of each photograph. 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 Graeloch Road, Laurel, Maryland 20707.
As NABS enters its sixth year of involvement in bluebird conservation, the Society’s horizons are expanding. People recognize us as a source of information on bluebirds and other cavity nesting birds. NABS at this point has sent out one-half million packets of bluebird information.

NABS started out to be a clearing house for bluebird activities. One thing being done is to search out ways to cope with nesting competitors. We receive inquiries from many different groups: college students in graduate programs, Camp Fire girls and boys, Scouts, 4-H, garden clubs, and other bird societies. The Department of Natural Resources in many states is utilizing money from non-game wildlife funds on behalf of bluebirds and other cavity nesting birds. Check in your state to see if such a fund exists and try to channel some of these funds toward bluebirds. While these non-game wildlife funds are for all non-game species, NABS has established a workable program and this is being sought by state wildlife officials. It is a natural because it gets people involved and it works!

Since NABS’ beginning in March 1978, it has sponsored the printing and distribution of nesting box plans, a full color informational brochure, the quarterly journal Sialia and a 144-slide lecture program. The Society has provided quality nesting boxes at the lowest possible price as well as other related bluebird items. A 30-second public service announcement about NABS’ efforts to help bluebirds will soon be available. This is ideal for use on television stations, both public and commercial. For further information write to headquarters.

All these accomplishments would not have been possible without the help of the membership. Continued support is needed to further these projects and to set new goals. Plans for the future include publication of the following: a bibliography which Tedd Gutzke has assembled, a booklet to help members collect trail data, and a pamphlet for beginners describing how to set up a bluebird trail. Since NABS is a non-profit organization and most of the work is done by volunteers, your tax-deductible donations are spent almost entirely for research and educational purposes. You can help NABS help the bluebirds by continuing your membership, getting others to join, writing articles for local newspapers and/or letters to the editor, sending in names and addresses of your friends, and by mailing a tax-deductible contribution today. You are rewarded by knowing that you have helped the bluebirds.

Watch for a new bluebird treat: André Dion’s book Le Retour de l’Oiseau Bleu (The Return of the Bluebird). This beautifully illustrated story has now been translated into English.

I wish to announce the following appointments: Reid Caldwell of Lucas, Ohio, a naturalist with the Ohio Division of Wildlife, as co-chairman of the Education Committee along with Bryan R. Shantz of Lacombe, Alberta, biologist with Union Carbide. Past-president Anne T. Sturm of Barnesville, Maryland, has been appointed to head the Development Committee.

Award

The list of awards made at the annual meeting included in my column in the Winter issue neglected to mention Amelia R. Laskey, who was posthumously given a Research Award for her work with bluebirds and other cavity nesting birds.
Historical Population Changes of Eastern Bluebirds in Northwest Tennessee

T. David Pitts

Since 1969 I have been studying a nonmigratory population of Eastern Bluebirds (Sialia sialis) in northwest Tennessee. My study area is in Obion County in the Reelfoot Lake watershed. I will describe here the types of changes that I have observed and other changes that are known to have occurred in this population since 1818, the year this area was acquired from the Chickasaw Indians. Similar types of changes have been observed in other areas.

Forty nest boxes are present on the area. While most nests are built in the nest boxes, some pairs occasionally use natural cavities. Routine investigative procedures include recording the dates of nesting activities, measuring eggs and nests, and banding young and adults. Projects such as the measurement of daily weight gains of nestlings and the description of food habits have also been conducted on the area.

The Eastern Bluebird population of northwest Tennessee has been characterized by three types of changes since 1818. Two of these types of changes, annual change and winter kill, have had short-term effects, while the third type, which has been due to habitat change, has occurred over a longer period of time. Each of these three kinds of changes will be described and discussed.

ANNUAL CHANGE

Annual change is due primarily to the production and fledging of young. The fledging of young birds will increase the population, but usually such increases are only temporary. Mortality, and perhaps emigration, will quickly reduce the population size. A stable population has the same number of breeding pairs each year; therefore, a stable population will lose the same number of individuals each year as it gains. Annual change in a stable population is illustrated in Figure 1. While the effects of annual change are usually short-term, as the name annual implies, cumulative effects can occur. For example, a population will decline and eventually become extinct if annual losses consistently exceed the number of individuals added. Conversely, a population will increase if annual gains are larger than the losses. Populations rarely remain the same from year to year, even in a stable environment. Usually there are small and offsetting fluctuations around a particular level.

In northwest Tennessee two or three broods are produced by most breeding pairs. First broods typically begin fledging in early May with subsequent broods being fledged through the summer and, occasionally, into early fall. The fledglings experience a high rate of mortality; some adults also die, but they die at a lower rate. The pattern of annual change will vary from year to year. In some years a cold, late spring may delay or reduce the production of first broods. In other years abnormally hot and dry summer weather may adversely affect second or third broods. Annual changes are therefore due to the production of offspring and the subsequent mortality or movement of both young and adults.

WINTER KILL

The second type of short-term change results from abnormally heavy winter mortality followed by a period of population recovery. Normally three to five years will be involved in most of these cycles, although a greater range of variation is possible. The most recent occurrence of this type of population change in northwest Tennessee resulted from the harsh winters of 1976-1977, 1977-1978, and 1978-1979.
As shown in Figure 2 the number of breeding pairs on my study area declined precipitously. Similar changes occurred across much of Tennessee. I calculated (Pitts 1981) that the number of pairs of Eastern Bluebirds in Tennessee dropped from about 45,000 in 1972 to about 10,000 in 1978. Normal winter weather in the following years allowed a recovery to take place, so that in 1983 the population on my study area and in the state had returned to the mid-1970’s level.

Eastern Bluebirds in the southeastern states have experienced winter kills frequently in the past. Heavy mortality due to winter weather in the southeast has been documented for 1884-1885 (Golsan and Holt 1914), 1899 (Wayne 1899), 1911-1912 (Bent 1949), 1940 (Musselman 1941), and 1958-1959 (Laskey 1958; James 1961). Although this list of years is not complete, it emphasizes the repeated, but unpredictable, occurrence of winter kills. Most of the writers who observed such mortality and then studied bluebirds in the following years noted that the populations recovered in a few years. The intervals between winter kills have usually been long enough to allow the populations to recover. If a population experienced repeated winter kills with inadequate time for recovery between kills, the population would become extinct. This is a major reason why most Eastern Bluebirds migrate away from the northern nesting areas. Only those individuals that migrate from the northern nesting areas have been able to survive during winter and return to rear offspring. Northwest Tennessee is near the northern edge of the Eastern Bluebird wintering range. Even though winter kills occur in northwest Tennessee, such kills are infrequent enough to allow population recovery.

**HABITAT CHANGE**

The third type of population change that has occurred, and con-
continues to occur, on my study area is a long-term change due to habitat changes. These changes take place over a period of several decades. While this is not a long period in a geological sense, it does involve many generations of bluebirds. West Tennessee was legally opened to settlement by the Jackson Purchase of 1818. Prior to this time the area was sparsely inhabited by Chickasaw Indians. While the number of Eastern Bluebirds in the area in 1818 is not known, estimates can be made by considering the amount of suitable habitat available. Most of the area was heavily forested with deciduous trees. A number of openings had been created by beaver dams, wind, and fire. While these openings in the forest were temporary, they provided nesting habitat for bluebirds. Most of the Indians probably removed some of the trees around their camps. In some parts of the southeast, Indians hung empty gourds for Purple Martins (Progne subis) to use as nest sites. Eastern Bluebirds also used some of the gourds. Whether or not the Indians of northwest Tennessee placed gourds for the birds is unknown. Based on the available information about the area, Eastern Bluebirds were not abundant in northwest Tennessee in 1818; however, it should be emphasized that some Eastern Bluebirds were present in the area at that time.

As settlers moved into northwest Tennessee and began clearing the land for farms, Eastern Bluebird numbers increased (Figure 3). Much of the early forest removal was accomplished by girdling trees but allowing them to remain standing while crops or pastures were planted around the trees. Pastures were essential for the survival of cattle and horses which were present on virtually every farm. Woodpeckers excavated cavities in many of the dead trees; consequently, bluebirds had available many nest

Figure 2. Number of pairs of Eastern Bluebirds on northwest Tennessee study area, 1976-1982.
sites in the form of abandoned woodpecker cavities. Likewise, the numerous short grass pastures provided an abundant and accessible supply of insects and other small animals for food. European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*), House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*), and pesticides were not present in the area. As a result of these habitat changes, Eastern Bluebird numbers increased rapidly. The increase, or at least the maintenance of large numbers, continued until the early 1900’s. Since then many land use practices and habitat changes have not been compatible with bluebirds. Tractors (which need no pasture!) replaced horses; fences were increasingly built with metal posts rather than wood posts; European Starlings and House Sparrows arrived in the area; and persistent pesticides were extensively used. In recent years Eastern Bluebirds have been faced with even further reductions in the amount of suitable habitat as many of the remaining pastures and hayfields in northwest Tennessee have been converted into soybean fields.

Some of the oldest farmers in northwest Tennessee can still remember when Eastern Bluebirds were abundant and commonly nested near, or even in, farm buildings. Those memories contrast with the hordes of House Sparrows and European Starlings found around most farm buildings today. Farming practices and land use patterns have changed; numbers of Eastern Bluebirds have also changed. The mosaic of small farms, each with livestock and pasture, has been replaced in northwest Tennessee with larger farms, most of which are now devoted almost totally to row crops. Eastern Bluebirds are, however, still present in northwest Tennessee, but they are not present in the numbers of 100, or even 50, years ago. It is possible that the current population is similar to the population of 1818. In 1818 small “islands” of suitable habitat existed; the same is true today. In 1818 the small areas of suitable habitat were surrounded by forests; today the suitable habitat is surrounded by soybeans and corn.

