



Mission: To increase the population of bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting birds through the promotion of bluebird awareness among concerned citizens.



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Bluebirds *Across Nebraska*

An Affiliate
of NABS

BAN celebrates TEN years

by Sandy Seibert

Bluebirds Across Nebraska (BAN) was organized in November of 1993 when a group of twenty-four concerned citizens met to determine what steps could be taken to increase the population of bluebirds in the state. None of these twenty-four people could have possibly imagined what would happen to this newly founded organization in just ten short years. BAN's membership has grown from the original 24 to over 1,700 members.

There are numerous reasons for this dramatic increase in membership. One big reason is the County Coordinator program which was started in 1996. It is the goal of this program to have at least one person in every county who is available to put on workshops, work with children, be available to help people determine good bluebird habitat, help put up nesting boxes and make people in their community aware of the plight of bluebirds. The County Coordinators are the heart of BAN. In Nebraska there are presently 51 coordinators representing 47 counties. This number represents half of the counties in Nebraska. BAN also has eleven County Coordinators representing seven counties in Iowa. The County Coordinators not only hold workshops in their own counties, but also in surrounding counties and states where there are no coordinators. Thus BAN has acquired many members from Iowa, Kansas and South Dakota. Recently, BAN has been fortunate to have members in both Kansas and South Dakota volunteer to become Coordinators of their counties.

Education has always been a top priority for BAN. Many members help with that effort by manning booths at the state fair, county fairs, plant shows and other festivals across the state. At these events, members visit with the



November 11, 1993 – First organizational meeting for Bluebirds Across Nebraska was attended by: front row (l - r) Anne DeVries, Carol Christensen, Dorothy Matzke, Joyce Schiermann, Elva Osten; standing: Andrew Pitcher, Wes Christensen, Steve Eno, Phyllis Niebuhr, Paul Kaufman, Amy Polivka, Cheryl Eno, Jackie Howe, Dwane Zimmerman, Barb Rivers, Dallas Bird, Betty Bird, Mary Zimmerman, Phil Marvin, Loretta Marvin, Peg Fletcher, John Dinan, Dick Behrens, Leland Osten. (photo by Stan Matzke).

public making them aware of bluebirds and teaching them what they can do to help increase the population; handouts on a broad range of bluebird topics are available for people to take home; and many new bluebirders are recruited.

The annual state conference held by BAN has been another valuable tool in educating the public and recruiting new members. Each year the conference is held in a different part of the state so that more people can be reached. BAN has a tradition of having top-notch speakers at these conferences who speak, not only about bluebirds, but also on a broad range of nature related topics. Because the majority of members are located in the eastern and central parts of the state, an additional conference was held in 2002 and in 2003 in the western portion of Nebraska. These conferences were well attended resulting in many new members. In addition to the conferences, four general meetings are held throughout the year. At the

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BAN marks anniversary

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spring & summer meetings, which are also pot-luck picnics, members love to socialize and share their bluebird trail stories.

BAN's excellent quarterly newsletter is another educational tool. This publication keeps members abreast of the activities of the organization, what other members are doing to increase the bluebird population and many nature related articles. Many articles are submitted by members telling of their successes or failures, questions or answers, problems or solutions, or anything they find interesting, helpful and entertaining.

The measure of success for any bluebird organization is the number of bluebirds fledged. This is where BAN really shines. In 1993, when the organization began, 1,606 bluebirds were reported fledging from 1,975 boxes. In 2002, 26,135 bluebirds left their nests from 8,578 boxes. The Iowa members have also been very successful increasing from 280 fledgings in 1998 to 1,642 in 2002.

The increase in the bluebird population could never have taken place without the attention so many of the members of BAN give to their trails. Throughout the cool spring months and the hot summer months they untiringly monitor their bluebird boxes to make sure everything is as it should be.

The explosion of bluebirds in the state is also due to the dedication of the Box Production Committee of the organization. This group of volunteers, led by Almon "Connie" Conover and Sanford Downs, has built over 17,000 bluebird boxes which have been distributed not only across Nebraska but to many other states as well. These boxes are sold at very low prices so that people can afford to place more nesting sites on their land.

The members of BAN are dedicated to helping other cavity nesting birds. Towards this end two projects have recently been started. The first project to get underway was the building, erecting and monitoring of American kestrel boxes. On a stretch of Interstate 80 from Omaha to York, kestrel boxes were placed last winter at rest areas and interchanges in an effort to increase the numbers of these magnificent birds in our state. This summer members monitored the kestrel boxes while they monitored their bluebird boxes. This is a trial project and, if it proves successful, other boxes will be erected in the appropriate habitats. The other project is still in the planning stages and it will be an effort to help increase the number of wood ducks in the state.

In the past ten years, the members of Bluebirds Across Nebraska have truly brought bluebirds back to Nebraska and our neighboring states. This organization is one of the most successful conservation groups in the state. As Bluebirds Across Nebraska celebrates its tenth anniversary, we, as members, have many reasons to be proud.

2 Bluebirds Across Nebraska



The new Wildcat Hills Bluebird Interpretive Panel was unveiled at the conference. BAN is proud to be a sponsor of the informative and beautiful addition to the Nature Center. Pictured here are the individuals who were key in the creation and placement of the panel: Ray Boice, project coordinator; Sarah Winfrey, the center's naturalist; and Rodney Johns, artist.

Mountain Bluebird Conference

BAN's Mountain Bluebird Conference was held at Wildcat Hills Nature Center south of Gering, NE on September 20th.

Chris Carnine from the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory spoke of her work with mountain plovers and Myrna Pearman of Red Deer, Alberta and Bob Niebuhr of Great Falls, Montana generously gave their time educating people about their mountain bluebirds.

The crowd was enthusiastic and each person registered received a box and pole.

Thanks to Sarah Winfrey, naturalist at the park, for helping organize this event and arranging use of the beautiful facility.

BAN member recipe

As always, there were many delicious dishes at the last potluck meeting! But the following recipe from *Jan Uttecht* of Stanton was the popular choice to share in this newsletter:

Beef Potato Loaf

1st Layer: 2-lb. pkg. of hash browns - thawed; 1 t. salt; 1/4 c. onion flakes; pepper, seasoning salt, lemon pepper - Italian seasoning to taste.

2nd Layer: 2 cans green beans (drained)

3rd Layer: 1 c. shredded cheddar cheese

4th Layer: 2 lb. ground beef; 3/4 c. evaporated milk (Soy Silk can be substituted); 1/2 c. oatmeal (or ground rice); 1/4 c. catsup; 1/4 c. onion; 1 t. salt, pepper to taste (Jan also uses garlic salt) Formed into a loaf

Topping: 1/2 c. catsup mixed with 2 T. brown sugar; 1 T. liquid smoke or more. (Jan used 2 c. catsup with a handful of brown sugar).

BAKE at 350 for 1 hour or until done.

(Jan says she cooks by "just adding this & that" – but this is close).

President's Message by Sandy Seibert

Why do we monitor trails?

As you know, it hasn't been too many years ago that the bluebird population was in trouble. This North American treasure was headed for disaster.

Because of efforts all across the country by people like you and me, the situation has turned around.

Why is it that so many people have taken to this one particular bird? I have often asked myself that question.

Each person that monitors a trail probably has their own special reason for taking up the crusade. For me, monitoring my trail means not only helping the bluebirds but also seeing blue heron and kingfishers by the ponds, hearing a barred owl when I'm running behind and the evening is getting late.

It means watching a male oriole feeding his young, seeing a cedar waxwing fly to its nest with food for its nestlings, turkeys strutting by and deer gently grazing. Monitoring my bluebird trail gives me the opportunity to watch Canada geese families grow up.

