

Last year for Operation Top State (OTS)

By Kent Hall

Four years ago, I challenged the BRAW Board to set the statewide goal of producing 30,000 bluebirds by the 2011 season, and to become the top bluebird producing state in the nation. If one counts all reports submitted to me (Table 1), you can see that we achieved the goal of top bluebird producing state in the country in 2007 and have now led the US for three consecutive years.

But I do not use late or inappropriately submitted data to calculate our goal of achieving 30,000 fledglings. It appeared that we might reach the 30,000 goal in 2008 (Table 2), but we were hit with a double whammy: 1) bad weather and 2) a refusal of several coordinators of mega trails to report their data on the new Form 21. These factors caused a major drop of almost 7,000 fledglings from the 2,007 level.

In 2009, largely because of the effort to place additional boxes (+1,312 from the previous season) and better weather, our numbers increased by 7,429 over the previous season, a



Tom Koch photo

major recovery. Approximately another 1,000 boxes were put in place last fall and this spring, so we are positioned to break the record of 30,000 fledglings.

But, wait, mother nature has intervened again. The Audubon Bluebird Trail that I coordinate (ca. 1,300 boxes) has dropped its productivity per box by about 7% since last season. Moreover, the cold weather in the 2nd week in May hit hard the most productive, western part of the state. For example, the highly productive area at Ft. McCoy has dropped an average of 1 1/2 fledglings/box since last sea-

son. If the rest of the western part of the state was as hard hit, we might be thwarted once again, from reaching our 30,000 fledgling goal.

So, as I write this article in mid-July, it is not clear that we are going to reach our goal of 30,000 fledglings for the 2010 season. Therefore, I am making plans for the final fall and spring of OTS. Toward that end, I am doing the following:

- 1) Organizing the construction of 750 rough-cut, pine boxes (1 1/8" thick)
- 2) Distribution of these boxes and mounting posts free of charge to monitors committed to expanding or developing their own trails throughout Wisconsin (one major distribution point will be at the Annual State Convention on September 18).

For three years I have traveled throughout Wisconsin to help install bluebird trails. I plan to continue doing that this fall and spring. And then, such travel will be over. If anyone is contemplating the development of a trail, just let me know and I will be glad to travel to look over your habitat. BRAW's policy is to put in trails with "no cost" boxes and mounting posts, only after a qualified and experienced monitor has surveyed the habitat in question.

So, if you think you want to put in a trail at no cost to you, now is your last, best chance to do so. Feel free to contact me at: kentsue@charter.net or (715) 344-8081. Let's give that 30,000 goal our best shot!

Table 1. Leading states for bluebird production: 2006-09

State	2 006	2007	2008	2009
Wisconsin	21,379	28,244	23,491*	31,875*
Nebraska	26,385	22,856	22,061	23,809

* Includes reports submitted with fledged data but not on a Form 21 or too late for Annual Report

Table 2. Changes in nest box production, number & occupancy and BRAW reports & monitors since Operation Top State was implemented: 2006-9.

Year	Total Bluebird Production#	Nest Box Number	Nest Box Occupancy*	Total BRAW Reports	Total BRAW Monitors
2009	28,808	8,699	58% (3.3+)	405	640
2008	21,379	7,387	56% (2.9)	323	499
2007	28,244	7,861	50% (3.6)	267	409
2006	21,047	6,021	44% (3.5)	195	245

#Does not include reports submitted improperly or too late for Annual Report

*Boxes with at least one bluebird egg

+Bluebirds fledged per box