

# Ghost Eggs of Mill Center Cemetery

By Jo DeVetter

Driving rural roads just west of Howard & Suamico these 'burbs of Green Bay have become my bluebird trail this last 4 years and a nice way to meet my neighbors in the process. Along the farthest reaches of my 50 box trail, only 3 miles out, I've discovered what's become a favorite haunt in more ways than one. Mill Center Cemetery is an historic resting place for many of the regions' earliest settlers. A well-maintained site beneath mature oaks, it's a bit shady for our beloved blues, and lining the back fence approximately 10 feet apart are 5 weathered nest boxes of the NABS design. Needless to say this close proximity was conducive to a proliferation of what I laughingly refer to as "cheep" birds, ( English sparrows). For a time I just drove on by, but as fate would have it our then-prospective monitor, Cathy Welter, (who has since graduated to her very own 30-box trail at Thornberry Creek Golf Course) spotted the nest boxes at the cemetery and urged me to stop to peek in. If I recall 2 of the boxes were indeed occupied by house sparrows



and one had tree swallows but to our surprise the very first box in line had 4 bluebird eggs. We were delighted and continued on our way.

As time passed Cathy became an avid birder with quite an attention to detail and she asked to come along each week and showed a special interest to the cemetery blues even though they technically weren't on my trail. One day we arrived just as they were preparing to fledge and tumbled from the side door just as it opened, skittering into the tall hayfield beyond the fence. I worried they might not make it, so returned after dropping Cathy at her car and tried to herd them out into the open. Only one, and I watched as he picked up altitude and landed on an old tombstone with his parents in attendance.

Hoping for the best and not wanting to intrude any longer I left.

Guilt-ridden the rest of that day for possibly causing their early demise I could only hope they had been called into the open by the parent birds. Curiosity led Cathy and I to return once each week the rest of the summer. I made an attempt to find who had placed the nest boxes there, with no luck, and hoped in time to see they spaced them out correctly.

Winter passed and we got more involved with the local golf courses and parks, but again this year I decided to adopt this bluebird family. Imagine my surprise when the first time I peeked in at the 3<sup>rd</sup> box in line there were 5 "white" eggs. Someone had to know basic information because I haven't noticed any English sparrow nestings this year although the birds are present in the neighborhood. More importantly the first brood was yet to fledge in Box 3 when another nest was started in Box 5, and to my amazement 4 more "white" eggs laid. All 9 chicks were successfully fledged, and I'm so glad this spiritual resting place has played host to 2 complete clutches of white-egged Eastern bluebirds and have been adopted to my count this year, too extraordinary not to. How fitting these "ghost" eggs have been, raised in this beautiful memorial park.