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Wisconsin Bluebird

Newsletter of the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, Inc.

BRAW is an affiliate member of the North American Bluebird Society (NABS), founded by Lawrence Zeleny.

BRAW Convention Will be Held in September!

See Page 3



© Dianne Lyn Brooks

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President's Report

Some of you may recall the name of Brad Zinda who served on the BRAW Board previously while a student at UW Steven's Point. Brad has agreed to rejoin the Board and serve as BRAW's Vice President. He is a very welcome and an important addition to the Board. Brad is an avid birder and monitors several bluebird trails. He also participates with raptors studies and works at the Wild Birds Unlimited in Madison. Welcome Brad!

April has been a very busy time for Board members helping others and this includes the distribution of nesting boxes to various trail monitors in and around the southeast portion of our state. Gene Kroupa and I made a special trip to Darlington in Lafayette County. Gene has made it his goal to populate as many cemeteries that have good bluebird habitat and Union Grove Cemetery in Darlington is special for Carol McDaniel will rest there. It is only fitting to place some of her sponsored nesting boxes at this cemetery.

The Carol McDaniel Legacy Fund was established by her bequest and by her husband, John McDaniel, to



commemorate Carol's long-time commitment to increasing the bluebird population in Wisconsin. She previously served as both President of NABS (North American Bluebird Society) and BRAW (Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin).



As part of the program, every box that honors her is listed by its GPS location. Gene and I repaired or cleaned out several boxes previously placed in this cemetery, and we installed three new boxes as well. Carol McDaniel Box #190 will be with her grave site at the GPS location of 42.6708, -90.1306. The accompanying picture shows John McDaniel with Carol's personal nesting box location.

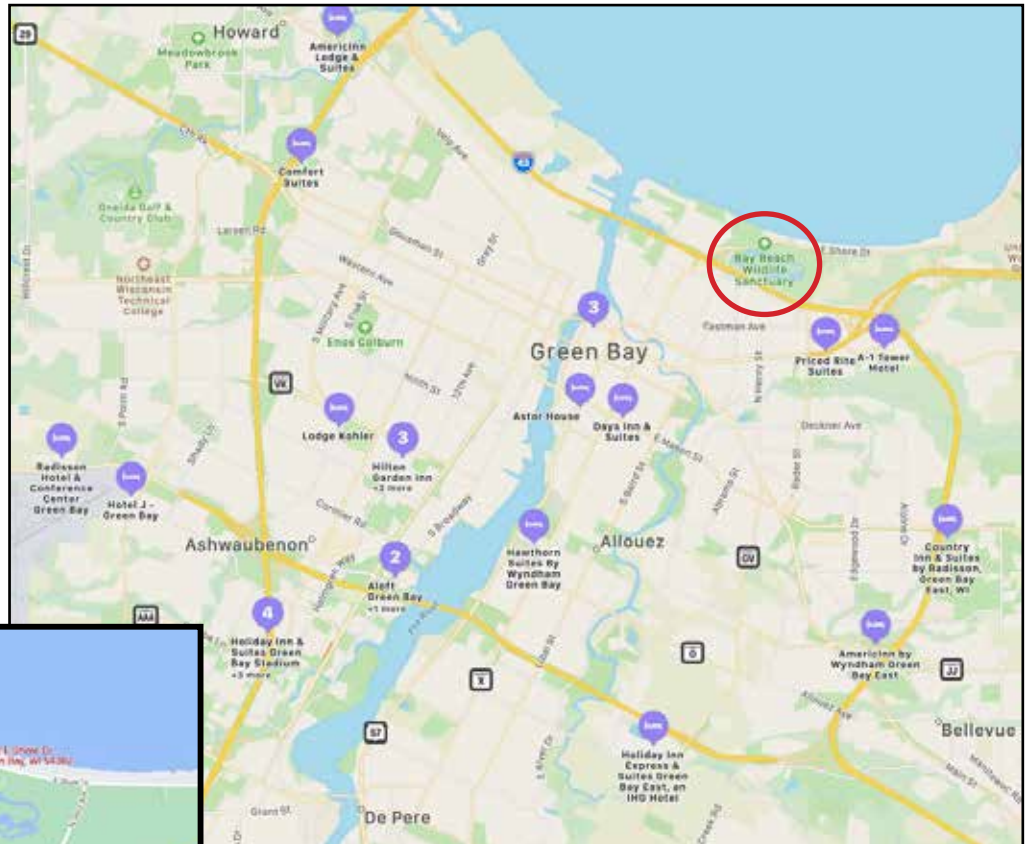
Thanks Carol and John!
See you at our Fall convention!

Steve
President

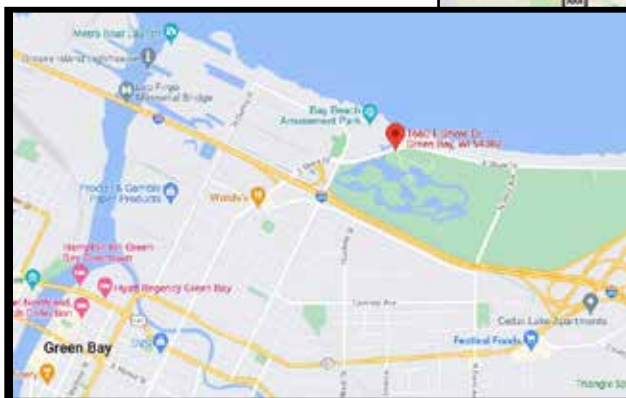
BRAW Convention 2022

These maps show the location of Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary at 1660 E. Shore Dr., Green Bay, WI

The Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary is a beautiful 600-acre urban wildlife refuge featuring live animal exhibits, educational displays, miles of hiking/skiing trails and various wildlife viewing opportunities. It is the largest park in the Green Bay Park system and home to the second largest wildlife rehabilitation program in Wisconsin, caring for more than 6,000 orphaned and injured animals annually.



Several area motels and hotels are shown on the map for those needing to stay overnight.



BRAW State Convention, September 10 at Bay Beach Wildlife, Green Bay

Save the date! Once again BRAW will be holding an “In-person” convention after a 2-year hiatus due to the pandemic. Hopefully BRAW members will feel comfortable attending this event.