While the timing may have been different, other areas in the eastern United States have apparently experienced similar increases and then decreases in Eastern Bluebird populations as the native habitat was changed. I have used the term “habitat change” in a broad sense. For example, the application of a persistent pesticide such as DDT may prevent Eastern Bluebirds from surviving and reproducing. The conversion of small farms into suburbs or back into woodland can have the same effect. Both are types of habitat change. It is probably obvious by now that I consider habitat change to be the factor that has most influenced Eastern
Bluebird populations in northwest Tennessee since 1818. While population changes due to production of young or winter kills may be conspicuous, and are important, such changes are usually short-term.

Should we be concerned about the decline in Eastern Bluebird numbers? Certainly! But we should keep in perspective the many factors that influence Eastern Bluebird numbers. Annual changes, winter kills, and habitat changes are all involved. The long-term trend, though, is primarily governed by the suitability of habitat which may, in turn, influence annual changes and the severity of winter kills. We should also keep in mind that the declines shown by Eastern Bluebirds in some parts of the United States are declines from peaks that were caused by human activities. Perhaps we should compare current numbers with populations at the time settlement began in each region, rather than making comparisons with the peak populations of the recent past.

Literature Cited:


More Bluebirds Feeding Chickadees

Ralph Tripp

I read with interest the report by the Benders in a recent issue of Sialia (5(4):125) about bluebirds feeding chickadee young. I had a similar occurrence in the spring of 1982 with a slight variation. Our 2.6 acre lot has two active bluebird boxes, one of which was occupied early that spring by Carolina Chickadees (Parus carolinensis). A few days after the seven young hatched, I noticed a pair of Eastern Bluebirds (Sialia sialis) frequenting the box and keeping the parents away much of the time. During the second day of such activity, I watched with binoculars and found that the bluebirds were not trying to oust the inhabitants of “their” box as I had speculated, but were busily feeding the young. This continued until fledging with the chickadee parents feeding when the bluebirds were absent. As soon as the box was vacated the bluebirds built their nest on top of the chickadee cup and raised one brood.

Another bluebird couple fledged two broods from the box at the other end of the yard. There seems to be no lack of tenants in our area lately.

15209 Turkey Foot Rd.
Darnestown, MD 20878
Reenforcing Nest Boxes with Galvanized Wire Cable

Robert R. Cohen

In 1975 I began a large-scale population study on the Tree Swallow (Tachycineta bicolor) in the mountains near Denver, Colorado, setting out 400 nest boxes, most of which I had made from 3/4-inch-thick cedar. Although cedar weathered well without need for paint or varnish, it is also rather fragile, and during that first year many of the boxes were cracked or smashed by vandals, horses, and cattle. Following that experience I reinforced all of the boxes by wrapping them tightly with wire cable. The boxes are not as aesthetically pleasing when wrapped with wire, but the birds do not seem to mind the wire in the least, and box destruction has been reduced greatly.

Tuttle (Sialia 4(2):65-69) recently described a livestock guard that prevents horses and cattle from disturbing boxes. However, where that type of guard is not practical or where vandalism is a problem, reenforcement of the box with wire can be very helpful. The wire I use is six-stranded, 18-gauge per strand, galvanized steel guy-wire cable, which I purchase at a local building supply store for $3.30 per 50 ft roll. This is a strong, durable, sturdy wire. When it is wrapped tightly around a nest box the box is greatly strengthened, and it is difficult for vandals to cut the wire or remove it without proper tools. In order to cut this wire, wrap it around a box, twist it tight, and cut off the excess, it is helpful to have large linesman’s pliers; the best, by far, that I have found for this is the Channellock Wiremaster pliers, model 349. The wire must be wrapped and twisted as tightly as possible.

I wrap wire around the body of the box and also around the back of the box where it extends below the body for mounting on a post or tree (Figure 1). Except for boxes attached to live trees, I also wrap wire around the box and post for additional strength and security. The wire that passes across the front of the box is positioned at an appropriate distance below the hole so that the birds will not mash their tail feathers against the wire as they hang at the hole before entering.

This wire is shiny and silvery in color when new; it weathered to a dull gray within about a year. None of the species using the boxes (Mountain Bluebirds, House Wrens, Mountain Chickadees, and Violet-green Swallows, as well as Tree Swallows) has shown any reluctance to use boxes wrapped with new cable or old cable. In most years, fewer than five percent of the boxes have been unoccupied.

Department of Biology—Box 53
Metropolitan State College
1008 11th St.
Denver, CO 80204

Attention Bluebird Trail Operators in Wisconsin

Research on the Eastern Bluebird in the state is continuing for a second year. Last year’s efforts resulted in nearly 2000 bluebird nesting box reports. Anyone interested in collecting information for this research is urged to contact Steven Kruger at the following address. Respondents will be supplied data collection forms and procedures for collecting this information. Contact:

Commander, Fort McCoy
Attn: Steven Kruger (LMB)
Sparta, WI 54656
Figure 1. Front and side views of nest box attached to wooden fence post by lag screws, reenforced with cable wire, and further secured to fence post with cable wire.
Prothonotary Warblers Accept Bluebird Box

John Findlay III

The only warbler species in the United States that is a cavity nester, the Prothonotary Warbler (Protonotaria citrea) nested in one of my Eastern Bluebird boxes last year in north-central Alabama. Five young fledged successfully from the single brood.

It is the first time in the seven years of my "Help Bring Back the Bluebird" program that this beautiful swamp warbler has occupied one of my nest boxes. This period represents hundreds of box nestings in both Illinois and Alabama. My four trails last year totaled 135 boxes. They are located in both Jefferson and Shelby Counties near Birmingham, with most boxes in Oak Mountain State Park.

The time-table recorded for the Prothonotary Warbler nesting was as follows:

4 May 1983. Unknown non-bluebird nest found completed in Box #24 on Campgrounds Site #101 in Oak Mountain State Park which filled the bottom of the 4½ x 4½-inch box floor and was approximately 1½-inches high. The cup-shaped nest contained mosses, grasses, and fine roots.

17 May 1983. The bright yellow of the large warbler (5½-5½-inch) was recognized as that of a Prothonotary even before the female flushed. Five cream-colored, brown-spotted eggs were found in the nest.

20 May 1983. Female flushed again. Five eggs were being incubated.

26 May 1983. Both the male and female warbler were observed bringing food to the five small young. Photographs were taken at close range from car without undo disturbance to the parents.

1 June 1983. Parent warblers feeding five pin-feathered young.

2 June 1983. Two young had fledged and were being fed by parents outside of the box in nearby trees. Three young remained in box also being fed. More

Further use of the box by the warblers was not observed.

Bluebird Box #24 is placed on a utility pole on a campground turnaround approximately 60 yards from the nearest water, a wooded and swampy backwater area of a state park fishing lake. This suitable Prothonotary Warbler habitat has had increased human use with "improvements" made to accommodate such use. This, in turn, has lessened acceptable nesting sites. The bluebird box apparently was a welcomed alternative.

With this in mind, an excerpt from A Field Guide to Birds' Nests by Hal H. Harrison is of interest: "Of 84 nests [of the Prothonotary Warbler] in Michigan in natural situations 29 were over standing water, 32 were over running water, 23 over dry land; of these, 43 were in natural openings, 41 in woodpecker holes." (p. 176).

2129 Greentree Dr.
Birmingham, AL 35216
A record 695 reports were received for the 1983 nesting season. Some news was good and some bad, but the large response, especially by new members, was greatly appreciated. The many comments written on the back of the reports were most informative and interesting.

For the first time more reports were received from the Midwest (361) than from the East (301), while reports from the West (33) remained the same. Increased membership in the Midwest is one reason for the great response, but most of the credit must go to Dorene H. Scriven, who chairs the Bluebird Recovery Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis. Dorene’s report covered 59 counties and 8 states. Refer to *Sialia* 5(4);129-130 for the story of how the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Nongame Wildlife Program has helped the cause of bluebird conservation. Does your state have a program to aid cavity nesting birds?

There are many variables in most surveys, but the greater the input the more meaningful the data become. For example, in 1982 the total number of 4" x 4" boxes monitored in the East was 2,915 and in 1983 numbered 3,108. The percentage of boxes used by all cavity nesters in 1982 was 64% of which 41% were bluebirds. No significant change occurred in 1983 when 66% were used by all species of which once again 41% were bluebirds. When the Midwest report is studied, however, there are significant changes which can be attributed to the greater number of trails just getting under way. In 1982 there were 1,389 boxes monitored in the Midwest. Cavity nesters as a whole used 77% of the boxes while bluebirds themselves occupied 50%. In 1983 the total number of boxes reported rose to 4,742. The usage dropped to 51% and bluebird occupancy dropped to 30%.

As the trails become more established, it is hoped the percentage of birds using the boxes will increase.

Due to the large increase in the number of reports received the total number of boxes monitored rose from 8,452 in 1982 to 12,780 in 1983, an increase of 51%. The number of boxes used by bluebirds rose from 3,143 to 4,793; an increase of 52%. However, the total number of bluebirds fledged only increased 39% from 14,499 to 20,162. This indicates that 1983 was not as good a year as 1982 for bluebirds. Adverse weather conditions were reported from many areas. In portions of the East a wet spring and a hot, dry summer reduced nesting success. In Idaho and Oregon there was an early spring, but the warm weather soon turned cold and wet. First brood reports were very discouraging as a consequence. Fortunately, the weather improved and second nestings were much more successful. Good news came from the Northern Plains states and provinces where ideal weather conditions prevailed during the nesting season. Early nestings were reported, followed by increased activity during the summer which together produced 2,565 fledgling Mountain Bluebirds. Only 430 Western Bluebird fledglings were listed.

Relatively few members experimented with open-top nesting boxes and jugs. Conversely, the use of 4" x 4" boxes rose from 4,733 in 1982 to 8,189 in 1983, a considerable increase. A greater number of larger nesting boxes were set out by members also, but the rate of increase was not as dramatic (4,410 compared with 3,497). Results of usage by bluebirds and other cavity nesting species were very similar to those noted last year. A higher percentage of the larger nesting boxes were
used by cavity nesters, but the percentage used by bluebirds was about equal. Apparently swallows prefer larger boxes also. Maybe it’s not a matter of preference at all but merely a matter of availability. The only way to find out is to set out boxes of different sizes in the same general area and see for yourself.

