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*Cover photo:* A very hungry Eastern Bluebird fledgling expresses his impatience. Photo by Susan Phillips / dreamstime.com  
*Table of Contents photo:* This handsome male Pileated Woodpecker checks out a potential nest cavity. Photo by Andy / flickr.com
Summer Message to Our Affiliate Organizations
Phil Berry

Well, we are all right in the middle of the season, some further along than others. Our bluebirds are in their second nesting. We fledged 90 for the first nesting, and the second one promises to be as good, if not better.

I have a couple of main thoughts, one being that we all want to hear about anything special going on in your Affiliate. Share your experience with the rest of us, either by sending in an article to our Editor, Scott Gillihan, or by sending me an email and I will see that all Affiliates get a copy.

The second thought is our annual meeting in Lacombe, Alberta. All the information you might need is written up in the Spring issue of Bluebird. July 8–10, 2016. Remember, you do need a passport to get into Canada. I can promise lots of fun if you can make it. Coincidentally, that weekend coincides with the Calgary Stampede, which runs July 8–17. This must be on your bucket list. Rodeos, musicians, and plenty of fun. And don’t forget the Chuckwagon Races!

There is not much time left until we start packing to head out to Alberta. I hope to meet you all there.

Sincerely,
Phil Berry
NABS Vice President-Affiliate Relations
First of all I hope many of you are making plans to attend the 2016 NABS Annual Conference to be held at the Ellis Bird Farm (EBF) in Lacombe, Alberta July 8–10, 2016! (see below)

Well it is summer again. It is strange writing this column because I bounce from season to season! In southwest Ohio we have had what can best be described as an “off balance” spring with longer predominantly cool weather periods broken by shorter interventions of clear skies, sun, and relative warmth, followed by another week-long spell of overcast, cool, and rain! This has not been ideal “bluebird weather” and wet soil has prevented the township from mowing the grassy riparian tract surrounding my trail. So this year I am having greater success with Tree Swallows than Eastern Bluebirds. In addition, while monitoring the trail this year, it seems like I’m not hearing my “usual quota” of bird song from the various habitats surrounding the trail. For example, the calls of Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, Scarlet Tanagers, Warbling Vireos, Great Crested Flycatchers, Indigo Buntings, and even Wood Thrushes seem markedly reduced compared to previous years—? Likewise, the Neotropical wood warblers seemed to slowly filter through our area in a series of smaller waves this year. I heard my very first House Wren song at the start of this week—early May. On the positive side I think I’m seeing and hearing increased numbers of Carolina Wrens and also more Blue Jays this year than any year since the West Nile virus scourge started. So off-balance here—how about you?

Since the last issue of Bluebird we have added two new members to the NABS Board of Directors, Kevin Corwin from Colorado and Del Straub from Montana. We are most pleased to have these two experienced bluebirders step up and of course both come from Mountain and Western Bluebird areas. So two of last year’s goals—to grow our Board and to add members working in Mountain and Western areas—have both been achieved. This year, we will begin to focus on some other issues. For example, growing NABS membership and working in a more meaningful way with our Affiliate organizations. Another goal will be to expand recognition and awareness of our Society. In my opinion, NABS should be the obvious “authority” and source of information for bluebirding on the continent. I believe that we need to develop products that will expand an awareness of NABS into other parts of the birding community, especially those groups that deal in some ways with bluebirds, for example, organizations like Wild Birds Unlimited, Inc. Rest assured there will be more on this theme later.

You will notice that since this is the Summer issue there is an announcement herein of both our Annual Election and our Annual Meeting. This year our Annual Election deserves special note because we have a total of 14 individuals on the ballot! The large number of candidates is a result of the fact that we have six new Board members appointed since last summer and also we are trying to balance our classes. Board members serve a 3-year term so we have the members broken into “classes” and ideally we want to have one third of our members (i.e., one class) up for election each year. So this year some of the candidates are running for the usual 3-year terms but some on the ballot are running for 1- and 2-year terms in order to rebalance the class sizes. Please be so kind as to complete the inserted ballot card and mail it back to NABS. If you have a family membership you can return both ballot cards. Be sure to sign and date your ballot otherwise it cannot be counted.

There is also an announcement of our 2016 Annual Meeting which will again be held via teleconference call. This meeting is the one chance each year for the members to directly interact with the NABS Board and Officers and to express their views on the direction and focus of the Society. Getting input from the members is something the Board would greatly appreciate so please take advantage of the opportunity to participate in the NABS Annual Meeting, scheduled for Monday, September 19th at 8:30 PM Eastern Daylight Savings Time. One of the first items of business will be to certify the results of the aforementioned Annual Election.

Bernie Daniel with one of his “Ohiowood” nestboxes that has received repairs including a new door and polystyrene heat shield for the new season.
Finally, let me again remind you all about our Annual Conference at EBF. I hope many of you are intending to make the trip to Lacombe, Alberta, to attend and participate. Myrna Pearman, director of EBF and noted bluebird researcher and author, along with her associates, have planned an exciting program of presentations centered around the topic of bird migrations, plus bluebirding on the Alberta prairies and some exciting field trips in the area. This is a great way to attend a bluebird conference and take a great vacation as well. Hope to see you there!

I started “bluebirding” in about 1998. My husband and I bought a portion of his grandparents’ ranch. We knew that there were always bluebirds around the ranch, and with encouragement from a local bluebirder, we hung a couple of boxes... from there my trails now total about 80 nestboxes (and will probably expand a little this spring).

I live in western Montana, Mineral County, with lots of ponderosa pine. It is mostly Western Bluebird habitat, but 60 miles as the crow flies (any direction really) is Mountain Bluebird habitat, and it interfaces with my area. I am fortunate to get both Westerns and Mountains, but mostly I fledge Westerns. I have experience with both during nesting season, and their personalities as a species are different. I know bluebirders in eastern Montana that have a few Eastern Bluebirds on their trails every year. So our state is one of the few places with all three species!

In 2004, I was trained to band by Ervin Davis from Charlo, Montana. I applied for a Master Banding Permit in 2104 at the encouragement of Gwen Tietz and Ervin who both wrote recommendation letters. I am now the administrator for Mountain Bluebird Trails (MBT) and band 200–350 bluebirds per year.

My trail is spread along approximately 20 miles, so I usually monitor once a week. It takes me about 6–7 hours to cover the entire trail depending on weather and number of birds. I try to get out early in the cool of the morning and work until it is about 70 degrees. That way the monitoring effort is spread out over two or three days. I have been committed to my trails for over 15 years and banding for 10 of those years. I am one of those blessed people to have two boxes in my yard that are used every year! So my camera lives on my table and I am able to watch and photograph bluebirds most of the year.

When Bob Niebuhr retired as the editor for MBT, he was sure that I would enjoy being the editor of the newsletter. He was right. I have been in this position for five years and have served on the Board of Directors for 10 years. We sponsor an annual contest for the first bluebird sighting of the year. It is an exciting time and I get phone calls and emails from all over Montana and Idaho as bluebirders anxiously watch for the first sighting of the New Year.

People who live with bluebirds year round might not understand what a wonderful reassurance those sightings are! Despite the crummy winter weather, we know that spring is finally coming! Seeing the blues again announces the most wonderful time of year—nesting season!

I hope that I can bring to the NABS board my experience of working with Western and Mountain Bluebirds and our perspectives on bluebirding in the West. I talk with bluebirders from Montana and Idaho, and am aware of many trail issues and problems that are unique to the western U.S.

Jane joined the NABS Board late last year and is running for a full term this summer. As you read from the story she comes to the Board as a direct “descendent” of some of the historic names in Mountain and Western bluebirding including Erv Davis, Bob Niebuhr, and Gwen Tietz so we are most pleased to have her perspective at our meetings.

–Bernie

The Bluebird Journey of Jane Brockway
New NABS Director from Montana
While you’re checking your nestboxes this summer, or sitting on the porch with a tall cold glass of iced tea, I hope you’ll take some time to contemplate the natural world and our role in it. A good place to start is with the ideas of the late Barry Commoner, who was a professor of plant physiology and a deep thinker about all things relating to Nature. His immersion into ecology—the study of how organisms and their environment interact—led to his involvement in the environmental movement of the 1960s and 70s. In fact, he was one of the leaders of the movement. Perhaps nowhere is his leadership role more evident than in his 1971 bestselling book, *The Closing Circle*, in which Commoner proposed four laws of ecology:

1. Everything is connected to everything else.
2. Everything must go somewhere.
4. There is no such thing as a free lunch.

These four rules have stood the test of time, and are worth contemplating this summer.

My thanks to Kathy Kremnitzer, Janice Thode (East Central Illinois Bluebird Society), and all of the writers and photographers who contributed material to this issue, and to the sponsors and advertisers.