Here is the line-up we have scheduled.



Attracting Eastern Bluebirds and Other Cavity Nesters

This program will cover what you need to do to attract Eastern Bluebirds to your yard, parks or farms etc.

Type of habitat, nest boxes, location of boxes and how to monitor nest boxes and keep records will be covered.

Nest boxes do attract other cavity nesters like chickadees, tree swallows and house wrens and these species will also be covered briefly. Problems you might have to deal with on the bluebird trail will also be discussed.

Patrick got interested in bluebirds when he lived in Stoughton and was asked to take over the bluebird trail at Lake Kegonsa State Park. That was over 20 years ago and he now manages 9 trails in Dane Co. He has fledged over 10,00 bluebirds from his trails. In 2004 he joined the board of directors of the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin. He has been the editor of their newsletter *Wisconsin Bluebird* since then, as well.

From 2014 to 2020 he was president of BRAW and continues as a director today. He and his wife Deb live on the west side of Madison enjoying retirement by keeping busy doing fun stuff!

Purple Martins! by Dick Nikolai

Dick is a past President (1989 & 1990) and Board member (1986-1990) of BRAW and one of its founding members (1986). He has been conducting ongoing research since 1985 on purple martins in Wisconsin. (Site fidelity, cavity fidelity, longevity, pair fidelity, reproduction, weight, physical traits, types of housing success, impacts of weather on weight, etc.) From 2018-2021 he placed color bands for finding dispersion and the public’s reporting. Began placing GPS Geolocators on purple martins in 2019 in Wisconsin with future continuance trying to understand the international component of these important migrants. He writes articles relating to information collected and does stories with news media on Purple Martins.



Featured speaker: Bill Volkert

Bill worked as the naturalist and wildlife educator for Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources at Horicon Marsh for 27 years, where he conducted more than 3,700 education programs for over 220,000 people. Bill has been watching and studying birds for over 40 years and in his travels has sighted nearly 4,000 species (more than 1/3 of the world’s birds). To facilitate his studies he is also a federally licensed master bird bander, with the Bird Banding Laboratory of the U.S. Geological Survey. Bill shares his experiences and understanding of the natural world through lectures, presentations, field trips and the media. He has been a regular guest on Wisconsin Public Radio for more than 30 years to talk about Wisconsin birds

The Migration of Birds

One of the most fascinating aspects of the lives of birds is their ability to migrate thousands of miles as they follow the changing seasons. This presentation will explore the annual migration of birds, their seasonal phenology, and explore recent studies that are revealing more information and instilling greater wonder over the phenomenon of bird migration.

Birds not only come and go with the seasons but they do so in the same order every year. This program will provide an insight into why birds migrate and the orderly succession of species that arrive in Wisconsin each spring.

The Fall issue of the *Wisconsin Bluebird* will have the complete schedule with times and updates. Registration information is on the next page with catered lunch choices and cost. Feel free to bring your own food and drink. Coffee will be provided. Yes there will be a Silent Auction! Donate items or bring money to bid on items. We hope to see you on September 10!

Registration form on next page.

Register for the BRAW Convention, September 10, 2022

The BRAW Annual Convention will be held on Saturday, September 10 at Bay Beach Wildlife, Green Bay WI.

Conference fees:

\$5.00: Registration without lunch per person

\$10.00: Includes registration & lunch per person

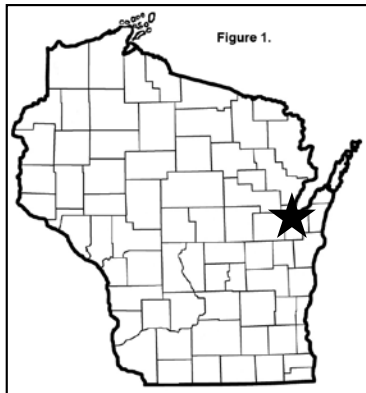
Lunch: Choice of ham & cheese or turkey & cheese on whole wheat or white bread (indicate preference); potato salad, dessert bar – cost \$10 prepaid. If registering for more than one person, please indicate food choice for each person. Vegetarian available upon request.

Registration is paid in advance. Deadline: September 1. Please include name/address of each person registering.

Mail check payment to:

BRAW

**N4028 Morgan Drive,
Waupaca, WI 54981**



Data Corrections for 2021

Dear Monitors:

Below is a list of corrections for the year 2021. All of our monitors are important and work hard to do their best for the birds. These additions bump our state EAB fledgling totals up to **12,140**, or about **58%** of the 2020 numbers. Let's hope the birds bounce back in 2022!

Thanks and regards,
Steve Fallon
BRAW Data Coordinator

<u>Name</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>EAB Fledged</u>
Barbie Allen	Kewaunee	17
Barbie Allen	Oconto	54
Evonne Kraemer	Sauk	68
Marjorie Andrae	Door	15
Ray Osinski	Door	21
Sherry Seubert	Door	5
Mary Bratz and Dick Stephens	Portage	30
Jeanne and John Flickinger	Columbia	78
Sue Eagle	Dane	27
Jim Hess	Lafayette	78
Melissa Bruder	Waukesha	73
Fred Camacho	Wood	33

SILENT AUCTION

Are you creative with sewing, painting, woodworking, photography or other crafts? Use your imagination for the silent auction. It doesn't need to be bluebird related.

Help support BRAW with your donation or plan to buy an item and support BRAW bluebird trail development.

ANNUAL CONVENTION PRE-REGISTRATION FORM

Please indicate the number of lunches for your party at \$10 each: _____. **Include check for full amount.**

___Ham ___Turkey ___White bread ___Wheat bread

___Vegetarian ___ registration only (\$5) no lunch

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

State _____ Zip _____

Return form with payment (to BRAW) by **September 1** to:

BRAW c/o Dan Schroeder

N4028 Morgan Drive,

Waupaca, WI 54981

BRAW Q & A

Q. I had a Chickadee build a nest in one of my nest boxes but before any eggs were laid I found a new nest on top of it. What happened?