Add Mountain Chickadees, Brown-headed Nuthatches, Bewick’s Wrens, Northern (Common) Flickers and Hairy Woodpeckers to the list of cavity nesters using nesting boxes monitored by members. This brings the total to twenty, not counting the three species of bluebirds. Just think, one-fourth of all cavity nesters will use nesting boxes. No wonder several State Departments of Natural Resources have adopted the nesting box trail program as a part of their non-game projects. Conservation of our native song birds is fast becoming a major concern of environmentalists everywhere. Another advantage is that any person who wants to help can become directly involved in monitoring, greatly expanding the effort with a minimum amount of monetary expenditure. The personal satisfaction and pleasure derived by participating in monitoring nesting boxes is a reward that money cannot buy. Proof of that are the many comments made on the back of survey forms which describe how exciting the arrival of the first bluebird was or how cute the little chickadees were.

Weather more than anything else was listed as the main agent affecting nesting success. Predation by House Sparrows, raccoons, snakes and House Wrens was a major secondary reason. Flying squirrels were considered a serious problem in some areas. In Arizona Scoloporus lizards were listed as the number one predator. That is the first time a lizard has been reported as a cause for concern. More and more members are beginning to view swallows and wrens not as predators but as competitors. These members are more selective in choosing the right habitat in which to place boxes. While the number of boxes used by swallows and wrens has increased, few members listed them as a cause for nesting failure.

Several members have asked about using the Cornell University Nesting Record Card. This is a worthwhile project and members are encouraged to participate, but NABS can no longer afford to become involved. Postage costs were becoming excessive. Anyone desiring to help Cornell University can do so by contacting them directly.

Last year Bob Bocine wrote, “Happiness is being out on a bluebird trail.” Of course nothing is ever perfect, but Bob knows the joy of seeing a brood of four or five young bluebirds fledging from a summer home he provided. Share your experiences with others when you send in your 1984 report. Whether the news is good or bad, whether you have one box or hundreds, sharing your knowledge can only help the bluebirds!

Table 1

Bluebird Slide Show

The NABS slide show is available for rental at $10.00 or purchase at $55.00. 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.

To rent or purchase the bluebird slide show, write to Reid Caldwell, Co-Chairman NABS Education Committee, 152 Moffet Rd., Lucas, OH 44843.
Table 1. 1983 Bluebird Nest Box Data According to Geographic Region.

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<th>Type of Boxes Used</th>
<th>4&quot; x 4&quot;</th>
<th>5&quot; x 5&quot;</th>
<th>Open-Top</th>
<th>Jug</th>
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<td>Total No. of Boxes</td>
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<td>109</td>
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<td>No of Bluebirds Fledged</td>
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<td>Boxes Used: Titmice</td>
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<td>% of Boxes Used by All Species</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>80</td>
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<tr>
<td>% of Boxes Used by Bluebirds</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>63</td>
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<td>% of Boxes Used by Others</td>
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E — East (301 reports)
M — Midwest (361 reports)
W — West (33 reports)
Total (695 reports)

Geographic Regions According to States and Provinces

**East:** Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Virginia, D.C., Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia

**Midwest:** Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, West Virginia, Ontario

**West:** Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Hawaii, Alaska, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia.
Prothonotary Warblers Use Bird Boxes

Lawrence H. Walkinshaw

In the work I have done with Prothonotary Warblers (Protonotaria citrea), I found they used bird houses regularly. In Michigan we placed several boxes along the Kalamazoo River, western Calhoun County in the early 1930's. We also put up 38 houses along the Battle Creek River in Convis Township, Calhoun County, a narrower river with a good wooded bottomland and 20 houses along the White River in Muskegon and Oceana counties. Nearly every house was used by Prothonotaries. On the Battle Creek River the birds had much trouble with House Wrens (Troglodytes aedon) which took over the boxes destroying the Prothonotary nests. Because of this we put up about 30 houses on the south side of Reelfoot Lake, Lake and Obion counties, Tennessee, where there are no House Wrens. Then in the mid-1970's we put up four houses along the Marion Creek, east of Haines City, Polk County, Florida. Except for the Florida houses which were destroyed by vandals, Prothonotaries nested in all the southern houses in Tennessee. We found the best place for their location was right over the river bank, nailed to a tree or on a pole erected for their use and facing the river, placed about 5 to 6 feet above water level when the river was at normal level.

Prothonotary Warblers laid 3 to 7 eggs in Michigan, 4 to 5 in Tennessee; 12 to 13 days was the usual incubation period and the young remained in the nest normally 9 or 10 days. In Michigan if a nest was successful, sometimes a second clutch was laid. In Tennessee two clutches were normal. We were working with banded birds and found they returned to their previous nesting area regularly. In Michigan two nestlings, one male and one female, returned to nest when they were adults. In one bird box in Tennessee three pairs of banded birds nested one summer: one in May, one in June and one in July. Apparently all were successful. Normally a pair renested in the same box.

5230 Timberland Rd.
Lake Wales, FL 33853

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Many new members desire complete sets of back issues which we are unable to supply. Copies of Volume 1:1, 2 and Volume 3:2 are particularly needed. Mail back issues to headquarters:
North American Bluebird Society
Box 6295
Silver Spring, MD 20906-0295
Should bluebird nesting boxes be opened and examined during the nesting season? If so, why, when, and how often? These are among the questions most frequently asked by beginning bluebirders. Opinions differ widely on how these questions should be answered.

Nearly everyone will agree that the boxes should be examined, cleaned out, and repaired if necessary prior to the nesting season. Beyond that many will argue that the boxes should be left strictly alone since bluebirds, like nearly all wild creatures, should thrive best without human interference. They are fearful that bluebirds will desert their nests if we open the boxes to look in at them.

Experience has shown, however, that under conditions as they exist today bluebird nesting success in most areas is greatest when the boxes are monitored periodically, weekly or oftener if possible, during the nesting season. Bluebirds will rarely, if ever, desert their nests as a result of careful monitoring.

The most important reason for frequent monitoring in most localities is to prevent the use of the nesting boxes by House (English) Sparrows. Wherever these alien pests are numerous bluebirds have very little chance to nest successfully without human help. Sparrows start to nest earlier in the season than bluebirds. Although they are very persistent in their nesting efforts they will eventually abandon a nesting box if their nests are removed repeatedly and often. House Sparrows may also be trapped in the boxes and released miles away or otherwise disposed of. They are not protected by law. The trap designed by Joe Huber and described by him in Sialia 4(1):20 is highly effective when used as directed. If the male House Sparrow is trapped and disposed of, the female will desert the nesting box; but if the female only is removed the male will usually maintain possession of the box and try to attract another mate.

Ordinarily House Sparrows nest rather close to human habitations, but when bluebird trails extend out long distances into relatively uninhabited areas the sparrows often follow these trails and nest in areas where they have never nested before. Thus bluebird trails that are not adequately monitored are likely to be overrun by sparrows sooner or later. Such trails then become a detriment rather than a benefit to the bluebirds.

Another important reason for frequent monitoring is to remove bluebird nests or those of other native species from the boxes as soon as possible after the nestlings have flown. Bluebirds often raise two broods and sometimes three broods in a season. They do not use their old nest for subsequent broods, but unless it is removed they may build a new nest on top of the old one. This raises the level so high that the nest becomes more vulnerable to an attack by predators. Also, if the old nest is infested with mites these tiny parasites will quickly move into the new nest where they will plague the nestlings of the new brood. Bluebirds seem somehow to sense these problems and are more likely to use the same box for second or third broods if the old nest is removed.

Sometimes one or more nestlings will die in the nest. If this happens when they are less than about five days old the parent birds will remove them, providing some living nestlings are still in the nest. But if the dead nestlings are older the parent birds are unable to drag them out and the nest may then become badly fouled to the detriment of the remaining members of the brood. Here again the bluebird family will benefit by frequent monitoring and the removal of any dead nestlings. Occasionally one of the adult birds will be
found dead in the nest and should, of course, be promptly removed.

Nests that are raided by predators with the loss of all eggs or nestlings are rarely, if ever, used again. Frequent monitoring usually enables one to detect such events. The nests should then be removed and steps taken, if possible, to lessen the chance of further predation. One possible objection to frequent monitoring is that some mammalian predators, especially raccoons, may sometimes be guided to nesting boxes by the scent of the person doing the monitoring. For this reason it may be better to monitor early rather than late in the day so that the scent will have largely disappeared by night when such predators are most active.

Weekly monitoring during the nesting season, although highly desirable under most circumstances, is often impractical, especially in the case of extensive trails or those located long distances from the persons who operate them. In some parts of the country highly successful bluebird trails are monitored only once a year, either before the nesting season or after it is finished. This is an acceptable practice in areas where House Sparrows are not a problem, especially if trouble with other predators is minimal. Eventually, however, such trails are likely to be discovered by House Sparrows and then may become more of a liability than an asset. When this happens the trail should be discontinued and the nesting boxes removed unless arrangements can be made for more effective monitoring.

The time required for House Sparrows to fledge a brood of young after they start to build their nest is approximately five weeks. So where sparrows are present they can be prevented from proliferating in nesting boxes by monitoring the boxes and removing all sparrow nests and their contents at least once every four or five weeks from March through July. More frequent monitoring, preferably weekly or oftener, is necessary to keep the sparrows out of the boxes so the bluebirds can use them.

Care should be taken in monitoring nesting boxes to create the least disturbance possible. The boxes should be opened quietly and the contents carefully noted. Unless some additional attention is then indicated the boxes should be promptly closed and the operator should leave the area quickly. A word of caution is in order when monitoring side-opening or front-opening nesting boxes. When these boxes contain bluebird nestlings more than 12 days old they should be opened with extreme caution, if at all, lest the nestlings become excited and jump or flutter from the nest prematurely. Top-opening boxes are much safer in this respect.

