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Cover photo: Jerry Oldenettel’s photo stills the frenetic foraging of a Red-breasted Nuthatch. Jerry shot this image in eastern New Mexico. You can see more of his photos at www.flickr.com/photos/jroldenettel/
Spring Message to our Affiliate Organizations

I want to welcome our first new NABS Affiliate of 2010. The Michael Kudish Natural History Preserve in Stamford, New York, has joined the NABS family of organizations committed to the conservation of bluebirds and other cavity nesters. They are our 51st Affiliate.

As I roam the internet I find that there are many organizations with “Bluebird” somewhere in their name. I’m sure that many of you who are NABS members also belong to some of these conservation-minded groups that have a particular interest in bluebirds. Please encourage these organizations to contact me through the NABS website and ask about becoming an Affiliate.

Elsewhere in this issue of the Bluebird you will find a complete description of NABS 2010 in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Look it over carefully and see the many fieldtrips and programs that I’m sure will interest anyone who loves cavity nesters. There is a registration form included. Please note that early registration ends on May 15th, and plan on spending extra time in the Hamilton area. Niagara Falls and Stratford are just two of the possibilities. There are new border crossing requirements as of June 2009. Page 23 has the detailed information you need. You can also go to www.GetYouHome.gov

I hope to see you in Ontario.

Brian Swanson
NABS Vice President for Affiliate Relations

Celebrate International Migratory Bird Day!

International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) celebrates and brings attention to one of the most important and spectacular events in the Americas—bird migration between their summer and winter homes. IMBD is celebrated in Canada, the United States, Mexico, and Central America through bird festivals, bird walks, and education programs.

IMBD officially takes place on the second Saturday in May each year (May 8 this year), but the date can be shifted to accommodate local migration patterns (i.e., it might be earlier in the South, later in the North). Check the official website for events in your area, or ideas for hosting your own event: www.birdday.org

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The North American Bluebird Society, Inc. is a non-profit education, conservation and research organization that promotes the recovery of bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting bird species in North America.

www.nabluebirdsociety.org
From the President
Jonathan Ridgeway

Greetings of peace.

I write quite often about the wonderful work that the members of the NABS Board of Directors are doing to make our organization more effective, both in our administrative functionality and in our ability to fulfill the society’s purpose and mission, to promote and preserve the bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting species. I mostly leave it to Brian Swanson, our Vice President of Affiliate Relations, to keep you informed about what our Affiliates are doing. I am not sure though, that I ever say enough about our members, other than that we have had such fine attendance at our conventions over the last three years, but there is a lot more that ought to be said. We truly are grateful for everything our members do.

One of the things I do as President is write thank-you letters to contributors, especially those who make memorial contributions or gifts to honor people who deserve recognition. I usually do not get to these letters right away but I try to send them out in batches, especially around the end of the year in time for people to use them as documentation for their income tax returns. During January, I managed to write more than 20 letters and I would like to tell you a bit of what some of them said.

I am saddened to report that a gentleman by the name of Warren “Bud” Taylor of Missouri passed away this fall. I do not believe he was a member of NABS nor that I ever had the privilege to meet him but he was certainly an avid bluebirder, so much so that it earned him the nickname of “Buddy Bluebird.” Over the last 10 years literally thousands of bluebirds were fledged on the restoration program trail he managed in Missouri. When his family was preparing to make funeral arrangements they decided that they wanted to give people an opportunity to make contributions in his memory. His son, Doug, told me they went surfing on the web to try to find a suitable organization. He said that they were not familiar with NABS but that they were so impressed with the valuable information they found on our website, they chose NABS to be one of the beneficiaries of the generosity of Bud’s admirers. As a result we received generous donations from more than 20 individuals as well as a local historical society with which Bud was associated. I believe it was a remarkable testimonial to a very great and popular man. It will not surprise me if the information provided in our thank-you letters might even result in some increase in our membership roster.

When Sheryl Struse of Illinois lost her mom, Eloda Phelps, she sent us a Life Membership in her mom’s memory. During the summer Jay and Denise Fisher of Nebraska made a donation to honor the memory of a devoted bluebird foundation member, Robert Hyland. Bill McBride was a long time member of the Evening Optimist Club of Albuquerque so that organization sent us a very generous donation. They knew how much Bill loved birdwatching and believed he would be pleased with their expression of support for our fine organization. Kathleen Mehosky of Pennsylvania sent a contribution after her aunt, Jean Bitler, died, as did Joseph Birett of Ontario to commemorate the loss of his friend, John Millman, who also passed away this past summer.

Last year Bob and Judy Peak sent us a memorial for their friend, George Zimmerman, and Dominick and Lucy Desensi sent one for their neighbor, Thomas “Woody” Lesnett of Pennsylvania, affectionately known to so many people as “the Bluebird Man.” John and Virginia McCall of Illinois sent a very generous donation. They knew how much Bill loved birdwatching and believed he would be pleased with their expression of support for our fine organization. Grace Kocher of New Jersey made a generous donation to our Zeleny Fund back in April 2007 after her husband, Robert, passed away, or as she sweetly expressed it, began his new journey. She wrote how building bluebird nestboxes, placing them in their yard, monitoring them, dealing with the discouraging threats of House Sparrows and all the beautiful experiences of watching their bluebirds nest and fledge their nestlings, all contributed to their fulfillment and quality of life.

In addition to those memorial contributions, the Catholic Daughters of the Americas Court in West Virginia sent us donations two years in a row as a meaningful expression to honor Monsignor Patrick Fryer and demonstrate their respect for the great love he exhibits for wildlife and especially for bluebirds.

Penny Borda of Connecticut recently sent a donation
to recognize Dan Sparks for his excellent work as a NABS Board member and manager of our online storefront. When I spoke to Wanda Hutter of Illinois she told me that my accomplishments since I became President moved her to become a Life Member last year and she plans to give us another generous contribution when she gets home from Florida.

I certainly feel that it is fitting to mention the generosity of those people and especially to repeat the names of the ones who passed away and did not have a proper obituary published in our journal. They are not only part of the heart and soul of our organization but also an important mainstay of our revenue stream. Those of us responsible for dealing with the business of the organization are so grateful for these demonstrations of confidence that people have in us. I would hope that this statement of our gratitude may encourage others to follow in their footsteps. For any who might be inclined to consider it, I thank you now for letting the idea find a place in your thoughts.

And by the way, if there is anyone I neglected to mention, I ask you please not to feel slighted. I assure you that any such oversight is unintentional.

Sending money is not the only way people have indicated their high regard for the work of our Society. Donna Lee Houle of South Carolina sent us her manuscript of “The Eastern Bluebird (That Beautiful Bird of Blue)” and Debra Rissinger Litecky of New Mexico sent her manuscript of “Curry and Coy.” Helping to get these and other works published is not an area where we have been able to make any progress but we very much appreciate authors who want to make NABS a part of their projects. We are thankful to William E. Zitek of New York who sent an autographed copy of “Along a Nest Box Trail” and “Bluebird Bob” Walshaw of Oklahoma who sent multiple copies of “The How and Why of Bluebirding.” Founding NABS member and former Board member, Dick Tuttle of Ohio, has sent us a number of his papers and several of his works have already been published in our journal over a span of nearly 30 years. In fact, the reason he recently left the Board at the completion of his term of office was because he is making final preparation to publish yet another bird book. The “Missouri Hillbilly Poet,” Russ Heidselman, even sent a hand-calligraphed collection of his poetry. Russ is the designer of a variety of styles of successful nestboxes, many of which are prevalent throughout Missouri and other parts of the country. Friends who share their intellectual property with us are certainly as worthy of due recognition as those who send us money. I would truly be remiss if I did not mention among those who have donated so generously in this way, Board members Terry Neumyer of Pennsylvania, Chair of the NABS Education Committee, and Bet Zimmerman of Connecticut, master of the outstanding website, sialis.org.

Earlier in this article I mentioned about Wanda being in Florida for part of the winter. I hope she had as good a time there as my wife, Lynne, and I had there as last year ended and this year began. We were near the Everglades. When we travel away from home we always enjoy seeing birds that are not common in the Hudson River Valley of New York where we live. I even got to take some photographs of some and I would like to take an opportunity to share a few of them with you. I hope you enjoy them.

One of my favorite of the shorebirds is a blue bird (but not a secondary cavity nester). I believe I got a number of good pictures of this Little Blue Heron.

If we identified the next two correctly they are new additions to our life lists, both Lynne’s and mine. We believe they are a Louisiana Heron and a Palm
Warbler. No doubt, if we have misidentified either one I ought to receive plenty of emails or notes telling me what they really are. I would appreciate anyone who may care to confirm them if we are correct.

We might have expected to find a Louisiana Heron more along the Gulf or Atlantic coastlines but we saw this one mid-way between, pretty close to the Everglades.

As for the warbler, it was notable this one did a lot of tail flicking which is characteristic of the Palm Warbler. There was another species we saw which we did not find in our field guides. We got a glimpse of it in the water of the Everglades during a ride on an air boat.

There were female Boat-tailed Grackles hardly 10 feet away who seemed to have no concern whatever about any potential danger but this male Boat-tail was on the shore where it was safer. I guess he was not taking any chances. The iridescence of their black feathers is so intense that in the bright sunlight, he is another one that looks like a blue bird. The female is just as iridescent but a color of antique bronze. We only see the Common Grackles near our home in New York.

We saw this Loggerhead Shrike in a park very near where we were staying in the town of Weston. I wanted to include this picture because I find them to be such an exceptionally beautiful bird. The first time we ever saw any of these was on a road alongside a pecan farm. There were dozens of them, many sitting on the telephone lines and I found the experience to be so striking that the memory is indelibly imbedded in my mind.

Thank you for letting me show these to you.

Yours in peace,
Jonathan Ridgeway
NABS President
From the Managing Editor
Scott W. Gillihan

In each issue of *Bluebird*, I strive for a balance between articles about NABS, scientific information, general information, and technical or how-to articles. But given that spring is upon us, and the birds will soon be busy with nesting activities (if they aren’t already where you are), I tried to shift the center of gravity a bit toward the technical and how-to articles. I hope this issue provides you with inspiration and helpful information that results in your best year ever for raising birds. My thanks to the authors who provided the many excellent articles.

Also, I must offer an overdue thank-you to my wife Brenda, whose eye for color and design is much better than mine, and whose sound judgment has bailed me out of many tough editorial decisions in the nearly two years that I’ve been your editor.

Please consider submitting an article or photos—there’s always room for more. If you’re an editor of a newsletter that is not currently sent to me, I hope you’ll add me to your mailing list. I often ask for permission to reprint articles from those newsletters, as I think it’s important to share the good ideas and practices of your members with the rest of the NABS membership.

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Letters to Bluebird

Cowbird Eggs in Nestboxes Again
I saw your request for Brown-headed Cowbird experiences in the Fall Bluebird. I have a trail of about 15 nest boxes on Eglin Air Force Base, Florida. Most are Gilbertson’s; however I was experimenting with a Hill Lake box a few years back and found a single cowbird egg laid on the bare floor just days after putting it up. This struck me as odd not only because the box was unoccupied, but that style of box is considerably deeper than the average bluebird box. I’ve never had anything else like that happen since.