- Ruth S.
Madison

A. Ruth, you may already know what took place here. It looks like a bluebird or a Tree Swallow took the box over forcing the chickadees out. To prevent this when you see the nest material that chickadees use put a 1-1/8" reducer plate or block with a 1-1/8" hole cut, over the entrance so larger birds can't get in. Chickadees only nest once per season so when their chicks fledge in early June you can remove the hole reducer so larger native species can use the box. In most cases the usurped pair of chickadees probably find another nest site and try over so no need to worry about them when this happens. It looks to me like you have a bluebird pair that moved in so that's not so bad!

Pat Ready
WB Editor



BRAW 2022 Financial Report

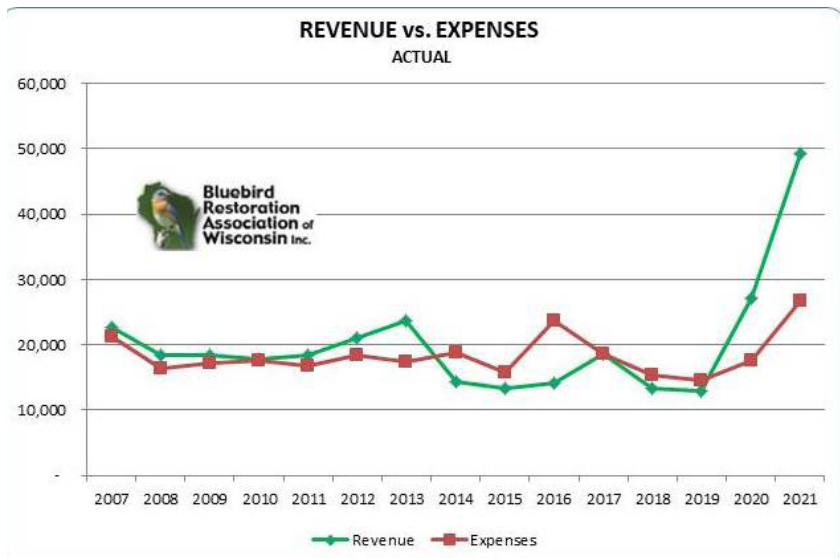
Dan Schroeder, BRAW Treasurer.

Greetings Bluebirders and Friends!

The last couple of years were certainly unusual, and impacted many things – especially what we’ve been doing here in the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin!

Although many of our expenses were still with us in 2021, we were very fortunate to have a surge in memberships and we received several large memorials. As you can see from the green line on the chart, our total revenues jumped to an all-time high over the last 15 year period. Revenue surpassed our expenses for the second time in eight years. And the best part is that it will have a positive impact on the bluebird population!

As we enter 2022, we find ourselves in good financial shape to address the challenges faced by our cavity nesters. They’re in trouble, but because of your commitment, we can do more this coming year to address the situation. We are planning, or already engaged in, a number of research projects and trail development programs. These



would not have been possible without your commitment and cooperation. BRAW has also established some reserves to ensure that our organization can weather any tough times ahead.

We hope that 2022 brings an end to the pandemic. However we do plan still to meet as a group. In the meantime, we will continue our work with your help. Many thanks to you all!

Recollections of a 15-Year Bluebird Monitor

Gene Birr, Oconto County Coordinator

After living for 35 years in the former home of my great-aunt and uncle, last October I moved 15 miles farther north to the Town of Morgan in southern Oconto County, on a quiet corner of the family farm into the home where my parents had retired 30 years earlier. Now my nearest neighbor is my brother Curt, who lives a half-mile away in the original brick farmhouse built in 1886, on the farmstead named the Rolling Lawn Farm, first settled by my great-grandfather August in 1873.

My new home is located on an acre largely wooded, with many spruce trees and several beautiful perennial



garden beds planted by my mother, when my folks retired here in 1989. The wooded portion of the property provides shelter and housing for the many species of woodpeckers and other songbirds nearby, including as many as 10 Cardinals, 8 Blue Jays and dozens of Mourning Doves, Tree Sparrows, redpolls and goldfinches.

The acreage of my brother’s adjoining farm fields supplies the habitat and food sources for these birds and the deer and other animals that thrive in the neighboring woods and the public Morgan Marsh nearby. My house now sits just 300 yards away from the spot where I sighted my first 8 or 10 bluebirds, north of the barn where my father and I were baling third-crop hay in August of 1978. That year also marks the time when the North American Bluebird Society (NABS) was founded by Lawrence Zeleny, after noticing a 90% decline in bluebird numbers after several harsh winters nation-wide.

Continuing My Passion for Bluebirds

This year I begin my 15th season of officially monitoring a bluebird trail for BRAW. I have held the position of Oconto County coordinator since 2010, after joining BRAW just two

years earlier. I am honored to have served as the CC Chair for the last 3 years since Carol Mc Daniel encouraged me to succeed her when she became ill and stepped down in 2019.

As a CC I have had the pleasure of meeting many new friends who have shared an interest in bluebirds or started to monitor a bluebird trail. I have also enjoyed giving presentations to garden and 4-H clubs, Cub Scouts, and annually with Nancy Paul at her Wild Birds Unlimited store in Green Bay. I’ve especially enjoyed working with Cordula Van Den Heuvel and her Oconto Bird City organization, which supervises 10 trail monitors and 75 bluebird houses in Oconto.

I first began monitoring a bluebird trail of 40 boxes after joining BRAW in 2008. Now those trails have grown to include 120 boxes, largely due to the assistance and mentoring of former VP and Data Collector, Kent Hall. During the last 12 years those boxes have helped fledge more than 3,100 bluebirds and 2,800 other native, cavity-nesting songbirds including Tree Swallows, Black-Capped Chickadees, and House Wrens.

The most rewarding aspect of my interest in bluebirds is the satisfac-

(continued next page)

(continued from page 5)

tion I get from building birdhouses, preparing the mounting poles and hardware used to erect them, and making the Noel Guards that provide predator protection. Along with Brown and Outagamie coordinator Steve Mayer, we have built nearly 750 NABS-style nest boxes and supplied them to about 25 monitors in our 3 counties. We provide the boxes and poles and our suggestions on where to place each nest box when we help them setup a bluebird trail.