Perhaps one of the finest fringe benefits derived from monitoring a bluebird trail is the opportunity it presents to observe at close range the family lives of the birds. It enables one to become intimately acquainted with the birds and to learn that each one has its own individual traits differing at least a little from those of all others of its kind. Children particularly enjoy and benefit from participating in these monitoring operations. It helps them to understand and appreciate the wonders of nature through direct observation. It should be mentioned, however, that young children should be carefully supervised when examining active nests of any birds.
Mountain Bluebirds in Saskatchewan
Mary I. Houston

Before Saskatchewan was settled and long before it became a province, the Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*) was a rare resident. It nested mostly in crevices in clay cliffs in the "badlands" of the southwest or in hollow stumps of trees which had been burned by fires in the central areas.

The first naturalists were John Richardson, Robert Hood, and Thomas Drummond with the two Franklin expeditions which crossed central Saskatchewan in the 1820's. Neither they, nor Thomas Blakiston with the Palliser expedition in the late 1850's, recorded a single Mountain Bluebird along the Saskatchewan River. John Macoun had one sighting in 1872, and found his first nest in 1895 in the extreme southwest.

With the arrival of the first ranchers and later of the wheat-farmers, telephone poles and fence posts were excavated by Northern (Yellow-shafted) Flickers (*Colaptes auratus*), and mail-boxes, binder-boxes and crevices in buildings also provided bluebird nesting sites. Mountain Bluebirds increased gradually until 1950, when they were regular as far north as Nipawin (Houston, 1977).

Unfortunately, the European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) appeared in the province in 1938, and increased rapidly during the 1940s. The starlings quickly usurped many of the nesting sites previously used by bluebirds; by the late 1950s the bluebird numbers had decreased greatly.

To counteract this disastrous development, Jack Lane of Brandon, Manitoba, with his Junior Birders, in 1959, began a nest box project. The entrance hole was deliberately made 1.5 inches in diameter, a tight squeeze even for a Mountain Bluebird, but impossible for any starling to enter. Brandon then was near the eastern limit of the Mountain Bluebird and the western limit of the Eastern Bluebird’s (*Sialia sialis*) range, and Lane’s project soon produced noticeable increases in both species. This proved contagious. Lorne Scott, a student at Indian Head, Saskatchewan, began building boxes and by the time he had finished high school, he had put out about 200 boxes. In 1968 Lorne linked up with Jack Lane’s trail of boxes at Broadview, Saskatchewan. At this time the Saskatoon Junior Natural History Society began building boxes and their trail joined up with Lorne’s trail in 1970. Jake Kargut, a retired farmer at Langham, extended the trail northwest almost to North Battleford. Meanwhile, Manitoba cooperators extended the trail east to Winnipeg. By the time of his death in 1975, Jack Lane could take satisfaction in about 2,500 connected miles of bluebird boxes averaging three houses to the mile with the extremities 600 miles apart, a greater distance than for any other bluebird house trail in the world.

My own study area consists of the sections of the trail on either side of Saskatoon, within 40 miles of the city and consisting of 250 houses. We have learned much from initial errors. Most of our houses are now along paved highways where passing cars are moving too quickly to notice them; consequently, vandalism is less than on quiet country roads. We make sure the boxes are made of strong plywood and firmly nailed together—plain boards split, pressboard disintegrates in the rain, and shingle nails have proved inadequate (Houston, 1971). Houses placed on the field-side rather than the road-side of a fence post are less conspicuous, but are rubbed loose by farm animals. Boxes placed near cropped land will attract Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*), but grassy pastures attract Mountain Bluebirds and in the latter habitat we will put up ten houses per mile. We avoid nearby shrubs and trees when possible, and thus keep down House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) numbers. Boxes near farmyards attract House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*)
but some boxes even half a mile away sometimes attract sparrows regularly. Such houses are then moved.

Until 1983, we had not felt that predators, other than human ones, were a cause for concern. We did not mind that an occasional box was occupied by a White-footed Mouse. In 1983, the number of unsuccessful Mountain Bluebird nests was unusually high. In many boxes, the eggs had disappeared by the time of the second visit, ten days later. Sometimes the nest showed signs of disturbance; sometimes it was just totally empty without any remaining eggs. We have few clues to help us decide what was happening, although raccoons have recently moved into the area. One box was severely gnawed on all the edges, and on the top. And why did the new predator, of whatever species, attack only boxes occupied by bluebirds and not those occupied by swallows, unless the earlier nesting schedule of the former made a difference?

Numbers of boxes used by Mountain Bluebirds increased almost exponentially for the first few years of the trail, from 3 in 1969, to 10 to 25 to 35 to 54 to 71 to 83 in 1975, the seventh year. Things levelled off over the next six years. In good years, up to half the pairs brought off a second nesting, quite satisfactory for 52 degrees north latitude. In 1981, for example, we had a total of 107 nestings.

My account of the damaging late May snowstorm of 1982 has already appeared in the Autumn 1983 issue of *Sialia* 5(4):128 (Houston, 1982). Bad weather, following a year of poor production of young in 1982, seems to have produced even more disastrous results of a cumulative nature in 1983.

In 1983, spring arrival of bluebirds was delayed. Then a 5-inch fall of wet snow on 9 May, though three weeks earlier than last year’s storm, caused nesting to be 10 days to 2 weeks later than normal. Statistics were the most dismal ever. Of a paltry 43 attempted nestings, 21 were unsuccessful, resulting in only 2.3 young per nesting attempt or 4.5 fledged per successful nest. There were no second nestings of bluebirds, though in four instances bluebirds used a box before or after use by Tree Swallows, not one of the four was successful. In total, I banded only 100 young this year, compared to 132 in 1982 after the late May snowstorm, 355 in 1981, and 324 in 1980 (Table 1).

Tree Swallows, though they were also about 10 days to 2 weeks later in hatching, produced normal numbers in 1983. Of 131 nestings, 114 were successful and yielded 526 young (4 young per nest attempt or 4.6 per successful nest).

The number of totally unused boxes was similar to 1982: 53 this year and 57 in 1982, over 20% of our 250 houses. In 1983, occupants other than Tree Swallows were House Sparrows (19), House Wrens (3) and White-footed Mice (2). In all other years, we have had

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<td>First banding</td>
<td>May 27</td>
<td>May 30</td>
<td>June 7 (1)</td>
<td>June 12</td>
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<td>Peak banding</td>
<td>May 29 &amp; July 8</td>
<td>May 31 &amp; July 8</td>
<td>June 29</td>
<td>June 13</td>
</tr>
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<td>July 17</td>
<td>July 21</td>
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Table 1. Mountain Bluebird Nesting Success, Saskatoon Area, 1980-83.
over 80% of the boxes used by one species or another, the peak year being 1972 when the occupancy rate was a remarkable 98.7%.

Eastern Bluebirds have only recently moved into the Saskatoon area, possibly having spread west along the nest box trail. In 1974, our first mixed pair, an Eastern Bluebird female mated with a Mountain Bluebird male, used a box south of Langham. We caught and banded the female and the five young. In 1975 an Eastern Bluebird pair nested near Pike Lake, the first definite nesting record for the area of an unmixed pair. We caught and banded the male. In 1976 the same box was used successfully by an unmixed pair of Mountain Bluebirds and then by a pair of Tree Swallows; we were delighted when Eastern Bluebirds returned to use the box in 1977. Neither adult could be caught but we suspect them to be the 1975 pair. They raised five young in their first attempt, then fledged only two young from the four eggs of the second attempt that year. No Eastern Bluebirds have used any of our boxes since.

We feel that bluebirds need our help more than ever; our boxes provide nesting sites with the least possible competition and disturbance and hence have a high nesting success rate. Nevertheless, after two bad years in succession, we predict that it may take some years before Mountain Bluebirds achieve their former numbers in the Saskatoon area.

Literature Cited:


863 University Drive
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
Canada S7N 0J8

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**Request from Historian**

If anyone has historical data going back to the beginning of NABS, magazine articles or newspaper articles about members’ work with bluebirds, or items in print about bluebirds in general, please send them to

Mrs. Roger W. Foy
P.O. Box 457
Oriental, NC 28571

I would like to have them either for our scrap book or to make copies. If you wish to have the originals returned, please state that fact when you send them to me.

I would like to thank the following people for sending me articles about our bluebirds and our bluebirds;

- Mrs. Homer Germond
- Doug LeVasseur

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**Grants Received**

Anne T. Sturm, Chairwoman of the Development Committee, announces the receipt of two grants during 1983:

- Jane E. Marilley Foundation, Inc.—$1000.00
- The Foundation for Peace in the Middle East—$500.00
Bluebirds and the Sages of Concord
Lillian Lund Files

During a portion of the nineteenth century the town of Concord, Massachusetts, was one of the preeminent intellectual centers of the country. Lillian Files has erected bluebird nesting boxes at the homes of some of the famous individuals who lived in Concord during that period. Each of the authors and thinkers whose homes are shown wrote of bluebirds on one or more occasions.

"If the warble of the first bluebird does not thrill you...know that the morning and the spring of your life are past." February 25, 1859.

This is a replica of Henry David Thoreau's famous hut which he built at Walden Pond. The structure is located at the Thoreau Lyceum in Concord.

Orchard House, Louisa May Alcott's home, is shown with a bluebird box attached to a tree in the right foreground.
"Our Pan is dead," she wrote on the occasion of Thoreau’s death,

"His pipe hangs mute beside the river
Spring mourns as for untimely frost,
The bluebird chants a requiem
The willow-blossom waits for him,
The Genius of the wood is lost."\(^2\)

The Emerson House has a nesting box in the backyard. As a portion of his journal entry on Jan. 17, 1862, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote

"Long ago I wrote of 'Gifts,' & neglected a capital example. John Thoreau, Jr. one day put up a bluebird’s box on my barn fifteen years ago, it must be—and there it is still with every summer a melodious family in it, adorning the place, & singing his praises. There’s a gift for you which cost the giver no money, but nothing he could have brought would be so good."\(^5\)

2. Taken from _The Alcotts: Biography of a Family_ by Madeon Bedell. Copyright © 1980 by Madeon Bedell. Used by permission of Clarkson N. Potter, Inc.
There is only one species of Sassafras found in North America, but within its range in the eastern United States, *Sassafras albidum* takes many forms. In the southern portions of its range where it is most common, Sassafras often occurs as a full-fledged tree, and, under favorable conditions, specimens may attain a height of 100 feet. In the North, however, Sassafras more often displays a shrubby growth habit and rarely assumes a height of 50 feet. Equally as variable are the leaves of this plant which may be 3-lobed, 2-lobed (mitten-shaped) or unlobed. All three leaf patterns generally occur on the same tree. Even the sex of Sassafras trees is variable; trees may be male or female (in which case both are needed to produce fruit), or flowers of both sexes may occur on the same plant.