As always, please send any photos, articles, or ideas to me at NABSeditor@gmail.com or 5405 Villa View Dr., Farmington, NM 87402.
This statement of financial position was prepared by NABS Treasurer Jim Engelbrecht to inform the membership on the financial health of our Society. Jim will present and discuss this statement at our Annual Meeting (via teleconference call) on September 26, 2016. Members who call in to the teleconference will be given an opportunity to ask questions about the NABS Financial Position on that call.

North American Bluebird Society
Statement of Financial Position
As of April 30, 2016

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| Union Savings Bank                                            |
| Total                                                         |
|                                                               |
| $142,380                                                      |
| $142,380                                                      |

| Checking/Savings Total                                        |
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| $214,472                                                      |

| ASSETS TOTAL                                                  |
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| $214,472                                                      |

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| TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY                                    |
|                                                               |
| $214,472                                                      |

Good fortune appeared to us again in March 2015 when we met Gulf Breeze (Florida) High School student Jacob Tutt and his parents. Together we worked out a plan to revamp the Tiger Point Golf Course bluebird trails. Jacob worked very hard, first coming up with a plan and then implementing it. He got very creative with some of the boxes by wood burning decorations and the NABS logo on them. Jacob’s parents, Linda and Wes, were such a pleasure to be on the trail with also. We attended Jacob’s Eagle Court of Honor and Phil Berry read a letter from NABS president Bernie Daniel recognizing Jacob for his contribution to the bluebird’s habitat on the two Tiger Point courses. What a pleasure it was to fledge another Eagle on our Tiger Point bluebird trail.
Notice to Members: NABS Director’s Election 2016

Per our by-laws NABS holds a yearly election of our Board members. The election runs from June 15th to August 15th and ballots can be submitted during that time.

Who can vote? Members in good standing as of May 15th shall be eligible to vote in the Annual Election. (NABS by-laws Article XVII.4)

How to vote? Please locate the two self-addressed (not franked) postcards inserted in the center of this issue of Bluebird. It you have an individual membership you are entitled to one vote (mail in one ballot). If you have a “family” membership you are allowed to mail in both ballots. *To be counted your ballot must be signed and dated.*

As of May 2016 the postage for an in-country postcard in the USA is $0.34 USD. The cost of a Canadian international stamp to the USA is $1.20 CAD.

The Director nominations closed on May 15th and the following slate was submitted by the Nominations chair and approved by the Board of Directors. To comply with NABS by-laws, the slate was posted on the NABS website (by June 15th) and printed in the Summer issue of Bluebird.

Short biographies of the 14 candidates (alphabetical order) are included below:

**Bob Benson** lives in South Easton, Massachusetts, where he monitors several bluebird trails in the surrounding vicinity. He also works with local residents, both children and adults, through the public schools and the local Moose Lodge to educate them on cavity-nesting birds. Bob is a NABS Director and the current chairman of the Nominations and Nestbox Committees. Bob is also the official “voice of NABS” and answers phone calls for help and information from the public and dispatches them to someone for assistance.

**Jane Brockway** and her husband Alan live in Mineral County, Montana, which borders the northern Idaho panhandle. She started bluebirding in 1998 after the family bought part the ranch owned by Alan’s grandparents and were told that “we have always had bluebirds around.” Most of the county is Western Bluebird habitat, but Jane sees both species on her trail. She has been on the Mountain Bluebird Trails (MBT, a NABS Affiliate) board of directors for more than 10 years, and holds a Master Banding permit and is the banding administrator for MBT. She is also the editor for MBT’s *Bluebird Tales* newsletter and loves running the annual “bluebird first sighting” contest in the spring when she talks to people from all over Montana and Idaho. She monitors an 80+ nestbox trail that is spread over 20 miles and enjoys photographing the countryside, bluebirds, and grandkids!

**Vicky Butler** is a retired Water Treatment Plant manager who lives in Sacramento, California and has been an active nestbox monitor since 2004 when she started fledging Wood Ducks. Today Vicki monitors over 100 boxes for a variety of cavity nesters including Wood Ducks, Barn Owls, American Kestrels, Tree Swallows, and Western Bluebirds. She builds and installs her boxes and has a sub-permittee license to band all of the species of birds in her nesting boxes. She serves as County Coordinator for the California Bluebird Recover Program (a NABS Affiliate) and also serves as a NABS Director.

**David Cook** resides in San Jose, California, where he has been active in bird conservation for over 20 years. He was one the founding members of the Cavity Nesters Program for Santa Clara County and served as a Director for Santa Clara Valley Audubon for 10 years, chairing the Environmental Action and the Burrowing Owl Preservation Committees. He has served as a NABS Director for six years, chairing the Journal Advisory and Awards Committees.

**Kevin Corwin** is a retired computer scientist who lives in Centennial, a suburb of Denver, Colorado. He became involved with bluebirds in 2003 when he helped establish the Colorado Bluebird Project under the auspices of the Audubon Society of Greater Denver and made it a NABS Affiliate. He also participates in monitoring a trail of 44 nestboxes about 30 miles south of Denver. He is a volunteer Naturalist at Roxborough State Park near Denver, a Senior Docent with the Raptor Education Foundation, a participant in the North American Breeding Bird Survey for the USGS, and he has several other volunteer activities to keep him busy. Kevin is a NABS Director.
Bernie Daniel is a retired environmental research scientist who lives with his wife Marie in Symmes Township in southwestern Ohio. Bernie has been a member of NABS since about 2001, and has served NABS as a member of the Board, Editor, and President and is a life member, and past president of the Ohio Bluebird Society. He has been bluebirding (off and on!) since 1953 and currently maintains his own trail of 40 nestboxes in Ohio. He has published some 140 research peer-reviewed papers in environmental science and has participated in the North American Breeding Bird Survey since 1999. He enjoys the study of bird song and “birding by ear.”

Jim Engelbrecht is a semi-retired management accountant (CPA) who lives with his wife Wendy in Rouses Point, New York, in the extreme northeast corner of the state. He started bluebirding after retiring from Wyeth Laboratories, monitoring boxes at a local golf course. He is a County Coordinator and Board Member of the New York State Bluebird Society and he has served on the NABS Board since 2012 and as NABS Treasurer since 2014. Jim prepares the annual 990 report for NABS and mails the Bluebird journal to our Canadian members.

Stan Fisher lives in Boyds, Maryland, and monitors his own nestbox trails in addition to actively assisting others in his community get into bluebirding by serving as a local resource for speaking and trail monitoring. He is the President of the Maryland Bluebird Society. Stan is a Charter as well as a Life, member of NABS, a recipient of the NABS Lifetime Achievement Award, and serves as a NABS Director and as a member of the Grants and Nestbox Committees.

Allen Jackson is a resident of the State of New Jersey and is retired from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He is a co-founder and current President of the New Jersey Bluebird Society, a NABS Affiliate. Allen has erected over 600 bluebird boxes on some 50 bluebird trails and he monitors his own 70-box trail. He has authored numerous articles on proper trail management for martins and bluebirds, with a special focus on House Sparrow control. He is a frequent speaker on nestbox trail management and has received numerous awards including 2002 Purple Martin Landlord of the Year. Allen is a master bander for Purple Martins and Eastern Bluebirds and is a current NABS Director.

Chuck James and his wife Terry are residents of Loudon in eastern Tennessee since he retired from a Vice Presidency with Transonic Systems, a world leader in surgical blood flow monitoring products. Today, Chuck serves on a number of nonprofit Boards. He became interested in bluebirds about 12 years ago and while attending the 2013 NABS Conference he became impressed with the South Carolina Bluebird Society and decided to start a similar organization in Tennessee. Today he serves as President of the Tennessee Bluebird Society, a NABS Affiliate, and he is also a NABS Director. Chuck believes a strong state effort in conservation and education is imperative and necessary when educating the next generation of bluebirders.

Linda Schamberger is an Elementary Education teacher who lives in Webster, New York, with her husband Peter. She has been bluebirding since June 2011 when she contacted NABS in distress with a possible House Sparrow attack on her first bluebird nest. She continued to learn and study about bluebirds and now heads up and administers our NABS Facebook page. She is also a member of NYS Bluebird Society, a County Coordinator, and a NABS Director. Two of her passions are to educate about, and photograph, bluebirds.

John Schuster lives with his wife Katarina at their vineyard property in Cotati, California. A former employee of the California Department of Forestry, Ecology Corps, he served as a firefighter for both the California and U.S. Forest Services. John also works with many and varied conservation projects throughout the state of California. In 2000, he established Wild Wing Company after personally witnessing the success that beneficial cavity-nesting birds had on reducing pests in his vineyard operations. He is a Director and lifetime member of NABS and serves on several committees.