Skylight Boxes and House Sparrow Control

Most recently, I have helped to promote the use of Skylight boxes to deter House Sparrows from nesting. These were first suggested to me by Dr. Dean Rust, President of the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania, from videos on his website, bluebirdconservation.com. He has used them with great success for nearly 10 years. In the last 5 years I have used them extensively on my trails in areas where the sparrows have been a pest. The first year I used 3 boxes where I had destroyed 13 sparrows in the previous 3 years in solid roof boxes at those same sites. That year none of those was bothered later by sparrows and each produced a nest of native songbirds.

Since then I have used 20 Skylight boxes on my trails and supplied another 25 to other monitors who have used them on their own trails. Only two of those boxes were later used by sparrows and they were sent away by trapping or removing the nest and eggs just once. Currently BRAW, under the guidance of Prof. Memuna Khan and Ripon College, is conducting a controlled Skylight Box Project study to test the actual effectiveness of these boxes on our monitors' trails. Interested monitors have been provided with 97 pairs—one skylight box, one solid roof box—that are being placed 3 feet apart where sparrows are a problem, and asked to monitor each pair weekly. When one box is selected by a native songbird species or a House sparrow and eggs are laid, then the other paired box is left open. Using this method we will be able to determine which box is preferred by native species like

bluebirds, and if the sparrows choose to avoid them because they find the cavity unsuitably bright to nest in. In my use of them I have found them to be effective about 90% of the time in keeping sparrows from nesting in our boxes intended for bluebirds. Despite my confidence in their value already, I am also participating in this project, testing 2 pairs to contribute to proving their value one way or the other.

Noel Guards and Predator Protection

Similarly, in recent years I have investigated how using different forms of predator prevention would keep raccoons from raiding the nest boxes. Ten years ago after many of my boxes were robbed of their eggs and young by raccoons I began placing wire-cage Noel Guards on 5 boxes. None of those was bothered later by raccoons and now I have them placed on 95% of my boxes. I usually first install them after a bluebird has made a nest and begun to lay eggs in it. Then I allow the guard to remain on the box. I have seen little evidence that leaving them on dissuades a bluebird from nesting in them again.

In nearly 10 years of use I have never lost a nest, eggs or young birds from a nest box that was equipped with a Noel Guard that extended out from the entrance hole at least 6 inches. I have always used a standard guard that measures 3 or 3 ½ " wide, 5 ½ " high and 6 " deep. Recently, Director Dave Lucey has introduced a revised, narrower version after he lost some of his nests to coons. The new guard is only 2.5" wide, 3" high and 6 ½ " deep, which seems to be large enough for the bluebirds to navigate into, yet keeps the reach of the raccoons away. His addition of a small board on the bottom of the cage that extends out beyond the end of the cage, (so the birds have a place to land and the young to fly away from), seems like a good improvement.

Disappointing 2021 Season

Like so many of my fellow bluebird monitors across the state I found my trail numbers in 2021 were extremely low, making my bluebird fledgling results to be "the worst year ever." Essentially, I had only one-fourth as many bluebirds as usual that returned to nest in my area. Most years my 120

box trail results in producing nearly 300 bluebirds and about the same number of other songbirds, resulting in an average bluebirds per nest box number near 2.5 or 3.0 (BB/NB). Last year that same number of boxes fledged only 73 bluebirds, making the BB per nest box ratio only .61 (BB/NB). Only one small trail on a horse farm near Stiles, WI did well, as bluebirds nested in 4 of the 5 boxes there and produced 23 young, nearly 25% of my total bluebird fledges. Some trails that normally are the most productive each year were the least productive. Within the 40+ boxes on and nearest the farm and along nearby roadsides, the one and only box that hosted a bluebird pair was more than 2 miles away from my home!

Hope for a Better Season

Likely, that disappointing season was caused by the large numbers of migrating bluebirds wintering in Texas that were destroyed in the harsh winter storms there. This was attributed by many to the presumed effects of climate change. However, I remain hopeful that just as severe weather can greatly reduce bluebird numbers, so can unusually warm weather and an early spring (like we had in 2012 when Wisconsin experienced its warmest year ever) greatly improve their numbers so we could again see the day that we produce nearly 33,000 bluebirds in our monitored boxes, as we did back then in our "best year ever."

Through the dedicated efforts of each one of us who provides a nesting box for bluebirds or monitors a bluebird trail for BRAW, we can continue to help out our blue feathered friends. By educating and persuading young people and others to join us as we journey down our bluebird trails, they may be able to continue to experience the joy of seeing bluebirds, like we do every year.



Pluses and Minuses Of Pasture Trails

By Gene Kroupa

Placing a nest box trail along a pasture fence line has its pluses and minuses. I've monitored two such trails and have firsthand experience with both aspects.

Perhaps the biggest plus is that the line of nest boxes is easy to put up, maintain and monitor. Pastures typically have a grass strip between them and adjoining crop fields. Those along rural roads have a grassy right-of-way that provides easy access.

I don't place nest boxes where trees and brush that might harbor wrens are too close. Like any other site, I will move those boxes that attract unwelcomed guests. I favor low-traffic gravel and dirt roads along pasture fence lines for trails.

The low-cropped pasture grass provides good feeding territory for bluebirds which can be supplemented by insects in the non-grazed vegetation on the other side of the fence. Having a grassy lane or road next to the trail makes it easy to check the nest boxes.

I always mount the nest boxes on separate 3/4-inch, 7-foot metal conduit poles, never on the existing fence posts. My poles are placed mid-way between existing posts. The end that goes into the ground is flattened so as to resist turning. Eight-inch plastic cable ties secure the barbed wire fence to the poles to further stabilize them.

All nest boxes are equipped with predator guards to prevent four-legged bandits from robbing the nests of eggs and chicks. To date, I've only had two instances where a raccoon has tried (unsuccessfully) to break in. The barbed wire also acts as a deterrent to climbing critters.