On open sites Sassafras is an aggressive pioneer species which often invades abandoned fields and burned-over land. Once established, it is capable of forming pure, dense stands by means of vigorous root sprouts. Though its open branches offer few nest sites for birds, its blue fruits, ripening in autumn, are a choice food for many species. Interestingly, three flycatchers, the Eastern Kingbird, Great Crested Flycatcher and Eastern Phoebe include Sassafras fruit in their diets. In some regions the twigs and foliage of Sassafras serve as important sources of food for White-tailed Deer. Attractive to many species of birds and mammals, Sassafras is a valuable addition to lands planted for wildlife.

**Sassafras**

*(Sassafras albidum)*

**Native Range**—Southern Maine to Florida west to Iowa and Texas
Culture—Adapted to many types of soil, but best growth occurs on rich, sandy loams with a pH of 6 to 7. Full sun. Male and female trees usually needed for fruit production. Natural stands are encouraged by the elimination of competing tree species. Simplest method of propagation is digging and transplanting suckers. Larger specimens seldom survive transplanting. Root cuttings are often successful, or cleaned seed may be sown soon after collection.

Undesirable Traits—Fruit production is variable with good crops occurring at one to two year intervals. Tendency to spread by root sprouts may be considered undesirable in some locations.

Special Uses—Sassafras tea (from the bark of roots). Aromatic oils derived from plant parts have been used as flavoring agents or scents in beverages, medicines, soaps and other products. Leaves are a natural source of a yellow-tan dye.

Wildlife Value—Fruits are favored by the Wild Turkey, Northern Bobwhite, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Kingbird, Great Crested Flycatcher, Gray Catbird, American Robin, Eastern Bluebird, and Red-eyed Vireo. Many other species, including the Eastern Phoebe, Northern Mockingbird, Brown Thrasher, Common Yellowthroat and Rufous-sided Towhee also take the fruits. As mentioned, Sassafras contributes significantly to the diet of deer in some areas, and it is often heavily browsed.

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

Correction: The autumn plantings article (5(4):138-140) contained a drawing which was not representative of Autumn Olive. That shrub has alternate leaves and fruit clusters which hug the stem.

Figure 1. Hardiness Zones for the United States and southern Canada. Temperatures for each zone are the average annual minimum temperatures. When no zones are mentioned with the plant description, plants are hardy anywhere. If a zone is given, it indicates that plants are hardy within the zone and in all areas south of it. Factors within zones such as altitude, exposure, soil type, moisture, etc. can create variations. This map was developed by the Agricultural Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
You advocate the use of plastic jugs as bluebird houses to deter House Sparrows. I think 4-inch i.d. white PVC drain pipe would be even better. It is much thicker than the bottles and would not need painting because light doesn’t shine through. It would be almost indestructible. If 4-inch is too small, 6-inch diameter could be used. What do you think of this idea?

Frank Ramondo
Newton Square, Pennsylvania

The plastic jug bluebird houses described in *Sialia* 5(4):140-141 are recommended only for experimental use at the present time. Bluebird houses made of polyvinyl chloride drain pipe have been used with some success, but more work is needed to determine their acceptability to bluebirds and whether or not they would be rejected by House Sparrows. Houses made with 4-inch diameter pipe would be a little crowded for large bluebird broods, so the 6-inch pipe would be preferable.

A sequence of events make me suspect that mid-season placement of bee hives 35-50 feet from a Western Bluebird nesting box caused abandonment of a clutch of eggs a few days before hatching. We are positive that the same pair of bluebirds was involved in these incidents. May we please have your opinion or comments?

Elsie Eltzroth
Corvallis, Oregon

Heavy concentrations of honey bees close to a nesting box might discourage bluebirds from carrying on their normal nesting ac-

***Would the salt-treated southern pine that is used for decks and patios (greenish color) be suitable for bluebird houses or is it toxic?***

Carroll F. Russell
Clarksville, Virginia

Nesting boxes made of so-called “treated lumber” have the advantage of being resistant to decay, but the lumber contains toxic substances that are potentially hazardous to birds. Boxes made of such lumber have been used successfully, but we do not recommend them until they have been proven safe without question. Boxes made of untreated cedar, cypress, or redwood will last for many years. Boxes made of less decay-resistant lumber should be painted on the outside with light-colored exterior grade latex or aluminum paint.
Not only is Dr. de Waard's description of bluebird and snake interaction of interest, but, in the process of watching a nesting box in his yard, he obtained rare circumstantial evidence of a male bluebird interfering in a Carolina Chickadee's attempted nesting by removing an egg.

Our involvement with Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialis sialis*) started in 1981 when my wife hung a small gourd containing water in a crape myrtle, because she thought the hummingbirds might be thirsty. She noticed a bluebird trying to get through the too-small hole of the gourd. Assuming a shortage of suitable nest sites in the neighborhood, she took a larger gourd, cut a proper-sized hole in it, and hung it in a nearby silk tree. The gesture was appreciated; the female promptly started building a nest in the gourd.

In the meantime I had retreated to the workshop, built a nesting box according to proper specifications, mounted it on a fence post, and placed it a few yards from the gourd. The idea was that the bluebirds, though having started to build a nest, would recognize that the gourd did not have the specifications ornithologists prescribe and would switch to the box. It was either too late or the birds did not care about specifications. They inspected the box seriously and often, but continued building their nest in the gourd. There they reared five chicks successfully, while using the box as a convenient perch.

After the young had left the gourd we removed it, hoping for a second nest in the box. The plan worked. The female started building almost immediately; the male provided encouragement and the five fledglings showed daily interest. The box turned out to be as good as the gourd in successfully producing another brood of five.

Absent during late summer and fall, the bluebirds returned in winter, along with a large flock of Yellow-rumped Warblers (*Dendroica coronata*). From the solarium we observed their daily routine: usually coming in the morning, the warblers chasing each other around the house, and the bluebirds sitting in the silk tree, then perching on and inspecting the nesting box one after the other.

In the spring of 1982 our bluebirds again had a successful first nesting, but when the second brood of chicks was almost ready to leave the box, disaster struck. That morning it was too quiet: no parents, no feeding. When we checked the box it was filled with a large, tightly coiled Oak Snake or Gray Rat Snake (*Elaphe obsoleta spiloides*).

I realized my mistake. I had mounted the box on a wooden post which is no contest for rat snakes. They are excellent climbers, often found in trees when birds are nesting. We built more boxes, and mounted them on 2-inch PVC pipe, which is presumed to be too slippery for snakes to climb. The boxes were placed about 100 yards from each other along the edge of our pastures.

Next spring (1983) a lone male bluebird arrived showing interest in the nesting box under the silk tree. He came several times daily to inspect the box. In the meantime a pair of Carolina Chickadees (*Parus carolinensis*) also showed interest in the box and started building a nest in it. This displeased the bluebird who did his best to hinder the construction. When, in spite of the belligerence of the bluebird, the chickadee had laid an egg, we observed the bluebird entering the nesting box several times. Upon checking the box we found the egg gone and felt that the bluebird must have carried it out. Because we could only see the back of the bird we did not actually see the egg removed. We feel quite certain the bluebird did it because we kept a
close watch on the disputed box, and we checked it before and after the occurrence. No other birds had shown an interest in the box; no snake or lizard could have climbed the PVC post; the wrens were busy elsewhere; and we do not have House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*).

In an attempt to ease the situation I took one of the unoccupied, identical nesting boxes and placed it a yard from the disputed one in the hope that the birds would accept each other as neighbors. But the bluebird was not so inclined and kept interfering with the chickadees. Next day I moved the chickadee box three yards farther to see whether this might satisfy the bluebird. The chickadees had no trouble finding it, but neither did the bluebird. Next day I moved it 20 yards and then 50 yards, with the same result. The chickadees finally gave up and disappeared; so did the bluebird.

A few weeks later a pair of bluebirds arrived and started building a nest in the empty box under the silk tree. All seemed well again. The box which the chickadees had abandoned was chosen by Carolina Wrens (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) for their second nest after their first in the woodshed. None of the other boxes attracted bluebirds. Although the boxes were identical and their locations similar, the one nearest the house appeared to be the preferred one.

In the bluebird box the nest was finished, eggs were laid, incubated, and five chicks hatched. One afternoon we noticed commotion near the box. The parents fluttered around in the silk tree above the nest sounding their alarm call. While we watched, the five nestlings popped out, one after the other and, unable to fly, hopped away from the box.

Then we noticed the six-foot Oak Snake which caused the alarm. On our approach the snake disappeared in the underbrush. We quickly collected the five hopping chicks and plopped them back in the box through the top opening, while I kept my hand in front of the entrance to prevent them from popping out again. After a while all was quiet and the parents were feeding again. Our minds were at ease with the knowledge that rat snakes cannot climb PVC pipe, provided, of course, that the young would stay in the box.

Next morning again there was commotion, popping and hopping birds, and probably the same snake. This time it had strangled a chick and had started swallowing it. With a hook I caught the snake, dumped it in a garbage can, put the lid on, and brought the can to the woodshed. Next morning we would take it to the other side of the swamp, as we had done before with quite a few Oak Snakes who threatened nests of mockingbirds, Brown Thrasher, cardinals, and Carolina Wrens. Again, we collected the brood of now four chicks, put them back in the box, and, once again, peace returned.

Until the evening. Same story. Parents sounding the alarm urging the chicks to get out, nestlings popping out one by one, hopping down the drive. And that was the last we saw of them. Buzzed by angry parents, who feared more interference, we searched for but could not find a snake as the cause of this hasty exit. Perhaps the parents had decided that this was the way to go, so we let them. But it kept us wondering. Why the evening?