I see frogs and turtles along the way. The frogs hurry to get out of my way while the turtles hide when I approach.

It means watching the trees and shrubs changing from their spring blossoms to their fall blaze of color. I watch the wildflowers grow until they turn to seeds and then the goldfinches and chickadees are there to take advantage of the new food source.

What do all of these things have to do with bluebirds? Nothing but everything. When we walk our bluebird trails nature is all around us.

No matter who we are; city residents, suburbanites or country dwellers, we all need some nature in our lives. Nature calms our souls, refreshes our minds, and brings enjoyment into our lives.

We humans are definitely helping the bluebirds but they, in return, are doing much for us.

Report form deadline extended

It's not too late to turn in your report form and have your bluebirds counted. The deadline has been extended to **January 1, 2004**. If you do not have a report form, contact one of BAN's officers or county coordinators. If you have already turned in *your* report form but know of someone that hasn't, please encourage them to get it in. Anyone returning in a report form receives a free statewide directory.

See this newsletter on the Internet

Thanks to Newslink, Inc. this entire newsletter, including COLOR photos can now be viewed through BAN's website www.bbne.org

Next meeting: Nov. 16th

Pottawattamie County Coordinator Floyd VanErt (the "Trap Man") will talk on sparrow control and trapping at the fall quarterly meeting. Floyd is known nationally for his traps and his knowledge of sparrows. He will also have his traps for sale.

In addition, Jerad Getter, president of Iowa Bluebird Conservationists, will be at the next meeting to talk about the newly formed Iowa bluebird recovery program. Membership brochures will be available and membership to this fledging organization is encouraged.

Annual holiday gathering

Please join us to celebrate the holiday season at James Arthur Vineyard on Sunday, December 7th at 1:00 p.m. It will be a fun time to visit with friends and fellow bluebirders while sampling wines, munching from meat & cheese platters, and touring the local winery. The cost at the door will be \$13.00. In lieu of a gift exchange, food donations will be gathered for donation to Lincoln's Food Bank on behalf of "*The Members of Bluebirds Across Nebraska*."

James Arthur Vineyard is located northwest of Lincoln, near Raymond, at 2001 West Raymond Road – 2 1/2 miles east of Hwy. 79 and 4 1/2 miles west of Hwy. 77 on Raymond Road.

A flash of blue...

The August 7, 2003 Fremont Tribune featured a nearly full-page article complete with large color photos of BAN member Stan Shavlik monitoring his trail:

"Shavlik, 73, became interested [in bluebirds] when he read an article 18 years ago about the declining population of this member of the thrush family. He built a nesting box and mounted it on fence posts by his meadow. 'A few weeks later,' he said, 'I saw a flash of blue fly out, so I opened the lid and found five sky-blue eggs. I watched them hatch, grow and fledge. I was hooked. I tried to find out everything I could about bluebirds.' Today Shavlik keeps track of about 40 nesting boxes. They are scattered around his farm and those at his neighbors, in the area between Morse Bluff and Linwood. Every week to 10 days, he makes the 11-mile trip – his bluebird trail – to check on his friends. He knows it takes 17 days for the eggs (usually five) to hatch and 16 days for the little chicks to fledge (fly from the nest)."

The paper also pictured Stan's license plate which "says it all about his hobby, his passion, his friends." **BLU BRDZ!** (Article by Mary Le Arneal).

Miscellanea

Thanks Dorene & MBRP!

As Bluebirds Across Nebraska celebrates its 10th anniversary this November, we want to thank Dorene Scriven who played an important role in establishing this organization. Dorene Scriven and the Minnesota Bluebird Recovery Program set the standards on what a successful bluebird organization should be.

An article in the July 2, 2003 Minneapolis Star Tribune highlighted Dorene Scriven and her dedication to the bluebird recovery efforts in Minnesota. "The Minnesota program began in 1978, when Scriven served on the conservation committee of the Audubon chapter of Minneapolis. A newspaper article about [bluebirder and box designer Dick] Peterson and his nest boxes had generated more interest than he could handle, and he came to the chapter for help.

Scriven's first bluebird sightings came when Peterson took the committee to see the bluebird trails he'd established. . . . They'd never seen anything like it: dozens of pairs of the slanted-top nest boxes tacked on poles, with beautiful blue and orange birds soaring between. Peterson's enthusiasm for the birds was contagious, said Scriven, and soon hers was, too.

With the help of the Audubon chapter of Minneapolis, the committee and Peterson founded the Bluebird Recovery Program. Scriven has been with it ever since, spending 30 hours a week or more helping folks learn how to build bluebird houses and establish and maintain trails. She

organizes annual meetings and workshops, in addition to editing the quarterly newsletter. Membership peaked at 2200 in the mid-1980's when only a handful of states had such organizations. Now that more than 25 states have similar programs, Minnesota's membership has stabilized at about 900.

Scriven, a retired medical editor and personal secretary, is the author of 'Bluebird Trails, A Guide to Success,' a well-respected, 210-page guide to bluebird recovery that is in its third edition."



State Fair 2003

Kenneth and Elva Damme of Syracuse were among the BAN volunteers that helped out at the state fair this year. Thanks to everyone who took a turn at manning the booth.

Tree potential

Certain species of trees offer greater potential than others for the creation of cavities used by both birds and mammals for breeding and shelter. Here is a list:

Excellent: White pine, oak, elm, ash, sugar maple, yellow birch, basswood.

Good: Aspen, red pine, tamarack, cedar, red maple, white spruce, black cherry, hickory, box elder, cottonwood, walnut, hackberry.

Fair: White birch, balsam fir, jack pine, black spruce, balm of gilead. (Summer 2003 issue of *Bluebird*, quarterly publication of the North American Bluebird Society)

Egg-dumping flickers

BAN member Allen Bower of Britton, Michigan is known nationally for his knowledge of flickers and his innovative nest box designs. Flickers are not generally known as egg dumpers, which is common among many other species of birds, but this year Allen found 16 Flicker eggs in one of his boxes, out of which 9 hatched and all successfully fledged. Allen has also designed a starling box trap which he uses aggressively throughout the season.

For information on flickers, contact Allen Bower, 213 N. Main Street, Britton, MI 49229 (517) 451-8240.



In the mail...

To Bluebirds Across Nebraska,
My name is Joan Hochstein and my nephew, Kayden Bridgman, put up our first bluebird houses this spring. We put 4 houses up and soon we had bluebirds and a few tree swallows in our houses. I wanted to teach Kayden about nature, and bluebird watching has been a wonderful pastime for the both of us. We have both learned a lot -- it also helps that Kayden's favorite color is blue. He also named his 4 bluebird houses: Thomas, Annie, Clairabelle and Percy -- after Thomas the Train. He is getting excited about adding new houses to his trail for next summer. I think he is probably the youngest Nebraska bluebirder at age 6!

– **Joan Hochstein**, Hartington

Kayden Bridgman may only be 6 years old, but he filled out his own report form (with just a little help from Aunt Joan) and reported fledgling 18 bluebirds. Good work Kayden!

We have a cabin north of Laurel, Nebraska near the river and were just driving in to mow the yard. This box was just fledging and as we drove in, one landed on the antenna of our pickup. Maybe he was saying "thank you." Keep up the good work.

–**Harold & Janice Loberg**, Carroll, Nebraska

Dear Bluebird Friends,

Although I have never met some of you, I shall call you my friends! you have shown this by the waiver of my membership dues to BAN and for all the wonderful cards you sent to me in celebration of my 100th birthday. Thank you for being so thoughtful!

God Bless You.

