



40 Years

Winter 2025
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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.

Bluebird Numbers Down in 2025

See Page 2.

**BRAW Photo
Contest Winner:
Mary Blanke**



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Is It Time to Renew Your Membership?

President's Report

By Steve Sample

I want to welcome our newest Board of Directors (BOD) members. First, Christine McDaniel is the daughter of Carol McDaniel, who served as President of BRAW and was an officer of NABS, too. Carol's name is on over 300 memorial nest boxes located throughout the state. Christine will help BRAW move forward and will, in her own way, greatly support our goals.



Tom Moser joined our BOD and will offer fresh perspectives in that he, along with his wife, owns and operates a Wild Birds Unlimited store in Brookfield. We are very pleased to have his participation in BRAW.

Two of our longtime Board members are retiring at the end of this year. Gene Kroupa, now serving as BOD Secretary, has been a leader in promoting new programs and going the extra mile to carry them out. His "Nest in Peace" cemetery trail and Driftless Area Land Conservancy free nest box programs have been a huge success. Gene also has contributed by publicizing our awards recipients and writing many articles for the *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter and the North American Bluebird Society's *Bluebird Journal*.

Dan Schroeder, our BOD Treasurer, is again stepping down. He served in this capacity twice at different times. Dan has a background in finance and has set up our orga-

nization to operate efficiently and productively. His legacy will continue even in his absence.

BRAW's next big event is the "2026 PBS Garden and Green Living Expo" in Madison on February 13-15, 2026. Please find our booth at the Exposition Hall. We'd love to see you! If you are interested, volunteer for one of the morning or afternoon sessions. It's always a treat to meet interesting people and discuss bluebirds.

You might have noticed that our website (www.braw.org) is evolving to a new level because of the continued work of Andy Garcia-Rivera. It has gained worldwide recognition and is often cited. Thanks Andy!

This year again BRAW nearly hit the 500-mark in the number of free nest boxes distributed to members and others for new trails and replacements. And if you attended the state convention in September, you know that we now offer a BRAW blue plastic box ID tag with UV resistance at no cost to members, except for shipping. Several attendees asked about these, and I am willing to mail some out upon request.

In the past, I have served as an officer in several outstanding bird conservation organizations. Without a doubt, my wonderful BRAW experiences with members, County Contacts and the Board of Directors top the list. Thanks everyone!

Steve

Bluebird Numbers

Down for 2025

By Steve Fallon, BRAW Data Director

The preliminary statewide reported total for bluebirds fledged in 2025 are shown in the table below.

These values are preliminary based on data received so far, but additional reports are still coming in. However, I wanted to give an update of where we stand currently statewide, and make an appeal to those who have not submitted their data yet, to please do so.

As of this writing, we're behind last year's 17K fledged totals by about 10-15%, as the reported number of boxes monitored is lower by a similar amount. In general, we're seeing an "average" to "slightly lower" type of

year, based on the numbers and comments I've received thus far. We had weather issues yet again with rainy stretches in May that contributed to egg and nestling mortality and then some heat related issues, that caused additional mortality later in the year.

A few monitors reported good increases, but many reported roughly the same or somewhat lower numbers as last year. However, weather will always be an issue and can be variable across the state and not all monitors experienced this. One of our perennially most productive areas of the state had numerous issues with bear predation this year!

Something that seems a bit out of the ordinary is the lower number of tree swallows reported and the even lower number of chickadees. The tree

swallows are 25% lower than last year and the chickadees are down nearly a third. These numbers seem out of whack, given the only 10-15% lower numbers of houses.

I'll provide additional analysis when I map the "final" numbers in our next newsletter. Please don't be discouraged if the numbers were down in your area. Many monitors reported rainy stretches that led to egg and chick losses, that suppressed the fledged numbers. Two of my trails had issues with egg infertility and losses to wrens while the third did reasonably well, which resulted in an average year for me.

Once again, thanks are due to the many monitors for their time and efforts to help the birds!