The answer came next morning when we were ready to take the snake away. It had escaped by pushing up the lid of the garbage can, and it had obviously caused the bluebirds to urge the chicks to get out, PVC pipe notwithstanding. The day after, we still heard the calls of parents and fledgling in the bushes, so some survived the ordeal.

It is winter now and, as is usual this time of the year, at least a dozen bluebirds, together with scores of Yellow-rumped Warblers, are visible near our home. The warblers chase each other at breakneck speed, and the bluebirds in the silk trees inspect the nesting box one after the other. Will it be another spring with snake-bluebird confrontation? We built the boxes because we like to watch birds, but we are also interested in snakes and wish
them no harm. Bluebirds seem to prefer to nest close to the house, and Oak Snakes are attracted to buildings. We found them in the barn, in the woodshed, on the screened porch, and one even on the carpet in the middle of the living room. Unless we move the nesting box out of sight, from under the silk trees to a place far from the house, and let nature take its course, our spring again will be one of vigilance: checking the bluebirds by the hour and catching Oak Snakes to be released on the other side of the swamp.

POSTSCRIPT: The ability of rat snakes to climb is further illustrated by the discovery of a large Oak Snake in our martin house when the birds were nesting. It had climbed the 14 foot iron pipe to the martin house and had consumed two adults and a number of chicks and eggs, as evidenced by the undigested remains found in the compartments. Applying engine grease to the lower portion of the pipe would have prevented this disaster.

Rt. 2, Box 53A
Greenville, FL 32331

In January 1983, I erected ten additional bluebird nesting boxes. Six were placed along a road entering Lake O' The Pines and four along a hard-surface highway (#450). On or about 9 March a vandal stole No. 16 along the highway. On or about 28 March another nesting box was stolen.

I had the above sign painted and erected. Since the sign has been in place I have not had another nesting box stolen. I cannot be sure but feel that the sign has had some effect in deterring vandals. All ten boxes were located on the roadside in front of a barbed wire fence. In the future I am going to locate the boxes 10 to 20 feet inside the fence making it a little harder for the boxes to be stolen.

A Texas state highway maintenance supervisor has assured me that as long as this sign is in front of the fence the state will have no objection. Harry A. Krueger, Rural Route 1, Box 632, Ore City, TX 75683. Photograph by Harry A. Krueger
Eastern Bluebirds Nest in Boot

Bluebirds do not always choose boxes or wooden natural cavities in which to nest. Photographer Norman Dean of Mobile, AL, put his boots outside to dry after a late spring fishing trip in 1983. A pair of Eastern Bluebirds promptly claimed a boot and built a nest. Two eggs are visible in the first photograph (Fig. 1). One egg hatched. The pair continued to feed the nestling at the time the second picture (Fig. 2) was taken in June 1983. Photographs reprinted with permission of Norman Dean and The Baxter Bulletin.

Figure 1.
In the article “Experimental Nesting Box Designed to Reduce Blowfly Parasitism,” *Sialia* 4(2):49-51, I indicated initial success in reducing blowfly parasitism for the 1981 breeding season in a limited trial.

During the 1982 season I placed platforms in 25 nesting boxes with *no* fledgling loss due to blowfly larvae. That success encouraged me to add platforms to even more boxes for 1983. For that breeding season I equipped 53 boxes with the platform and again experienced *no* fledgling loss due to blowfly parasitism. Not only am I convinced of the value of the platform, but now I can offer a simplified method of construction. Miss Fran Hanes of Utica, NY, wrote to me with the suggestion which is illustrated below.

236 Church Street
Timberville, VA 22853

Figure 1. Improved design of experimental nesting box to reduce blowfly parasitism.

3/8” Hardware Cloth
(3-3/4” x 5-3/4” flat)
Achieving a ratio of one bluebird brood to seventeen Tree Swallow families is somewhat disappointing to bluebird enthusiasts, but we'll take it. Managing a successful nesting and subsequent fledging by either species has been a continuous struggle against every possible predator. Skunks, opossums, raccoons, snakes, domestic cats and House Sparrows frequent our ten acres located in a fairly wooded, wild farmland area of southern Michigan.

Having noticed several years ago that small flocks of bluebirds visited our property during autumn migrations, we began our nesting program in 1981. The possibility of enticing Tree Swallows also pleased us. A profusion of Box Elder saplings on our land provided an adequate supply of two to three inch mounting pole houses. Seven standard four by four-inch bluebird boxes were erected at heights of five to eight feet in somewhat open habitat.

Our beginning efforts were rewarded: five pairs of Tree Swallows showed definite interest in those boxes situated near our five acre pond. Unfortunately, House Sparrows also desired the waterfront dwellings. Daily removal of the sparrows' nests resulted in their subsequent reconstruction. Shooting the sparrows provided temporary respite, though they soon became too wary for this method of control. For every sparrow dispatched, two or three more materialized to battle the Tree Swallows for control of the boxes. Frequent armed patrols of the nesting area enabled the Tree Swallows to secure five homes and they began nesting. Within a week we noticed building materials scattered below the nesting boxes and frequently heard agitated swallows chirping during the early morning hours. Raccoons and possibly cats were making nocturnal visits for an easy swallow meal.

Another week or two passed; the swallows had either been devoured by predators, driven off by sparrows or simply abandoned our boxes for more hospitable nesting locations. The last pair of swallows vacated an experimental screened, open-top box which the raccoons had pried open. Discouraged by our initial effort of housing construction, we read an article in "Sialis" which mentioned the utilization of PCV pipe as a deterrent to climbing adversaries. Too late for the 1981 nesting season, we implemented the idea in 1982. Nine ten-foot sections of black smooth-finish 4-inch diameter PCV pipe were purchased, cut in half and used to sheath the bases of our old mounting poles. All posts were buried one and a half to two feet deep, resulting in an above ground elevation of six to eight feet. Houses were attached with one-quarter inch bolts above the plastic pipe. In addition, some houses were fitted with three-quarter inch predator blocks, a precaution which later proved unnecessary. Twelve new boxes were also fabricated, sheathed in PCV and provided with hook-and-eye, top-opening lids for easy observation and cleaning access.

Every dwelling was visible from our house, arranged in a semi-circle covering two to three acres adjacent to our pond. Several houses were situated twenty feet or less apart, an experiment involving compatibility of Tree Swallows and bluebirds. The eagerly anticipated first pair of bluebirds had arrived late in the spring of 1982, appeared interested and remained in the vicinity, leisurely investigating each box every day. Seven pairs of Tree Swallows arrived later, did not contest the bluebirds' chosen house and immediately were locked in combat with sparrows for the most desirable waterside houses. Although we continued to eradicate sparrows...
with firearms whenever possible, they proved to be plentiful and tenacious. Obviously, shooting sparrows barely kept them at bay, alternate solutions to their abundant replacements were required. *Sialia* provided the answer: the Huber box trap. After setting the trap in a sparrow-infested home, we observed the entrapment from our picture window or suitable vantage point in the yard. To avoid any possibility of a trapped sparrow escaping and simultaneously deter injuring a desirable bird unwittingly enticed by the boxes, we use a large clear plastic bag to envelope the house before freeing the catch. The bag is fitted securely over the nesting box and closed snugly at the base; the top is then opened and the sparrow flies into the bag. Desirable birds inadvertently incarcerated can be released unharmed by opening the enclosure.

Incorporating the Huber trap and PCV pipe resulted in immediate positive results; all seven pairs of Tree Swallows fledged families without incident by predation. The initial bluebird nest ended in failure caused by our ignorance of blowfly infestation. A second bluebird nest in the box was dusted with rotenone culminating in the subsequent maturation of five healthy young.

Encouraged by our success in 1982, that fall we began a continuous sparrow eradication program. As winter approached, new hordes of sparrows moved into the territory of their dispatched ancestors. We purchased a repeating sparrow trap available from most seed catalogues and trapped and disposed of approximately 20 undesirables. Hourly monitoring of the trap assured the release of friendly species; usually the same pair of chickadees trapped repeatedly. By January the sparrows avoided the trap; 40 or so were then shot from the bird feeder using a .22 rifle with number 12 shot. Sparrows shot from the feeder resulted in the displacement of no desirable birds; great care was practiced to avoid harming friendly birds. Adequate undisturbed feeding time was allocated for the birds to fortify themselves against nightfall. Sixty-two sparrows were disposed of in 1982 using the Huber trap, repeating sparrow trap, and rifle. Moreover, seventy to eighty percent of the sparrows were eliminated in the winter, nullifying their tremendous potential to reproduce throughout the warm summer months.

Our sparrow control methods resulted in a tremendously successful 1983 nesting season for our cavity nesting birds. As of this writing in November, 75 House Sparrows have been destroyed this year. Weeks go by without our seeing or hearing one. Due to the PCV protective collars, zero predation has resulted from raccoons, opossums, cats or other enemies. Although only one pair of bluebirds nested, a condition probably attributable to the close proximity of our nesting boxes, they fledged seven young in two different broods. Seventeen pairs of Tree Swallows and one pair of Black-capped Chickadees successfully reared families. We have derived immense satisfaction from seeing more bluebirds each year. Knowing the 100 yard minimum distance between boxes, we plan to expand our trail onto an adjoining neighbor’s land in the spring of 1984.

17321 Ely Road
Manchester, MI 48158

*Sialia*, Spring 1984
I first became interested in bluebirds in 1951 while living on a very small farm in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. However, I subsequently moved to an urban area, where I lived until my move to Bethlehem, Connecticut, in January 1979.

I put up four bluebird nesting boxes that spring. In August an Eastern Bluebird visited one box for a few minutes. This gave me hope that I might get lucky in the spring of 1980.

Spring came and my wife and I were delighted when a pair of bluebirds took up housekeeping in one of our boxes. Four birds fledged and I cleaned out the box right away. Three weeks later, two bluebirds returned (I think it was the same pair) but decided to nest in a different box. This pair fledged five more birds.

