

# A New Way to Create New Trails

By Bob Tamm

Back in the good old days of last year and many years before, any Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW) member needing nest boxes for a new bluebird trail could simply request them from BRAW headquarters, and, if the trail was deemed worthy enough, boxes were supplied. I should know... I got my fair share of them, and because of it, many new trails were established here in southeast Wisconsin.

Now, it is going to be a bit more of a challenge. Volunteer workers built those boxes in the past – donating much of their time and expertise in the process. And we all benefited greatly. But eventually, these wells run dry, and new sources for wood and nest boxes are needed. And that gives all of us new opportunities to use our ingenuity and resources in finding those new sources for lumber and hardware, so that we can take a more active role in creating new bluebird trails in the future. It CAN be done, and it isn't that hard to do – REALLY! For example... A few weeks ago, I decided to check out some options, the first ones being lumber companies here in the general Milwaukee area. My target lumber would be at least one inch thick, cedar or pine. Preferable widths for the boards would be about 6 and 8 inches wide. After giving these dimensions to a few retail lumber dealers, it became evident that the price for "custom" orders would be prohibitively high, even with a discount given for our non-profit organization. So, I looked elsewhere...

My wife and I spent some time with our friends Will and Stephanie Purner at their Hummingbird Ridge B&B this last fall, and while there, we always spend considerable time talking bluebirds. No surprise there – Stephanie has a wonderful bluebird trail on her land and surrounding area, and she is the County Coordinator for Vernon County. In talking with the two of them, I mentioned the need for finding a good source for wood, and we couldn't help but think about an Amish sawmill



only two short blocks from their B&B. My first time over there, the owner, Andy Kaufmann, showed me some of the wood they "mill", and he gave me some trial wood to take back home with me. The wood

was pine, at least an inch thick, and not planed, so the subsequent boxes would have a rustic look. I built a few boxes with the wood and decided if the price were right, we'd go with them. And the price WAS right. After checking with Kent Hall and others, it looked like the price I was quoted was even better than prices from other mills of the past years. So, with BRAW's approval, I called Will and asked him to put in an order for pine boards in two widths – 6 1/4" and 8 1/4" – and 10 ft. lengths. They would cut the boards in half for me, to make transporting them back to Muskego easier. On October 17<sup>th</sup>, I drove to the sawmill with my pickup truck and



continued on next page

## New Trail . . . continued from page 7

brought back the wood, which, I am happy to say, all fit in my not-so-big pickup!

When I returned, I built more boxes with the sawmill wood – my immediate goal was to turn out at least 20 boxes for a new proposed trail for Amy and Steve Bachman - fairly new, and, I might add, enthusiastic members of BRAW. They live in a beautiful area of Pewaukee, and they have already attracted bluebirds to their own spacious yard. So, when Amy asked me for some help in creating a trail for her neighborhood, I met with her to “scope out” the proposed area. We determined that she could easily have 16 to 20 boxes to start with, and room to grow if they wanted to. We picked Friday, Oct. 28<sup>th</sup> as a target date for trail installation. As we know here in Wisconsin, late October can produce anything from rain to snow to sleet to – yes, even sunshine! And sunshine is exactly what we got on that day, so I met with Steve and Amy in the morning, and by early afternoon, they had their nice rural 16 box bluebird trail... with room for at least four more boxes in the near future. As a good omen, I heard a bluebird while Steve and I were installing one of the last boxes, and sure enough, Steve turned around to spot a bright blue male bluebird in a nearby tree. It



seemed to watch us intently as we put in the box/post, and hopefully he has imprinted this box for future consideration next spring!

So, we will see how things go in the coming months. This trail is the first one using the new wood from the sawmill. About the wood itself: Because the wood is somewhat “green”, I will be watching how the boxes “weather” in the months ahead. Of course, much of the wood will sit over the winter, so that will give it a chance to “season”. Also, a couple boards have grub-tunneling in them. Where it is extensive, I won’t use it for boxes. But, overall - so far, so good. The price, certainly, was right.

It should be noted that our organization – the Bluebird Restoration Assoc. of Wisconsin – will reimburse anyone who takes the initiative to create new trails, using their own lumber and hardware resources. So,

if you discover an inviting spot for a new trail, and have a willing person to monitor the trail, then the next step is to find a source for wood and hardware. In my own case, besides negotiating lumber prices from the Amish sawmill, I also met with the general manager of our local Menard’s to get a better price for hardware supplies needed for post assemblies, i.e., EMT conduit and straps, screws, etc. I sent the receipts to Kent Hall, who in turn sent me a check to cover these two bills. (I donated lesser expenses myself, including cost of gas for driving to and from the Vernon Co. sawmill and box-building) After you have your supplies, you’re now ready to build a good bluebird nest box. Find a good box plan and go for it... build ‘em yourself or find someone else – or others - willing and capable to build them. After this, the last and most satisfying step is to actually install your brand new trail – then sit back and wait for spring and the bluebirds to arrive!

In the future, all of us may have to do a little more to make new trails become a reality. I don’t consider that a problem at all... just a challenge. And it has its rewards – install a trail in which you have to use your own creativity more means you will get that much more satisfaction when it becomes a reality! You’re the real winner... and so are our beloved bluebirds!