Elizabeth (Bet) Zimmerman Smith lives with her husband Patrick in northeastern Connecticut, where she manages a 100-nestbox trail. Bet is the creator of www.Sialis.org, possibly the most comprehensive website on the Internet dedicated to cavity nesters and bluebirding. She is also a regular contributor of articles to Bluebird, a NABS Director, and serves on the NABS Grants, Education, and Nestbox Committees. Bet is a Certified Environmental Professional who has
been working and volunteering for nonprofit environmental organizations for over four decades.

Del Straub is a resident of Gallatin Gateway, located in south-central Montana and is a licensed bird bander and a member and Director of Mountain Bluebird Trails, a NABS Affiliate. He is also a NABS Director. Del has managed a 90-nestbox trail in Montana for nearly a decade. He specializes in organizational financial management of 510.c.3 tax-exempt nonprofits and is also involved in long-term citizen science projects in his area.

NABS by-laws are found online at www.nabluebirdsociety.org/Board/boardofdirectors.htm

Officials of the North American Bluebird Society, Inc.

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<tr>
<td>President - Bernie Daniel (OH)</td>
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<td>1st VP for Affiliate Relations - Phil Berry (FL)</td>
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<td>2nd VP for Community Relations - Jim Burke (SC)</td>
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<td>Secretary - Kathy Kremsnitzer (MD)</td>
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<td>Treasurer - Jim Engelbrecht (NY)</td>
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| Nestbox Committee |
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| Kevin Berner (NY) |
| Bernie Daniel (OH) |
| Allen Jackson (NJ) |
| Kathy Kremsnitzer (MD) |
| Myrna Pearman (AB) |
| John Schuster (CA) |
| Bet Zimmerman Smith (CT) |

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| Jane Brockway (MT) |
| Dave Cook (CA) |
| Jim McLochlin (NE) |

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| Bluebird Managing Editor |
| Scott W. Gillihan (NM) |
Instructions for NABS Research Grant Application

To be considered for funding from the NABS research grant program, please prepare a proposal packet that includes all of the items listed below.

1. Cover letter
2. Grant proposal (required content):
   A. Project Title
   B. Name, contact information (phone, email, mailing address), and affiliation of applicant
   C. Introduction
   D. Project Motivation (e.g., what question(s) will this research project answer, what theory is being tested, or what are the expected results?)
   E. Anticipated benefit as it relates to the mission of NABS (please be specific)
   F. Research Protocol
      i. Methods
      ii. Cavity-nesting species of interest
      iii. Study location
      iv. Any permits required
      v. Timeline
      vi. Literature Cited
   G. Detailed budget, including other funding sources and the amount requested from NABS.
3. Letters of support (2 for students, 1 letter of recommendation for other applicants)
4. Curriculum vita of the investigators

NOTES:
• The proposal must be submitted by November 1 via email to annets1@aol.com
• All items must be combined into a single pdf document. (Free conversion software is available online at www.cutepdf.com) If you do not have access to software to create a pdf, a single Word document is acceptable. In either case, your last name should appear at the top right corner of each page, and each page should be numbered at the bottom center.
• Please restrict the file to a maximum of 10 pages.
• Projects to create or maintain small or individual bluebird nestbox trails are not eligible for NABS grants unless they are being established for research purposes, or unless they are part of larger-scale, longer-term bluebird conservation efforts (e.g., establishment of bluebird trails on golf courses or public parks) and if assurances can be provided that the project will continue to receive support and active supervision for multiple years after its completion. Such supervision would include assuring proper nestbox trail management and the maintenance of trial productivity records. Likewise, assurances must be given that all trails and boxes will be taken down if the project is terminated for any reason.
• Grant recipients are expected to submit a report summarizing project results within three months of the project completion.

Membership Renewal
Is this your last Journal? Please check your mailing label for membership expiration date. If renewing through PayPal, remember you can use either your credit card or your PayPal account.

Q: I see on the form I can renew for multiple years – how do I do it using PayPal?  
A: Change the quantity from the default of 1 to the number of years you want to renew for. PayPal does the math and Marion picks up the number of years to adjust your NABS record.
I became a Virginia Master Naturalist to learn about and get involved with natural Virginia. My mostly nonprofit career was largely devoted to working for zoological institutions. I helped build national and international collaborations of coordinated species survival and reintroduction programs for mostly exotic and/or endangered species. In the process I built a working knowledge about the flora and fauna of Africa, Asia, and South America. By contrast, living in the natural beauty that is Charlottesville, Virginia, I knew relatively little about the flora and fauna in my own back yard. As a member of the Virginia Master Naturalist class of 2012 I was looking for an opportunity to learn more and to get actively involved as a Citizen Scientist on a local level. I had no idea what that might entail and where that might lead. Little did I know that I was about to embark on a great bluebird adventure.

One of our earliest class sessions was devoted to presenters from various organizations describing volunteer opportunities. One of those presenters was Ann Dunn, Virginia Master Naturalist and County Coordinator for the Virginia Bluebird Society. Ann was seeking volunteers to monitor established trails in Albemarle County. I inquired about the possibility of establishing a trail in my neighborhood. Then and there the all-important first piece of my life-changing journey fell into place when she agreed to come to Ivy and assess the viability of our habitat for bluebirds. The second piece fell into place when she identified 10 suitable spots. Being a compulsive designer/builder with a well-equipped work shop, I volunteered to build and donate the 10 bluebird set ups. Ann provided me with the Virginia Bluebird Society recommended and approved “Carl Little” nestbox design and formally approved “Owensfield Trail” as a designated Virginia Bluebird Society trail making me the trail monitor. It was then that the wheels of the universe turned and something that felt like destiny fell into place and put me squarely on the path leading to where it has presently led. I never could have imagined then in 2012 where that path would so quickly lead by 2016.

One side of my heritage is German. My grandfather was an inventor during the industrial age. He built and ran a steel forging plant to make the things he sold to General Motors, Frigidaire, and, during WWII, the RAF for the British Spitfire. That means I am genetically predisposed to be incredibly organized. Thankfully the other side of my family introduces a French gene that keeps my German organizational obsession from becoming a crippling neurosis and actually transforms it into an art form. It is a fine line I walk between obsessive compulsive disorder and art. I like to think so anyway. That also means I like doing things on a big scale so if I’m going to be building 10 bluebird nestboxes anyway, I might as well do more.

Things started small when I offered to build bluebird set ups for my Master Naturalist classmates for the cost of materials. A few took me up on my offer and in early Spring 2012 I built my first 20 nestboxes with poles and baffle predator guards—10 for me and 10 for them. When I delivered those 10 to the next Master Naturalist class session, bluebird nestbox envy swept through the room. Everybody wanted some and I needed to build another 48 for class members and instructors. More orders trickled in and I ended my first year having built 91 bluebird nestboxes. I could hardly believe it and so close to 100! That seemed like a magical number to me and I hoped that I would have occasion to build at least nine more in the coming years. Little did I know.

The following February in preparation for the 2013 nesting season I needed a few more boxes to expand my trail. Only two months removed from my last building session, I was anticipating little or no demand for more nestboxes. Nevertheless, I repeated the offer to my classmates and a few other local VMNs to build nestbox setups for the cost of materials. I was truly surprised when the response was immediate and steady. As orders accumulated through the year I periodically mounted
building sessions to meet demand. Orders totaled 170 nestboxes in 2013. Once again, most of those were going to Virginia Master Naturalists in the Charlottesville area to replace worn out boxes and to establish new bluebird trails. I passed the magic number of 100 nestboxes so fast I should have been ticketed for speeding in a building zone.

By February of 2014 my call for orders was being passed on to Virginia Master Naturalists and Virginia Bluebird Society members statewide and had crossed state lines to attract bluebirders from Maryland, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Ohio. My call for orders was also reaching bird clubs, institutions, and educational projects at schools including Rutgers University, Innis Free, and Fredericksburg Academy. Individuals and groups were arriving in rental vans or with trailers to pick up 30 or more bluebird setups at a time. A group of Master Naturalists from Blacksburg made an all-day outing to pick up their large order, visit my shop, and tour Charlottesville. Others brought their grandchildren to visit the shop for a “hands-on” bluebird box building session. I built 240 nestboxes that November (the single largest building session to date) and finished 2014 with 365 nestboxes built for the year. My original goal to build 100 had long dropped out of sight and now I watched as 500 nestboxes built faded into the distance in my rearview mirror. Far ahead a new magic number was just visible on the horizon and I dared to dream. It would take years and years to get there… if only I could live long enough and stay healthy enough.

From the beginning Ann Dunn made it clear that when building bluebird nestboxes I was to use the Virginia Bluebird Society recommended and approved “Carl Little” design. I had heard of the Peterson box and other famous birders with their names attached to box designs, but I was not aware of Carl Little. I decided to remain silent on that subject and nodded my head like I knew when in fact I did not know. From the beginning whenever people picked up their boxes I would dutifully explain they were getting the Carl Little design and they would nod their heads solemnly in what I assumed was reverential respect for the great birding man Carl Little lost to the ages. Yes, I figured the great Carl Little was now long dead and gone, but never forgotten.