Preliminary Data for 2025

Number of boxes	Boxes used by Bluebirds	Bluebird eggs laid.	Bluebird eggs hatched	Bluebirds fledged	Tree Swallows fledged	Chickadees fledged	House Wrens fledged	Total Cavity Nesters
6,092	3,276	20,889	16,931	15,225	6,584	704	3,899	26,412

BRAW CC News

Winter 2025

Gene Birr, CC Chair
gbbird22@gmail.com

It was great seeing and meeting with many of you at our recent convention at the Horicon Marsh Visitor Center last September. I trust that we all enjoyed the variety of guest speakers, the silent auction items, and sharing the stories of this past season with our fellow monitors and bluebird friends. As we reflect on those experiences we now can plan for the next one and prepare our boxes so that we are ready when the bluebirds return to our trails in spring. The following represent the experiences of a few of our County Contacts this year and what they have planned with others for next year's nesting season, as well.

Door County, Charlotte Lukes

Ben Teich could not monitor his boxes this year and that is a reduction of 60 boxes compared to the 2024 report.

Thanks again for helping to get good nesting sites for the bluebirds. Charlotte.

2025 Door County Nest Box Report

Total nest boxes = 248
Used by Bluebirds = 136
Eastern Bluebirds fledged = 602
Tree Swallows fledged = 132
House Wrens fledged = 187
Chickadees fledged = 42

Racine County, Rick Fare

Besides being a county coordinator for BRAW, I also accumulate the totals from the monitors who check the boxes for the Hoy Audubon Society. Hoy Audubon is a local chapter of the National Audubon Society, representing parts of Kenosha and Racine counties. We have around 25 trails and 356 boxes in various locations. This year the numbers of bluebirds fledged were 561 compared to 717 in 2024. Tree swallow numbers dropped also from 733 to 613. House wren numbers went from 70 in 2024 to 11 in 2025. BC chickadees also dropped from 42 to 10. All birds fledged went from 1603 to 1254. Hoping for a better year in 2026.

Since the season ended, I have visited 4 of our trails to either move or

replace some boxes. We have one new monitor that is willing to check 2 trails next year.

Waukesha County, Steve Vidmar

Hello everyone, Waukesha County had good results this year from most of the people who contacted me. We had some losses from nest boxes leaking during extended rain events and soaking the nesting material in the nest boxes. The chicks suffered hypothermia and died. Now is a good time to check nest boxes and caulk all joints to prevent water infiltration. I would like to give a shout out to Samantha Humes from Pewaukee WI for making 5 more X-style bluebird houses (total 10 now) and donating them. She has also completed her 2025 WI Master Naturalist Course and is one of our newest members. Welcome Samantha! Great to have you with all your skills.

Again please if you put up bluebird houses, please monitor them and protect them from House Sparrows. Too many good people with good intentions lose the bluebird broods by not protecting them. Waukesha County has a huge House Sparrow problem caused by many uneducated people feeding House Sparrows cheap food and putting up cheap store bought birdhouses to breed them. These people mean well, but it is very difficult to change their minds and their bad habits. Please spread the word to protect the bluebirds that we do have here in Waukesha County. Plan now for another successful season in 2026.

Milwaukee County, Michelle Mellencamp

As usual, being a bluebird monitor has been full of surprises! We have had many interesting repairs and replacements in 2025. We continue to be very thankful for all of the Carol McDaniel Legacy Fund bluebird boxes that BRAW has provided. It allowed us to replace some very old weather damaged boxes and some that mysteriously vanished.

GPS coordinates are being used for each box location. This



practice was established by Emilie Burmeister, Conservation Biologist, Milw. Co. Parks, to help volunteers navigate via a QR code.

Al Sherkow, Suburban bluebird trail blazer, was busy banding bluebird nestlings that hatched in roadside newspaper holders (49 EABLs banded to date). If you find a banded bluebird, please let BRAW know. Al has been researching the adaptability of bluebirds in Milw Co. He is now using the [Cornell Lab's NestWatch](#) program to track his EABL counts (research findings). Looking forward to trying out this tool too! Sounds like it could be a "best practice."