Bill Burke
Crestview, FL

Stovepipe and PVC Pipe Guards
I would like to comment on the letter in the last issue about the Ron Kingston stovepipe guard. The writer stated that the stovepipe banging against the steel rod on windy days seemed to deter early nesting. My experience was exactly opposite. I have a nest cam in the nestbox in the backyard. Nest building started on February 28, 2009. I could hear the wind howling and the clanging of the guard against the “tee” post it is mounted on. However it did not interfere with what went on in the box. In fact, when the female got her nest finished and had laid three eggs, another female came in and started covering up the eggs. The resident female would come in and uncover them, and then the second female would cover them back up. The second female finally won the battle and the first female left. Lo and behold, a day or so later, a third female showed up and started carrying grasses in to help rebuild the nest. At times, they both wound up in the box at the same time. There was never any real fighting, but a few pecks on the head. Then came the interesting part: they shared the laying of nine eggs. It was amazing to watch as one female would sit close by until the other one laid her egg, then she would enter and lay hers. When it came time to incubate, they both were in the box together that night as we saw it the last time before we went to bed. I made pictures of it from my TV connected to the webcam. The next morning, the female that looked to be a very young bird had disappeared and she never showed up again. Several opinions thought it might be a mother and daughter sharing this event.

All this was going on while the March and April winds were howling and banging the guard. In fact, I could see how the wind blowing across the nest stirred the grasses as I had removed the foam from the vent holes during a warm spell thinking the cold was over. It turned cold with lots of wind, so I went out and stuffed the vents again before the females started laying.

On the subject of the 4-inch PVC pipe guards, a couple of trail managers installed them on LBBS sponsored trails several years ago and we had pretty positive proof that snakes were getting past them to the nests. We have non-poisonous snakes that can grow longer than 72 inches. I’ve not had one climb the seam of a stovepipe guard and always keep the pole greased so that I know if anything got past it (and to keep off the terrible fire ants we have to deal with).

I just wanted to share my experiences and the only thing I can think of would be the differences in the birds. When nesting season gets in full swing here, the birds seem to be very tolerant and I’ve never had one abandon a box if I did something different, such as turning it in a different direction.

Evelyn Cooper, President
Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society

“Of all our birds, this soft-voiced harbinger of spring is one of the most eagerly awaited. When winter begins to yield at last to the warming touch of the returning sun; when several days of clearing skies and southerly breezes have loosened the ice-fettered streams, drawn the frost from the ground, and given a balmy tang to the air; and when all nature seems in an expectant mood, vibrant with a new hope and a new promise—the Bluebird returns... Its soft, pleasing warble, like the gentle murmur of a flowing brook in soothing cadence, awakens a sense of well-being and content in each responsive listener.” — W. E. Clyde Todd, 1940
Yellowjacket Traps for Protecting Cavity-nesting Birds

John Schuster

To protect yourself and your more-than-helpless baby birds inside your nestboxes from killer yellowjacket attacks, I recommend the implementation of aggressive yellowjacket eradication programs. Below is a cheap homemade trap you can make yourself, but before you jump to the end of this article, please allow me to share my personal history with the concept.

When I worked for CDF (California Division of Forestry), I was stationed in Humboldt County, California near the Eel River. When we were at base camp, things could get a little boring, so sometimes we made yellowjacket traps to cut the monotony, and to lure these pests away from our dining area (this method works great for picnics), so we would not have to compete with the swarms of yellowjackets over the meals we were trying to eat.

Our yellowjacket traps were very simple: someone would walk down to the Eel River to catch a fish (e.g., a mud sucker), which we would string up by the tail with the head down inside a bucket with three inches of water mixed with dish soap. In less than a minute, the yellowjackets would be swarming in to devour the fish. Yellowjackets are flesh eaters, and they will not stop eating until they are full. As they fill up, they eventually fall down into the soapy water. The soapy water plugs up their air passages and they drown. After a while we would have to clean out the bucket of drowned yellowjackets, reload the bucket with fresh soapy water, reset the fish (if we still had a fish), and we were off to the races again.

In time, as the trap took its toll, we would see fewer and fewer yellowjackets in our dinner area.

Though I can’t remember the brand of dish soap we used, it really doesn’t matter which brand you use. I am partial to Dawn® dish soap, because in my opinion it is the best, plus Dawn® is the soap of choice for wildlife rescue workers for safely removing tanker oil off of birds and mammals caught in oil spills. For that reason alone, I like, endorse, and only use Dawn® dish soap.

Another trap option is a one-gallon plastic water jug or two-liter soft drink bottle. Cut a couple of one-inch diameter holes near the top and add soapy water. Punch two holes in the neck of the bottle and pass a wire or wooden skewer through the holes, with bacon or other meat bait hung on the skewer and dangling down into the jug. A YouTube video shows this trap, which is similar in concept to the one we used 35+ years ago, but I like the YouTube trap better than ours. You can view the video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7KkBySHWK

Have fun—your cavity-nesting birds will appreciate your assistance.

[Editor’s note: A number of authorities suggest that you start putting out yellowjacket traps in late winter or early spring, when the queens are just starting to build nests and the colonies are small and easier to control. Even so, you may need to trap all summer and into the fall, depending on the size of the local population.]

John Schuster is a musician, commercial grape grower, NABS Board member, and owner of Wild Wing Company (www.wildwingco.com), which offers an array of nestboxes and other supplies for bird lovers. He appears regularly on TV and radio to explain the benefits of Integrated Pest Management and the many benefits of providing safe nesting sites for native cavity nesters.
Black flies (also known as buffalo gnats, turkey gnats, or white socks) are biting, blood-sucking, swarming insects in the genus *Simulium*. There are about 1800 different species that belong to the Simuliidae family, and at least 254 known species of black flies north of the Mexican border, some of which target specific species.

The ones that are a problem in the nestbox are small (about 1/8 inch [2–5 mm] long), black or gray, with a humped back, short legs, and antennae. Only the female takes a blood meal. They will bite for about three weeks before they die. They can fly up to 15 miles in search of blood. Eggs are laid in fresh, slow running water (rivers, creeks, streams). There is only one generation each year. Saliva injected during biting can cause an allergic reaction (welt).

Black flies are a serious pest, especially in some parts of the midwest. In 2008, Bob Flam indicated that ~240 bluebird nestlings were lost in 300 boxes on nine golf course trails in Iowa. Flam also lost 35 Purple Martin nestlings in his boxes, and his friend lost all of his Purple Martin nestlings (70-80) that same year.

These insects typically live for one month in the spring (especially in areas with a lot of rainfall). They typically die when temperatures exceed 80° F (although Keith Kridler notes that he has seen them in northeast Texas on livestock when it is 115° F.) They prefer to feed on warm, sunny, windless days. Populations tend to peak from mid-June to July, and adults are active for about 2–3 weeks each year. Thus they are a bigger problem for later broods. BRAW (Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin) has found that nestlings under 5 days old are not bitten and 10 day old nestlings are most susceptible.

CLUES AND IMPACT: Intense, repeated black fly feeding can cause death of nestlings, possibly due to blood loss or an immune response to the saliva injected during feeding, or even from suffocation as birds pile up on top of one another to avoid bites. Nestlings may have circular red or purple welts/lesions on featherless areas of the body, especially under the wings. Adult flies may be found in ear canals. Black flies may be seen hovering around the nestbox.

DETERRING: Black flies may be attracted to dark colors, carbon dioxide (CO₂) which birds exhale, and the scent of a dirty nest.

- Do not locate boxes near fresh, slow-moving running water.
- When blackflies are active, BRAW recommends spraying the inside of box with Pyrethrin Flys Away II (daily) until nestlings are 12–13 days old. Pyrethrin is a repellant, but has low residual activity.
- Remove or replace dirty nests (with lots of fecal material).
- Minimize access:
  - Try nestboxes without ventilation holes, or stuff ventilation holes or slots with Mortite caulk or cotton, or cover with duct tape (on the outside) or fine screen folded on itself. (But note that Kent Hall in Wisconsin found that no nestboxes were immune to blackflies, even with vent holes plugged.)
  - Use a nestbox with no vent holes (Gilwood,
• Simple House, flyGuard boxes) if you are not in a very hot climate (e.g., I suspect this would not work in Texas).
• Apply Tanglefoot around the exterior edges of all vent holes, but NOT near the nestbox entrance where it could get on birds and kill them.
• Vent CO₂: CO₂ is heavier than air. It will come out the entrance hole of a nestbox before it will go out the vents on the top. Bob Flam suggests the following: drill holes in boxes BELOW the entrance, on the bottom on one side of the box. This will allow the smell and CO₂ to escape. Cover the hole with a piece of window screen, folded double and stapled over the inside of the hole, or stuff screen into the hole. The screen will keep the hole from getting plugged with nesting material, and will also prevent entry by black flies. If you have vents up top, put screens over them too (staple over the outside).
• Try spraying pure vanilla extract (not imitation) in box daily with a mist bottle (expensive, but Flam feels he was able to save ~140 Purple Martin nestlings using this and venting).
• Black flies may be attracted to dark colors. Do not use dark colors (e.g., blue, black, brown, purple) on the outside of the nestbox. If you must paint the exterior, use white or yellow. (This is better for reflecting heat anyway.)
• What doesn’t work: Getting rid of standing water, fogging with insecticides at night (unlike mosquitoes, black flies do not breed in stagnant water or feed at night), garlic in mesh bags, DEET, Sevin dust, European Hornet trap bottles.

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Ken Holscher, Associate Professor & Extension Entomologist at Iowa State University for information about black flies; Bob Flam of Iowa for his results and photo; and BRAW for reports on unvented nestboxes.

Bet Zimmerman is a Certified Environmental Professional, a life member and NABS Board member, and is on the Woodstock, Connecticut Conservation Commission. She maintains a popular educational website on cavity nesters at www.sialis.org (where this article originally appeared), and monitors several bluebird trails with about 100 boxes.

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Western Bluebirds, year-round residents in central California’s oak woodlands, are occasional cooperative breeders. They usually breed as individual pairs, as do Eastern and Mountain bluebirds, but Western Bluebirds occasionally have helpers at the nest.

In autumn, most Western Bluebird daughters disperse, but most sons and a few daughters remain with their parents. These families are joined by immigrant females—sometimes that year’s young from nearby territories, and more often unbanded females from farther away. The resulting groups usually remain together through winter, sharing mistletoe berries, sleeping together on cold nights (as many as 13 birds huddled into a single nestbox), and defending the territory against intruders. Benefits of winter group life are clear, but what benefits exist for parents, sons, brothers, and other close relatives living in “kin neighborhoods” during the breeding season? Ever since a field assistant discovered an adult male bluebird feeding young at another male’s nest in 1983, our field researchers have been exploring the behaviors of this fascinating species and collecting critical conservation information on factors influencing its survival and reproductive success in a long-term study supported by the National Science Foundation and the staff of the University of California’s Hastings Reserve.

