

# Bluebirds at Old World Wisconsin

By Bunny Schoen

Old World Wisconsin is a 600 acre living history museum in southeastern Wisconsin operated by the state Historical Society. It is home to 65 original, historical Wisconsin buildings representing a variety of ethnic groups that settled in the state.

BRAW members are not the only Wisconsinites who love bluebirds. Old World staffers Ellen Penwell, curator of collections and Marty Perkins, curator of research, noticed the dilapidating bluebird houses that were built and erected by the DNR when the department owned the property in the 1950's. They discovered that our ancestors loved their bluebirds. To quote the Peoples Cyclopedia of Universal Knowledge, 1859, "*Few American farmers fail to provide a box for a bluebird nest.*"

Jerry Schoen, a BRAW board member, was called to evaluate the situation. He found the majority of the neglected houses were mice infested and unacceptable. These NABs boxes were historically incorrect and needed replacing. He modified the design to allow easy access, constructed a few boxes, and began monitoring them. Some boxes were allowed to remain in place because they were not visible to the public eye. Six are on the historic site with six others elsewhere on the property. All are checked weekly. As of July 1, 31 birds had fledged from the boxes at Old World Wisconsin.

Old World has authentic, historically reconstructed farmsteads, shops, a

church, a school, and a meeting hall. The costumes worn by the interpreters are historically authentic as are the animals, the plants in the gardens and fields, and even the fences. To help the visitors appreciate the gardens and the bluebird trail, the museum has developed a special flier/guide which is available in the visitor's center.

Because Old World appreciates its bluebirds and houses, 2' by 4' signs were erected by each house with a historic quote by a famous American. One sign reads, "*The bluebird carries the sky on its back.*" - Henry David Thoreau.

Old World Wisconsin is open daily from May 1- October 31. Admission is \$16 for adults, \$14 for students and seniors, and \$9 for children. This includes a ticket to ride the motorized tram from site to site. The Clousing Barn Restaurant serves casual food with picnic tables available for carry-in lunches.

Old World Wisconsin is located south of Eagle on Hwy. 67. The web site is [www.oldworldwisconsin.org](http://www.oldworldwisconsin.org).

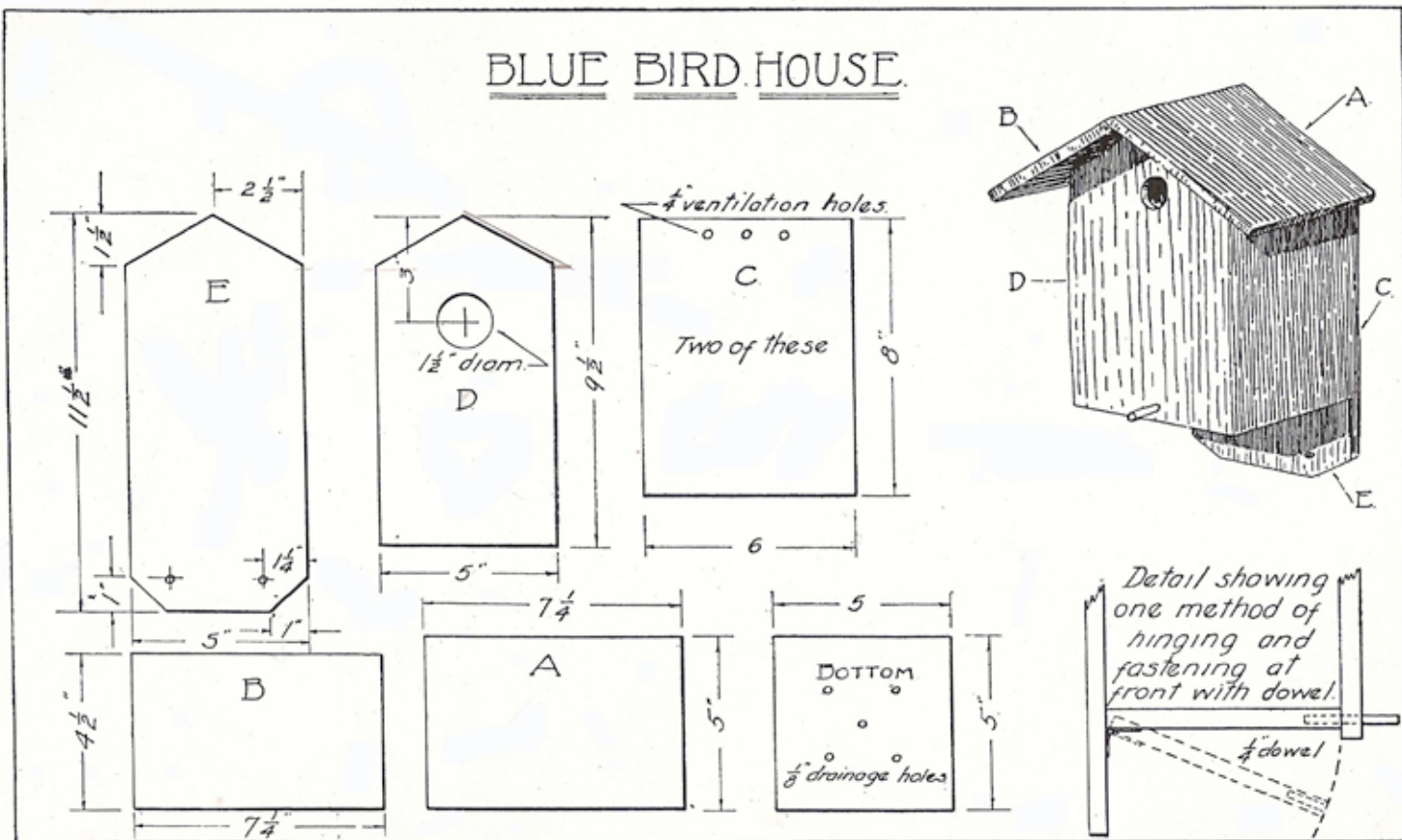
See page 15 for the box plan that Jerry used for the nest box pictured here.



**Above: Jerry Schoen shows Ellen Powell and Marty Perkins how to monitor a bluebird nest box at Old World Wisconsin.**

**Below: Jerry explains the importance of weekly monitoring.**





**Old World Wisconsin nest box**

One of the old nest box designs that Jerry Schoen used at Old World Wis.

Jerry modified the plan so that the front of the box pivots forward for easier monitoring rather than a floor that drops down.

In the old days it was common to mount boxes on wooden fence post. OWW requires authentic looking period items so Jerry mounted it to a wood post.

For better predator control a metal post or 3/4" conduit is recommended.

See page 9 for the complete article.

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The mission and purpose of the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, Inc. is to monitor and increase the production of Eastern Bluebirds and other native cavity nesters through a coordinated statewide nest box construction and monitoring program.