Marinette County, Barb Allen

While my total nestboxes monitored creeps closer to 500 houses, my total bluebirds fledged totaled 681, with 1,764 songbirds fledged. Unfortunately, I had 903 bluebird eggs laid, which makes me sad that I lost too many eggs mainly due to

continued next page

the weather conditions. My totals included 4 new monitors: Mike Anzalone, Mark Weber and Stacy and Scott VanStraten. I also had 3 new monitors who reported their numbers separately: Gary Riggle, Chris Mazer, and Gerry Giese. Thank you to all the monitors in Marinette County as we definitely have one of the largest county increases in new monitors and in bluebird totals for a year. Also thank you to the many people who have allowed me to put bird houses on their property so that I can monitor their nestboxes. I just received 24 more houses from Gene Birr to put up before the ground freezes.



The picture of the dead bluebird chicks with egg shells still in the nestbox was

the first time I have seen this happen. I found it at Governor Thompson State Park on August 5 this year. With the bluebirds so good at getting rid of the egg shells right away, I can only assume that something happened to the female hen or possibly both the male and female bluebird parents, and therefore the new chicks did not survive. These were my only bluebird chicks lost in Marinette County.

Oconto County, Gene Birr

During September, I assisted Brown CC Steve Mayer with installing 12

nest boxes on the grounds of Unity Hospice in DePere, along with new member Jim Kneiszel, who will be monitoring his new trail nest summer. Steve and I also helped another new BRAW bluebird monitor, Greg Miller, put up a 12 gourd rack in his efforts to establish a colony of Purple Martins on his Oconto County property. While readying to supply the poles and boxes to Barb Allen, I reorganized my workbench and garage to make room for the new supply of cedar lumber I acquired and planed down and then stored in preparation for building 100 or more nest boxes this winter, which will be available for BRAW trails next year.

Eau Claire County, Rita Gundry

Phillips Medisize in Menomonie, WI contacted me in July, looking for advice on launching a bluebird trail on their company campus. I engaged the help of my brother, Larry Liegel, also a bluebird and BRAW member. We motored to Menomonie along with printed material from BRAW, two different versions of NABS-style bluebird houses/ poles and a boatload of advice. We took the opportunity to educate them on bluebird housing. Larry constructs modified NABS nest boxes using 7/8 inch cedar, with all the amenities a bluebird would want. He extends the roofline two inches to discourage sparrows which, we are told, fly higher than bluebirds, making them less likely to see the entrance hole. The longer roofline also deflects driv-

ing wind and rain, especially in the spring. He modifies the back piece by extending it three inches on the top and bottom. He uses the three inches to attach two steel U-bolts which are used as clamps around a 6 foot 6 inch steel fence post. These steel fence posts are more expensive than metal conduit, but better withstand violent storms, frost and animal abuse. A five foot section of PVC pipe is slipped over the fence post giving it a neat and clean appearance. His boxes are slightly heavier than the standard NABS box, while the sides, front, entrance hole and inside dimensions are the same. His nest boxes are complete with Noel guards and screened floor risers.

Phillips Medisize has a lovely campus on which to erect their trail and plan to start with eight nest boxes. Two of them will be outfitted with cameras so employees will be able to view "life inside the box" from a large screen in the company lunchroom. Their nest boxes will be monitored by volunteer employees who "adopt a box" and will be trained in the ensuing months. Employees will also be engaged in an effort to educate youngsters in a nearby elementary school about bluebirds, with the possibility of conducting a bluebird nest box building workshop.

Larry and I traveled to Menomonie in late August to assist in siting and erecting the nest boxes on the trail, which should be ready to greet new bluebird inhabitants next spring. We will conduct a training session for monitors from Phillips Medisize in February 2026.

Dane County, Pat Ready

Even though many bluebird eggs and chicks were lost in May due to cold, wet weather late in the month bluebirds rebounded!