A high-quality winter territory provides males with berries all season, and also with access to potential mates and a breeding territory the next spring. The unrelated immigrant females that join the group in the fall often pair up with stay-at-home sons in midwinter and breed with them in spring. Unlike males that do not live in family groups, sons that spend the winter with their parents on a “wealthy” territory do not have to endure the challenges of locating a mate on their own. In spring, when a son and his mate edge their way onto a nearby territory, his parents may help them carve out space; parents may appear to have their own, exclusive territories, but they often share an outer sliver of the home territory with their newly independent sons and “daughters-in-law.”

When a young male is unable to find a mate, helping his parents can be an excellent option. Parent Western Bluebirds with helpers on average fledge one more chick than parents without helpers, and these chicks share many genes with the helpers. Thanks to this process of “kin selection,” helping provides an unmated male the equivalent of having two-thirds of an offspring (because he shares about half of the genes with an average of three chicks), which is better in the long-run than producing no offspring at all. Remarkably, a few helpers may have a nest of their own, moving back and forth to feed young at both nests on the same days. Simultaneous breeding and helping is extraordinarily rare in cooperative breeders, suggesting that helper Western Bluebirds must be getting something out of helping—otherwise why would they work so hard to feed additional young, potentially at the expense of their own offspring?

If there are some benefits for male bluebirds remaining near their kin’s territory, there are also costs. If females are in short supply, relatives may compete for mates. Preliminary evidence suggests that helpers may lose in another less obvious way: DNA fingerprinting of the entire population over several years indicates that fathers occasionally sire offspring in their sons’ nests. Even when sons feed only the young in their own nest, they are sometimes effectively helping to raise their father’s nestling in place of their own! Fathers have an advantage over their sons in the genetic game of cuckoldry because, based on DNA evidence, sons
do not mate with their mothers. In contrast, fathers are completely unrelated to their sons’ mates and, at least sometimes, are the actual fathers of some of their supposed grandchildren. Do sons lose more than they gain by nesting near them? Might raising some chicks sired by their father be a better option than occasionally raising a chick sired by an unrelated neighbor? DNA-paternity data will help us learn whether living near their fathers provides more long-term costs or benefits for male bluebirds.

Theoretically, birds living in cooperative groups may spot predators and even help one another in dangerous circumstances. Unfortunately, predation events are rare and difficult to monitor under ordinary circumstances; it could take years to assemble enough data to understand whether critical life events provoke responses by kin. However, determining the consequences of such aid could help to unravel the mystery of kinship and its importance in a wide array of behavioral interactions, including when family members live on independent territories and appear to ignore each other.

This article originally appeared in BirdScope, the newsletter of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. It is reprinted here with permission.

Caitlin Stern is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Neurobiology and Behavior at Cornell University and recipient of a NABS research grant.

Janis Dickinson is Associate Professor of Natural Resources at Cornell and the Director of Citizen Science at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Elise Ferree is a postdoctoral associate at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Your Nestbox Data Can Help Conserve Birds

Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s NestWatch is a continentwide citizen-science project and nest-monitoring database, funded by the National Science Foundation and developed in collaboration with the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center. The project’s continentwide database tracks survival and reproductive success of a wide range of bird species, which can help scientists understand the causes of, and solutions for, population declines. Monitors of bluebird trails or other nests simply submit their nest records (nest-site location, habitat, species, and number of eggs, young, and fledglings) to the NestWatch online database, where their observations are compiled with those of other participants in a continentwide effort to better understand and manage the impacts of environmental change on bird populations. For more information on how you can participate, visit www.nestwatch.org
As a responsible bluebird landlord, I often find myself in a state of worry over the potential harm that can befall a bluebird or Tree Swallow nesting, mainly from the dreaded House Sparrow. Several years ago, after tragedy struck one of the nestboxes in my yard, I did some reading on one of my favorite web sites: www.sialis.org. Listed as a useful tool in repelling sparrows was something called a “sparrow spooker”. The spooker, it seems, is a device made from dowel rods with attached streamers that move in the breeze and scare or “spook” House Sparrows, causing them to avoid the nestbox. A spooker can either be ordered from a listed supplier or made following plans provided on the sialis web site.

I monitor more than 30 nestboxes in several different locations and decided it would be convenient to have a few of the spookers on hand. I placed an order from www.sparrowtraps.net and my spookers arrived within a week. They were a cinch to install as parts and directions are included with each kit. Each spooker even came with two mounting brackets so that the brackets could be installed on two separate nestboxes. The spooker could then be quickly installed on the nestbox in need. Due to a variation in roof design, I did have trouble fitting the spooker to one of my nestboxes, but help was only an e-mail away. Blaine Johnson, designer of the commercially made spooker, contacted me with possible solutions and the problem was promptly solved.

I must admit that I was afraid to place much confidence in the spooker idea but, much to my relief and delight, the device works wonders! In the four years I have been using sparrow spookers to protect my nestboxes, I have only lost one bluebird nestling to House Sparrow attack. Two summers ago, the last little female in a nesting of six was severely injured by a male House Sparrow before she could fledge with the rest of her siblings. I can only suppose that the excitement of fledging day caused the House Sparrow to overcome his fear of the spooker’s streamers.

Many fellow bluebirders believe profoundly in installing a sparrow spooker to their bluebird nestboxes as a matter of course. However, the following suggestions should be adhered to for best results:

- A sparrow spooker should be installed only after the host bird nest has its first egg. Once an egg is laid, the nesting birds are more strongly bonded to the nestbox and are less likely to abandon their nest. The nestbox should be observed after the spooker is installed to be certain that the nesting pair accepts the change and enters the nestbox. This can take several minutes to more than an hour. If the change is not accepted, the spooker should be removed. Repeat attempts may be made until the change is accepted.
- Streamers should be adjusted to hang so that ends brush the top of the nestbox as close to the entrance hole as possible. It sometimes helps to clip the streamers together and release a few at a time if the nesting pair is having trouble accepting the spooker.
- Nestboxes should be checked after storms or high winds to be certain that they are still correctly positioned to protect the nesting birds.
- Spookers should be removed as soon as fledging occurs so that House Sparrows do not become desensitized to them. Spookers should never be permanently installed on a nestbox for this reason.
I have had occasion to observe many bluebirds as they adjust to having this protective device installed on their homes. In my experience, the female bluebird is the first to overcome her fear and she is almost always the first to return to the nest. I have even seen bluebirds sit on the dowels and attempt to peck the streamers off!

This past nesting season, nature photographer Steve Ferendo was visiting Fountain Rock Park in Frederick County where I monitor several nestboxes. He took the accompanying photos of a nestbox which had just had a spooker installed. It took the female bluebird about 30 minutes to work up her courage but she finally entered the box and resumed nesting.

I believe in actively controlling the House Sparrow population that tries to use any of the nestboxes on my trails and I do trap regularly. However, there are times when it is impossible to keep a constant vigil on a specific nestbox and it is comforting to know that the sparrow spooker is on duty. This device does not remove the responsibility for other measures of House Sparrow control but is a worthwhile tool in helping to protect the precious contents of a nestbox.

Bluebirds can also be “spooked” by a sparrow spooker and need time to adjust. Photo by Steve Ferendo.

A male bluebird overcomes his fear of the spooker and accepts the change. When a spooker is added to a nestbox, the box should be monitored to be certain the change is accepted by nesting birds. If birds do not re-enter the box within a reasonable amount of time, spooker should be removed. Photo by Steve Ferendo.

Kathy Kremnitzer serves as secretary for the Maryland Bluebird Society. She is also editor of the society’s newsletter, Bluebird Chatter, and serves MBS as coordinator for Frederick and Washington Counties. She and her husband live in Knoxville, Maryland in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. She monitors 32 nestboxes throughout Frederick and Washington Counties. When she’s not busy with bluebirds, she loves to garden, crochet, read and take walks with her husband, Dan, and her Scottie, Sam.

This article originally appeared in Bluebird Chatter. It is reprinted here with permission.
Handling Bluebird Eggs
Linda Ruth

Many disease-producing bacteria can penetrate the intact egg, causing poor hatch ability or reduced chick survival. Among these are *Salmonella* and *E. coli*. This has been extensively studied in poultry because eggs contaminated in this way can be a source of illness in humans when the eggs are eaten without proper cooking. It has also been studied in endangered species such as Whooping Cranes, because each egg is so precious. In commercial poultry production, incubators are routinely fumigated with disinfectants between batches, and eggs are dipped in disinfectant solution prior to incubation to reduce bacterial contamination of the shell surface. Sterile surgeon’s gloves are recommended for handling valuable eggs.

Another cause of embryo damage is rough handling of the egg. Eggs must be turned frequently during incubation, but the movement must be gentle to avoid tearing the membranes which attach the embryo to the shell. Eggs should never be turned over 180 degrees all at once. As a matter of fact, shaking or “addling” an egg is a method of killing an embryo without damaging the egg. The parent bird will continue to incubate the non-viable eggs for the normal incubation period, or sometimes even longer (this is sometimes done as a method of controlling the population of nuisance birds).

Eggs should not be handled at all, if possible. If handling is necessary, disposable painter’s gloves should be worn, and changed between nests. This precaution not only protects the eggs, but also protects your own health. We all know what part of the bird an egg comes from, and bacteria on the shell surface can also be transmitted to you. Although this isn’t likely to cause illness in healthy people, bacteria from eggs can cause serious problems in people who have impaired immune systems as a result of chemotherapy, transplant rejection drugs, HIV/AIDS, or other chronic illnesses.

Bird embryos obtain all their oxygen through the porous eggshell, so anything which prevents the free flow of air into the egg may be harmful to the developing chick. However, it is not a good idea to try to clean a soiled egg or remove anything which may be stuck to the shell, such as a piece of shell from a broken egg. Bacteria on the surface are much more likely to pass through the shell if it is wet, so trying to rinse any foreign material away will make matters worse. Eggs are so fragile that it is more likely that you will harm the egg by handling it than by leaving it alone.

Since eggs are so fragile, I wouldn’t try to remove anything stuck to the shell, such as part of another shell, because it is more likely that you will harm the egg by handling it than by leaving it alone. Bacteria on the surface are much more likely to pass through the shell if it is wet, so trying to rinse the stuck shell away will make matters worse. Besides, if the obstruction were large enough to harm the chick, the damage would have already been done by the time you discovered the problem.

As they say in medicine—first, do no harm.

Linda Ruth is a retired veterinarian, a lifelong naturalist, and an amateur wildlife photographer. She lives in Coventry, Connecticut with her husband, David, a Labrador retriever named “Marley”, a goat, a sheep, and 16 birds. She put up her first bluebird box in 2005. A few weeks later, the bluebird in the photo at right made himself at home in the new box, and she was hooked for life.

This article originally appeared in a slightly different form on Bluebird-L, the e-mail discussion group that is a service of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and NABS. It was reprinted in Bayou Bluebird Nest News, the newsletter of the Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society. It is reprinted here with permission.
32nd Annual North American Bluebird Society Conference
“Cavity Nesters Back to Basics”
Hosted by The Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society

ONE-DAY REGISTRATION $40*
FULL CONFERENCE: $60*

Plus the optional meals and tours
Advance Registration is required
Deadline for registration and tours:
July 31, 2010
*Register before May 15, 2010 and
save $10!