A few days later there was a knock at my door. I answered it to a nice couple standing there and the man says to me, “Hi! I’m Carl Little.” My first reaction was to blurt out, “You can’t be, you’re dead!” However, my ability to stay silent on things I don’t know about remained blessedly intact when I needed it most. About this time I began to see the light and realize that there was a connection between Carl Little and the lovely Ann Little standing next to him who, coincidentally at that time, just happened to be President of the Virginia Bluebird Society. With good reason they could have worried about me and that could have been the end of my blue birding days right then. However, they were kindly forgiving. Carl visited my shop, signed my “Carl Little” blueprints and positively made my bluebirding year. I was twice honored—they had come to pick up 50 Carl Little boxes. Holy mackerel! That’s like Thomas Edison coming to me for a light bulb, not to suggest that I would or could build light bulbs for the cost of materials. I would much prefer a visit from Carl Little anyway. Anybody can design and build a light bulb.

2015 was more of the same. More boxes to a wider audience coming from farther and farther away. The big new magic number barely visible in the distance not so long ago was barreling towards me at an alarming rate. This past October was my biggest one-time building session yet with 310 nestboxes plus 258 poles/baffle predator guards. I finished 2015 with 376 nestboxes built for the year and, in all the excitement, the big magic number slipped past me before I knew it. The grand total built since it all began with those 20
boxes in the Spring of 2012 is 1,002 nestboxes and 733 poles and baffle predator guards.

The past year has been a thrilling experience. Individuals and organizations came from every corner of Virginia to pick up boxes. Organizations taking large numbers of boxes in 2015 included the Monticello Owners Association, Monticello Bird Club, Loudon Wildlife Conservancy, Dorrier Park, Brambleton Community, Sunset Hills Winery, Pleasant Grove Trail, Brambleton Bluebird Club, Monticello High School, Fredericksburg Academy, and the Augusta County Bird Club.

Managing the time, material costs, material needs, expenses, and communications related to this project have evolved into a small not-for-profit enterprise. I need Excel spreadsheets to monitor pricing of parts, material lists, inventory, orders, and scheduling of pickups and deliveries. I have an account at a local builder supply to buy materials cheaper in quantity. On two occasions I have bought out the available supply of 1 x 6 cedar. This past fall big trucks delivering large loads of lumber had the neighbors asking if we were putting on an addition. Forklifts came down the driveway carrying 100 10’ metal conduits at a time. I tell inquiring minds that I am building a nuclear sub.

I’ve accumulated more than 750 hours of Virginia Master Naturalist volunteer service since 2012 including 240+ hours this past fall. I also monitor Owensfield Trail for the Virginia Bluebird Society that has grown to 20 boxes fledging an average of 85 bluebirds per year over the last four nesting seasons. A wonderfully memorable moment was the first time I opened a box to see five baby bluebirds in the nest. I was so happy I wanted to pass out cigars and put balloons on our mailbox.

I have organized the entire building process for mass production. Before a single nestbox was assembled this past October all the pieces and parts for 310 boxes were cut, pre-drilled, and stacked in sequential order ready for assembly. Material costs in 2015 were approximately $10,000. Material costs since 2012 exceed $22,000.

This experience has been and continues to be positively wonderful and rewarding. I watch the floor space of my shop disappear as it fills up with nestboxes ready for pickup until I can literally only just set foot inside the door. And then I watch it reappear as people pick up their boxes and take them away to the far corners of the state and beyond. It is positively thrilling to have all the Virginia Master Naturalists, Virginia Bluebird Society members, various institutions, and other individuals from all over come to my shop to pick up their boxes and stay for a visit. They like the smell of the red cedar that hangs in the air. Word that I will build for the cost of materials for all comers has spread to people outside of Virginia Master Naturalists and Virginia Bluebird Society members to envelope organizations like Master Gardeners and Tree Stewards. It is inspiring to see all of these people get interested in bluebirds. Two years ago people from adjoining neighborhoods who walk our street found me and got bluebird houses for their respective neighborhoods. Last year people walking in those neighborhoods tracked me down and got bluebird houses for their neighborhoods. And so it goes... spreading happiness on the wings of bluebird diplomacy.

I see no end in sight. October 2016 is already blocked off on the calendar for building bluebird nestboxes. Between now and then I will continue perfecting my predisposed German-French organizational skillset as an art form finding new ways to make boxes faster and cheaper.

Yes, this has gone far beyond what I ever dreamed. Early in my Virginia Master Naturalist training I wondered how I could ever accumulate the 40 hours of volunteer service a year required to remain certified. If someone had told me in February 2012 that I would one day volunteer 243.5 hours in one month as a Virginia Master Naturalist building bluebird boxes for the Virginia Bluebird Society and loving every minute…. Ha! No way!

Clark Walter is a certified Virginia Master Naturalist, a member of the Virginia Bluebird Society, and a member of NABS. He was selected this past Fall as the 2015 Volunteer of the Year by the Virginia Bluebird Society. Please feel free to email Clark at captainbreck@comcast.net if you have a question or want to place an order for his October 2016 building session.
Christopher Durant is an amazingly talented young artist from England. You will find more of his beautiful work at https://www.facebook.com/TheArtworkOfChristopherDurant

NABS member Carolyn Perkins sent this photo of her resident male Eastern Bluebird with an attitude. Carolyn notes that “The garden stake is from Wild Birds Unlimited in Avon, Connecticut, and certainly describes the birds in my yard!“

This past winter, Barb Harbach happened to see this group of Western Bluebirds huddling together for warmth. The prime spot was right in the center, where it was undoubtedly warmest, so there was constant shuffling as cold birds tried to squeeze into the middle. You can see the last bird on the right bracing himself to keep from sliding too far as another bird tries to nestle into the warm center. Barb took this image in Larkspur, Colorado.

Hey, it’s cold in the East, too! Janeen Adil spotted this cluster of Eastern Bluebirds outside her home on a cold day this past February. Huddling together—even out in the open—is an effective way for birds to stay warm and conserve energy. By the way, Janeen lives in the appropriately named Birdsboro, Pennsylvania.
Eastern Bluebird Winterkills: An Analysis of Sex and Age
Bob Peak

On March 20, 1978, under the direction of founder Dr. Lawrence Zeleny and a core group of charter members, the North American Bluebird Society (NABS) was incorporated as a nonprofit organization, with a long-term goal of helping preserve bluebirds and other cavity-nesting birds. About the same time, many parts of the central United States experienced three consecutive winters in 1976–1978 that ranked among the coldest of the past 150 years, and the heavy snowfall and record-breaking cold temperatures during those winters significantly reduced the Eastern Bluebird population across much of its wintering range. Some estimates from that time period indicate perhaps as much as 70% of the population perished. Fortunately, as a result of milder winters during the interim years and faithful assistance from members of NABS, bluebird numbers increased to record levels by the early part of the 21st century. Today, the Eastern Bluebird population is estimated to be about 19 million birds, and the species actually has a much lower conservation priority than most cavity-nesting species (Gillihan 2014).

Although there has been an overall improvement in bluebird numbers, recent cold winters have again impacted bluebirds in many parts of the U.S., particularly the Midwest. In western Kentucky and western Tennessee, the winters of 2013–2014 and 2014–2015 were unusually harsh, especially in terms of the late winter storms that sometimes catch migrants and early nesters off-guard. Unlike some species of small songbirds, such as White-throated Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos, bluebirds are not well adapted to survive long periods of subfreezing weather, especially when snow or ice covers the ground. Much of the winter mortality that occurs in bluebirds is due to the unpredictability of the timing and endurance of this cold weather (Pitts 2011).

For the past 26 years, my wife and I have monitored and managed over 200 bluebird nest boxes located throughout Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area in western Kentucky and Tennessee, as well as Lake Barkley State Resort Park in Trigg County, Kentucky. The federal lands of the national recreation area encompass approximately 170,000 acres, and the state park property covers about 3,700 acres. During our tenure, over 30,000 bluebirds—and over 2,000 juvenile birds for seven other species—have fledged from the nestboxes of these combined bluebird trails. When we begin our nestbox monitoring in late March of each year, we typically find a dead bluebird or two that succumbed during the winter months. More than half of the years we have worked on the volunteer project, we have found no dead bluebirds in March, and prior to 2014, the greatest number we had found in any given year was seven. On March 28–30, 2014, we found 69 dead bluebirds in the nestboxes located on the state and federal properties, and on March 23–25, 2015, we discovered 24 additional dead bluebirds in boxes on the same properties. Of course, we immediately wondered, why did this large number of mortalities suddenly occur, and what could we learn from these disturbing events?