– **Otilie Lorenz**, Johnson, Nebraska



Going native can make a difference

By Lynn Hassler Kaufman, Reprinted from *Backyard Birds News*

Today native plants are popular alternatives to exotics in the home landscape. Resources for finding out about natives are plentiful, and more and more nurseries are stocking them on a regular basis. Many of us recognize the value of landscaping with natives in order to contribute to the sense of place for a particular region. Planting things that belong in the local environment makes good sense from an aesthetic point of view, as well as for encouraging wildlife. Landscaping with native plants also improves the quality of the environment for a number of reasons.

When natural plant communities disappear from the environment, the wildlife that depends upon those communities disappears as well. Landscaping with indigenous plants provides valuable resources for local wildlife. A diversity of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and insects are attracted to native plant communities for food and shelter. Creating local pockets of natural vegetation in urban or suburban areas can do much to sustain wildlife. This enhances the biodiversity of an area – an area where we can watch, enjoy, and connect with the many relationships within the natural world.

If you're uneasy about using toxic pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers, then indigenous plants are for you. Over time they have evolved natural defenses against local pests. Some of these defenses include thorns, spines, resinous leaves and stems, tough fibrous tissue, and even a tolerance for being browsed upon. Most chemicals used in the garden or in agriculture are indiscriminate in their action. They kill not only insects that are regarded as pests, but they may also kill beneficial creatures such as lady beetles and lacewings which help to keep aphid populations in check. If you like butterflies in your garden, forget using pesticides which will promptly contribute to their demise. Chemicals kill many plant pollinators and even songbirds.

Fertilizers for native plants are unnecessary since the plants are already adopted to local soils and don't really need added nutrients. The chemicals used in the homeowner's backyard can travel via winds or water over long distances and contribute to the pollution of streams, rivers, and lakes. Just think, by not using chemicals we can not only save time and money, but we can also contribute to a healthier environment.

Banded Bluebird

By Gordon Hopp

On Thursday, June 12th, I found a bluebird lying on the deck of the house where I was working two miles east of Unadilla. Apparently it had flown into a window pane and broken her neck. I turned it over in my hand and was shocked to see a metal band on the left leg and two plastic bands on the right leg – one blue and one white.

I reported this to the banding center in Maryland and they sent me a Certificate of Appreciation and information that the bird was banded by a Dr. P. Goldman on July 18, 2002 near Kirksville, MO approximately 240 miles southeast of Unadilla. I wrote to Dr. Goldman and received the following letter:

My Mirage

By Lawrence Fuchs

A Pheasant cackling from the south fence row
The distant calling of the Crow
Morning Dove cooing from the Pine
What sounds God has planned and they are mine

Bluebirds talking to their young
Bob White calling from the wagon tongue
Cardinal whistling from the Blue Spruce tree
All are happy to be free

Purple Martins warbling from the power line
Woodpecker drumming a snag to climb
Oriole singing from a tall Elm tree
All are happy they can see

My eyes are weak, but my hearing true
All their music for me and you
Barn Swallow calling from our garage
What a beautiful morning to hear my mirage

“Dear Mr. Hopp,

Thanks for your letter detailing how you came upon poor 1381-58686. She was barely a year old when she met her end, but at that probably lived longer than most bluebird do. I hope she raised a family this year so her alleles for wanderlust might still exist in the bluebird population.

I have banded bluebirds near Kirksville, MO for about 20 years, but never learned of the fate of banded birds unless I saw them myself or found their carcasses myself until this year. In the past 6 months I was informed by the bird banding lab that one of “my” birds was recovered in Arkansas last March and now your record in Nebraska. . .

The bird was actually banded two miles west of Kirksville as a nestling. Some students and I are trying to learn if young bluebirds stick together in family groups during their initial period of independence from their parents and if it matters if they do. So far the results are all over the place. Some juveniles seem glued to their siblings, while others seem in-different. Most marked birds fledge never to be seen again. Like you, I always assumed that the youngsters do not disperse very far, basing this assumption on the few successful sightings of first year birds and some birds extremely faithful to particular places throughout their lives. Now, who knows?...”

–Pete Goldman,

Professor Emeritus of Biology, Truman State University

Threshing Bee

BAN’s second appearance at the annual Pierce Threshing Bee was again a big success. The dedicated group of Northeast Nebraska Bluebirders signed on 12 new 3-year members.

Gene Gaddie organized the booth and was helped by Kae and Rich Anderson, Tony Dohmen, Bob Frieberg, Julie and Bill Beutler, and Lawrence Fuchs.

Did you know?

- A lawnmower pollutes as much in one hour as does driving an automobile for 350 miles?
- 30 to 60 percent of urban fresh water is used for watering lawns.
- 67 million pounds of synthetic pesticides are used on lawns each year.
- \$25 billion is spent for lawn care each year
- \$5 billion is spent on fossil fuel-derived fertilizers for lawns each year.
- 580 million gallons of gasoline are used for lawnmowers each year.
- \$700 million is spent for pesticides for lawns each year.

Doesn't it make sense for something we mow, bag and send to the landfills. Think about converting some of your lawn area into wildlife habitat by planting trees, shrubs, ornamental grasses and flowers.

Central BAN Picnic

By Valerie Vierk, Buffalo County Coordinator

The 3rd Annual Central BAN picnic was held on August 3, 2003 at the Cottonwood Hilton on the north bank of the South Loup River near Pleasanton on the land owned by June and Norman Hand.

A bluebird banner hanging on the side of a barn directed the visitors to the site.

Those attending were: June & Norman Hand, Lurlie Campbell, and Valerie Vierk, Ravenna; Gordon Backer, Grand Island; Blake Hatfield and Vicki Orr, Dannebrog; Marlene & Bob Rasmussen, Jacie, Ethan, Linda & Dale Zoerband, Litchfield; Donna and Leroy Lammers, and Hazard, Litchfield; Darlene Hughes, Hazard; and Gordon and LaWana Mills, Ansley and Ravenna.

It was a perfect day for a picnic with a moderate breeze blowing to keep the bugs away and lots of shade under the large cottonwood trees.

After a bountiful feast, Darlene Hughes read an essay written by Valerie Vierk entitled, Two Little Blue Angels that had been printed in the United Methodist July church newsletter.

It documented Valerie's experience placing two orphaned

week old bluebirds after two of their siblings were found dead in their nest that had been abandoned.

Jacie and Ethan enjoyed wading in the river until a snake swam by, then Jacie's interest waned considerably.

Nine-year-old Jacie Zoerband showed the group her bluebird scrapbook that she started this past winter. It was very well done and interesting.

Jacie also brought some of her glass Bluebirds of Happiness that she and her family bought on their visit to Fayetteville, Arkansas this summer. The family visited the actual farm where these tiny birds are made. One of pictures showed an outdoor gazebo-like structure that held hundreds of the little birds! The Buffalo County Coordinator was thrilled to receive one of the birds from Jacie.

Linda Zoerb, Jacie's mother, is an expert photographer and shared some beautiful pictures of Jacie and her brother, Ethan, when they were checking bluebird houses.

After some bluebird talk, Norman Hand saddled up the 'mule and we took turns going on a tour of the Hand houses along the river. The terrain required some of the riders to disembark at one point so the mule could navigate up an incline.

Naturally, bluebirds were seen during the tour.

Couple shares love of bluebirding

By Cliff Elwonger, Richardson County Coordinator

I would like to introduce you to an elderly couple, Vesta & Elmer Linderman, who have monitored 15 bluebird boxes at Indian Cave State Park for two years.

They are not members but are very faithful in checking the boxes every week. They love taking the 25-mile trip to the cave and nearly every week take a friend or two with them to enjoy the beauty of the park and see the bluebirds.

I won't give you their age, but they have seen 80 years. Vesta has had both hips replaced; one during the 2003 bluebird season (she can still outwalk me).