Complete conference schedule & registration forms are available online at: www.oebs.ca or www.nabluebirdsociety.org

Map of the Royal Botanical Gardens
For more information go to rbg.ca

OUR HOST HOTELS

The Visitors Inn Hotel
649 Main Street West (at Hwy 403)
Hamilton, Ontario L8S 1A2
(905) 529-6979 or toll free at 1-800-387-4620
www.visitorsinn.com

The Holiday Inn Burlington
3063 South Service Road
Burlington, Ontario L7N 3E9
(905) 639-4443 or toll free at 1-888-987-4888
www.hiburlington.ca

The Visitors Inn Hotel is conveniently located two miles southwest of the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington (where the conference is being held). Amenities can be viewed at www.visitorsinn.com or call 1-800-387-4620. A block of 30 rooms has been set aside at the corporate rate.

The Holiday Inn is conveniently located eight miles northeast of the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington (where the conference is being held). Amenities can be viewed at www.hiburlington.ca or call 1-888-987-4888. A block of 30 rooms has been set aside at the corporate rate.
Thursday, September 9th

3:00 pm - 9:00 pm  
Registration at RBG Centre

4:30 pm - 6:00 pm  
NABS Executive Meeting

4:00 pm - 7:30pm  
RBG Cafe Restaurant will be open

7:30 pm - 8:15 pm  
Bill Read  
History of the Eastern Bluebird in Ontario

Join Bill Read president and founder of the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society for an overview of the history of the Eastern Bluebird and its current status in Ontario. Results from the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas 2001-2005 will be examined along with recent trends in migration patterns. Overwintering of Eastern Bluebirds in Ontario and the states that border Lake Erie and Lake Ontario will also be examined. Current conservation projects underway in the province will be reviewed along with the possible effects of global warming on the future of bluebirds in Ontario.

Friday, September 10th

7:00 am - 10:00 pm  
Registration at RBG Centre

Friday Tours

Due to the transportation contracts, reservations must be made with your registration. We will endeavor to accommodate everyone on their trip choice. In the event that a trip must be cancelled or rescheduled due to lack of participants, an alternative trip or a refund will be offered. All trips leave from the RBG Centre main entrance. Moderate fitness is required for all Friday morning tours.

Cootes Paradise Fishway  
8:30 am – 11:00 am  $15 per person

Melissa Fuller, the aquatic Ecologist at the Royal Botanical Gardens, will demonstrate the function and operation of an innovative carp exclusion control integral to the restoration of Cootes Paradise Marsh. Expect to see both native and exotic fish species up close while appreciating the challenges and successes of our ongoing restoration efforts. Bus transportation is provided.

Botanical Tour of the RBG  
9:00 am – 11:15 am  $15 per person

Join Virginia Hildebrandt for a tour of the gardens. Early fall is an excellent time to visit the Royal Botanical Gardens. Visit Hendrie Park where vibrant annuals balance perennials as you approach the reflecting pool and numerous rose beds. Two long, mature arbores hold climbing roses, clematis, other vines and some espalied trees. There are also beds featuring ornamental grasses, native plants, medicinal plants, drought-tolerant plants as well as those grouped by Family and country of origin among mature trees. Over at the Rock Garden, select, mature conifers and deciduous trees are fed by a waterfall. Annuals are interspersed for a punch of colour among these trees and a number of ponds. It is all aesthetically pleasing and educational. A botanical guide will be provided. Bus transportation is provided between garden areas.

LaSalle Park Trumpeter Swan and Birding Tour  
9:00 am – 11:15 am  $15 per person

Join Beverly Kingdon and Bill Read for a trip to LaSalle Park on the north shore of Hamilton Harbour to view Trumpeter Swans and do some birding on the LaSalle Park trail. This area was first discovered by Sieur De LaSalle in 1669. As you walk along the trail you will be able to see the remaining shoreline of ancient Lake Iroquois created during the last ice age 12,000 years ago. The top of this trail gives a panoramic view of Hamilton Harbour. Large mature oaks and white pines are present in this remnant of Carolinian Forest. You could see as many as 10 warbler species along the trail. Over 200 Trumpeter Swans spend the winter here and there should be at least 10 – 15 swans present at this time. Beverly will discuss the reintroduction program and answer any questions you might have about swan biology and behaviour. Bus transportation is provided.
2:30 pm - 3:30 pm  Don Wills  Prothonotary Warbler

Don Wills is conservation director of OEBS, a member of the Prothonotary Warbler Recovery Team and recipient of a 2007 NABS Conservation Award. His many nestbox trails cover a large territory in Southern Ontario and have proved to be very successful. Don will discuss the methods he uses for not only bluebirds but also the large cavity nesters including ducks and owls. He will concentrate on the status of the critically endangered Prothonotary Warbler in Canada and explain what conservation efforts are in place to save this species.

2:30 pm - 3:30 pm  David Galbraith  Biodiversity

Join Dr. David Galbraith, Head of Science at Royal Botanical Gardens, for an informative talk on the biodiversity of RBG’s nature sanctuaries, among the richest areas in Canada for plants and wildlife. He will describe the many projects underway to study and protect these important habitats and the many species that call them home. RBG’s conservation program includes restoration ecology in both the terrestrial and wetlands portions of the nature sanctuaries, such as Project Paradise, one of North America’s largest wetland restoration projects. The United Nations has proclaimed 2010 as International Year of Biodiversity. The Cootes Paradise Fishway tour by Melissa Fuller on Friday morning is a complement to this talk.
3:45 pm - 4:45 pm
Members Forum

This session will give bluebirders an opportunity to show the various methods they use in being successful at fledging bluebirds. Anyone from across North America who is registered for the conference is invited to take part in this session. The type of nest box used, how you deal with predators, record keeping etc. will be of interest to others attending. This is always part of the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society AGM and gives members an opportunity to discuss their successes and failures. A strict time allotment will be used for those registering for this session. The time allotted to each person will be determined by the number registered. Pre-registration required.

Display Room
A room has been set aside for member displays. If you have a special nest box that you promote, bring it along and we will put it in the display room. Other items that you use while running your bluebird trail are also of interest and can be put in this room. Individual club material can also be added.

5:00 pm - 6:00 pm
NABS Affiliate Meeting

6:15 pm
Buffet Dinner RBG $30 per person
Cash bar available

Pepperwood Bread Basket
Mixed Green Salad with Vinaigrette
Greek Salad with Feta and Black Olives
Ratatouille
Beef Bourguignon with Mashed Potato
Fresh Fruit
Coffee & Tea

7:15 pm – 8:30 pm Sherry Linn
A British Columbia Perspective on Cavity Nesting Birds

Sherry Linn is a naturalist living in the south Okanagan Valley. She will discuss the status of Mountain and Western Bluebird conservation efforts throughout BC and ongoing nestbox and natural cavity monitoring for several bird species including owls, kestrels, and at least three others that are considered at risk. Work is currently being conducted on the BC Breeding Bird Atlas throughout the province and the goal in the South Okanagan is to confirm breeding of approximately 200 species! Join Sherry to find out how the birds and BC birders are taking to this challenge.

7:15 pm - 8:30 pm Elisabeth van Stam
Chimney Swifts

Chimney Swifts are a threatened species in Canada, and over the past 40 years have experienced an overall population decline of 95%. There are several suspected causes for this rapid and alarming decline, including a reduction in essential food and habitat resources. Bird Studies Canada has recently initiated Ontario SwiftWatch, a project that aims to identify important nest and roost sites, areas of concentration and occupancy, and trends in numbers over time; and will also facilitate the preparation of appropriate Chimney Swift recovery strategies.

Saturday, September 11th

7:00 am - 8:00 am
Continental Breakfast - included with registration

Vendors and exhibits and silent auction items all day

8:00 am -9:00 am
NABS Members Meeting

9:15 am -10:30 am Mark Nash
Birds of Prey

Join Mark Nash of the Canadian Peregrine Foundation for a live presentation on birds of prey. Mark will give us a description of the Peregrine Falcon in relation to other birds of prey and an overview of the present status of the Peregrine Falcon in Ontario and North America. The goal of the CPF is to raise awareness of environmental issues in general and to generate support for endangered species. A Peregrine Falcon, Barn Owl, Red-tailed Hawk and Merlin will be shown.
10:45 am - 11:45 am  John Tautin
Maintaining Purple Martin Populations Around the Great Lakes

Join John Tautin executive director of the Purple Martin Conservation Association in Erie, Pennsylvania for an informative talk on the status of the Purple Martin in North America. Recent population trends and results of provincial and state breeding bird atlases will be reviewed. John will also discuss proper management strategies for Purple Martin colonies. John will give us an idea of what the future holds in store for the species in North America and how we can help to increase Purple Martin numbers.

12:00 pm
Lunch  RBG $21 per person

Assorted Sandwiches & Wraps with a variety of fillings
Assorted Cookies
Assorted Soft Drinks
Coffee & Tea

1:30 pm - 2:30 pm  Bridget Stuchbury
Miraculous Migrants

Join Dr. Bridget Stuchbury for an informative and empowering presentation on songbird conservation. Dr. Stuchbury made worldwide headline news in February 2009 for her ground-breaking research using “geolocators” to track the amazing journey of purple martins and wood thrushes to their wintering grounds in Central and South America. In her talk, Dr. Stuchbury will reveal her latest geolocator results and talk about how tracking songbirds is essential for understanding the mysterious declines of many songbird species.

3:00 pm - 4:00 pm  Lyle Friesen
Wood Thrush

Dr. Lyle Friesen is a songbird biologist with the Canadian Wildlife Service. He heads a long-term research project in Waterloo Region looking at the impacts of urban development on wood thrushes and other forest birds. For the past four years, he has been using miniature digital cameras to monitor events at Wood Thrush nests. The results are illuminating and at times disconcerting. They show that for Wood Thrushes, and likely for other neotropical migrants too “it’s a jungle out there” whether on their wintering or breeding grounds.

4:00 pm - 5:00 pm
Pick up silent auction items

4:00 pm - 8:00 pm
Cash bar

6:00 pm
Dinner, awards etc

Pepperwood Bread Basket
Baby Field Greens with Vinaigrette
Choice of :
Chicken Supreme ($40 per person)
Grilled Striploin Steak ($45 per person)
Baked Atlantic Salmon ($45 per person)
(all served with roasted potato & vegetable medley)
Fruit Trifle
Coffee & Tea

7:30 pm  Beverly Kingdon
Trumpeter Swans

Join Beverly Kingdon for an informative talk on the life history and current status of the Trumpeter Swan in Ontario. Beverly is known affectionately throughout the province as the swan lady and is considered an authority on their behaviour. She holds a federal Science research license for the province of Ontario and can be seen most every day from November to March on the shores of Hamilton Harbour catching, banding, marking and monitoring migrating Trumpeter Swans. She works closely with biologist Harry Lumsden who was responsible for the re-introduction of Trumpeter Swans in Ontario. Beverly has established an overwintering program on the north shore of Hamilton Harbour which contains almost 30% of all the free flying Trumpeters in Ontario.
Sunday September 12th Tours

Due to the transportation contracts, reservations must be made with your registration. In the event that a trip must be cancelled or rescheduled due to lack of participants, a full refund will be made.