During the winter of 2013–2014, most of western Kentucky and parts of western Tennessee experienced five major snow/ice events, with two of them occurring during February, and the final one in early March. The timing of the winter events, combined with protracted snow/ice cover and unseasonably cold temperatures, placed a great deal of stress on bluebirds and other wildlife in those areas. Each ice event affected a bluebird’s ability to secure food, but the late winter events were perhaps the most devastating because it was a time of year when the birds’ fat reserves had dwindled and food resources were very scarce. Additionally, very cold temperatures following the ice events prolonged the ice/snow coverage of many bluebird foods-of-last-resort (e.g., sumac seeds), and the birds simply could not generate enough body heat to survive—even after congregating in nest boxes at night. (In one instance, we found 11 dead bluebirds in a single nest box.)
After the dead adult birds were collected from the nestboxes in March 2014, the 69 specimens were given to Dr. David Pitts for postmortem analysis. Dr. Pitts is a recently retired University of Tennessee biology professor and an Eastern Bluebird authority. Dr. Pitts’ examination revealed there were 24 females and 45 males in the winterkill sample. Of the 24 females he examined, 14 were second-year birds (hatched in the spring/summer of 2013) and 10 were after-second-year birds (hatched before the spring/summer of 2013). The male bluebirds consisted of 25 second-year birds and 20 after-second-year individuals. In its entirety, 39 (57%) of the deceased bluebirds in the 2014 sample were second-year birds and 30 (43%) were after-second-year bluebirds.

On February 16, 2015, more than 10 inches of snow fell in Trigg County, Kentucky, followed by bitterly cold temperatures, freezing rain, and windy conditions later in the week. The ground remained snow-covered for nearly two weeks, and then a few days after the ground finally cleared, a record snowstorm dumped more than 15 inches of snow in the same county on March 4–5. The landscape remained snow-covered for several additional days. When we checked the nestboxes along our bluebird trails in late March, we found 24 dead adult bluebirds. Six of the dead bluebirds were discovered in a single nestbox. The 24 specimens were given to Dr. Pitts for analysis. Dr. Pitts’ examination showed there were 7 females and 17 males in the sample. Of the seven females he examined, six were second-year birds (hatched in the spring/summer of 2014) and one was an after-second-year bird (hatched before the spring/summer of 2014). The male bluebirds consisted of 10 second-year birds and 7 after-second-year individuals. Altogether, 16 (67%) of the deceased birds in the 2015 sample were second-year bluebirds and 8 (33%) were after-second-year bluebirds. Unlike the 2014 sample of winterkilled bluebirds, age apparently did have some effect on winter mortality in the 2015 sample.

Stated another way, although one might expect younger bluebirds to die at a significantly higher rate than the older, more experienced birds, there was no remarkable discrepancy between the age groups in 2014. However, although it was a much smaller sample size, there was a distinct difference in the age groups in the 2015 sample, with the younger birds outnumbering the older birds by a 2:1 margin. Consequently, when the ages of the winterkilled bluebirds in both samples are compared, inconsistencies in the data make it impossible to
develop a definitive conclusion about the impact of age on winter mortality for the bluebirds in these study areas. It is apparent that further study of bluebird mortality is needed in many geographic areas, with multiple groups of winterkilled bluebirds, to gain a broader understanding of how age affects winter mortality in the species.

In reference to the sex ratio of winterkilled birds, Dr. Pitts indicated the natural tendency might be to assume the ratio would be equally distributed between the sexes—unless one has evidence to the contrary. Surprisingly, the actual numbers in the 2014 sample were 24 (35%) females and 45 (65%) males, clearly indicating male bluebirds experienced a much higher rate of winter mortality than did females. The same wide gap occurred with the sex ratio of the 2015 sample, which had 7 (30%) females and 17 (70%) males. Why is this the case? There appears to be no single indisputable answer to the question, but it is possible the male bluebirds had already bonded to a nesting territory in late February/early March and were therefore less likely to migrate to more hospitable environs in the early stages of the nesting season. Dr. Pitts describes this kind of scenario in his (2011) book: “The bluebirds that live in the northern latitudes and in the middle latitudes are gamblers. Those from the north are gambling on their ability to return home early enough in the nesting season to be able to acquire a high-quality nesting site before another bluebird or some other cavity-nesting species claims it. Those living in the middle latitudes are gambling on their ability to survive the winter weather as they attempt to remain near their nest sites throughout the year. Both groups sometimes lose, big time.”

After the winterkilled bluebirds were found in 2014 and 2015, the ensuing nesting seasons clearly revealed the negative impact on the reproductive success of the bluebird population where the deaths occurred. In 2014, the nestboxes on the state and federal properties yielded the fewest number of bluebird nesting attempts—and bluebird eggs—since 1998. When compared to the previous nesting season, it was a 40% decrease for the combined areas. The following year, a decrease occurred again, with the bluebird nesting attempts and eggs dropping an additional 10%. The end result was a commensurate decrease in the number of bluebird fledglings, with the 2014 nesting season producing 36% fewer fledglings than the 2013 season (1,814–1,160), and the 2015 season entailing a further decrease of 11% in fledgling numbers (1,160–1,029). In 2015, the bluebird fledglings per nest box ratio (f/b)—which is arguably the single best measure of bluebird trail success—was the lowest at the federal properties since 1997 (4.5 f/b) and the smallest ratio at the state park since 2002 (also 4.5 f/b).

Interestingly, despite the highly negative impact on bluebirds, perhaps the lone positive outcome of the 2014–2015 bluebird deaths was the fact that smaller cavity-nesting songbirds were provided with numerous opportunities for nest sites in the empty nestboxes. In 2014, the total number of fledglings for other species (Prothonotary Warbler, Carolina Chickadee, Tree Swallow, Carolina Wren, Tufted Titmouse) was the highest recorded in 26 nesting seasons along our bluebird trails—109 fledglings—and a comparable effect occurred during the 2015 nesting season with an additional 73% increase to 189 fledglings. Most importantly, the 2015 season included 49 Prothonotary Warbler fledglings, a neotropical migrant species in much more dire straits than bluebirds, ranking seventh on the Gillihan conservation priority list of cavity-nesting landbird species. (The Eastern Bluebird ranks 58th on the list of 63 species.)

In the future, when winterkilled bluebirds are discovered in various places throughout their range—especially in nestboxes along bluebird trails—it will be important to garner as much information as possible about the circumstances of the deaths and the individual traits of the birds involved. Although it’s shocking and distressing to find a large number of dead bluebirds, winterkill does at least provide a rare opportunity to analyze and evaluate the physical traits, behaviors, and biological dynamics of the birds we are attempting to help. Hopefully, as a counterbalance to winterkill losses that occur in the future, members of NABS will continue to assist and nurture these beautiful creatures, and bluebirds will remain an important part of the world around us.

**Literature Cited**


*Bob Peak is a retired public school teacher who lives in Cadiz, Kentucky. Bob and his wife, Judy, have been members of NABS since 1990.*
Retiring at Age 98
Chester Schmidt

My fascinating journey started in 1983. Ruth, my wife, was President of the Woman’s Club in Columbia, Illinois. One of their Conservation projects was to tend to bluebird nesting boxes at the local park. After one of the meetings my wife told me that baby bluebirds hatched in one of the nests so we went to see them. Curious about what the Club Conservation member did on her bluebird trail I asked to walk with her. Seeing the blue eggs and the beautiful bluebirds at another nest feeding their babies—I was hooked.

The husband of one of the club ladies is a good friend of mine. They have a bluebird box near their home. Before long Walter “Gig” Giffhorn and I had our own bluebird trail consisting of 14 nestboxes. Every Thursday we’d check the boxes. Gig made a spreadsheet listing the boxes and he’d update it every week. The sheet listed: MT – empty nest; BBN – bluebird nest; BBE – # eggs; BB – # baby bluebirds; BBF – # bluebirds fledged; SN – sparrow nest.

Over the years we only caught one snake. We moved one of the boxes away from a farmer’s barn—too many sparrows. We’d remove their nest and they’d move back in. Thinking about how to remedy the problem, I took one of my wife’s canning lids, put a screw near the outer ring and screwed the lid over the hole. After a week we opened the hole. It worked—the sparrows moved on and the bluebirds moved in. To make sure the lid did not accidentally close on its own or open when we wanted it closed, we placed the screw in the lower right side of the hole and cut a notch in the lid to insure it stayed closed. See photos below, left.

Our next encounter was raccoons grabbing the eggs and baby birds. I got the idea from your Bluebird Magazine of extending the opening by placing an additional layer of wood over the entrance.

My niece, Charlotte Hoock, went with me one day to see and photograph the bluebirds. One afternoon while looking at the pictures taken of the side of a nestbox, I realized the parents had to use a lot of tail strength (bending) to balance themselves while their feet were on the opening. So—another idea. Extend the length of the board covering the opening. The birds now have a more natural look and balance while holding onto the opening. See photo at right.