A bigger (literally) problem are the curious cattle that want to check out the structures and possibly the activity going on in them. Cattle don't knock down well-mounted boxes, but sometimes push them in an unfavorable weather direction, i.e. away from the preferred east or southeast hole heading. However, the cattle also can keep



This nest box was loosened by cattle and nearly ripped apart by a coon. (Gene Kroupa)



BRAW ID cards affixed to nest boxes will lower theft and damage along roads. (Dave Lucey)

the grass and weeds clipped at the base of the poles.

Two-legged critters can be a nuisance along rural roads. Sometimes the nest boxes are pilfered for home places or damaged simply out of mischief. Putting readily seen identification on the nest boxes seems to deter bad human behavior. (If you want some free BRAW ID name cards, contact President Steve – ssample@gmail.com.)

June, or anytime in the summer, is a good time to ask farmers for permission to put up nest boxes along their pasture perimeters. Most are empathetic to bluebirds and will let you proceed as long as you don't bother the cattle and promise to not wander around their property. Ask if you need to let them know each time you come out to monitor the boxes.

Putting up nest boxes in early summer might attract second or third nesters that have been relying on natural tree cavities. Farmers will get used to seeing you around. You can also offer to show their kids (young and adult) and them the results of their generosity.

Always haul off any nest debris and materials, such as clipped cable ties, so that cattle don't ingest them. Likewise, use natural insect repellants on poles and boxes.

Don't hesitate to share any mushrooms you might find, produce from your garden or homemade jam. Tell them about any damaged fences or field issues. You are building a relationship to benefit the bluebirds and make new friends. In my experience, the pluses far outweigh the minuses of pasture trails.



Pasture fence line boxes should have predator guards. (Gene Kroupa)

Nest Guide to Cavity Nestors

by Patrick Ready/BRAW

Eastern Bluebird

Fine or coarse grass, pine needles, lined with fine grasses. Eggs are light blue and rarely white.



White eggs-rarely



Tree Swallow

Similar to bluebirds, grass & straw, lined with feathers when eggs are laid. Eggs are white and elongated.



Black-Capped Chickadee

Moss, fine grass, lined with animal hair. Chickadees sometimes cover their eggs with the fur when they leave the nest. Eggs are white with fine brown speckles.



House Wren

Sticks and twigs jammed in tight. Lined with a small amount of fine grass. Often builds dummy nest with a few sticks but no grass lining.



Wren photos by Jack Bartholmai



House Sparrow

Grass, straw, feathers, paper, plastic, etc. and they usually swirl the grass upward to fill the box, then tunnel down in. Sometimes when a nest is first started it may be hard to tell what species is nesting. Wait a day or two to see how the nest develops. Feathers and wrappers early on with some grass pieces are definite signs of House Sparrows.



Above: Peterson box filled with straw, grass, and garbage indicate a house sparrow nest.



Middle: Eggs-white or grey with brown specs



Left: Beginning nest. Similar to bluebird and tree swallow but note chicken feathers and debris = signs it's a house sparrow.

Species Identification of Cavity Nesters

Male & female Eastern Bluebird



Tree Swallow pair.



Black-capped Chickadee, sexes similar.

House Wren, sexes similar.



All photos by Pat Ready unless otherwise credited.

County Coordinator News

Gene Birr, CC Chair

A new and hopeful season of bluebird monitoring has begun, but early reports from several local monitors seem to be painting a bleak picture of how many bluebirds have returned and started to nest this spring, especially here in NE WI. I didn't see my first bluebird until April 23 while driving by a nearby cemetery, but I had discovered a bluebird nest with 4 eggs two days earlier in the first box when I began my regular trail monitoring. In the next 40 boxes I found no other bluebird nesting.

Some of the other coordinators are reporting better results in other areas of the state. Their reports that follow give us hope that the summer will ultimately produce more bluebirds, so that they can recover from the unusually low numbers recorded last season, when bluebird fledglings in the state were 44% lower than the previous year. My own trail was down 75%, and the state of Nebraska reported a 66% decline, as well. So we will need to have an abundance of bluebirds this year to make up for all of that, and it will likely take several years for their recovery to be complete.

Douglas County, Charles Bergsten

Douglas County is in the NW corner of the state and we still have traces of snowbanks around. Still quite a bit of snow in the woods. The temperature has been too cold for the bluebirds and tree swallows to even think about coming this far north yet. It will probably be another week before we see the birds. Last year it was the last week of May before I found my first and only nesting pair of the season. We had a low of 24 degrees this morning and forecast is for 22 degrees before forecast for warmer temperatures.

Dane County, Pat Ready

Looking forward to another nesting season. In April I gave a talk at the Wild Birds Unlimited store in Madison. My first talk there since the pandemic hit. A small crowd but lots of interest and some good Q & A followed.

My trails have been slow to start with the crazy spring weather we had. First too cold then too hot! My first box of 5 eggs only had 1 chick sur-

vive. I think the sub-freezing temps a few nights in late April and early May froze the eggs. Not sure but no other sign of predation so that's what I'm going with.

A few boxes didn't do too well over winter so I had to do a couple replacements. Some were over 15 years old and time for new ones.

The Black-capped Chickadees are off to another good start since the other cavity nesters have delayed starting from weather conditions. I had 6 chickadee nests started in early May! Not sure how many will get taken over by larger cavity nesters?

I hope everyone has a good season! Go Blues!



Barb Houllihan

Door County, Charlotte Lukes

I gave my bluebird nest box PowerPoint program at The Ridges Sanctuary in Baileys Harbor here in Door County on March 19th for the annual Ridges nest box building workshop.

They had about 22 people show up, which is almost capacity for their space.

Hello Door County Monitors, April 25

Yesterday's weekly check of our 22 boxes showed activity in 13 of them and 9 remain empty.

There are bluebird eggs in 5 of the boxes with two of the clutches being incubated. Two others had cold eggs and the hen might still be in the processing of laying more eggs. They don't incubate until all are laid. A total of 23 eggs was noted.

One box from 8 days ago still had 4 cold eggs and I fear that the hen starved during last week's cold wet weather. I will check that box on Thursday and if there is no change I will clean it out so *another bluebird pair can use it.*

Please let me know what you are finding in your boxes. The weather does not look good as predictions are colder than normal temperatures will continue until about May 20th.