DEPARTURES: All bus departures are from the RBG Centre, Burlington, ON. Check in for boarding the bus is required 15 minutes prior to departure time. There are no refunds for late arrivals or no-shows. Tickets are not required; passenger names will be verified by manifest upon boarding the bus. Tours confirmed will be indicated on your conference confirmation notice once you are registered and paid.

WHAT TO WEAR: Please wear comfortable walking shoes and come dressed for the weather. Tours operate rain or shine.

Hawk Cliff Raptor Tour
8:00 am -4:00 pm
$45 per person (includes box lunch)

The Hawk cliff viewing area is located on the north shore of Lake Erie near Port Stanley. This site is about 70 miles from RBG and should take about 1 hour and 20 minutes each way. The peak Broad-winged Hawk flight occurs at this time. Over 100,000 Broad Wings have been seen on a single day at this location. Other birds that should be seen in good numbers are American Kestrel, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Harrier, Bald Eagle, Merlin and Osprey. You should also see good numbers of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and Monarch Butterflies migrating past this spot. This is also the weekend when the Hawk Cliff banders bring raptors over to the viewing area for the public to see. Bring a camera, hat, binoculars, drinks and a folding chair that can be put on the bus. A portable toilet is available at the site. See Hawk Cliff Foundation on the internet for more information.

Long Point Tour
8:00 am –4:00 pm
$45 per person (includes box lunch)

We will depart the RBG at 8:00am for one of the best birding spots in Southern Ontario and site of the oldest banding and bird observatory in North America. (The Long Point Bird Observatory was founded in 1960). This area has been declared a world biosphere reserve by the United Nations. You will visit the old cut banding station on long point and view fall migrants being banded. A wide variety of warblers and flycatchers can be seen at this time of year. Golden-winged, Blue-winged, Nashville, Magnolia, Cape May, Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue, Blackburnian, Bay-breasted, Chestnut-sided, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, Northern Waterthrush, Mourning, Hooded, Connecticut, Wilson’s, Canada and American Redstart are some of the warblers you may see at the banding station.

After visiting the banding station the bus will stop on the Causeway to look at a proposal by the Long Point Causeway Recovery Project to erect tunnels under the road to increase water flow between the marsh and the bay and prevent road kills of amphibians as they move between the two bodies of water. Our next stop will be to view some of the windmills that have been erected along the north shore of Lake Erie. The Erie Shores wind farm is one of the most advanced wind power development projects in Ontario. These windmills are 360 feet high. On our way from this stop we will visit Backus Woods, the largest acreage of undisturbed Carolinian forest in Ontario. On return to Burlington we will cross through the Six Nations reserve which figured prominently in the early history of both Ontario and New York. We will return to the RBG around 4pm

Niagara Peninsula Wine Tour
9:00 am –3:00 pm
$60 per person (includes lunch)

Join us for a tour of the Niagara Peninsula Wine district. Four wineries will be visited on this trip with a 12:30 lunch at the View Restaurant at the East Dell Estates Winery.

East Dell estates is located on the Niagara West wine route, perched atop the famous Beamsville Bench in the heart of Canada’s wine district, the Niagara Peninsula. The Niagara Peninsula is the largest wine producing area in Canada accounting for almost three quarters of Canada’s grape growing volume with approximately 11,000 acres of wine grapes in place. Situated at approximately N43° latitude, the growing season sunshine is comparable to the Langudeoc-Rousillon in France, south of both Burgundy and Bordeaux. Lunch is included with the fee.
32nd Annual North American Bluebird Society Conference
“Cavity Nesters Back to Basics”
September 9-12, 2010
Royal Botanical Gardens, Burlington, Ontario, Canada

Advance Registration is required. Deadline for registration and tours: July 31, 2010
Save $10 per person off the Conference Fee by registering before May 15, 2010.
Complete conference details and registration forms will be available in February 2010 at:
http://www.oeb.ca or http://www.nabluebirdsgociety.org

CANCELLATION POLICY: All cancellations must be made in writing. Changes of any type to existing reservations must be made no later than August 15, 2010. Refunds of Conference Registration Fees will be made less $10 per person cancellation fee and also less any amounts for which OEBS / NABS 2010 has become obligated.

REGISTRATION FORM

Indicate your name(s) as desired for your name badge for those registering on this form:

REGISTRANT #1

ADDRESS ____________________________________________________ CITY:___________________________________
PROV / STATE:______________________ POSTAL CODE / ZIP: ___________________
PHONE (DAY) (_____)_________________ (EVE) (_____)_________________ EMAIL: _______________________________ 

I would like to be recognized as: ☐ 1st time attendee ☐ NABS Board Member ☐ Attendee of 10+ Conferences 
☐ Former NABS Board member ☐ OEBS Board Member ☐ Current OEBS Member ☐ Other__________________________

REGISTRANT #2

ADDRESS ____________________________________________________ CITY:___________________________________
PROV / STATE:______________________ POSTAL CODE / ZIP: ___________________
PHONE (DAY) (_____)_________________ (EVE) (_____)_________________ EMAIL: _______________________________ 

I would like to be recognized as: ☐ 1st time attendee ☐ NABS Board Member ☐ Attendee of 10+ Conferences 
☐ Former NABS Board member ☐ OEBS Board Member ☐ Current OEBS Member ☐ Other__________________________

HOTEL RESERVATIONS: Can be made by calling the Visitors Inn or the Holiday Inn directly (credit card required) Group Code: NABS
Hotel ____________________ Date of Arrival _______________ # Nights: ______

If you would like to volunteer or donate an auction item, please indicate here:
Yes, I would like to donate an item for the auction.
Donor’s Name________________________________ Item________________________________ Value $__________________
I will bring or mail item   (circle one)

NOTE: Items may be received at the conference no later than Friday, September 10, 2010, or delivered to the OEBS registration desk at the RBG Centre no later than Friday, September 10, 2010, at 4 pm. Please contact Bill Read by email at info@billreadsbooks.com, or mail to 411 Mulligan Road Caledonia, Ontario, Canada N3W 2G9 , or by phone at 905 765 2117 for questions or more information.

Yes, I would like to volunteer for the conference:
Volunteer Name (s):________________________________ Date/Time available: _____________________________
Volunteer Assist experience / interests: ________________________________________________________________
A representative from OEBS will get in touch with you about volunteer opportunities. THANK YOU!

ANY SPECIAL NOTES TO CONFERENCE REGISTRAR:

REGISTRATION ON DAY OF EVENT(S): Walk-in registration is available for conference meetings/speakers and tours where spaces are still available. Advance reservations are required for all meals and tours.

REGISTRATION: at Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG)
THURSDAY September 9, 2010 3:00 pm - 9:00 pm, FRIDAY September 10, 2010 7:00 am -10:00 pm, Saturday September 11, 2010 7:00 am-12:00 pm

PLEASE ALSO COMPLETE THE REVERSE SIDE OF THIS REGISTRATION FORM
Please confirm the following for the registrants indicated on reverse side of this registration form:

**MEMBERS FORUM**
Friday September 10, 2010 3:45pm - 4:45pm

Please enter your name(s) and affiliate organization below to register for the Members Forum

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Affiliate Organization</th>
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**CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE**

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<th># People</th>
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<td>1 day only, please circle day attending - Thursday  Friday  Saturday  Sunday</td>
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<td>1-4 days, please circle days attending - Thursday  Friday  Saturday  Sunday</td>
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**NABS 2010 TOURS and MEALS**

**FRIDAY September 10, 2010 tours leave from RBG main entrance**

For Friday morning tours, please indicate your 1st and 2nd choice by circling:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tour</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Rate</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cootes Paradise Fishway Tour</td>
<td>8:30 am - 11:00 am</td>
<td>$15</td>
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<td>Botanical Tour of the RBG</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lasalle Park Trumpeter Swan Tour</td>
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<td>$15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boat Tour of Hamilton Harbour with lunch</td>
<td>12:00 pm - 2:00 pm</td>
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<td>Buffet Lunch at RBG</td>
<td>12:00 pm - 2:00 pm</td>
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**SATURDAY September 11, 2010**

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<tr>
<th>Meal</th>
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**SUNDAY September 12, 2010**

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**TOTAL PAYMENT (US or CAN CURRENCY ONLY PLEASE)**

ENCLOSED IS OUR PAYMENT OF $___________ FOR ____ PERSON(S)

Deduct $10 pp if registering before May 15, 2010

- Payment enclosed by cheque or money order
- Please charge the following credit card in the amount of $__________ Card Type (please circle): VISA  MASTERCARD
  
  Card Number: _________________________ Exp. Date ____________
  
  Name of Card Holder (as it appears on card): ________________________________________________
  
  Cardholder billing address: __________________________________________________________________

**PAYMENT TERMS:** Full payment is due at the time of reservation. Please make payable to the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society and mail with the reservation form enclosed. Please send registration and payment to: OEBS (Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society), c/o Tom Kott, 9370 North Chippewa Rd, RR # 3 Caistor Centre, ON, Canada. L0R 1E0. Reservations will not be accepted without payment. We will send you a confirmation within 3 weeks.

**DISCLAIMER:** The conference attendee is reminded that by embarking on his / her travel, the attendee voluntarily assumes all risks involved in such travel, whether expected or unexpected. You are hereby warned of such risks and advised to obtain appropriate insurance coverage against them. By making a deposit for the conference, tours or boat cruise, the attendee acknowledges and accepts these responsibilities, terms and conditions outlined herein. The OEBS or NABS shall not be held responsible for lost or stolen items.

I/We have reviewed the flyer including the payment, cancellation, and responsibility terms regarding the 32nd Annual North American Bluebird Society Conference for September 9-12, 2010 in Burlington ON, Canada.

**TODAY’S DATE:_________________________**

**FOR OEBS USE ONLY: DATE RECEIVED:______________**

Please Sign: **REGISTRANT #1__________________** **REGISTRANT #2______________**

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR REGISTRATION!**

**CONTACT INFORMATION:**

**Conference Registrar:** Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society
**Vice-President:** Tom Kott (905 957 3208)
**Email:** amorak@sympatico.ca

**President:** Bill Read (519 620 0744)
**Email:** info@billreadsbooks.com

**PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO:**

Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society
c/o Tom Kott
9370 North Chippewa Rd, RR # 3
Caistor Centre, Ontario, Canada. L0R 1E0
High winds, severe thunderstorms, hail, and tornadoes coming out of a late January storm or a REALLY low pressure system.

Severe storms knock down trees with natural cavities but as Mt. Pleasant, Texas prepares to build a high-speed highway loop around our city the highway construction company sent a Wildlife Biologist to make sure I have ALL of the nestboxes DOWN before nesting season THIS YEAR. It seems even a couple of nestboxes that are being “actively monitored” could put the whole mega millions-construction project on hold...until after the current nesting season.

They are converting a 20 foot wide 40 MPH county road into a 36 foot wide paved 70 MPH highway. The old 40 feet of right of way between the tree-lined fences will be bulldozed out to 150 feet on the straight sections, then wider in the high-speed corners.