The past 30 years was enjoyable for me and beneficial for the bluebirds. I’ve enjoyed reading your magazine and highly recommend birding as a hobby. Having turned 98 and moving into an Assisted Living facility I think I’ll turn the bluebird trail over to someone a few years younger! Maybe Charlotte will get infected with the bluebird fever.

Chester Schmidt is a highly decorated World War II veteran. He was a shortwave radio operator and gunner on a B-17 bomber and flew 32 missions beginning with the invasion of Germany. After graduating from St. Louis University he worked 27 years as an insurance agent. He has always enjoyed flying his private plane and took up golf after retiring. He’d like to thank his wife and Carol Giffhorn (Gig’s wife) for getting him interested in bluebirding. A great memory was personally talking with Dr. Lawrence Zeleny, bluebird activist, author, and founder of NABS.
Passing the Torch
Jim Semelroth

In the Spring 2016 issue of Bluebird, President Bernie Daniel challenged NABS members and readers to suggest ways to pass on our enthusiasm and knowledge of bluebird and cavity-nester conservation to a new generation. In this age of cell phones, texting, social media, and video games, how can our generation ensure that future generations are aware that it is up to them to continue what we have begun? We in the Southern California Bluebird Club (SCBC) long ago realized the need to get youngsters interested, not only in the stopgap method of hanging and monitoring nestboxes, but in looking to the larger issue of preserving standing dead and dying trees for many species, especially in our urban environment.

As such we have sponsored schoolchildren’s projects, presented countless talks and Powerpoint presentations to thousands in schools, set up webcam boxes, rewarded graduate students at California State University–Fullerton for their scientific research projects, sponsored Eagle and Sea Scouts in their quests for top honors, provided internships, and created and maintained two websites. We have also created a science-based educational program for elementary classrooms as well as a kit for outdoor educators. A Wildlife Tree Warden patch was designed to reward youngsters for their study of dead trees, and to engage youth at community events, we created several interactive tools and games, some of which are available on our website (http://cavityconservation.com/engaging-youth/).

Our efforts have been rewarded as our youngsters have gotten involved, returned to our meetings and made school and community presentations, won awards and scholarships, passed on their enthusiasm to their peers, finished and documented their graduate research projects, and gone into higher-education programs in environmental studies. Here are a few:

Alex Krebs

One of our first mentees was Alex, who under the tutelage of Dick Purvis earned his Eagle Scout rank and garnered the prestigious William T. Hornaday Bronze Wildlife Protection Medal created to encourage and recognize outstanding efforts in natural resource conservation and environmental protection. In addition to his scouting achievements Alex organized the building of nestboxes, created a trail he monitored for several years, and set up a website to document his bluebird trail success. He also made a presentation at the NABS Conference in Newport Beach in 2011.

Alex went on to UCLA to study statistics, and his activities there included Statistics Club Executive Board: ASA DataFest at UCLA Chairman, UCLA Alumni Scholars Club, Alpha Lambda Delta / Phi Eta Sigma National Honor Society, and Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity.

Alex says: “Mr. Purvis is one of the most dedicated environmentalists I will ever meet. He inspired my first conservation project, which in turn motivated me to lead other conservation efforts for my Eagle project. I’m so appreciative of the influence Mr. Purvis has had in my life, taking me under his wing and instilling the importance of conservation. He truly is inspirational, and is making his legacy one that will be enjoyed for many generations to come.”

William Cox

William was another mentee; he earned the Sea Scout Quartermaster rank by organizing and managing the construction of bluebird nestboxes. Along with Alex Krebs, Will made a presentation at the NABS Conference in 2011. He went on to college, where he

Alex Krebs and his mentor, Dick Purvis
is Student Assistant to the University Archivist and is University Photographer.

Will says: “My involvement with the Southern California Bluebird Club while working on my Quartermaster rank for Sea Scouts allowed me to develop skills pertinent to leadership, communication, and organization and implementing them in concert throughout my community service project. The difficulty of solving the many problems I encountered was eased by the support of Jim Semelroth and other mentors from the SCBC. These skills have proven fundamental to all the projects I have done afterwards and this experience also served to direct the focus of my current studies. After learning of the habitat destruction of the Western Bluebird I felt a responsibility to help in this and other environmental problems facing us today. I then set my course to be an agent of change and I am now majoring in Environmental Studies at Soka University of America and hope to go into environmental management effecting positive change in our world.”

Lexi Stanley
Another success was an internship granted to Lexi for her work with Gillian Martin, Director of the Cavity Conservation Initiative (CCI), an SCBC project. Lexi helped do snag surveys and monitor Tree Swallow boxes, did a slide show for her fellow homeschoolers, assisted in many teaching projects of the CCI, and then went on to an internship at the Maritime Institute in Dana Point, California. Lexi’s recording of “This Old Tree” can be heard on the CCI website on the “Engaging Youth” page (http://cavityconservation.com).

Of Lexi’s experience with the CCI, she says: “During this internship I learned about the amazing ecology of a snag. The internship gave me valuable experience in public program directing and opened me up to the world of dead trees that I didn’t know existed. Gillian knows so much about the snags and the numerous creatures that live in them. She effectively shares that knowledge and passion with the people she comes in contact with. I have not only gained a wealth of knowledge, but also a friend.”

Dessi Sieburth
Dessi is a most amazing young man who has stunned our seasoned bluebirders with his knowledge and enthusiasm for conservation. One of Dessi’s many projects to help birds took the form of building and monitoring nestboxes for Western Bluebirds. He soon learned that, though nestboxes are helpful, dead trees are much more beneficial in the long term because they not only help bluebirds but many other birds and wildlife. With the support of his devoted parents, Dessi now takes his message to elementary school classrooms, science fairs, and other events. Dessi also photographs and sketches birds. His goal is to become an ornithologist. When introduced, his impressive credentials alone are sufficient to get an audience’s attention. Among them are the American Birding Association’s 2015 Young Birder of the Year Award and the International Eco Hero Award. Read more about Dessi’s achievements on his website (http://protectingourbirds.my-free.website/).

Tomas Dardis
Tomas, a 14-year-old, began monitoring 18 nestboxes in 2015 with SCBC monitors. He has volunteered at SCBC educational booths and made presentations to his school classmates about bluebird and tree conservation. We featured Tomas in a blog post after his assistance at a conservation booth in a county park (http://cavityconservation.com/2016/04/03/the-power-of-a-young-ambassador/).

Tomas chose “Conservation of Western Bluebirds” as his 8th-grade project. The students chose a project at the end of their 7th grade, and had almost one year to do the research. He researched the science,
history, and geographic range of bluebirds. If the 18
nestboxes he monitored, he had 22 clutches, 93 eggs,
86 hatchlings, and 83 fledglings. He presented this
information to over 100 people, including parents,
students, and faculty at his school. He demonstrated
how to use the Purvis lifter basket, as well as how to
monitor the nestboxes. He spoke about the problems
Western Bluebirds faced, and the importance of
natural cavities and snags. Additionally, he made 10
nestboxes which he sold to raise over $200 for SCBC.

The school was so excited with this learning
opportunity that they purchased two nestboxes for
the campus to show the elementary school students
that they, too, can make a difference in nature. One of
the nestboxes was quickly adopted by local bluebirds.

Tomas says: “I like monitoring bluebird nestboxes,
because I know that I can make a difference in the
world. I enjoy working with the SCBC club and
learning about conservation of birds and trees.”

Natalia Doshi, Jeanne Tiegs, Ellen Sorensen

Three students from the Department of Biological
Sciences and Environmental Studies at California
State University–Fullerton, under the tutelage of Dr.
William Hoese, researched bluebird nesting habits
and materials, temperature effects on fledgling
success, and noise effects on bluebird reproduction.
They presented their research to our club members.
SCBC has donated funds to the Biology Department
for further ornithological studies.

Jeanne Tiegs says: “My graduate project on the
incorporation of man-made material by Western
Bluebirds in their nests would not have been possible
without the support of the SCBC members. From
choosing study locations for my project, to teaching
me how to check nestboxes and monitor reproductive
success, SCBC members guided me every step of the
way. My time in the field proved to be much more
than gathering data; I gained a love and appreciation
for Western Bluebirds that I will carry with me for the
remainder of my life!”

Natalia Doshi says: “I have enjoyed collaborating
with the bluebird club. They have been so supportive
in helping my colleagues and me in any way possible
on our research. Our research projects have been a
smooth and successful process thanks to the bluebird
club’s help and involvement. I’ve also learned so
much from attending their monthly meetings, from
conservation biology and bluebird natural history to
local community involvement. I have been inspired
by their passion and everyone’s dedicated work.”