This season they reported 163 fledges and keep good records. They also tell me of the deer and wild turkeys they see. They live in Preston, Nebraska and have several boxes at their home. They keep warm water out for the bluebirds during the winter and regularly have 4 - 5 bluebirds visiting regularly.



Vesta and Elmer Linderman

Attention Northeast Nebraska Bluebirders

Pierce County Coordinator Kae Anderson would like to put some boxes along the new bike/walking trail to Willow Lake. If you are interested and can devote some time to the project, please contact Kae.

Condensed Minutes

BAN summer business and potluck meeting

by Joanie Cradick, secretary pro-tem
August 17, Maskenthine Lake, 2:00 p.m.

Scott Wessel of the Game and Parks Commission was able to attend and he spoke on wildlife habitat restoration. Scott said one objective is to try and get groups with similar interests in touch with each other. He suggested BAN give bluebird boxes to USDA to give to landowners putting in CRP. Scott said that Game and Parks, which supervises 1.1 million acres of grassland, is also working to convert grassland into habitat.

REPORTS: Treasurer *Elva Osten* gave the financial report; *Connie Conover* reported three thumbs were injured by various people making bluebird houses. This year, he and his helpers produced a phenomenal number of houses made 2,310 bluebird houses, 1,500 conduit/rebar poles, 16 bluebird display frames, 10 kestrel boxes, 10 kestrel poles, 210 magnet mini houses and 1,562 PVC houses. In addition, *George Wenzel* collected 900 discarded mounting poles from two overhead garage door companies in Lincoln; County coordinator program chair *Chuck Finley* announced

six new coordinators: *Tony Dohmen* of Norfolk, *Betty Noffke* of Hampton, *Jaclyn Hill* of Hamilton, IA, *Bob Barry* of Harrison County IA, *Bill Hellmer* of Kansas, and *Ken Henseler* of So. Dakota. Chuck also reported that he had made a final report to the Environmental Trust Fund. He said the ETF would also like to have a three-year report. Membership chair *Bill Seibert* said BAN's members now total 1,737. He urged members to get their Annual Bluebird Report Forms in as soon as possible and that it is even more important this year because bluebird numbers are down. Executive Director *Steve Eno* reported that *Dave Titterington* has accepted the position of publicity chair. He also advised that the organization received 28,000 board feet of cedar at 30 cents per board foot. The cost of more than \$8,000 was split between the Environmental Trust Fund and BAN. The wood, in 23-inch lengths, is stored in a warehouse north of Lincoln. *Cheryl Eno* introduced promotional bluebird tattoos. She encouraged using the wet-first-and-then-stick-on tattoos when we are working with children. Cheryl also advised the newsletter was getting a makeover in color

and format as evidenced in the Summer 2003 issue. Recipes have also begun to be included. Look for a favorite in the fall issue which received rave reviews at Maskenthine.

Following committee reports, Vice President *Denny Cradick* reported on the kestrel program and said that the Roads Department is thinking about adding 10 more kestrel boxes west of Henderson. *Bill Seibert* reported on the proposed new wood duck project. During the first year, if a grant is forthcoming, BAN will limit its production/distribution of wood duck nest boxes to 50 in the first year. President *Sandy Seibert* encouraged members to lend a helping hand at state parks, which have experienced reduced funding, and to do it in the name of BAN. She and Bill volunteered their time and have undertaken an outhouse roofing project. *June Parks*, vice president of the new bluebird organization in Iowa, reported on upcoming events and membership fees. She thanked BAN for its contribution of \$250 to bolster the fledgling organization.

In closing, upcoming events were announced.

“They’ll be back”

Getting ready for next season

Fall is an ideal time for working on your bluebird trail. The crisp, cool mornings, along with the turning of the leaves, make it a great time to walk your trail and to experience the ‘great outdoors’ before winter temperatures and snow set in.

First, look over your past records and see which boxes have not been used by bluebirds (it pays to keep good records). If a box has not been used in

the last three to five years, there’s probably a good reason why a bluebird hasn’t used it. Sometimes moving a box as little as 20 feet or changing the direction the entrance hole faces can make a difference. Maybe you’ve had boxes that sparrows or wrens have shown a particular interest in that should be moved or eliminated. Both of these species can be very persistent in staking a claim on a box, making it

unavailable for bluebirds.

A common mistake made is putting boxes too close together. Again, check your records to see how many adjoining boxes have been used. One hundred yards has always been the recommended distance between boxes. However, recent thinking is that unless the boxes are located in excellent habitat or the view between neighboring

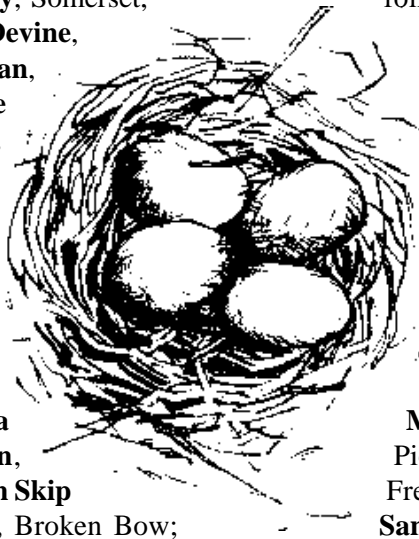
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Welcome new members!!!

(And thank you to all continuing members)

Welcome Newest Members! We're glad to have you join us we begin our second decade of helping bluebirds and other cavity nesters.

Gerald J Abler, Pierce; **Dalton, Logan & Taylor Anderson**, Virginia; **Terry Ball**, Stanton; **Ardith Barber**, Diller; **Bob Barry**, Missouri Valley, IA; **Harold Book**, Shenandoah, IA; **Harold L Brugman**, Douglas; **Dr Janet Bumgarner**, Shenandoah, IA; **School Sisters of Christ the King**, Lincoln; **Charlynn Church**, Palmyra; **Sharon Combs**, Superior; **Michael R Connelly**, Somerset, NJ; **Mike Cronin**, Kearney; **Dennis Devine**, Sr., Council Bluffs, IA; **Joyce Dickman**, Halsey; **Nancy Doerr**, Pierce; **Davie Dolezal**, Edmond, OK; **Robert Fisher**, Moorefield; **Darrell M Gammon**, Alliance, OH; **Jerad Getter**, Hastings, IA; **Sherry Gustman**, Plainview; **Roland & Annie Hall**, McCool Junction; **Cyril Hansen**, Wayne; **Jasey & Lindsey Hartman**, Firth; **Jeannie Hauptman**, Nebraska City; **Joe Hawkins**, Weeping Water; **Jim Iseminger**, Blair; **Sheila Jensen**, Arlington; **Rachel Johnson**, Stanton; **Cheryl Johnson**, Beemer; **Don Skip Kahler**, Norfolk; **Darlene Kapustka**, Broken Bow;



Kevin Kennedy, Rock Port, MO; **Sharon M Klein**, Lincoln; **Dennis Kollars**, Randolph; **Carol Loos**, Lincoln; **Gayle Mason**, Lincoln; **Thomas Mayo**, Broken Bow; **Candace McClun**, Louisville; **Jack & Louise McIntyre**, Wolbach; **Gene Meier**, Plattsmouth; **Carol Meyer**, Kimball; **Dr Curt Meyer**, Stanton; **Ruth Miller**, Palmyra; **Marcia Mitchell**, Fairbury; **Joe Moore**, Columbus; **Ward Moore**, Norfolk; **Rose Marie Murphy**, Burwell; **Jim Neuvirth**, West Point; **Tom Newman**, Hoskins; **Dennis J Newman**, Norfolk; **Eileen Newton**, Springfield; **Paul Norris**, Roca; **Andy Pinneo**, York; **Marie Puckett**, Franklin; **Sylvia Redding**, Volin, SD; **Kip Reeves**, Brownville; **David Rezac**, Valparaiso; **Mike Royle Family**, Central City; **Robert Sanders**, O'Neill; **June Sheppard**, Long Pine; **Joy Smith**, Griswold, IA; **Scotty Smith**, Marquette; **Jens Sorsen**, Norfolk; **Pris Stelling**, Fairbury; **Dennis Stunkel**, Broken Bow; **Marlene Swett**, Fairbury; **Gerry Swinney**, Chadron; **Beth Tekolste**, Lincoln; **Wesley Thelander**, Norfolk; **Terry Travis**, Sidney, IA; **Mark Van Etten**, Spooner, WI; **Katie Voecks**, Pierce; **Leonard Vogel**, Stanton; **John Vyhlidal**, Fremont; **Charlie Weible**, Winside; **Charles & Sandra Wink**, Walton; **Brad Young**, Wausa.