Many new boxes were put up in city parks creating cavity nesting trails. All boxes will be monitored and results shared with the city parks department. Paul Noeldner oversees the trails in most city parks in Madison.

My trail at Elver Park produced Tree Swallows this season. A pair of bluebirds had a nest with chicks that died in May. They didn't attempt to nest again.



Gene Birr and Steve Mayer promoting BRAW last summer.

Convention Highlights, By Patrick Ready, Editor

Another good turn out for the BRAW Convention at Horicon Marsh. Over 100 members attended!



President Steve Sample welcomed everyone and thanked them for all they do for Eastern Bluebirds in the state. Our efforts are paying off!



David Drake highlighted research he and his students conducted relative to birds and bats at a wind farm in Dodge and Fond du Lac counties.



Mariette Nowak explained how to create the perfect habitat for bluebirds with our beautiful Wisconsin native plants. We learned about the best plants to provide a smorgasbord of bugs and berries for bluebirds.



Dave Misterek covered many ideas about creating a nest box trail for our native cavity nesters.



Cats that roam free kill birds. Steve Betchkal gave us excellent information and stats about outdoor cats and the dangers they present to wildlife and themselves.



Pat Blakeslee, Rita Gundry and brother Larry Liegel provided coffee and treats for everyone. Thank you!

Go to BRAW.org for YouTube videos of all presentations from the convention.

A few members are wondering why the the conventions are being held at the Horicon Marsh Visitor's Center? The answer is simple, those of us on the board that do all the planning, food ordering, arranging speakers and do all the clean up live close to it. Most of us are in Dane Co and Madison. We need to drive there early in the morning to get tables set up, organize the Silent Auction and get chairs set up. Also some of our best attendance numbers are at this location. Yes, the location is barely large enough for the event but at every program there were empty seats available. At lunch time you may need to be neighborly and sit at a table and make new friends! Hope to see you next year.

Bluebirding Tips: Peterson Boxes Still Work

By Gene Kroupa

Back in 1978 when Dick and Vi Peterson, of Brooklyn, Minnesota, developed their uniquely shaped nest box designed to ward off predators, many bluebirders adopted it for their trails.

Known for its steep-sloping roof and downward-facing entrance panel, the thought was that bluebirds would build their nest in the deep, elongated interior pocket out of harm's way. However, the box was heavy and somewhat unwieldy to mount and check its contents.

Then along came the basic North American Bluebird Society's (NABS) vertically, rectangular design that was easier to mount, allowed for attaching a predator guard, and with the option for a top or bottom hinging side door. However, some folks think a single entrance hole works better than the double one NABS prefers.

Yet, the Peterson box has its fans and loyal users, including Mike Moran, of Rudolph. Mike has 45 boxes split among four trails. The retired master cheesemaker notes: "Bluebird nest boxes are a lot like dairy cows. You have regularly high producers and then the rest."

I met Mike and Kathy Moran at BRAW's State Convention, back in September. He explained that using Peterson boxes is not much different from other styles. "Location, location, location is the key to getting high bluebird occupancy."

As a result, Mike is quick to move unproductive boxes or ones with predator problems. "It's not how many nest boxes you have up, but what kind of fledgling production you get from them that counts," said Mike.

Interestingly, he has found that nest boxes placed on lowlands aren't as productive as those sited more in the rolling uplands with a diversity of habitat. "My best trails are in cemeteries and golf courses that offer short grass, as well as some trees," Mike observed.

While the Peterson boxes seem to keep out hungry raccoons, he revealed



Mike Moran cleans out a Peterson nest box at end of season. (Kathy Moran)

that "hawks are a big problem around here. They like to patrol the open ground edges and grab fledglings." He hasn't had much trouble with House Sparrows because "I hang a couple strands of fishing line (monofilament) from the roof on each side of the entrance. Split shot at the ends keeps the strands straight down."

Mike has also experimented with skylight roofs to let light into the Peterson box to keep away House Sparrows. "The main problem is that bluebirds don't like them either and I got lower usage of skylights," he explained. Research about box preference done for BRAW by Ripon College has confirmed Mike's observation.