Pierce County, Jim Beix

I closed my Pierce Co. boxes (42) 10 on March 17th. I made my rounds on April 27th and found 10 completed BB nests with 6 eggs in one, 4 eggs each in two other nests. There were 4 incomplete nests. It has been pretty chilly weatherwise. I am encouraged by the start of the nesting season here. Jim Beix, River Falls

Eau Claire County, Rita Gundry

Alas, things look pretty bleak in Eau Claire Co. at this time. I have checked all 25 of my boxes within a 5 mile radius of my home. Except for a few sprigs here and there, I have not a single nest. One neighbor reported seeing a male bluebird on her deck railing. Informational packets on bluebirds have been prepared and distributed to two cousins in the family and also to a local 4-H Club.

La Crosse County, Scott Kinny

There hasn't been much to report from Lacrosse County. One friend reported a bluebird checking out her nest box, but I personally haven't seen a bluebird yet this spring which is very unusual. It's been a cold prolonged spring across the state but that hasn't seemed to affect other bird species. Grosbeaks, thrashers, white crowned & white throated sparrows, and warblers have shown up on their regular schedule.

Lafayette County, Jim Hess

It is a slow start here in Lafayette Co, as well. Out of 26 boxes on April 24 I have:

11 BB nests
9 BB eggs (4 in one box and 5 in another)

1 TS nest
0 TS eggs

No house sparrows or wrens

Iowa County, Dale Moody

We checked our Iowa Co trail last Sat 4/23 and found 29 eggs in 10 nests (of 70 boxes) one nest was hatching and 4 of the 5 eggs had hatched! I do not think that mom had checked the weather forecast!! Good luck finding bugs!

We will be helping a 4-H group in Dodgeville build BB houses on May 15

Oconto County, Gene Birr

I am one of several dozen monitors who is participating in our Skylight Box Project this year. I have placed 2 pairs of plain and skylight boxes in the places where I have always been bothered with house sparrows in my boxes. To date there is no nesting in any of the boxes, but I anticipate there will be birds nesting soon. Through this study BRAW, along with the help of staff of Ripon College, is hoping to determine the actual effectiveness of these skylight boxes in deterring sparrows from nesting in them, which often comes at the expense of bluebirds.

In late March I appeared at a day-long event at the WBU store in Green Bay, along with fellow bluebird enthusiast Steve H., and answered many questions from folks interested in bluebirds. During my appearance I was able to sign up 5 new members to BRAW.

On April 26, I assisted Cordula Van Den Heuvel, a BRAW monitor and the Bird City Oconto Coordinator, in repairing, removing and replacing several boxes on the bluebird trails in Oconto. One week earlier we had both met with the staff and clients of New View Industries in Gillett,

WI where we gave a short talk about bluebirds. Then we assisted in reassembling the 20 bird houses that were funded and provided by Bird City Oconto and which I had built for each of them. New View is an organization that assists adults with life-challenging disabilities and provides them with certain employment skills and expanded personal experiences which enhance their lives. Each person there expressed great interest in learning about bluebirds and showed patience and determination in putting their nest box (which they each got to take home) back together. They showed their appreciation by writing personal notes of thanks that were accompanied with hand-colored pictures of bluebirds on the front cover. Several days later I set up 2 bluebird nest boxes nearby at Serenity Gardens in Gillett, the assisted living facility where my mother now resides. The staff and residents there are looking forward to seeing bluebirds and tree swallows there soon.

As of May 2, I had monitored most of my bluebird houses and still had only one bluebird nest with eggs. The most promising trail is at the Patriot Golf Club in Abrams where at least 6 boxes there have nearly completed

nests but none have eggs yet.

Kewaunee County, Don Pritzl

Just a note to let you know what's happening in Kewaunee County (4-16-22). **Not Much.** I've got my boxes ready and have yet to see or hear a bluebird. Others claimed to have seen them but I haven't. It's been cold with off and on snow showers, but usually I see BBs in the middle of March.

I won't have as many boxes this year (50). I took some down that were getting pretty brushy. It's getting harder to find suitable habitat with all the farms and houses being built in the country.

I'm having a display at Bird City Algoma on May 16.

I don't know how things are in the rest of the state. Hopefully when (and if) warm weather gets here things will pick up. Happy Bluebirding!

Sawyer County, Diane Chambers

The snow is 99% gone and I have seen one bluebird as of the 1st of May. She was sitting on a nest in my best BB box. This is always the first to get a BB, and she's keeping the tradition going. Haven't got any activity in any of the other boxes yet.

SHOW US YOUR BLUEBIRDS! Enter our member photo contest.



Show Us Your Bluebirds!

Enter the BRAW 2021 Photo Contest for a Chance to Win a \$50 Amazon Gift Card and MORE!

The contest is open to all BRAW members. Photos of bluebirds are preferred but photos of other cavity nesters are also accepted. There will be first, second and third place winners.

RULES:

Open to BRAW Members only.

Original photography please.

Up to 3 submissions (photos) per person.

Photos do not need to be from the current year.

Photos will be judged on composition, image quality and subject matter. Judges will not be affiliated with BRAW.

FIRST PLACE

A \$50 Amazon Gift Card

Your photo on the cover of the *Wisconsin Bluebird* Newsletter - Winter Issue.

A free, one-year subscription to the newsletter for yourself, a friend or family member.

SECOND PLACE

A \$25 Amazon Gift Card

A free, one-year subscription to the newsletter for yourself, a friend or family member.

THIRD PLACE

A free, one-year subscription to the newsletter for yourself, a friend or family member.

Submission deadline is September 30.

Please email your photographs (JPEG file) with **your name, location and any other information** that you think others will find interesting to: Patrick Ready at birdsready@gmail.com. Subject line: **BRAW Bluebird Contest 2022**

No mail in photos please.

Summer and the Living Is Busy

By Gene Kroupa

Summer is here and the living for bluebirds and monitors is busy. With delayed nesting due to the cold and wet spring, many bluebirds are still feeding young in anticipation of their fledging.