Power lines, water, natural gas, and fiber optic cables will be installed off the right-of-way where they will clear another 50 to 100 feet of trees and/or woods for utility construction.

Right now my nestboxes are located on the east sides of electric power poles that are only eight feet off of the pavement of the county roads. I can open the door of my truck, take three steps, and I can monitor my nestboxes right now in a matter of seconds and zip down the road to the next nestbox.

Some Texans already drive 70 MPH on the narrow county roads making nestbox checking along roadsides HAZARDOUS at times. One road over, on another 70 MPH roadway, the drivers often are stopped while cruising at 100 MPH. In the past I have had to abandon these types of new road construction areas just due to dangerous conditions of getting on and off the roads as I monitor nestboxes. Especially since this loop is designed as a high speed, heavy truck by-pass route.

Anyway, I took down all of the nestboxes leaving up four with active southern flying squirrels in them. One Sunday afternoon I drove just a small section of this bluebird trail and was surprised to see pair after pair of bluebirds sitting along the fences RIGHT at the poles where their nestboxes have been up. According to my records three of the nestboxes I took down have been up since the late 1970s. Some were from the 1980s but most of these boxes were replaced from 1998 to 2002. At one of the poles where I have had nesting pairs of bluebirds for about 15 years in a row there was a pair of bluebirds sitting on a fence post within three feet of where their nestbox has ALWAYS been. It would appear that even after a month they are still waiting on their nestbox to re-appear!

Road construction along this route will take two to four years with multiple highway overpasses and major bridges constructed over creek and floodplains. After the road reopens they say they will install new posts at the new fence lines where I can re-install nestboxes. They have photographed EVERY nestbox from three different directions and have plotted them with GPS and have the locations of ALL nestboxes plotted on current satellite view maps....

They “might” need the nestbox records that I normally carry as I check these boxes. These date back to 1992, showing the species that have used each nestbox. They “might” need to follow up years from now to see what species are using the replacement nestboxes.

I tried to explain that if you bulldoze all of the trees and food sources then you won’t have the chickadees, titmice, flying squirrels, and bluebirds in the same locations as you have currently. This new highway construction is a WHOLE lot more damaging and far more permanent than the destruction caused by a tornado!

For the next few years I should be able to hear the clickety clack of bulldozers building this “loop” as I work in my back yard.... I wonder what the bluebirds thought when they found their homes had been stolen? What will they find down inside of the natural cavities along these roads as the trees are pushed over and burned?

Keith Kridler is co-founder of the Texas Bluebird Society and co-author of The Bluebird Monitor’s Guide. He lives in Mt. Pleasant, Texas.

This message originally appeared on the Bluebird-L e-mail list, a service of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and NABS. For more information, visit www.birds.cornell.edu/bluebirds/joinbblist.html
The discussions about what type of nest box is better are endless. We all have our preferences, but the bottom line should always be: what is best for the bluebirds! Good healthy objective arguments often result in a better product for our blues. I only have to cite the Bauldry box and the Hill Lake box as examples. They were, as we all know, popular boxes at one time, but better boxes followed. The same process has allowed us to come up with better mounting systems, better nest box location/habitat, etc.

There have always been different ideas about the various options when it comes to nest box doors. Top opening, side opening, or front opening boxes? Let’s eliminate the top-opening box. The disadvantages to that are fairly obvious. Top-opening boxes require you to either mount the box low enough to enable the monitor to look down into it—which makes it easier for a hungry cat or raccoon to jump onto it—or, unless you happen to be 6’ 5” or more, you’ll need a stepstool to peer down into it! (Normal box height on all my trails is around 5 feet.) The other major disadvantage is the difficulty in cleaning a top-opener, as opposed to the ease with which you can clean and sweep out a side- or front-opening box.

But let’s look at the differences between the side opening box vs. the front opening box. In 2008, BRAW used cedar side-opening boxes, which opened from the top. A screw was used to pull the side open. In 2009, we used the side-opening box, but they were made from pine, and they swung open from the bottom.

Can we do better? In my opinion, the answer is YES. And last Spring was for me a reminder of why front opening boxes are the way to go, without question. Over at a brand new bluebird trail at Edgewood Golf Course in Big Bend, a few miles from my house, we were expecting a good first year as far as bluebirds are concerned. But, as in many other areas, House Sparrows are a very big problem. On April 24th, thanks to aggressive House Sparrows, I found one dead bluebird and one dead Tree Swallow, plus two almost dead Tree Swallows, in boxes on the golf course, mainly those closer to the clubhouse and maintenance buildings. At box #15, I actually saw feathers flying—in the cracks of the box—which meant only one thing… a House Sparrow was in the process of killing either a bluebird or a Tree Swallow. I put a plastic bag over the box and opened it. Out flew a House Sparrow, which I destroyed, and sitting at the base of the box was another Tree Swallow. He survived, but only because I happened to be there at the right time. The answer on this golf course was to put in the popular Van Ert traps, which, in my opinion, are the best on the market.

And here’s the rub. Have you ever tried to install Van Ert traps, which mount to the front of the box, right below the entrance, with side-opening boxes? It is no easy procedure. My hand fills the cavity almost completely, and you have to use a stubby Phillips screwdriver and do your best to awkwardly turn it to tighten the two screws. And the “new” pine boxes with side-opening doors that swing out from the bottom are even harder to maneuver!!! The door in the open position is so far down in the box that it is almost impossible to put in the Van Ert trap. Now multiply this several times, as I set up many boxes with this trap. This was NO fun... After I finally got done with this, I decided it was time to write about...
I have built ONLY front-opening boxes. A big reason is the ease with which you can quickly install these traps. But, that’s not the only reason. With a front-opening box, you do not need an extra screw on the side of the box, the sole purpose of which is to merely OPEN the box! The other type of side-opening box that we are using opens from the bottom. Again, if you want to peer inside a box with the least amount of disturbance, wouldn’t you want to open the box from the top? Opening a box from the bottom means that you have to open the door all the way before you can see inside the box.

I heard one argument in favor of the side-opening box that went something like this: “Yeah, but with a front-opening box, if there is a bird inside the box, I don’t want it to fly into my face when I open it!” Sorry, folks, but just doesn’t happen! Why? Because you stand a step to the side while you are opening the box. Besides, the bird inside could also fly at you with a side-opening box!

Building the front-opening boxes is just as easy as building the side-opening boxes. Just change the dimensions for the front and sides. The overall cavity size is identical.

It is my hope that we can look at these ideas objectively, and if there is merit to them—and I believe there is—then perhaps it is time to move in that direction in the future.

Bob Tamm is a bluebirding enthusiast who is a coordinator for bluebirding activities in southeast Wisconsin, where he works with BRAW (Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin) in creating new trails in the southern part of the state, where he holds yearly seminars/field trips in different venues. For several years he has also enjoyed monitoring or helping to monitor many trails in various southeast Wisconsin counties.

From the Grants and Awards Committees

Anne Sturm

Greetings from Anne Sturm and the rest of the Grants and Awards Committees: Greg Beavers, Stan Fisher, Sherry Linn, David Smith, and Dan Sparks. We are writing to ask your help in submitting nominations for our annual awards, which recognize individuals and groups who have made major contributions to bluebird conservation. It would be most helpful if you would visit the NABS website (www.nabluebirdsociety.org) and click on the Award Nomination link. There you will get a good idea of all the award classifications and what good deeds individuals and businesses have done to merit this special recognition. Then think about your own bluebird organization or fellow bluebird conservationists. If you feel there is someone you would like to nominate, just fill out the form and send it along by June 30th. Don’t worry if you miss this year’s deadline, as we look forward to recognizing outstanding bluebird work annually.

We also would like your help in spreading the word that NABS is awarding grants for worthy proposals to study bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting birds. We are receiving grant applications twice a year—June 1 and December 1. The grants are reviewed by the Grants Committee and awards are made by August 1 and February 1, respectively. Please encourage interested individuals to write me at annets1@aol.com. Thanks so much for your time and consideration.
Bringing Back America’s Parrot
Scott W. Gillihan

Did you know that the U.S. had a native cavity-nesting parrot as recently as 15 years ago? The Thick-billed Parrot was a resident of southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico. The only other parrot native to the United States was the Carolina Parakeet, which has been extinct since 1918. The Thick-billed Parrot disappeared from the United States by the 1930s but was reintroduced in the 1980s and 1990s. Unfortunately, those reintroductions failed and the species is now found only in Mexico. Populations there have been declining over the past century, and there are probably only a few thousand birds left in the wild.

The parrot and its ties with Mexico were mulled over in an essay by naturalist Aldo Leopold, “The Thick-Billed Parrot of Chihuahua,” which was later included in his classic, “A Sand County Almanac.” Leopold encountered the parrot while in the Sierra Madre Occidental in 1936, and felt that it so defined the landscape that he declared the species to be the ecological spirit, or essential essence, of the region.

Like other members of the family Psittacidae, the Thick-billed Parrot is highly social, and forages in noisy flocks. Its ear-splitting vocalizations, which can be heard up to a mile away, have been described as resembling human laughter. But unlike your typical tropical parrot, this species lives in dry, high-elevation conifer forests, where it enjoys a diet of pine seeds and acorns, and nests in pine trees.

The thick-bill’s sharply curved beak is suited for extracting seeds from pine cones, but it’s ill-suited for excavating nest cavities. For that, the birds rely on woodpeckers. Historically, the Imperial Woodpecker probably provided many of the parrots’ cavities in Mexico. This spectacular, two-foot long woodpecker is (or was) the largest woodpecker in the world. It was never very common and, sadly, it is probably now extinct. Cavities made by Northern Flickers provide most of the parrots’ housing now.

The thick-bill’s decline is related to hunting, trapping for the pet trade, and the logging of pine forests in the Sierra Madre Occidental of western Mexico and southeastern Arizona. This mountain range was once thickly forested with conifers but logging has removed many of the large trees that provide nesting cavities for the parrots. Adult birds may not be able to breed simply because they cannot find a place to nest. Less than 1% of the old-growth forest remains intact in the Sierra Madre Occidental.

In recent years, government agencies and conservation organizations in the U.S. and Mexico have cooperated to boost populations of the species in Mexico. The projects focus on two objectives: working with local landowners to set aside protected reserves of critical old-growth habitat, and installing nestboxes to compensate for the shortage of natural nest cavities.

These pigeon-sized birds need a big nestbox. The boxes measure 80 cm tall by 40 cm wide and deep (about 32 x 16 x 16 inches). The boxes are mounted directly onto pine or aspen trees at a height of 10–15 meters (33–50 feet). Typically, the parrots ignore the
boxes in the first year, but start accepting them in the second year, and have successfully fledged young from them. This is encouraging news for the species’ future in Mexico.