The stainless-steel mounting poles he uses make it difficult for any climbing predators to reach the nest boxes. As a result, he doesn't use any predator guard on the boxes, but Mike will sometimes put metal disks on the poles for added deterrence. "I never nail a Peterson box to a wooden post, dead tree or telephone pole," he said. "I leave the door open over winter and don't have a mouse problem."

One thing Mike is sure about is that bluebirds do better nesting in weather-tight boxes. "I keep cracks filled so rain and cold wind can't cause hypothermia or mold. Also, I use screws and not nails to secure the roof and sides."

To help keep the nesting area dry, Mike adds about an inch of cedar shavings to the floor. "The shavings also make it easier to clean the box, especially if messy Tree Swallows nest in the box first." He will quickly refresh the box after a first nesting of any birds, including bluebirds.



Cemeteries are among Moran's most productive trails. (Kathy Moran)



Saw cross-cuts make it easier for fledglings to climb out. (Kathy Moran)

"House wrens become a problem later in the season, when they fill boxes to the top with dummy nests," Mike explained. He also prunes brush and cuts weeds near mounting poles.

Mike had someone build his first



Adding cedar shavings at bottom keeps nest dry and easier to clean. (Kathy Moran)

Peterson nest box and then used it as a template. "I've been making my own boxes since then," he noted. "You have to make a ladder of saw crosscuts inside for the fledglings to climb out, as they are about half-way down in the deep box."

Looking down the road, Mike plans to stick with the Peterson boxes. "Once you get comfortable with something, you can always tweak the boxes and their use to make them better," concluded Mike.

Winter 2025 Donations

James Stamm, \$10
 Paul Zillgitt, \$25 nest Box
 Jim Neider, \$5
 Community Foundation of Southern Wisconsin, \$3144
 Ursula Muehllehner, \$10
 Helen Smith, \$10
 Mike and Mary Smith, \$10
 Ray Pinter, \$25
 Lynn Barrett, \$50
 Eric Preston, \$80
 Rich Horbaczewski, \$20
 Wendy Bekx, \$25 nest box
 Bernie Hoefgen, \$25
 David and Sandra Fonger, \$10
 Dave and Patti Becker, \$100 nest box
 Mike Moran, \$100 research
 Wade Jeske, \$25
 Michael Morgan, \$100
 Margaret Riley, \$25
 William Meeks, \$10
 William Bailey, \$5
 Todd and Betty Berens, \$25
 Maynard and Patti Nigbor, \$5
 Jon and Diane Koenig, \$25

In Memory of Roger Brey, \$100
 By Kathy, Michael and Sarah



**KEY STAT
 ABOUT
 BLUEBIRDS**

Bluebirds have two to three clutches a season.

2026 Nest Box Programs for Members

By Gene Kroupa

This year BRAW distributed nearly 500 free nest boxes for members to establish new bluebird trails and refresh old ones. For 2026, there will be several programs in place to continue increasing and improving nest box trails.

Among them are: *Nest in Peace* – This program seeks to populate the state's 2,720 cemeteries with bluebird nest boxes. Ease of setting up, maintaining and monitoring cemetery trails in ideal habitat make them popular among seniors, school children, and new bluebirders with limited time.

Carol McDaniel Memorial – Carol McDaniel was a past president of BRAW and a national leader in the rescue and restoration of the bluebird. In her honor, BRAW offers nest boxes with memorial tags. GPS or road intersection locations must be recorded upon siting of the boxes. *Trail Builder* – Golf courses, schools, parks, corporate campuses, water towers and other sites offer opportunities to install new trails. This program provides the materials while recipients must supply regular monitoring. *Replacement Boxes* – Nest boxes don't last forever; so, BRAW can help refresh existing trails with replacements. Keeping up an existing productive trail is easier than trying to establish a new one.

In some cases, BRAW can supply or subsidize the cost of mounting poles and predator guards. Materials can be picked up or shipped if reimbursement is received for mailing costs. Availability will last until supplies are exhausted for instate members only.