For monitors there is plenty on BRAW's "Eastern Bluebird to Do List" found on its website www.braw.org under the site map heading. Providing TLC for any chicks still in the nest tops the list for me.

This means trimming weeds and grass at the base of mounting poles, plus taking other measures to control insects, especially black gnats and ants. Also, I'll be checking to make sure nest boxes are still pointing in the preferred east direction and that predator guards are firmly attached.

Ensuring that nest boxes have enough ventilation and covering skylight openings to help cool down inside temps are critical "to do" jobs. Moving problem nest boxes plagued by wrens and house sparrows now will make them still available for second nesting bluebirds.

Summer house cleaning as soon as bluebirds fledge might encourage the parents to start working sooner on a second brood. Also, this is a good time to make minor repairs or replace



Providing TLC for chicks still in the nest box tops the "to do" list. (Pat Ready)

damaged and stolen nest boxes.

Now is when you might ask for permission to start a new trail or place nest boxes in parks and cemeteries. If you can get these boxes put up in June, there's a good chance that bluebirds will occupy them for a second or third nesting attempt.

Summer is also prime time to not only look for new places to set up a trail, but a wonderful window for sharing the trailing experience with family, landowners and friends. Be sure to give them copies of the *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter and our website address.

By now you've been recording nest box data, but it might also be fun to summarize the records to date to see how you're doing so far. Don't forget to take a few photos of your trailing activities to share with others. Plus you might want to enter the BRAW photo contest which is open to all members and offers some nice prizes.

If you are wondering what fall might hold for bluebirders, BRAW offers a fall "to do" list on its website. Checking to see if your BRAW membership is current each season is important, too.



President Steve Sample checks out a bluebird trail. (Steve Sample)



Summer is a great time to put up nest boxes in cemeteries. (Gene Kroupa)

BRAW & Amazon Smile!

Amazon has developed a way to support non-profit organizations such as BRAW. If you use Amazon, log into "https://smile.amazon.com" instead of amazon.com. You will need to select BRAW as your intended organization that you support by typing **Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin** in the appropriate line. **ALL ORDERS USING THIS LOGIN WILL GENERATE A PORTION OF YOUR PURCHASE TO BRAW!** The products purchased will cost you the very same as if you just log into their standard site. However, BRAW will receive 0.5% of your total purchase. It is easy and you will be supporting us without any additional cost to you.



Skylight Study Update

By Dave Lucey

We all know very well the challenge that House Sparrows pose to bluebirds and other native species that use our nest boxes. This year, Ripon College professor Memuna Khan is collaborating with BRAW to evaluate a new House Sparrow management technique.

The Skylight Study involves 97 box pairs in 19 counties in Wisconsin. Ripon College student, Kira Stark, is collecting data from 32 BRAW volunteers across the state and on the Ripon College Bluebird Trail.



Ripon College student, Kira Stark, is collecting data from 32 BRAW volunteers across the state and on the Ripon College Bluebird Trail.

We would like to thank those BRAW members who answered the call to help with this project. The study is set up in pairs allowing birds to make a choice between two types of boxes. At each box location where historically there have been problems with House Sparrows, the two boxes are placed side by side, three feet apart and facing the same direction.

The boxes are virtually identical except for one having a plexiglass “window” or “skylight” on the top. We are looking to see if House Sparrows *dislike* the skylights and will nest in them less frequently than normal boxes.

Once a bird has made a selection and begun to lay eggs, the other box will be made unavailable by dropping open the box’s door. House Sparrows will be managed by oiling their eggs once warm to prevent eggs from hatching while prolonging incubation to keep the females from starting another brood quickly. We are very excited to learn about the effect of the skylights this breeding season and we will update you in subsequent newsletters.

American Kestrels Continue Decline

By Pat Ready

I volunteer with the Madison Audubon Society checking nest boxes put up for American Kestrels. Kestrels are the only falcon that is a cavity nester. Over the last 20 years their numbers have declined in some areas as much as 60%! So far in Wisconsin the decline hasn’t been that dramatic.



The area I cover is from Oregon to Mount Horeb in southern Dane Co. I have had a slight drop over the past 5 years mostly due from European Starlings nesting in boxes before Kestrels pair up. If I find starlings when monitoring, I block the entrance hole with a plastic Solo cup for 1-2 weeks. Then I remove the cup and add fresh wood chips. Twice this season I was able to get Kestrels by doing so.

To check the boxes I use an old cell phone attached to a pole. I set the camera timer to 10 seconds and raise it into the box entrance.

It takes a flash photo, inside the box. (Above is a hen started briefly by the camera exposing her 5 egg clutch.)

In early May Audubon reported they have 68 occupied nest boxes by Kestrels. That’s out of 275 nest boxes spread out over 5 counties in south-central Wisconsin.

We hope our efforts will pay off and help increase kestrel numbers and provide valuable data for future research.



Swallows Had a Visitor!



Steve Lang of Madison found this odd clutch of eggs in one of his nest boxes. Obvious it is a Tree Swallow nest with six white eggs. He asked “What laid the speckled egg?”

Membership Renewal Information

By Valerie Van Winkle, Membership Services

If the address label of your *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter reads **Summer 2022** next to your name, then your membership expires this month and you need to renew immediately. If you are an online member, you won't see this clue so please consider marking the expiration date on your calendar when you sign up. We don't want you to miss a single newsletter!

The next issue of the *Wisconsin Bluebird* goes into production in August and will be mailed in August. Memberships received after August 15 may not be processed in time to receive the Fall newsletter. Consider an extended or one-time \$300 Life Membership.

Please fill out the membership renewal form on this page and send it with your check or money order to: **BRAW, Inc., Valerie Van Winkle, PO Box 628492, Middleton, WI 53562**

You can also renew your membership at www.braw.org and use PayPal or a credit card.