In the spring of 1981, a pair came to one of the boxes on 22 March. That year we fledged nine birds. With the agreement of my neighbors, I put up 11 boxes in my area.

Early on 22 March 1982, a male and female bluebird returned once again to our yard. As I was leaving for work I saw only the female, so I checked the box. Inside were a male House Sparrow and a badly wounded male bluebird that could not fly. Despite a trip to our vet, the male bluebird died two days later. Until that time, my wife would not allow me to destroy any birds, but from then on, it was open war on House Sparrows.

I have a Havahart repeating trap from which I have “permanently removed” one male and seven female House Sparrows to date. I have also eliminated 15 House Sparrows and 60 eggs from boxes on my trail last year. I do this by slipping up to the box, covering the hole with one hand, opening the front carefully with my other hand, and catching the bird on the nest. If I get a male, then I leave the nest and try again, and usually get the female also. I then remove the nest and any eggs.

The trail now has 11 boxes around my home, 16 boxes on our Land Trust, and 13 new ones that a friend and I put up around his house and the homes of six neighbors. Additionally, individual townspeople have put up ten boxes about which they keep me informed.

In 1983 we fledged 18 bluebirds, 24 Tree Swallows, and 64 House Wrens from the above-mentioned boxes.

I had no bluebirds in any of the 16 boxes on the Land Trust. I did have ten occupancies, all wrens. One chickadee nested, but I believe a wren took over during my two week vacation. I may paint 1 1/2-inch holes on these boxes this year, as suggested in a recent Sialia, to try to get better bluebird occupancy.

During the breeding season, I monitor the boxes between two and five times a week. Two items are worth noting. First, I found my first case of blowfly infestation. As per the literature, I purchased 1% rotenone powder. My wife suggested applying it with her nylon baster to avoid disturbing the nest. I reduced the size of the baster hole by melting the nylon in a flame. Then I filled the bulb with rotenone. By carefully inserting the baster tip under and in the middle of the nest, I applied the rotenone without disturbing the nest and without getting the powder on the young. Five healthy birds fledged.

The second interesting item was that four small babies disappeared from their nest overnight, but the nest was not disturbed. All four young were on the ground: two dead, one active, and one barely moving. I picked up the two live ones and put them back in the nest. The parents returned, and both
babies fledged 16 days later. Had the adults not returned, I would have added these two nestlings to a second box about 500 feet away that had four nestlings that were one day younger.

We have raccoons, snakes, and squirrels in our area, but so far I have had no problems with them (the biggest problem is the House Sparrow). All boxes are mounted on 6-foot steel garden fence posts.

At our annual Bethlehem Land Trust meeting I gave a lecture about bluebirds and displayed nests of House Sparrows, bluebirds, Tree Swallows, and House Wrens. The biggest challenge was justifying the elimination of House Sparrows.

As a result of this lecture, I was asked to give a full-day session at the Flanders Nature Center. There I passed out bluebird house plans, one of which went to a Girl Scout leader who hopes to start a trail.

Just thought I'd let you know that the bluebirds have many friends in Bethlehem, Connecticut.

Route 2, Box 332B-1
Bethlehem, CT 06751

Television Commercial Available for Loan

A 30 second public service announcement (PSA) TV commercial promoting bluebird conservation has been produced by NABS and copies of the tape are available for loan to NABS members.

The commercial was produced with the help of Holden Arboretum in Mentor, Ohio, who graciously gave permission to use footage from their excellent movie, "A Flying Piece of the Sky," and Dr. Mike Dumonceau of the University of Maryland’s Communication Arts department.

Six copies of the 3/4-inch video tape cassette are available for free loan, although postage and packaging must be covered. In order to obtain the commercial, write Richard J. Dolesh, 17800 Croom Road, Brandywine, Maryland, 20613. Enclose a check payable to NABS for $2.50. The tape should be returned in the enclosed self-addressed mailer within 10 days. Loan is on a first-come, first-served basis.

If your community has a bluebird celebration or your club is doing something to promote bluebird conservation, this commercial is ideal to help obtain publicity. Not only will it be shown by local TV stations as a public service announcement, but it also may be picked up as a news item, often as a feature story.

To have the commercial aired takes a little initiative. Generally, it must be delivered to the station in person. An appointment with a specific reporter or someone on the station management staff is advisable. Just explain who you are and what you are doing for bluebirds. You may be surprised by the interest it will create. Be prepared to suggest some follow-up activity, such as nest box building, trail monitoring, or bird banding for a film crew to shoot. You may lend the tape to the studio for copying; this would often be done on the spot in a matter of minutes. Feel free to go to several local stations all of whom may express interest. Write us about your experiences. We will publish the best techniques in a future issue of Sialia.
"On the Trail" is intended to provide succinct information about bluebird and cavity nester trails. Let us know what is happening on your trail. Send trail reports, unusual observations, publicity efforts, etc., to the editor, 10617 Graeloch Rd., Laurel, MD 20707.

NORTH HUNTINGDON, PENNSYLVANIA—Emil Kianchar writes that he gave a bluebird program for 150 AARP members in early January. The middle of that month he spoke to 30 DAR women and had two programs scheduled for March.

DUTCHESS COUNTY, NEW YORK—This trail had just over 200 boxes during 1983 of which 103 were used by bluebirds and the rest by wrens and Tree Swallows. Although 423 bluebirds fledged, egg loss and nest abandonment were high. Factors contributing to these losses were the wet, late spring, four-footed predators, and human interference. Florence Germond banded 320 nestlings and had her first band return: a male bluebird found dead in a box in Orange County, NY, which she had banded in July of 1982.

BELLVUE, COLORADO—Cheri and Steve Den, founders of the Cherokee Park Bluebird Trail, collected 15 Mountain Bluebird eggs for organochlorine analysis during the 1983 nesting season. They are happy to report only DDE was detected and that at a very low level of concentration at 0.06 ppm. They note that their trail has fledged 322 Mountain Bluebirds over the past four years.

JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI—Reber Layton, Chairman of the Jackson Bluebird Project, continues with his vigorous publicity efforts. In addition to the annual sale of boxes which the Jackson Audubon Society conducts, on 21 May, 1983, they sponsored a statewide invitational drive-in bluebird conference which included presentations and field trips.

FORT COLLINS, COLORADO—Joseph A. Zwenger is promoting the return of the bluebird in the mountain resort areas within 50 miles of Fort Collins. During 1983 he maintained 58 nesting boxes, 52 of which were used by Mountain Bluebirds which fledged 271. The remaining 6 boxes were used by Tree Swallows and House Wrens.

KINGS MOUNTAIN, NORTH CAROLINA—Edith Miller, "the bluebird lady" in Shelby, NC, writes that a junior high school science teacher gets the better of House Sparrows by building a box with a removal bottom. When the sparrows start building a nest, he removes the bottom and leaves it out until the sparrows leave.
Dear Editor:

Eric Forsman read the article about the visit to the Spotted Owl in Sialia 5(4):154-156 when he dropped in last week. Although he may have been the ringmaster of the three-owl circus that you folks watched, he said that he would like to give credit to Gary Miller, a research assistant in the Fish and Wildlife Department at Oregon State University who actually led the field trip and who originally found the owls that were observed.

Elsie Eltzroth
Corvallis, Oregon

Dear Editor:

I attribute our success last year to the use of the two sparrow traps—the one for the nesting box [Huber] and the large holding trap as a decoy. We used them the first two weeks in April and caught seven sparrows. The day after the last sparrow was caught, the bluebirds looked over the house and started to build. They seemed to sense that the coast was clear. We didn’t have any trouble the rest of the season, and they successfully raised three broods for a total of 11.

Mr. Haehner (Howard County) borrowed my traps after I was finished and except for some initial problems with sparrows killing the fledglings, he raised several broods [of bluebirds] after trapping more than a dozen sparrows. (He has a line of houses on his and a neighbor’s farm.)

My next-door neighbor also borrowed the traps after Mr. Haehner. She caught eight sparrows, but it was evidently too late in the season as she had no bluebirds (as she had had other years before the sparrows took over).

We all feel that the EARLY use of the two sparrow traps (in combination) really can rid the area of sparrows in about a week of diligence.

Kitty Ackerman
Ashton, Maryland

Dear Editor:

When setting out Wood Duck boxes it is recommended that predator guards also be included on each. However, the cost of aluminum or sheet metal to construct the conical guards is very expensive. An alternative source of metal that is relatively inexpensive is the used thin aluminum sheets (2 1/2 x 3 feet) used in the newspaper printing process. I purchase these thin metal sheets with newspaper print still on them from a local small town newspaper. I wrap the trunks of trees or stubs on which I put my Wood Duck boxes with these sheets for a length of 4 to 5 feet. This has proven to be effective in keeping away raccoons.

Mark Gretch
Champlain, New York

Dear Mark Gretch:

This suggestion has been made previously for use on bluebird nesting box posts. Not every newspaper appears to have these sheets available, but it is worth an inquiry.
The following two items were taken from longer letters written to the Toronto Star during December 1983 in support of naming the Eastern Bluebird as Ontario's official bird.

Dear Editor:

While I don't want to end up on some baseball nut's hit list, I cannot but agree that the Blue Jay is a lousy choice for Ontario's official bird—apart from the fact that Prince Edward Island so claimed Cyanocitta cristata six years ago. We should do nothing to revive the Hogtown disparagement our largest city already suffers....

But if our official bird must be Tory blue, why not get behind superb naturalists like Leo Smith who for years now has been toiling to bring back the bluebird after its near extinction from pesticides some years ago?

H.W. Somerville
Toronto, Ontario

Dear Editor:

Bluebirds would be a good symbol for Ontario. They are here for eight months of the year and will occasionally stay the winter. They never bully other birds. Farmers like them because they eat harmful insects and, though they eat some small wild fruit, do not touch the larger cash crops.

The song is definitely thrush-like but has a harshness to it, something like a gurgle, and appears to trail off as if they suffered from mind-wandering.

Eastern Bluebirds are colorful, cheerful and in need of help in the way of nesting boxes. Let's all pressure the Ministry of Natural Resources to remove the Blue Jay and install the bluebird of happiness on the list of official symbols.