But what of the U.S.? Thick-billed Parrots were reintroduced to Arizona from 1986 to 1993. Although birds in captivity may live more than 30 years, life is much harsher in the wild. Many of the introduced birds died within the first two months of their release, although some pairs were able to survive longer and successfully breed. Some of the 88 birds released persisted until at least 1995, but no birds remain today. Although most of the released birds had been captured in the wild in Mexico, about a fourth were captive-bred birds. One of the reasons the reintroduction failed was because these captive-bred parrots were unable to learn how to avoid the numerous predators in the area—in particular, Northern Goshawks and Red-tailed Hawks. Poor pine cone crops (a result of drought) and an apparent inability of the parrots to recognize suitable habitat for finding food also contributed to the reintroduction failures.

Still, researchers learned much from those reintroductions. As a result, future prospects for a successful reintroduction are good. Any such efforts will undoubtedly involve only wild-caught birds, which will be released into areas with substantial pine cone crops. The releases will probably occur during the spring, when raptors are busy with incubation and require less food. And because of the parrot’s habit of flocking while foraging (in part, for protection from predators), sufficient numbers of birds will be released to form viable social groups.

One factor in the parrots’ favor is that, unlike Mexico, southeast Arizona has little commercial logging, and much suitable habitat remains. If the Mexican population continues to grow, it may become possible to relocate some of those wild birds into their former haunts in Arizona. Establishing a breeding population there would improve the species’ prospects for survival over the long term. Hopefully, the day will come when the laughing call of America’s only cavity-nesting parrot is once again heard in the Southwest.

Given the precarious conservation status of the species and its charismatic nature, it’s no surprise that a lot of support has been marshalled on its behalf. Organizations that have played a role in conservation efforts over the years include the American Bird Conservancy (which was the source of much of the information in this article), Arizona Game & Fish Department, Pronatura Noreste, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, USDA Forest Service, The Wildlands Project, Wildlife Trust, World Bird Sanctuary, and World Parrot Trust.

Acknowledgments: I am very grateful to all who provided information and photos: Dr. James Gilardi and Steve Milpacher of the World Parrot Trust; you can learn more and help support their conservation efforts by visiting www.parrots.org/thickbills. Dr. David Wiedenfeld of the American Bird Conservancy (www.abcbirds.org), which works with the Mexican conservation group Pronatura Noreste. Tom Wood of the Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory (SABO); if you’re interested in seeing the parrots, SABO offers guided trips to Mexico—see their website for more information (www.sabo.org).
Remembering Bud Taylor
Scott W. Gillihan

Describing a “typical” bluebird enthusiast probably isn’t possible. Like any sizable collection of people, the bluebird community has its share of movers, shakers, dreamers, eccentrics, introverts, extroverts, cranks, and saints—in other words, a complete cross-section of humanity. Still, amidst all of this diversity, some individuals stand out from the crowd.

One look at Bud Taylor’s decorated nestboxes will confirm that he was unique. While some bluebirders fret about the color of the box, Bud had no qualms about embellishing his boxes with elaborate designs. The bluebirds didn’t seem to mind—some years his 200+ boxes produced more than 2,000 bluebirds. Bud probably raised more bluebirds than anyone else in Missouri.

Bud’s nestboxes were located on his brother-in-law’s 2600-acre Roaring Spring Ranch near St. Louis. In the 15 years that Bud managed his boxes, he raised more than 10,000 bluebirds, plus hundreds of chickadees and swallows.

Bud embraced his hobby with such enthusiasm that he took to introducing himself as “Buddy Bluebird” after his grandkids started calling him by that name.

One might suppose that a stint in the U.S. Marine Corps would harden a man’s demeanor and outlook on life. Especially if that time included the fierce fighting in the South Pacific during World War II. Bud Taylor’s time in the Marines did, indeed, color his outlook on life—it made it rosy. At one point, while pinned down by enemy sniper fire and certain of his impending death, Bud made God an offer: lead me to safety, and I will never complain about anything again. The response came in the form of an amphibious vehicle, which rescued Bud and his companions.

True to his word, Bud adopted an optimistic, enthusiastic outlook on life. In the words of an old family friend, “Bud had a curiosity and excitement about life that was contagious, and he always made the people around him feel good. In the early ‘60s, when most of our parents were sort of buttoned up, he’d be rushing around his backyard making us cotton candy and snow cones, and having more fun than anyone.”

Bud’s background was cooking, so soon after the war he founded the Chuck-A-Burger chain of restaurants in the St. Louis area. He was an avid outdoorsman, with a fondness for fast boats and riding his ATV. He and Ginny, his wife of 68 years, raised four boys.

Bud passed from this Earth last November. As with so many dedicated bluebirders, he leaves a legacy of thousands of bluebirds. In addition, there is this comment from an anonymous signer of Bud’s memorial guest book: “Bud touched the lives of so very many. We will all miss him very much. We are all better human beings for having known him... and what a tremendous legacy that is!”

Bud’s son Doug provided the photos and information.
First Bluebirds

A friend gave them a Bluebird book
And ever since they have been hooked.
First a plan and then a house
Put together by a helpful spouse.

Much to read and then to see.
What to believe? Not on a tree?
Face it North, South, East, or West?
Which direction is the best?

The house and post are up at last,
Facing inward toward lawn’s grass.
And soon the project meets the test,
A pair of Bluebirds build a nest!

And then there are eggs of blue,
Nature’s promise coming true.
Following this the babies hatch,
Nestled deep in a cup of thatch.

Open mouths begin to speak,
Calling for food with hungry beaks.
The birders watch and yearn to know
More about how Bluebirds grow.

They see the young fly from the nest
And think the parents now can rest.
But soon they are amazed to see
A second nest has come to be!

And now they are truly hooked,
Buying equipment and more books.
Next year there will be more houses,
Put together by helpful spouses.

Bluebird Bob Walshaw
Coweta, Oklahoma
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"Feeding live insects to the wild birds in my yard has helped me build a special bond with individual birds."

—Julie Zickefoose
Attending NABS 2010 in Canada will require some advance planning if you live in the United States—returning to the U.S. is not as easy as it once was. Starting in June 2009, U.S. citizens returning home from Canada (or Mexico, the Caribbean, or Bermuda), by land or sea, are required to present one of these travel documents:

- **U.S. Passport** – This is an internationally recognized travel document that verifies a person’s identity and nationality. It is accepted for travel by air, land and sea.
- **U.S. Passport Card** – This is a new, limited-use travel document that fits in your wallet and costs less than a U.S. Passport. It is only valid for travel by land and sea.
- **Enhanced Driver’s License (EDL)** – Several states and Canadian provinces are issuing this driver’s license or identification document that denotes identity and citizenship. It is specifically designed for cross-border travel into the U.S. by land or sea.
- **Trusted Traveler Program Cards** – NEXUS, SENTRI, or FAST enrollment cards can speed your entry into the U.S. and are issued only to pre-approved, low-risk travelers. The cards are valid for use by land or sea; the NEXUS card can be used in airports with a NEXUS kiosk.

For more information, including information on re-entry by special groups (children, Native Americans, U.S. Lawful Permanent Residents, and U.S. military), visit [www.GetYouHome.gov](http://www.GetYouHome.gov) or contact your travel agent or U.S. Customs and Border Protection office. Please be ready to join us in Ontario in September 2010!
**Research Review**

*A Summary of Recent Scientific Research on Bluebirds and Other Cavity Nesters*

Scott W. Gillihan

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**Do Eastern Bluebirds lay each egg in a clutch at the same time on consecutive days?**

Like many songbirds, bluebirds lay one egg per day, in the early morning. But beyond that, very little is known about the timing of egg laying. Does a female lay each egg in a clutch at, say, precisely 7:30 each morning for four or five consecutive days? The authors of this study examined videotapes of Eastern Bluebird nests (“nest cams”) to find out when eggs are laid and how long the interval is between eggs.

Bluebird females spend surprisingly little time on the nest during the egg-laying period — they’re on the nest for an average of 33 minutes while they lay each egg, but then are off the nest much of the rest of the day. These absences allowed the researchers to easily keep track of the number of eggs in the nest and the approximate time of laying.

What they found was that, for their nests (which were in Kentucky and Maryland), all eggs in a clutch except the last one were laid at about 8:00 a.m. (about two hours after sunrise). However, the final egg in the clutch was always laid later — about 10:00 a.m. In other words, the last egg took about two hours longer to be laid than each of the previous eggs in the clutch.

Why would the last egg take longer? It could be because the female is having a hard time finding enough nutrients, so the egg is slower to develop. However, the most likely cause is hormonal changes, which are causing the ovary to start regressing as the last egg is moving along the oviduct, thereby impeding the egg’s formation. Nature shuts down the female’s egg-production system so she can focus on incubating her clutch and successfully raising the young.


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**Do bright blue males produce more offspring?**

We love bluebirds in no small part because of their brilliant coloration. Male Mountain Bluebirds, with their sky blue backs and powder blue fronts, could win any contest for most handsome bird. But do their female counterparts feel the same way about them? Or do all males look pretty much the same to females? The authors of this study wanted to see if males with brighter coloration were luckier in love than their duller competitors.

Mountain Bluebirds are monogamous — a mated pair stays together for the duration of the nesting period. However, both males and females will engage in what is called “extra-pair mating”, i.e., they fool around with the neighbors. A previous study using DNA analysis found that almost ¾ of all Mountain Bluebird broods contained at least one offspring fathered by a male other than the female’s mate. Overall, 36% of all offspring were fathered by a male other than the female’s mate.

Susan Balenger and her colleagues explored the relationship between the brightness of a male’s plumage and his breeding success. They used a spectrometer to measure the brightness of male rump feathers, and DNA analysis of blood samples from nestlings to determine paternity.

What they found was that brighter males sired more offspring overall than did duller males — both more young with their own mate and with other males’ mates. Possible reasons for this higher success rate: The brighter males were slightly larger (as measured by wing length), so they may be more attractive to females, or they may be able to bully duller (i.e., smaller) males — in effect, kicking sand in the face of the smaller males and then running off with the defeated male’s mate for a “date”.


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**Do Tree Swallows add feathers to their nests for insulation or to control parasites?**

Anyone who has had Tree Swallows in their nestboxes knows the species’ fondness for feathering its nest. Previous research had found that, when feathers are removed from swallow nests, the nests have more parasites (blowflies, fleas, mites, etc.). This...
suggests that the feathers might somehow act as a parasite deterrent. However, other research found no difference in parasites between feathered and unfeathered nests. Also, it was known that removing feathers from swallow nests results in nestlings that grow more slowly and have lower rates of survival. Sarah Stephenson and her colleagues wanted to test the feather effect more thoroughly.

They devised an experiment that involved three groups of nests: nests with all feathers removed, nests with all feathers removed and an insecticide applied (one with low toxicity to birds), and nests that were not manipulated in any way.

They started removing feathers from the nests on the day that all chicks had hatched. Because the adults continued to bring feathers to the nests, the researchers removed feathers again on the fourth day and the eighth day after hatching. They also weighed each nestling and measured their wing length. After the young had fledged, the nests were removed and taken back to the lab to count the number of parasites.

The result? Nestlings in the unmanipulated nests (i.e., nests with feathers) were slightly larger, although there was no difference in the number of chicks fledged or their length of stay in the nest before fledging. Surprisingly, the number of parasites was about the same in all three groups of nests—neither the removal of feathers nor the application of an insecticide affected the parasite populations. These findings suggest that feathers serve primarily as extra insulation, to keep the nestlings warm, which allows them to grow larger.