Preparing for next season

Continued from Page 8

boxes is obstructed (by a hill or tree, etc.), 100 yards may be too close. Boxes spaced too close together will greatly favor attracting tree swallows as their territory is not as large as that of the bluebird. If tree swallows use more than 50% of the boxes on your trail, try pairing your boxes 15 to 20 feet apart.

If your boxes are mounted on trees, wooden posts, steel t-posts where predation has occurred, remount your boxes on smooth round pipe. For added protection, you may want to add a coat of high-quality grease to the pipe in the spring.

Check your boxes for any needed repairs. Roofs are usually the first thing that needs to be replaced. A leaky roof will result in a wet nest which will greatly increase the chances of nestlings dying from hypothermia. Take along some extra roofs, nails, screws, and miscellaneous tools (such as a hammer, screw driver, cordless drill, pliers, & wire). If vandalism has been a problem, replace the nail securing the door with a screw. You might have to replace boxes that are

beyond repair. Take along a few extra boxes and perhaps try a different style of box.

If you find a box that wasn't cleaned out after the last nesting, a putty knife and whisk broom will be helpful. If a box contains a mouse nest, you must be aware of the Hanta virus which is spread through mouse droppings. If mice are a problem, the box can be left open until spring. If sparrows have been a problem, leaving the box open may also help to keep sparrows from claiming the box before the bluebirds arrive. Ventilation holes can be plugged which allows the box to be used for winter roosting by other native birds.

Besides being an excellent time to make necessary repairs and adjustments to your own trail, fall is the ideal time to get someone started in bluebirding by setting up a new trail. Please share what you've learned with others. With trails ready, the anticipation of the fun and excitement that comes with the return of the bluebirds will help your winter pass more quickly.

Directory Report Forms show your efforts continue to be important

Taken from the 2003 Directory Report Forms. Thanks again to everyone who submitted their report form. It takes a while to compile all the information, but the initial review of the reports indicates the numbers will be down. However, it's not due to lack of effort by bluebirders. Many states with bluebird organizations have reported lower numbers of bluebirds this year. This only shows that the bluebird population is volatile and your efforts continue to be important.

"Disappointing year" ***reported by many.***

If your bluebird numbers were down this year, you're not alone. In addition to loss of eggs, nestlings, and birds to competitors and predators, there were numerous reports of unexplained dead nestlings in the box and many reports of bluebirds arriving later than usual. Here is just a sampling of what other BAN members experienced:

The *Powers family* of York said "We checked boxes on a weekly schedule. Saw very few bluebirds in the area. Last year we constantly saw bluebirds in the area. Raised less than half as many birds this year compared to last year. Had the same number of boxes in the same areas. Sparrows were more of a problem this year." However, in closing they added: "Good family activity."

Phil Knerl of Ponca reported "I was unable to monitor the houses as frequently as they should be and I was covered up with wrens and tree swallows. My fledgings were down from 64 in 2002 to 40 this year. But I'm looking forward to a better 2004."

"This year was very disheartening as there were lots of eggs laid - then they would disappear. I think

wrens and sparrows were the cause. This year compared to last year with the same number of boxes in the same places, I had 50% less birds fledge." *Colleen Noecker*, Albion.

Ruth Collies of Leigh fledged 5 bluebirds from her 2 boxes but after battling both wrens and sparrows she felt it was "not a very good year here".

On the Other Hand:

"It was a very exciting and successful year" for *Jackie Young* of Callaway. In addition to fledging 15 bluebirds from her 6 boxes, Jackie said they "had a pair nest in a tree and fledge 4 babies."

Monica Francke of Valentine reported "bluebirds are present here the whole year long. Not as often in winter - they come for water then."

Reynold Hoebelheinrich, 80, of Fordyce fledged 197 bluebirds and said that "people enjoy accompanying me on my trail."

From *Elmer Linderman* of Falls City: "15 of the [19] boxes we monitor are in Indian Cave State Park. Each box produced at least one brood. The amazing fact is that eight of these had three broods each. I have no way of knowing if the same pair raised three broods but the birds were busy from about April 1 until near the end of August."

"This was the first year I had two pairs of bluebirds. This made monitoring even more enjoyable." – *Judith Voelker*, Pierce.

I had more unhatched eggs this year and more nests with 4 eggs than in the past. ...I thought the birds were late compared to others I talked to, but I was happy with my results. I had less wren trouble this year than normal. . . .I've been having fun watching the birds and comparing notes with my dad, sister

and friend." – *Janet Hansen*, Nehawka.

Leanne Manning of Crete reported on the 5 boxes put up this year and monitored by a local 4-H club at the Crete hospital: "The 4-Hers learned a lot about bluebirds and enjoyed monitoring the boxes. They really got excited when 3 out of 5 boxes had nests in them within one week of putting up the boxes!!" After fledging 5 bluebirds from their trail, "the 4-Hers are already looking forward to spring nesting season." Leanne also monitors 10 boxes in Lancaster County where it was "a banner year for tree swallows. They drove off one or two pairs of bluebirds looking to nest early in the spring. Since the bluebirds and tree swallows arrived almost the same day, the bluebirds didn't have their nests set up yet and thus, the swallows took over."

After hosting a bluebird conference for the past two years at the Wildcat Hills Nature Center near Gering and distributing free boxes to attendees, the following report from *Robert and Audrey Sterkel* of Sidney is especially exciting: "We attracted one pair of Eastern Bluebirds on a trail of 5 boxes – 100% success – 4 eggs and 4 fledged on the 4th of July. As it was late in the season, the parents did not attempt another brood. ... We have been around this area for 13 years with no rewards. Bob & I cannot take all the credit for this trail. This was a group effort: *Roger & Marge Jorgensen* also built new houses, erected and helped to monitor; *Sam & Jane Wilson* built several houses. Several people in this area are now interested and want to get in-

Continued on Page 11

BAN Membership Renewal Form

- Individual - 1 year \$7.00
- Individual - 3 years \$15.00
- Family - 1 year \$10.00
- Family - 3 years \$25.00
- Business, Corporation,
or Civic Organization - 1 year \$50.00
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- Lifetime Family \$100.00
- Additional Tax-Deductible
Donation \$_____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ County _____

Please check if you have had a change of address or phone

Please mail this membership form and your
tax-deductible contribution to:

Membership, BAN
P.O. Box 67157
Lincoln, NE 68506-7157

Trail Reports

Continued from Page 10

volved. . . They had no idea bluebirds could be attracted to this area. We have new areas to expand next year.”

Another report from Western Nebraska was submitted by *Arlene Farrell* of Scottsbluff. Although she reported ZERO bluebirds fledged from her nesting boxes, she said “I did have bluebirds nesting in trees. I had a confirmed pair that fledged but did not get a true location of the nest or exact number of babies.”