BRAW, Inc. Membership and Wisconsin Bluebird Subscription

Yes! I would like to join or renew as a member with the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, Inc. (BRAW) and receive its quarterly newsletter *Wisconsin Bluebird*. Enclosed is my check/money order (do not send cash) made out to BRAW, Inc. for the following:

- \$10 Gift Annual Membership (Online subscription)
- \$15 Student/Teacher Annual Membership (Online subscription)
- \$20 Online Annual Membership
- \$40 Extended Online Annual Membership for 2 years
- \$60 Extended Online Annual Membership for 3 years
- \$25 Individual or Family Annual Membership (Printed copy mailed)
- \$75 Extended Individual or Family Annual Membership for 3 years (Printed copy mailed)
- \$100 Corporate Annual Membership
- \$300 Life Membership

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip Code: _____

*Email Address: _____

Telephone: () _____

County of residence: _____

*BRAW sends out nest box deal promotions and "time to renew" reminders via email.

Donation (optional)

\$15 to nest box construction/post & predator guard

\$100 for nest box trail

\$_____ for bluebird research

In addition to my membership contribution, I wish to contribute: \$_____

(Contributions to BRAW are tax deductible.)

Check appropriate boxes:

This is a renewal.

This is a new membership.

This is a GIFT membership.

Enclosed please find my check \$ _____

Mail this membership request to:

BRAW, Inc.
Valerie Van Winkle
PO Box 628492
Middleton, WI 53562

We do not share or sell BRAW's membership list. If you have any questions, please contact Valerie at 847-302-5684 or ripvws@gmail.com.

A BRAW membership makes a great Anytime gift!

\$10 includes Online Newsletter

Give the gift of Bluebirds!

BRAW ELECTED & APPOINTED OFFICERS

President Steve Sample, 422 Shepard Ter., Madison, WI 53705 • 708/606-8070 • ssample@gmail.com (term to 12/22)

Vice-president Brad Zinda, 6737 Pinelake Dr. #213, Madison WI 53719 • brad.zinda@gmail.com (term to 12/22)

Secretary Gene Kroupa, gkroupa@tds.net (term to 12/22)

Treasurer Dan Schroeder, N4028 Morgan Drive, Waupaca, WI 54981 • 920-475-8525 • brdanjoe@gmail.com (term to 12/22)

Director Steve Fallon, 974 Halcyon Days Ct., Oregon, WI 53575 • stevfall50@gmail.com (term to 12/23)

Director Dave Lucey, Cross Plains, WI • dklucey@chorus.net (term to 12/22)

Director Mary Sobol, 5205 Broadhead St., McFarland WI 53558 • 608-838-6962 (H) 608-338-8529 (cell) msobolontime@gmail.com (term to 12/22)

Director Mike Crawford, 817 5th St. Waunakee, WI 53539 • 608-213-1806 • mike@marieandmike.com (term to 2023)

Director Patrick Ready, (Past President) 815 Sky Ridge Dr., Madison, WI 53719 • 608/239-0791 • birdsready@gmail.com (term to 12/23)

Directors Fred & Mary Craig, 3308 Nathan Lane, Holmen WI 54636 • 608/783-2225 266marycraig@gmail.com (term to 12/23)

Director Andy Garcia-Rivera, 10 Darien Circle, Madison, WI 53717 • agarciarivera@gmail.com

APPOINTED OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS:

Data Collection Officer: Steve Fallon (see above)

County Coordinator Chair: Gene Birr, 3698 Morgan Marsh Rd Oconto Falls, WI 54154 • 920-373-2551 • gbbird22@gmail.com

Funding: Dan Schroeder (see above)

WI Bluebird Editor: Patrick Ready (see above)

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Public Relations and Promotions: Gene Kroupa (see above)

Student and Youth Outreach Committee: Positions open to volunteers

Website: Andy Garcia Rivera, agarciarivera@gmail.com

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Bureau of Endangered Res. Liaison: Sumner Matteson, DNR, 101 S. Webster St. PO Box 7921, Madison, WI 53701 • 608/266-1571

WSO Liaison: Jennifer Wenzel • miloloki@wi.rr.com • 262-488-8077

BRAW Welcomes

These Members

Kelly Herda, Bayside
Tim Hovre, Marshfield
Kevin Dickey, Silver Lake
Judy Jolin, Pickett
Bridie Fanning, Muskego
Nancy Perez, Mequon
William Freund, Fond du Lac
Jon & Diane Koenig, Mukwonago
Susan Ludington, Blue Mounds
David Mattison, Blair
Barbara Gould, Ephraim
Julie Barker, Abrams
Michele Rivers, Greenville
Ed Giamarino, Seymour
Terri Harrison, Suamico
Carol Freer, Green Bay
David & Phyllis Wesner, Prairie du Chien
Erin Mader, Green Bay
Daniel O'Keefe, Milwaukee
Thomas Krickl, Oak Park, IL
Thomas Powell, Madison

Martha Martin, Mt. Horeb
Linda Picl, Ft. Atkinson
Serenity Gardens, Gillett
Timothy Koechel, Verona
Stephen Sanborn, Middleton
Alice Herald, Beloit

Donations

Gib Docken, \$25
Thomas Amenson, \$15 nest box
Richard Gunderson, \$25
Dave & Carolyn Mertens, \$100
Brian & Janet Nelson, \$55
Cindy Shallock, \$50 nest boxes
Mike Morgan, \$175
Nancy Paul, \$50
Todd & Betty Berens, \$10
Walter Jost, \$15 nest box
Joan Hoy, \$30
Warren Schultz, \$15
Charles Lepinski, \$25
Patriot Golf Club, \$20
Marilyn Michalski, \$5
Timothy Koechel, \$100



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The mission and purpose of the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, Inc. is to broaden the base of state residents to help Eastern Bluebirds and native cavity nesters by erecting, maintaining and monitoring nest boxes.

Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin

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BRAW Convention 2022

See page 3

Check the address label. If it says "Summer 2022," then you need to RENEW membership now.

Life cycle of the Tree Swallow

Photos by Pat Ready & Jack Bartholmai.



Once they pair up, a nest site is picked. Tree Swallows will use a natural cavity as well.



Within a few weeks, 4-6 white eggs usually appear in the feather lined nest.



Males stand guard while the female incubates the eggs.



After 13-16 days of incubation, the chicks hatch.



After 16-24 days old, the chicks fledge the nest.

JB



The chicks grow quickly, being fed by both parents.

JB