L.A. Smith
Toronto, Ontario

Dear Editor:

We have a large mailbox which attracted the bluebirds, and I watched three young grow and fly away. The "nest" was merely a pile of grass in the far corner, but it seemed like an ideal nesting place: airy, cool and protected, and predators would be unable to climb the post and get into such a large mailbox.

Dear Angela Mernone:

Your mailbox nesting indicates the adaptability of bluebirds. Perhaps before the nesting season is too far along, you could make an effort to place wire screening over vents and cover holes in eaves to prevent starlings from multiplying.

Dear Editor:

Just a note to tell you I really appreciated the bluebird material Executive Director Mary Janetatos sent for our Ohio Association of Garden Clubs Convention at Westerville. There were some left so our regular director placed one at each plate for our regular meeting; they were all taken home except a few. So I have some left to take when I give a bluebird talk.

Our North Liberty Garden Club Bluebird Trail raised 226 this year and 20 Tree Swallows. I raised 154 in my 47 houses.

Arlene Kunkel
Fredericktown, Ohio

The daily mail delivery in the "upstairs" slot didn't seem to worry them at all. We have a lot of starlings nesting around the house, in the vents and under the eaves so perhaps there isn't competition for the mailbox. I don't know whether this is common, but it seems encouraging. I certainly enjoyed watching their growth as I collected the mail.
BLUEBIRD TALES

Mary D. Janetatos

If the dearth of bluebirds in the doldrums of winter does not encourage optimism, on some days my telephone messages do. George Dye of Takoma Park, MD, reported seeing a flock of six bluebirds at the Dickerson, MD, PEPCO power plant; Gerry Hartley saw a flock of about 100 near his Enterprise, AL, home; Fran Hanes of Utica, NY, said that four bluebirds were seen on a Christmas count nearby; and Marty Chestem saw seven late in December on a busy parking lot in Columbia, MD. So, if bluebirds are absent in this suburban (Washington, DC) backyard at the time of writing this piece, surely they'll be on location by the time you read this.

There has been a very fine response to the membership appeal which was issued to all members with the Autumn '83 issue of Sialia. Carol Collett of Xenia, OH, mailed us a large number of address labels from an arboretum. George O'Neill of Sewickley, PA, sent us pages from the Sewickley phone book with the names of likely members starred. John Findlay, III mailed in the membership directory of the Birmingham, AL, Audubon chapter. Linda Phillips of Greensboro, NC, sent address labels of all public libraries in North Carolina. Many other members furnished us with smaller numbers of names.

Another NABS appeal that brought good results was the 1983 Nesting Survey. See those results reported by Chuck Dupree elsewhere in this issue. Survey responses which came in after the deadline were noted and filed. Late responders: next year PLEASE get them in on time!

There have been many ambitious projects begun and carried through by bluebirders across the continent. Some of those brought to my attention have been spearheaded by Linda Phillips of Greensboro, NC; Augusta Elders of Claxton, GA; Carl Schindler of Phelps, NY; and Thomas Outerbridge of Bermuda. Here are some details on each.

Linda Phillips, a student at Greensboro College, headed a “Local Committee of the North American Bluebird Society” which published a first rate 32-page “Bluebird Directory of Guilford County” (NC). Linda utilized many resources in her community for both input and funding.

Another prodigious effort on behalf of bluebirds was made by Augusta Elders of Claxton, GA. While she was president of the Claxton Garden Club from 1979 to 1981 she began a bluebird conservation project. Her goal was “getting bluebird nesting boxes placed in every cemetery in the county.” She began lining up the nesting box supply with the help of a friend in the public school system who arranged for the boxes to be built by high school woodworking classes. She obtained the help of a local historian in finding a list of all cemeteries, plus the name of an individual for each cemetery who would be helpful in placing the boxes.

Carl Schindler writes that his long involvement with bluebirds had to be cut short this year because of car trouble and illness in the family. Still, he managed to get 118 nesting boxes up in Phelps, NY, and fledged 36 bluebirds and many Tree Swallows. He reports that he lost 14 boxes of nestlings to blowflies. He says he gave away 82 boxes and keeps in touch with all the bluebird people to whom he gave boxes or plans.

Tom Outerbridge of Bermuda is marshaling bluebird helpers on the vacation island. David Wingate, the chief conservation officer on the island, told the story of Bermuda’s bluebirds at the Fourth Annual Meeting of NABS at Gunston Hall, VA. David’s professional duties prevented in-depth work on behalf of the bluebirds. Enter rock singer Tommy Outerbridge, who championed the cause with fervor. Since he had contacts in the media, he immediately arranged a video taping of bluebird events on his newly installed trail. This video with soft rock background beat was seen at the Sixth Annual Meeting.

Meanwhile, back on the continent, efforts abound to 1. See bluebirds (they’re mostly absent except in the South); 2. Feed bluebirds—Mrs. Mildred G. Marcell of Morganton, GA, saw them on her feeder; Gay Duncan of Southern Pines, NC, and Jack Finch, Bailey, NC, spent much time last autumn collecting dogwood berries then during the winter placing them on feeders where, mirabilis dictu, bluebirds are
eating them!; 3. Tell others about bluebirds; 4. Build more bluebird nesting boxes.

In order to tell others about bluebirds, NABS' slide presentations are being made in many places. There are numerous speakers out on the "circuit" telling all who will listen about the joys and pitfalls of bluebirding. Charlotte Jernigan, NABS Board Member from Wagoner, OK, who has given many bluebird talks, received a letter from a veteran bluebirder, Don Yockey of Onaga, KS. She says Don is "active with the Kansas non-game program. Besides 100 new bluebird houses he cut out, he also built 30 screech owl or kestrel boxes." Sherry Ullius of West Bend, WI, writes "...our Botany Club at the University of Wisconsin-Washington County center system had the NABS slide program. With everyone's varied schedules I decided to show the program four different times. Students and faculty stopped in with their lunches in hand and sat back, relaxed and enjoyed 30 minutes of springtime. Thanks for making this program possible."

A.L. (Bert) Powell saw the bluebird program at a Kentucky Ornithological Society (KOS) meeting. He reports, "I was so impressed with the program that I told a fellow member of our state KOS about the program. This person, who is a member of the Audubon group in Paducah, KY, asked me to send her information about the slide show so she could use it for a program." Carolyn Jarnagan of Corinth, MS, tells us that their company has a subsidiary business called The Hobby Shop "which tries to satisfy all the hobby, arts and crafts needs of the community. One of these projects is to help the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, YMCA and other groups with projects and teach them how to do these projects. One of the major undertakings this year is the project of making bluebird houses and then I wish to rent the slide program and make a presentation to the Cub Scouts before they place their bluebird houses."

Louise C. Lumpkin, a realtor from Norfolk, VA, says that she saved the article in Parade magazine, Nov. 25, 1979. She asked for several informational pamphlets because "...the parents will secure the boxes and help the children place them." David Booth of Lake Charles, LA, arranged to show the NABS slide program in January, 1984, to his club, Gulf Coast Birders, and then sent us mailing labels so we could send complimentary copies of Sialia to all of them. So, dear readers, why not do the same—decide whether to give or not to give the NABS slide program, but do send us names (we really love labels) of interested people and we'll send them the best advertising we have—a complimentary issue of Sialia!

In the building and refurbishing department, Major Donald R. Packard, of Pinkney, MI, found a commercial forestry company that "would give me 3/4 inch pine but the manager kiddingly said, 'You're going to use this in your garage for shelves,' so I went looking for my bluebird membership card—but couldn't find it. Would you please mail me out a duplicate membership card so I can spend my winter increasing my trail from 27 boxes to at least 100." George Walter, Roy, WA, must have been doing a lot of building because his nesting survey return shows that in 1981 he maintained 5 nesting boxes, 16 in 1982, and in 1983 the number was listed as 87. From these, 93 Western Bluebirds fledged, as well as some Tree and Violet-Green Swallows.

Sam Patten, of Boyce, VA, who is newsletter editor for the Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon Society, says, "We are thinking of promoting bluebirds in the Winchester-Front Royal-Berryville area by buying and selling bluebird boxes." And J.M. Garrett of Haynesville, LA, writes that "This week I have been cleaning and painting 12 boxes which are spread over a distance of 9 miles and in a variety of locations such as hospital lawn, city golf course, telephone poles on remote streets and cemeteries."

It is altogether heartening to travel about the country and experience the heightened interest in bluebirds everywhere. Bob Bodine of Media, PA, had invited a fine group of about 20 people when Larry Zeleny and I visited the Philadelphia area.

This weekend visit was part of a trip to Philadelphia to attend a Camp Fire Congress banquet where a Bluebird Conservation Award was presented to Camp Fire by the National Wildlife Federation. The award turned out to be an original painting by wildlife artist Ed Bierly (NABS member) from Lorton, VA, who was in attendance with his wife Edie. I know all of you enjoyed receiving the beautiful brochure in the winter issue of Sialia which offered the set of three bluebird prints numbered and signed by Ed. Receipts from the sale of these prints will benefit NABS and the Camp Fire organization.

And so, amid all the wonderful talk about bluebirds, may January's main question, "Where have all the bluebirds gone?" give way to April's cheerful "cher-whew"—"Here we are!" May it be so on your trail, in your garden, and in mine!
ANOTHER MOTHER

That early bird who gets the worm,
With moss from non-roll stones she found,
Has built a nest to re-affirm
That motherhood is still around!

Her little home,
In ways so still,
She's glued upon
Our windowsill.

And now, with busy love, to raise—
Four Robinettes too young to sing;
She works without a thought of praise,
And quite without a wedding ring!

On guard upon
A nearby shelf
A watchful father—
Preen's himself.

— A. E. METELMAN

Art Credits
Jon E. Boone: 42, 76
Suzanne Pennell Turner: 52, 54, 64, 78
Richard L. Woodward: 47 Spring Beauty, 56 Marbled Salamander, 62, 72 Trout Lily, 74 Speedwell, 75.
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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