Ellen Sorensen says: “The Southern California
Bluebird Club and their members taught me so much,
were so supportive, and extremely helpful while I
was working on my undergraduate research project,
‘How do Insulation Properties in Western Bluebird
Nests Change Between the First and Second Clutch?’
I could not have done it without them. Their passion
for environmental conservation is so heartening, if
there were more people in the world like the members
of the SCBC it would be a much prettier and better
place!”

We in the Southern California Bluebird Club are very
aware of the need to replace nestbox monitors as
they retire, age, or burn out, but more importantly,
to educate the young and to pass on our enthusiasm
for birds, conservation, and the environment to
the next generations. As illustrated above there are
many proven ways to get the younger generation
interested and involved. Go to schools and scout
troops, do presentations, create educational materials,
get support from groups and industry, get publicity
in local media, work with land and park managers,
connect with colleges and university departments,
create websites and link to social media, and provide
funds for conservation projects. Our efforts have been
richly rewarded as these young folks have picked up
the challenge and have even taught us a few things
about bluebirds and tree cavity conservation.

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Where the Bluebirds Sang, Looking Back in Time

Elsie K. Eltzroth

If you are involved in a bluebird trail, you are well aware of the frequent inclusion of the word “bluebird” in poetry, prose, rhymes, greeting cards, stories, and songs.

Perhaps you have heard of Jan Peerce, the famous tenor of the early 1900s who sang for the Metropolitan Opera and the NBC Symphony Orchestra. His rousing version of “The Bluebird of Happiness” was composed for him in 1934 by Sandor Harmati and Edward Heyman. Peerce popularized the song during the dark days of the Depression. Later he called his autobiography The Bluebird of Happiness. He coined a phrase that is still used today.

There were other songs written and sung about our blue-feathered friends long before Jan Peerce. We needn’t look far; here in the valley where our Western Bluebirds sing, I have an original copy of a love song mentioning bluebirds that was popular a decade or two before Jan Peerce. Thirty years ago, friends gave me a yellowed, tattered, 100-year-old folio of piano sheet music that they found in a used book store in Albany, a nearby town. It was titled, “In the Valley Where the Bluebirds Sing.” How appropriate for the mid-Willamette Valley of Oregon! The singer featured on the cover was Jas. B. Bradley, a Lyric Tenor from Virginia; the words composed by Monroe H. Rosenfeld, the music by Alfred Solman, the copyright MDCDII (1902). This song speaks of love long lost; even a more recent song by Dionne Warwick, “A Message to Michael,” echoes that same sentiment—the search for a lost love. We who have been caring for this beautiful songbird recognize that our perception of this small blue thrush can bring a sense of hope, faith, good will, care, and compassion, and it is symbolic of the peace and beauty of the natural world.

I didn’t want this old sheet of piano music to remain buried in my file cabinet any longer, so please enjoy the musical nostalgia and history that this ballad represents.

Elsie Eltzroth’s long association (since 1976) with the Audubon Society of Corvallis, Oregon, Bluebird Trail, is well known [see Bluebird vol. 38 no. 1]. The trail was established to create a sustainable breeding population of Western Bluebirds in the mid-Willamette Valley. Little was known about this species, therefore the data reported and articles published added valuable information that was used to educate the public about the beautiful bluebird of the West.
In the Valley Where the Bluebirds Sing
Lyrics by Monroe H. Rosenfeld

There’s a picture in my heart that lives forever
’Tis a home with honeysuckles ’round the door
By a brook that always murmured Love’s sweet story
In those happy days gone by forever more

At the window I can see my sweetheart waiting
She is list’ning as the evening churchbells ring
I can see her in the valley where we parted
In the valley where the bluebirds sing

In the valley where the bluebirds sing
In the valley where the churchbells ring
I can hear her voice it seems,
In my roaming, in my dreams
Down in the valley, the valley, the valley
Down in the valley where the bluebirds sing!

I can see the moonlight gleaming on the river
I can hear the whip-poor-will so far away
In the verdant meadow I can see her strolling
Where the fields are fragrant with the golden hay

‘Tis a picture that will never fade in beauty
For its recollections fondest mem’ries bring
How I long to see my sweetheart who is waiting
In the valley where the bluebirds sing.

In the valley where the bluebirds sing
In the valley where the churchbells ring
I can hear her voice it seems,
In my roaming, in my dreams
Down in the valley, the valley, the valley
Down in the valley where the bluebirds sing!

Remembering Loren Hughes

Loren L. Hughes and his wife founded the East Central Illinois Bluebird Society (ECIBS), a NABS Affiliate, in 2002. Loren served as the organization’s president until 2014, helping to guide efforts to rebuild the Illinois population of Eastern Bluebirds. Because of his efforts he was affectionately known as The Bluebird Man. In 2007 he was presented the Environment Hero Award from Illinois Lt. Governor Pat Quinn.

Prior to his work with bluebirds, Loren served his country in the U.S. Navy. After his service, he was a Journeyman Industrial Millwright, and worked as a maintenance engineer.

Loren taught many people to love life and nature. He spoke about bluebirds to anyone who would listen, including scouts, garden clubs and other organizations, and complete strangers. His interest in bluebirds overlapped his interest in woodworking: he developed the Hughes Sparrow Resistant Slot Box (plans are available at www.nestboxbuilder.com).

Loren’s family generously donated all the nestboxes from his home workshop to ECIBS: 96 new boxes and 86 used boxes in good condition, just needing roofs, minor repairs, or paint, and an additional 20 cut and ready to assemble. He’s still helping ECIBS as they give his nestboxes to members when they need them.

The family also wanted all memorial contributions to go to ECIBS. So far enough has been received to get 70 memory plates to put on boxes on his trails and also to donate an oak tree to be planted in the cemetery close to the Hughes plot. It will also have a memory plaque on it.

Loren passed away on April 7, 2016, at the age of 86. He will not be forgotten.
My criminal career began at the tender age of five. I was excited to find an unbroken robin’s egg on the lawn in our backyard. I got a shoebox, fashioned a nest from grass, and placed the beautiful blue egg inside. I put the shoebox underneath a desk lamp and eagerly waited for the egg to hatch. Of course it never did, which was a good thing. I had neither the ability nor any idea how to raise a baby wild bird. Nestlings require a specialized diet, need to be fed every 15 minutes or so, and then need to be taught to fend for themselves by a member of their own species.

I also had no idea that I was committing a criminal offense. Under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, it is illegal to have in your possession live or dead nongame native birds (adults or young), feathers, nests, or eggs, or to keep nests or eggs even for “show-and-tell” educational purposes without a permit. And those permits are extremely hard to get.

But I REALLY wanted a baby robin! Unfortunately, what humans want and what is best for wildlife do not always intersect. In fact, at times they are diametrically opposed. Sometimes in an attempt to help, and despite our good intentions, we end up doing more harm than good.

An incident this May at Yellowstone National Park highlighted what can happen as a result of inappropriate interference. A pair of well-meaning tourists “rescued” a newborn bison shivering by the roadside. They put it in their SUV and drove it to a ranger station. Park rangers then spent two days trying to get the baby bison to return to the herd, but it kept being rejected, and would not eat. The calf also repeatedly went back to the roadway, apparently having become imprinted on cars and people. “The calf was either going to starve to death, get sick, get hit, or cause an accident, so we had to make the difficult decision to put it down,” said Charissa Reid of the park’s public affairs office.

The road to hell is paved with good intentions. I hear questions like this all the time:

• I found a baby bird on the ground—can I raise it?
• It’s going to be really cold tonight. Should I bring the eggs/baby birds inside my house to keep them warm? Or can I put a heater inside the box?
• The baby nestlings are so cute—is it okay to pet them? Can I put bands on them?
• The eggs were supposed to hatch yesterday and they didn’t—should I throw them out so the parents can try again?
• I haven’t seen the parent birds in a while, so I think the nest has been abandoned—should I bring the babies inside the house and take care of them?
• There is a Tree Swallow nesting in my box, but I want bluebirds—can I throw out the swallow nest?
• A bird built a nest in my gas grill—can I move it so I can cook some hamburgers?
• There are wasps inside the birdhouse—can I use hornet spray inside the house?
• A male bluebird keeps hitting my window, and it’s driving me crazy—can I shoot it?

The answer to all of the above questions is NO. Even if these actions were not outright illegal (most are), such meddling would still be bad for the birds. There is a line between helpful intervention and interference/micromanagement.

This doesn’t mean you should do nothing. Inviting birds to nest in your birdhouse comes with some responsibility. As a bluebird landlord, you can and should do what is reasonable and legal to increase the likelihood that a nesting will be successful. Examples include:

• Using a properly designed, sturdy, weather-resistant nestbox that can be opened for monitoring and cleaning, and has the proper size entrance hole for the species of interest.
I had the unique pleasure of attending a rural school outside the small town of Geneva, Ohio, five miles inland from Lake Erie and about fifty miles east of Cleveland. There were 27 in my graduating class, so over the years we became like sisters and brothers to each other in such a small environment. Our teachers were like parents and uncles to us. Our small school was finally consolidated into the Geneva school system. Every year we have a reunion at Geneva Township Park to renew our friendships with fellow students.