John & Karen Wanamaker of Hamburg Iowa reported “Best year we have had. No wrens, sparrows or predators!!”

Sparrows, Starlings and Wrens:

Cyndi King of Gibbon monitors the bluebird trail at Rowe Sanctuary: “This was my worst year for sparrows and wrens in the 5 years I have been monitoring.”

Tom Keefe of Lincoln reported: “First year I have noticed a problem with sparrows. Persistent little buggers. I’m not into, or equipped to, trap the male, so I kept throwing nests full of eggs out.”

Simply put by *Richard Kujath* of Beatrice: “Those English Sparrows spoiled the whole season for one box.”

Howard & Carolyn Olson of Red Oak, IA reported: “Early in spring & summer -- sparrows very active. Wrens were very persistent all summer – would fill nest box with sticks in two days.”

West Nile:

Don Brockmeyer of Eustis reported: “3 died of what looked like West Nile.”

Problem Solving:

Bill Schneider of Dwight said he had “more wrens than usual. I plan to move 3 boxes to a more open area to attempt

to remedy the problem.”

Dixie Norris of Weeping Water said “wrens destroyed the bluebird eggs and I finally left the box open to discourage them.”

Sam & Vicky Cowan of Beatrice reported a major problem with a raccoon who raided 18 of their 40 boxes. They “greased all of the poles, but still had trouble with a couple of the boxes. So we opened them – they will be moved before next spring!”

Nancy Soukup of Davey took control of a bad situation: One nestbox of tree swallows had 6 eggs. Only 4 hatched. About one week til fledge, I found the nest infested with mites, with one dead chick inside. I removed the 3 remaining chicks and cleaned out the box. Gave it a spray of slightly soapy water and allowed it to dry. Put back fresh dry grass, for nesting material. To “de-mite” the chicks, I lightly rubbed them with dry grass - after putting them back. I decided I’d check later and “dust” them if necessary (run fine dust through their feathers.) Not necessary. Within the hour, the protective parents were back to the feeding schedule. All 3 fledged within the week.

Not Giving Up – *Rose Brady* of Yankton, SD reported: “On June 29th there was a bluebird nest in one of the Gilbertson boxes and it had 5 blue eggs and the parents were guarding it. By July 6, the eggs had hatched; on July 13th, there were 4 dead babies. I was devastated as I considered myself so fortunate getting a bluebird the first year. I had been told those birds would probably come back the next year so I would have lots of bluebirds. That was my sad experience but at least I got to see my first bluebird and they are beautiful – I’ll try again next year.”

Going native

Continued from Page 5

Water scarcity is of great concern in many areas of North America. Because native plants are well adapted to local climates, they are generally able to survive without supplemental water. From this perspective, using natives helps protect water supplies for generations.

Air quality can also be affected when we don't use polluting garden equipment such as lawn mowers, weed whackers, or leaf blowers. Many of these operate using gasoline or electricity, fuels that are associated with the emission of air pollutants.

The use of native plants can serve as a source of discovery for new connections in nature. I'll never forget the day I watched a tiny verdin flit nimbly about in a native desert broom plant. Desert broom is pretty weedy-looking by anybody's standards and is not particularly attractive in the garden, but the adaptable verdin found the fluffy down produced by the flowers to be a marvelous source of nesting material. I watched this diminutive creature come back time and time again to collect the white fluff for lining its softball-sized spherical nest. I will never again cast aspersions upon this weedy native plant.

Native landscaping improves the environment not only in your neighborhood, but also on a larger scale.

Is it time to renew?
Take a moment to check the date above your name and address. If your membership has expired, please renew today. Your continued support is appreciated.

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Nov. 16, 2003 | BAN Fall Quarterly Business Meeting - Mahoney State Park, 2:00 p.m. |
| Dec. 7, 2003 | Annual holiday gathering at 1:00 p.m. (See Page 3) |
| Jan. 3, 2004 | Deadline for submissions for the winter newsletter. |
| Feb. 8, 2004 | BAN Winter Quarterly Business Meeting - Mahoney State Park, 2:00 p.m. |
| Feb. 29, 2004 | County Coordinator Meeting - Kearney Holiday Inn, Noon - 3:00 p.m. |
| March 7, 2004 | County Coordinator Meeting - Women's Club, Raymond, NE, Noon - 3:00 p.m. |
| March 27, 2004 | BAN's 10 th Annual Bluebird Conference - <i>Mahoney State Park</i> |
| April 17, 2004 | Minnesota Annual Bluebird Conference - <i>Monticello, Minnesota</i> |
| April 24, 2004 | Iowa Bluebird Conservationist FIRST Annual Bluebird Conference - <i>Story County Conservation Center, Ames, Iowa</i> |
| May 16, 2004 | BAN Spring Potluck Meeting - Kearney, NE - Harmon Park, Sertoma Shelter, NE 1:00 meal, 2:00 meeting. |
| July 7 - 11, 2004 | NABS 27 th Annual Convention - Ithaca, New York |
| August 15, 2004 | BAN Summer Potluck Meeting -- Platte River State Park, Turkey Shelter, 1:00 meal, 2:00 meeting. |
| April 2, 2005 | BAN's 11 th Annual Bluebird Conference -- Beatrice, Nebraska |

Call the Seiberts (402) 334-8691 or the Enos (402) 783-3011 for more information or to volunteer.

Bluebirds Across Nebraska Board of Directors - 2003

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Bluebirding Basics

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How do I identify a bluebird nest?

A: The female bluebird constructs a tidy nest from materials that are readily available near the nest site. These nests are usually composed of dry grasses, pine needles, or strips of bark. The nest is usually not lined with soft materials. The presence of bluebird eggs will confirm that a pair of bluebirds has taken up residence. It can be difficult to distinguish between bluebird and house (English) sparrow nests in the early stages of construction. The completed nests, however are quite different. House sparrow nests are built up much higher on the sides and are often domed over the top. These nests are composed of a variety of materials from small twigs, grass, leaves, and quite often contain man-made products such as paper or string. The common house wren builds a very identifiable nest from the beginning of construction. House wrens build their nest almost entirely of small sticks, using enough to fill the entire box. Many birding books show photographs of the nests of various species of cavity-nesting birds

Q: Will bluebirds nest in a box near a human dwelling?

A: Yes. In fact several bluebird landlords have reported limited success at attracting bluebirds until the box was moved closer to a house or patio area. Bluebirds, like Purple Martins, are very compatible with humans. The problem with trying to entice bluebirds to nest close to human dwellings is that house sparrows also commonly nest around buildings and sheds, and are likely to aggressively compete for the nest box. Care must be taken to ensure house sparrows do not use nest boxes.

Q: Can I attract bluebirds inside the cities or towns?

A: Generally not. Bluebirds prefer wide open spaces found in rural areas and around the perimeter of small urban areas. They have been known to nest on the fringes of towns and cities, especially if they were nesting in those areas prior to development. Predation by cats and competition from house sparrows is a serious problem in large developed areas such as cities and towns.

Q: Will bluebirds come to my feeders?

A: During the nesting season, many bluebird trail operators, as well as those that maintain only one or two nest boxes, attract bluebirds to feeding stations where mealworms are offered. Mealworms are generally available at birding stores. You may also purchase them by mail. It is simple to raise your own mealworms at home. (Refer to NABS information sheet on "Raising Mealworms"). Some bluebird specialty food is available in wild bird specialty stores. There are also some foods you can make at home. It is often necessary to initially attract bluebirds to the artificial foods by offering mealworms. Where they overwinter, bluebirds occasionally come to feeders for seeds during foul weather. This generally takes place when insects, which are their main food source, or berries are in short supply.