A similar study in the southern end of South America, in the harsh climate of Patagonia, found that the closely related Chilean Swallow feathers its nest in response to temperature: the colder it gets, the more feathers it adds. This strongly suggests that the feathers play a role in insulation of swallow nests.


Are American Kestrel populations declining? Why?
Like many cavity-nesting species, American Kestrels readily accept nestboxes. And because the large tree cavities this species needs are often in short supply, nestboxes have become an important tool in kestrel conservation. However, in spite of the nestboxes, kestrel populations may be declining. Reasons for the decline may include exposure to West Nile Virus, predation by Cooper’s Hawks, and loss of habitat. John Smallwood and his colleagues looked at the evidence for population declines and the possible causes.

Population trends: After examining data from the Breeding Bird Survey (North America’s longest-running bird count) and nestbox data (from more than 600 nestboxes across North America), the results were clear: American Kestrel populations are declining, and have been since at least 1984.

West Nile Virus: This disease has been found in more than 250 species of North American birds, including kestrels. However, it did not appear here until 1999, when the kestrel declines were already well under way, so it cannot possibly be the cause.

Cooper’s Hawks: These birds are known to prey upon kestrels; if Cooper’s Hawks are indeed responsible for the kestrel decline, then we would expect the Cooper’s Hawk populations to be increasing while the kestrel populations were decreasing. But BBS and Christmas Bird Count data for both species show no such trend. Thus, it does not appear that Cooper’s Hawks are responsible for the decline in kestrels.

Habitat: For most species, the primary cause of population declines is the loss or degradation of habitat. Since habitat loss is difficult to measure at a continental scale, Smallwood and his associates looked at habitat quality on their nestbox trails. For the most part, they found little or no change over the the last 10-15 years. The habitat still appears to be suitable, but the nestboxes are going empty because there just aren’t enough kestrels around to use them.

The authors suspect that habitat changes outside of their nestbox study areas are responsible for the declines in kestrel populations, i.e., changes on the wintering grounds or along the migration routes.

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5720 – 59 Ave
Olds, AB T4H 1K3 - CANADA
Ph: 403-556-8043
E-mail: rreist1@shaw.ca

Ellis Bird Farm, Ltd.
Myrna Pearman
PO Box 5090
Lacombe, AB T4L-1W7 - CANADA
403.885.4477
403.887.5779
mpearman@telus.net
www.ellisbirdfarm.ab.ca

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Conservation Society
Gwen Tietz
PO Box 401 Stn Main
Lethbridge, AB T1K-3Z1 - CANADA
403.553.2780
mtnblue@telus.net

**Arkansas**
Bella Vista Bluebird Society
Jim Janssen
83 Forfar Drive
Bella Vista, AR 72715
479.885.4451
jans33@sbcglobal.net

**British Columbia**
Southern Interior Bluebird Trail Society
Sherry Linn
18588 Old Richter Pass Rd
Osoyoos, BC V0H-1V5 -CANADA
250.495.7891
goldstrm@vip.net
www.bcbluebirds.org

**California**
California Bluebird Recovery Program
Dick Blaine
22284 N. De Anza Circle
Cupertino, CA 95014
408.257.6410
dick@theblaines.net
www.cbrp.org

**Palos Verdes South Bay Audubon Society**
Nancy Feagans
2010½ Pullman Lane
Redondo Beach, CA 90278
310.483.8192
nancy@pvsb-audubon.org
www.pvsb-audubon.org

**Colorado**
Colorado Bluebird Project
Audubon Soc of Greater Denver
Kevin Corwin - 720.482.8454
9308 S Wadsworth Blvd
Littleton, CO 80128
303.973.9530
303.973.1038 f
bluebirdproject@denveraudubon.org
www.denveraudubon.org/bluebird.htm

**Florida**
Florida Bluebird Society
Bill Pennewill
P.O. Box 1086
Penney Farms, FL 32079
floridabluebirdsociety@yahoo.com
www.floridabluebirdsociety.com

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*Spring 2010*  
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*Bluebird*
Idaho
Our Bluebird Ranch
Leola Roberts
152 N 200 E
Blackfoot, ID 83221
208.782.9676

Rocky Mountain Blues
David Richmond
HC 67 Box 680
Clayton, ID 83227
208.838.2431
fowest@custertel.net

Illinois
Jo Daviess County BBRP
Dick Bach
9262 Fitzsimmons Rd.
Stockton, IL 61085
815.947.2661
kiritemoa@mwci.net
www.jdcf.org/guardians

East Central Illinois Bluebird Society
Loren Hughes
1234 Tucker Beach Rd
Paris, IL 61944
217.463.7175
lghughes@join.com

Indiana
Indiana Bluebird Society
Ken Murray
PO Box 134
Rensselaer, IN 47978-0134
219.866.3081
ibs@indianabluebirdsociety.org
www.indianabluebirdsociety.org

Brown County Bluebird Club
Dan Sparks
PO Box 660
Nashville, IN 47448
812.988.1876
360.361.3704 f
b4bluebirds@yahoo.com

Iowa
Johnson County Songbird Project
Jim Walters
1033 E Washington
Iowa City, IA 52240-5248
319.466.1134
james-walters@uiowa.edu

Iowa Bluebird Conservationists
Jerad Getter
PO Box 302
Griswold, IA 51535
712.624.9433 h
712.527.9685 w
jgetter@hotmail.com

Bluebirds of Iowa Restoration
Jacyln Hill
2946 Ubben Ave
Ellsworth IA 50075-7554
515.836.4579
jaclynhill@netins.net

Kentucky
Kentucky Bluebird Society
Philip Tamplin, Jr.
PO Box 3425
Paducah, KY 42002
502.895.4737
ptamplin@aol.com
www.biology.eku.edu/kbs

Louisiana
Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society
Evelyn Cooper
1222 Cook Rd
Delhi, LA 71232
318.878.3210
emcooper@bayou.com
www.labayoubluebirdsociety.org

Maine
Mid-Coast Audubon Society
Joseph F. Gray
35 Schooner Street #103
Damariscotta, ME 04543
207.563.3578
joe@midcoastaudubon.org
www.midcoastaudubon.org

Maryland
Maryland Bluebird Society
Kathy Kremnitzer
19305 Deer Path
Knoxville, MD 21758
301.662.7818
Griffin459@myactv.net
www.mdbluebirdsociety.org

Massachusetts
Massachusetts Bluebird Association
Henry R. Denton
726 Montgomery Road
Westfield, MA 01085-1090
413.562.0926
dald9@msn.com
www.massbluebird.org

Michigan
Michigan Bluebird Society
Kurt Hagemeister
PO Box 2028
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-2028
734.663.9746
810.736.8713 f
khagemeister@michiganbluebirds.org
www.michiganbluebirds.org

Minnesota
Bluebird Recovery Program
Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis
Lance Krog
22035 Penn Ave
Lakeville, MN 55044
952.469.2054
lancek@frontiernet.net
www.bbrp.org

Missouri
Missouri Bluebird Society
Steve Garr
P.O. Box 105830
Jefferson City, MO 65110
573.638.2473
stevegarr@missouribluebird.org
www.missouribluebird.org

Montana
Mountain Bluebird Trails, Inc.
Johnny Hanna
P.O. Box 14
Wapiti, WY 82450
307.587.7064
president@mountainbluebirdtrails.com
www.mountainbluebirdtrails.com

Nebraska
Bluebirds Across Nebraska
Derry Wolford
705 9th Ave
Shenandoah, IA 51601
info@bbne.org
derrywolford@prodigy.net
www.bbne.org
New Hampshire
NH Bluebird Conspiracy
Bruce Burdett
5 Upper Bay Rd
Sunapee, NH 03782-2330
603.763.5705
blueburd@myfairpoint.net

New York
NY State Bluebird Society
John Ruska
3149 Witaker Road
Fredonia, NY 14063
716.679.9676
ruskhill@adelphia.net
www.nysbs.org

Orleans Bluebird Society
Gary Kent
3806 Allen’s Bridge Rd.
Albion, NY 14411
585.589.5130
gkworking4u@hotmail.com

Schroharie County Bluebird Society
Kevin Berner
499 West Richmondville Rd
Richmondville NY 12149
518.294.7196
bernerkl@cobleskill.edu

Michael Kudish Natural History Preserve
David Turan
2515 Tower Mountain Rd
Stamford, NY 12167
607.652.9137
princessprism@yahoo.com

North Carolina
NC Bluebird Society
Jimmy Miller
P.O. Box 589
Garner, NC 27529-0589
919.772.9457
treasurer@ncbluebird.org
www.ncbluebird.org

Ohio
Ohio Bluebird Society
Bernie Daniel
9211 Solon Dr
Cincinnati, OH 45242
513.706.3789
ohiobluebird@acninc.net
www.ohiobluebirdsoociety.org

Oklahoma
Oklahoma Bluebird Society
Herb Streater

Ontario
Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society
Bill Read
24 Brand Place
Cambridge , ON, N1S 2V8 - CANADA
519.620.0744
info@billreadsbooks.com
www.oeb.ca

Oregon
Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project
Charlie Stalzer
PO Box 1469
Sherwood, OR 97140
email@prescottbluebird.com
www.precottbluebird.com

Pennsylvania
Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania
Harry Schneider
448 Portman Road
Butler, PA 16002
724.285.1209
harryschneider@gmail.com
www.thebsp.org

Purple Martin Conservation Assoc.
John Tautin
Tom Ridge Environmental Center
301 Peninsula Dr., Suite 6
Erie, PA 16505
814-833-2090
jtautin@purplemartin.org
www.purplemartin.org

Tennessee
Tennessee Bluebird Trails
Louis Redmon
381 Liberty Rd
Wartburg, TN 37887
423.346.3911
amyredmon@hotmail.com

Texas
Texas Bluebird Society
Pauline Tom
PO Box 40868
Austin, TX 78704
512.268.5678
ptom5678@gmail.com
www.texasbluebirdsoociety.org

Virginia
Virginia Bluebird Society
Anne Little
726 William St
Fredericksburg, VA 22401
540.373.4594
vbs@virginiabluebirds.org
www.virginiabluebirds.org

Audubon Society of Northern Virginia
Jill Miller
4022 Hummer Rd
Annandale, VA 22033
703.256.6895
info@audubonva.org
www.audubonva.org

Washington
Cascadia Bluebird & Purple Martin Society
Michael Pietro
3015 Squalicum Pkwy #250
Bellingham, WA 98225
360.738.2153
mppietro@hinet.org

West Virginia
Potomac Valley Audubon Society
Peter Smith
PO Box 578
Shepherdstown, WV 25443
304.876.1139
pvsmit@frontiernet.net
www.potomacaudubon.org

Wisconsin
Aldo Leopold Audubon Society
Larry Graham
918 Arts Lane
Stevens Point, WI 54481
715.344.0968
lgraham@uwsp.edu
www.aldoleopoldaudubon.org

Bluebird Restoration Assoc of Wisconsin
Patrick Ready
1210 Oakwood Ct
Stoughton, WI 53589
608.873.1703
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