One of our class members, Char, graciously invites our classmates to their nearby backyard for further visiting in the gazebo her husband Rod built. Of course, seeing such a beautiful environment, my husband Phil got on the subject of bluebirds. He happened to have a nestbox in the car, which he gave to Rod. Rod’s hobby was woodworking. Sadly, Rod passed away recently. We knew there would be plenty of flowers due to all their friends, so we made a contribution to NABS in his name.

Little did I know of his largesse until I received a wonderful thank-you note from Char. The front of the note had six pictures—deer in their yard, Rod’s workshop with a “Closed” sign on the door, his picture, etc. The note inside told of Rod’s gift of nestboxes to many friends on any occasion they had. Char said he made and gifted them to friends more times than she could remember.

So, our gift to Rod of one nestbox was multiplied many, many times. Thank you for what you did for the birds, Rod, and Rest in Peace!
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—Julie Zickfoose
Technological Breakthrough in Tracking Songbirds

A new tracking device allowed researchers to find three Tree Swallows from Ithaca, New York, among the 10 million or so overwintering in Florida. This feat was possible due to the first lifetime solar-powered tag for songbirds, an invention that could revolutionize the way birds and other small animals are tracked and studied.

“This is something we’ve been awaiting for 20 years: the ability to follow small birds throughout their migrations,” says the device’s creator, David Winkler, professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at Cornell University.

While large birds like eagles and ospreys can handle the extra cargo of a battery-powered tag, Tree Swallows themselves weigh only about half an ounce. To develop a lightweight alternative, Winkler collaborated with electrical engineers to create a tag powered by sunlight. Their prototype consists of a solar cell and radio chip, with a wispy wire antenna that transmits the bird’s unique ID number to any receiver within about a mile.

Last summer, Winkler and his students attached the tags to 70 Tree Swallows in Ithaca. Tree Swallows migrate to Florida in the winter, so Winkler and his colleagues traveled there in January, where they used weather radar to locate large flocks of Tree Swallows that might harbor their tagged birds. The team was able to locate a flock, barely visible almost a mile away, in which the receivers picked up the pings from three different birds.

The next step is to improve their ability to detect the signals. Winkler hopes his team can couple longer-range detection with the ability to pinpoint the location of the signal. He is keen to connect his tags with a network of stations up and down the East Coast placed by other researchers to track birds during their migrations.

Adapted from a press release from Cornell University, Ithaca, NY

Bluebirds Everywhere

“Bluebirds Everywhere” is a feature that celebrates the widespread and creative uses of bluebird images and the word “bluebird” itself. We invite you to submit your own images and ideas—simply email them to NABSEditor@gmail.com or mail them to NABS Editor, 5405 Villa View Dr., Farmington, NM 87402. Let’s see what bluebirds you can find!

NABS member Bill King passed along this photo of a unique bucket, which originally held a whole lot of allspice. An internet search turned up nothing on the Blue Bird spice company. Does anyone have any information about them?

Blue Microphones is a California-based creator of audio recording equipment including the Bluebird, a studio microphone pictured here.

NABS member Jon Belisle dug up an oldie but a goodie. In 1951, Canadian-born country-western singer Hank Snow recorded a song called “Bluebird Island” with Anita Carter. You can hear this fine old song by searching on YouTube; Jon recommends selecting the version that has a picture of palm trees; he says, “It is a lovely song with a great picture of a bluebird.”
An Overlooked Path to Increasing Populations

Human hosts of bluebirds, Purple Martins, Wood Ducks, and other cavity-nesting species have effectively used nestboxes to increase populations of those birds. The nestboxes provide an alternative for natural cavities when those are lacking, and humans can take additional steps to increase breeding success in nestboxes by protecting against predators, parasites, etc.

These focused efforts on improving nest success have been an effective way to increase populations of a number of cavity-nesting species. But efforts might be even more effective if focused at a different stage in a bird’s life cycle. For songbirds, the period of highest mortality is the first three weeks after leaving the nest. It is during this period that young birds are poor flyers, inexperienced at finding food, and naive about predators. It is not unusual for half or more of these young birds to perish in those first three weeks out of the nest.

How to help? Ensure that fledglings have access to suitable cover (young birds of many species need shrubby cover in which to hide from predators) and an ample food supply (for many species, this means an abundant insect population). Improving the survival of birds during those first three weeks after they have left the nest may be the next frontier in bird conservation.


Do Eastern Bluebirds Give Nestlings Different Warnings Based on Predator Type?

Nestlings of cavity-nesting species seem especially vulnerable to predators, given that they are effectively trapped inside a nest cavity with only one way out. In the event that a predator comes prowling around the nest, it would be extremely helpful to nestlings if Mom or Dad gave them a warning that communicated the type of predator—one type of warning for predators that could enter the nest cavity and a different warning for predators that could not. Nestlings could then respond appropriately by either jumping out of the cavity or hunkering down inside it.

This is exactly the strategy that seems to be employed by the Great Tit, a cavity-nesting European species closely related to North America’s chickadees. When a rat snake is nearby, adults give an alarm call that prompts the nestlings to jump from the cavity before the snake slithers inside. When a crow is nearby, adults give a different alarm call that prompts the nestlings to crouch down in the nest, hopefully far enough to be out of reach of the crow’s beak when it comes through the cavity opening.

An experiment in Kentucky sought to determine if nesting Eastern Bluebirds utter different calls in response to different predators, to give their nestlings information about the proper evade-and-escape response. Taxidermy mounts of potential predators (American Kestrel, raccoon, and eastern chipmunk), along with a rubber snake, were positioned one at a time close to active bluebird nestboxes. The adults’ vocalizations and the nestlings’ responses were taped.

Adult bluebirds give two basic vocalizations in response to a threat: an alarm call and a chatter call. In this experiment, the adults did not give a different call for the different predators—each predator elicited both alarm calls and chatter calls. However, the rate and duration of the alarm calls was longest in response to the raccoon, as was the number of notes and the duration of the chatter call. In virtually all cases, the nestlings responded by crouching down in the nest. For 17–19-day-old nestlings, who would be close to fledging, the choice was usually to crouch, although some premature fledgings were recorded.
Thus, it does not appear that Eastern Bluebirds have any sort of secret code to warn their nestlings about different predators, but they clearly recognize raccoons as a significant threat and strenuously communicate the need to hunker down and keep quiet in the presence of a raccoon.


**Purple Martins Love Fire Ants**
The fire ant is an introduced, exotic pest species in the U.S. Colonies in the southern states are responsible for inflicting painful bites on humans and fatal attacks on native wildlife, including cavity-nesting birds. But Purple Martins have turned the tables on fire ants by targeting the flying queens. Turns out they are an abundant, nutrient-dense food source that might just be keeping Purple Martin populations going in the South.

Fire ants form large colonies, and lots of them. One of the keys to their growing population is an extended breeding season—basically throughout the spring and summer, and year round in warm climates. Breeding activity involves large swarms of flying queens—a single hectare of land might produce 40,000 queens at a time.

Purple Martins take advantage of these swarming flights and capture many of the queens. Each queen is a juicy bundle of fat and protein, just the thing to feed growing young martins. A recent study of martins nesting in Oklahoma found that about a third of the food items fed to the young were fire ant queens. With an estimated one million nesting pairs of martins within the U.S. range of fire ants, the nestlings consume an estimated 1.7 billion fire ant queens each nesting season. Add in consumption by adult martins and we’re talking about tens of billions of fire ant queens eaten per year. It’s possible that Purple Martins (and Chimney Swifts, Tree Swallows, Red-headed Woodpeckers, and other know predators on fire ants) are keeping the ant populations in check.

And perhaps it’s a coincidence, but the southern U.S. is the only area where Purple Martin populations are stable or increasing. Could it be that the pesky fire ant, a super-abundant food source, is propping up those populations?


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Thank you for supporting the conservation of bluebirds and other native cavity nesters!
Affiliates of the North American Bluebird Society

The North American Bluebird Society serves as a clearinghouse for ideas, research, management, and education on behalf of bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting species. NABS invites all state, provincial, and regional bluebird organizations to become NABS Affiliates in a confederation of equals working together in a partnership in international bluebird conservation. No cost is associated with affiliating with NABS. Your affiliated organization will be listed on the NABS website and in Bluebird. If your organization has a newsletter, please forward a copy to our headquarters. To find out more about becoming a NABS Affiliate, read our Affiliate Letter. Notice: If you are listed below, please check listing to see if it is current. If not, please send correct information to Phil Berry at pbsialia@gmail.com and info@nabluebirdsociety.org.

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