Q: Do bluebirds migrate?

A: Yes. They are known as "partial migrants". In the northern sections of their range, all bluebirds migrate to more southerly latitudes for the winter. In the central and southern sections of their range, they have less established migratory patterns. It is believed that some winter migration is in response to local weather conditions. Yet even in very cold wintery weather, some bluebirds do not migrate at all. They tend to group together for feeding and protection during the winter months. While some bluebirds that remain do survive the inclement conditions, many perish.

Q: Are Spring snowstorms hazardous to nesting adult bluebirds?

A: During the nesting season, a bluebirds diet consists primarily of insects. In the fall and winter, they supplement, or completely switch their diet to berries and other fruits. Food shortages often occur in the spring when the supply of berries and fruits have been exhausted, and insects are not yet active. Natural food can be supplemented with mealworms, raisins and other dried fruits, chopped nut meats (unsalted), suet and specialty feeds. Offer food on an elevated platform. A picnic table or porch railing will work well. Since bluebirds are not a seed eaters, they will not benefit from the provisions of standard wild bird mixes for them. There have been reports, although rare, of foraging on hulled sunflower meats.

Q: When should I have my Bluebird boxes ready for the nesting season?

A: Southern states -by February 1st; Northern and Central states -by March 1st; Canada by March 15th. This does not mean that houses cannot be put up prior to or after these dates. These are the dates for receiving full season results. Bluebirds will raise one brood in the northern parts and as many as three broods in the south.

Q: What habitats do bluebirds prefer to nest in?

A: Bluebirds prefer to nest in open fields, prairies, and meadows that contain scattered trees and shrubs. Nest boxes placed around livestock pastures, cemeteries, and other open spaces in rural settings. Successful bluebird trails have been established around pesticide-free golf courses. Woodland habitats are less favorable to bluebirds. There are a number a species, however , that will use bluebird boxes placed in wooded areas. These include House Wrens, Chickadees, Flycatchers, Nuthatches. Swallows, both the Tree and Violet/Green, are common in bluebird nest boxes.

Q: Can you attract bluebirds to a box located where no activity has been spotted in years?

A: Yes, assuming the bluebird box has been located ‘in suitable bluebird habitat. Other than that, there is nothing you can do but to keep the nest box free from being inhabited by house (English) sparrows. It is surprising how often bluebirds show up at a properly-located nest box, even if bluebirds have not been spotted in the area for years. In the early spring, these birds are suspected of searching far and wide for suitable places to nest. Loss of natural habitats and the proliferation of the house sparrow population across North America has made nesting sites for many native cavity nesting birds scarce. You may also want to try planting trees and shrubs that are attractive to bluebirds.

Q: Where and how should I locate a bluebird nest box?

A: Ideally, nest boxes should be mounted on a smooth metal pole. Such as a fence post, pipe, or electrical conduit. The boxes should be at least 50 feet from nearby trees and shrubs, and 200 feet if house wrens are likely to compete for the nest site. Bluebird boxes should be placed at 300-foot intervals or greater. If possible, obscure the nest boxes from each other by distance, a small hill, an obstruction or other barrier. If tree swallows are using your boxes another bluebird nest box may be paired with the other and spaced at least 10 to 25 feet apart. The nest box should be no higher than is convenient to monitor and maintain the box. Bluebirds will tolerate nest boxes mounted as high as 15 feet or as low as 3 feet above the ground. Boxes that are mounted less than 4 to 5 feet above the ground will become more accessible to ground dwelling predators. The opening of the nest box should be directed away from prevailing winds to prevent rain from blowing in. The direction of the opening does not affect the use of the box, but young birds exposed to moisture can suffer hypothermia, which is often fatal. When possible, position the opening away from direct sun exposure. Also facing the entrance toward a tree or bush allows for a safe perch when the young have fledged the nest. Records indicate the most often used boxes have the opening facing either east or slightly northeast. It is also wise to position the opening away from or parallel roads and highways to reduce conflict with traffic as they leave the box.

Q: Is it important to monitor bluebird boxes and keep records of their activities?

A: Monitoring is the very heart of the bluebirding experience. The monitoring of bluebird nest boxes is very important, whether you have just one or two boxes, or a trail consisting of many. By monitoring the nest boxes on a weekly basis, you will be able to keep track of all that goes on in and around your boxes. You will also be able to make repairs to boxes as needed. Monitoring on a regular basis will also enable you to reduce potential problems with competitors of the box, as well as parasites and predators. In addition to ensuring that your bluebird trail is successful, monitoring enables you to keep records of bluebird productivity. By keeping records, you will be able to determine which boxes are successful for bluebirds, and which ones may have problems with predators or competitors. You will also get satisfaction from knowing how many birds successful fledged from the boxes you are maintaining. The data you collect are also used by bluebird organizations and researchers to track bluebird population and movements. Most states and provinces have reporting forms which can be filled out at the end of the nesting season. If possible obtain a copy of the form prior to the nesting season so you are familiar with the specific information required. If no state or provincial organization has yet been formed in your area, contact the North American Bluebird Society for a copy of their nest data form. Basic information that should be collected on every bluebird trail includes: 1) Date of each box inspection, 2) number of eggs laid, 3) number of young hatched, 4) number of young fledged. Additional useful data includes: style of nest box, pairing information, date of first egg, hatching dates, fledging dates, type of habitat, white eggs, sex ratio, etc... It is useful to record unusual behavior and other interesting observations.

Q: How often should bluebird boxes be inspected?

A: Under normal circumstances, a weekly inspection is sufficient. However other factors may require more frequent monitoring. During the egg laying period, which generally takes place in the early morning and lasts 5 days, care should be taken so as not to frighten the female. Boxes should not be opened after the nestlings are 12 to 13 days old. This may frighten them and cause the young to fledged prematurely. After the 13th day, it is best to observe the box at a distance until you are certain all the nestlings have fledged.

Q: What bluebird predators may I expect to encounter?

A: Bluebird predators include snakes, cats, and raccoons, which are able to climb the post to access the nest, and raptors (birds of prey) which may take the fledglings as they leave the nest. There are precautions that can be taken to reduce the problem of predation at the nest box. These precautions include proper mounting and placement, and frequent monitoring, (Refer to NABS informa-

Bluebirding Basics – *Frequently Asked Questions*

tion sheet on “Predator Control”). For insect infestation, such as blowflies and ants, you may gently raise the nest and brush the insects and their larva out of the box. Gently tap the nest to dislodge others. Check the nestlings for any larva that may be attached to them also and remove. In the event of a serious blowfly infestation, replace the old nest with a new one made from fresh dried grasses. Some bluebird enthusiasts go as far as to carry an old bluebird nest in their pack while monitoring boxes to replace heavily infested or wet nests. The two most common and serious avian competitors are house (English) sparrows and the house wren. House Sparrows were introduced into North America in 1850. They are considered a pest species, so are not protected by Federal Laws. House Sparrows are very intelligent, aggressive and persistent. They will kill adult and nestling bluebirds in the box, then build their nests over the corpses. Another introduced cavity nester, the European Starling, poses a threat to bluebirds in natural areas, but can be excluded from bluebird boxes as long as the entrance is no larger than “1 9/16 inches. House wrens are native to North America and fall under Federal protection. Both have been know to puncture bluebird eggs, kill the young birds and adults. The sparrow will then build its nest on top the bluebird nest. Wrens have been know to not only puncture eggs or toss them out of the nest, but remove nestlings and drop them to the ground. Competition from house wrens may be reduced if the nest boxes are located at least 200 feet from trees, shrubs, briars, and other woody areas. The European starling can pose another serious threat to bluebirds. However if the entrance hole is no larger than 1 9/16 then you can prevent their access.

Q: Can a bluebird box be made house sparrow proof?

A: Although extensive field testing has been done by bluebirders across North America, no one has yet to discover a way to prevent House Sparrows from using bluebird boxes. To reduce the problem of House Sparrow use, locate bluebird nest boxes away farm building, areas where animals and livestock are fed, out buildings such as sheds, and away from towns. Some trail operators have found mounting the box 4 to 5 feet above the ground may also discourage the house sparrow. However again we must mention that nest boxes mounted that low become a risk by ground predators. Thin-wall PVC boxes appear to be less attractive to the house sparrow, especially if they are paired with a standard wooden bluebird box. It is also critically important to remove house sparrow nests from bluebird boxes. There are several styles of live traps that can be used to help reduce local house sparrow populations. One design allows to trap the sparrow from the nest box itself. Traps should be checked regularly to release the inadvertent trapping of other birds. It is highly recommended that house sparrows that are trapped not be released back into the wild. (Refer to NABS information sheet on “Controlling House Sparrows”).

Q: How do you protect bluebirds from the family cat?

A: Cats, both domestic and feral, pose an serious threat to our wild bird population. A recent study in Wisconsin estimates that roaming cats kill more than 800 million song birds a year in the United States alone. The American Birding Conservancy, The National Humane Society, and The National Wildlife Federation recommend that family cats be kept indoors for their own safety and health, as well as the safety of our wild birds. Feral cats, (cats with no owners) pose a serious problem not only to wildlife, but to humans as well. Feral cats should be eliminated for health and safety reasons. Cats will kill whether or not they are hungry. Even cats that have been declawed possess the ability to kill birds and wildlife. A cat’s urge to kill is independent of their urge to eat. They kill because it is part of their instinctive nature as hunters. Bluebird nesting boxes may be protected from cats by placing a funnel shaped baffle, wide smooth collars made of sheet metal, or a metal stove pipe mounted over the post below the nest box. Since cats have good jumping ability it is suggested the box be no lower than 6 feet off the ground. These same protective measures may also reduce predation by raccoons. For more information on the impact of cats on birds and wildlife, contact: The American Birding Conservancy, 1250 24th Street N.W., Suite 400, Washington, DC 20037. Request the kit entitled, “Cats Indoors”.

Q: What if house wrens pose a constant problem by building nests in bluebird boxes?

A: Bluebirds usually start their nesting activities two to three weeks before house wrens begin theirs. This give the bluebirds some advantage in locating nesting sites. Once the house wrens arrive in their nesting territories, they will sometimes enter a bluebird nest box, puncture bluebird eggs and may even eject the eggs from the nest. They have been know to remove nestlings from the box as well and simply drop them to the ground. To minimize house wren competition, locate the nest box in open areas, as far as possible from stands of trees, shrubs, and other underbrush. Although it is unlawful to remove a completed House Wren nest, you may remove the male wren’s uncompleted or dummy nest.

Q: Should the bluebird nest be removed after each fledging?

A: Yes. Remove the nest, clean the box and make any necessary repairs.

Q: Bluebirds arrive in the morning, perch on the nest boxes, then leave showing little interest in nesting. Why?

A: Since bluebirds are very territorial, boxes should never be spaced closer than 100 yards, the length of a football field. With a trail consisting of several nesting boxes located closer than 100 yards apart the bluebirds are probably using them as perches to look for insects. If this happens on a regular basis there is a good chance they are nesting nearby. Check to make certain your nest boxes meet the requirements for bluebirds and that they are spaced adequately apart. (Refer to NABS informational sheet on “Getting Started with Bluebirds”).

Q: Do Bluebird fledglings remain in the vicinity of the nest box once they have fledged?

A: The movement of young bluebirds after they leave the nest is not well known or always predictable. It is thought they usually remain for a time in the general vicinity, but not necessarily in the immediate vicinity of their natal box. Since suitable nesting sites for bluebirds are scarce, bluebirds will often choose a nesting sites where the food supply is not optimal. Thus, adult birds may have to travel some distance to obtain food for the nestlings. As soon as the young birds can fly, it appears that the parent birds encourage them to move closer to a better supply of food. This simplifies the task of feeding them and, at the same time, explains why the young birds appear to disappear from the nest site . It also permits the adult birds to begin construction of another nest. If mealworms are supplied this enhances the chance the young birds will remain in the immediate area even after the adult bird ceases providing them food. Mountain Bluebirds appear to abandon the nesting area altogether after the young have fledged, but then seem to regroup in the fall prior to migration.

Q: How important are drain holes and ventilation openings in bluebird boxes?

A: Some ventilation is important as nest boxes should be placed in open areas and away from trees that would normally provide shade, except where such shade is provided by a single tree. Ventilation holes or slots should be located on both sides of the box just below the roof. Boxes with large overhangs, such as the Peterson Bluebird Box, do provide adequate protection from rain, and as such, do not require drain holes. Other nest boxes lacking the extended overhang should have the four corners of the floor cut off. This produces triangular drains at each of them. This allows drainage for any water that accumulates inside the box, as well as moisture from condensation. The floor of the nest box should also be recessed 1/4 inch above the four sides to prevent the floor from absorbing water.

Q: Is an exterior perch necessary on a bluebird nesting box?

A: Since bluebirds have the ability to cling, they are adapted to enter both tree cavities and nest boxes without the aid of a perch. House sparrows do not have the ability to cling, and as such a perch will assist their ability to enter a nesting cavity. It also permits easier access for other predators. It is recommended to eliminate perches not only from bluebird boxes, but also from all nesting boxes for primary and secondary cavity nesters.

Q: Are raccoon guards effective on bluebird boxes?

A: The preferred method to keep raccoons from climbing the pole in the first place. Smooth metal poles can be sprayed with silicone making them to slippery to scale. You may also rub the pole with steel wool and then apply “carnauba” wax producing the same results. A quality grease rubbed on the pole should last the entire nesting season, but periodic inspections are recommended, and the pole cleaned and re-greased if necessary. The effectiveness of the extended wood block predator guard at the entrance hole is not completely is still undetermined. It is far from fool proof and may make it more difficult for bluebirds to access the box. The “Noel” predator guard with the adapter works well. Do not install this guard until after the first egg is laid. The exception is if the bluebirds have used the box previously with the guard in place.

Q: What if wasps try to establish a nest in my bluebird box?

A: If at all possible remove the nest. If the wasp nest is discovered in the early stages of construction there will only be a few wasps on it making eviction less hazardous. Later into the season removal is more difficult as the nest becomes larger with many more wasps. Always check under the roof and at the bottom of the nest box when monitoring your bluebird housing. Hard soap or vaseline rubbed on these surfaces will help prevent wasps from attaching their combs.

Q: Do bluebirds have a sense of smell?

A: Bluebirds and other passerines have a very poor sense of smell and taste compared to mammals including man. This is often the reason why it is permissible to handle young birds while maintaining nests, or placing a nestling back into the nest if they have fallen out. The adult birds cannot detect the scent of the human handling their young, as well as the fact man and wild birds interact much more readily than most other wildlife. Birds do however have excellent hearing and superb eye sight

Q: What are some berry producing plants, attractive to bluebirds, whose fruit lasts through the winter?

A: Among the best are the American holly, Mountain ash, Staghorn sumac, pyracantha, bittersweet, red choke berry, and various hawthorns. Multiflora rose is also one of the best, but this shrub can become a serious nuisance because of its invasive nature. There are many books available that deal with landscaping for wildlife. Plant species native to your area will insure a hearty and long lasting yield year after year. Your local nursery may be able to help if he is accustomed to plantings for attracting wildlife. Check with your state forester, game commission, or local natural resource district to see if they have any publications on this subject.

For additional information write:

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