Besides maintaining and monitoring the boxes, recipients will be expected to file a season's end data report about the boxes' nesting activity. Keep in mind that as part of all these programs, BRAW offers free blue plastic nest box ID tags.

Funds for these programs come from donations of members and grants that BRAW seeks from various sources. To make your request, send an email to: ssample@gmail.com or go online to www.braw.org.



Cemeteries are ideal for bluebird trails. (Gene Kroupa)



Carol McDaniel memorial boxes have recognition tags. (Gene Kroupa)



Trail Builder boxes are funded by member donations. (Gene Kroupa)



Dilapidated, old boxes are ripe for replacement. (Pat Ready)



BRAW offers free ID tags for member boxes. (Gene Kroupa)

BRAW Honors 2025 Awards Recipients

By Gene Kroupa

Another season has slipped by in the blink of an eye. Now, it is time to recognize those members and others who have made special efforts on behalf of bluebirds, the environment, and the organization. "This is our way of saying 'thank you' to individuals whom we rely on to serve BRAW's mission," said President Steve Sample. Here are the 2025 awards recipients:

Ann Wick

Carol McDaniel Bluebird Award

Ann Wick, of Black Earth, received the 2025 Carol McDaniel Bluebird Award. Carol McDaniel was a past president of BRAW, plus a statewide



and national leader in rescuing the Eastern Bluebird from the brink of extinction. Both McDaniel and Wick served on the board of directors of the North American Bluebird Society. According to BRAW President Steve Sample, "The purpose of the award is to recognize persons who have demonstrated a strong dedication to the restoration of the Eastern Bluebird."

A former teacher at the Aldo Leopold Elementary School in Madison, Wick has monitored bluebird nest boxes for over 35 years. As a federally licensed bluebird bander, she has banded more than 13,300 chicks on her trails.

Sample noted that: "Ann Wick has set a wonderful example for those of us who love birds."

Her three rules in working with all birds include: 1) do no harm, 2) expect the unexpected, and 3) never say never.

Wick's mother and maternal grandfather set the tone for her love of nature, especially songbirds, insects and flowers. "Neither of them believed in using pesticides, and I am following down their path in this regard," said Wick. Looking to the future, she believes humankind can best help birds by first educating the

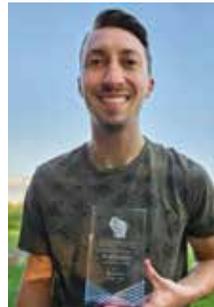
younger generations. "Getting them involved with nature through hands-on experiences will be the key," added Wick.

In receiving the award, Wick expressed gratitude to early mentors Dorene Scriven, Dick Peterson and Dave Ahlgren of the Minnesota Bluebird Recovery Program. Others who helped her were Delores and Ernie Wendt of BRAW, plus Dr. Thomas Nicholls of the Nature Education Center in Fifield.

Brad Branwell

Bluebirder of the Year Award

Brad Branwell, of Stevens Point, received the Bluebirder of the Year Award. He is BRAW's Vice President and a County Contact for four counties.



According to BRAW President Steve Sample, "He is a leader in restoring and starting new bluebird nest box trails in Portage, Marathon, Waupaca, and Wood counties." Branwell currently monitors 55 bluebird nest boxes on his own trail.

Branwell points to "a passion for birds that started by being obsessed with mallard ducks and then getting my first bird feeder in fourth grade" for wanting to help birds.

Later, UW-Stevens Point professor Dr. Kent Hall "took me under his wings and helped me develop a 35-box bluebird trail." Hall was a key figure in restoring a threatened bluebird population in the state.

To help birds now and in the future, Branwell suggests we "recognize the importance of birds not only to the environment but also for our own mental well-being. By providing and protecting their habitat and food sources from use of pesticides and herbicides, our whole ecology benefits."

In accepting the award, Branwell said: "It is my mission to promote the conservation of the Eastern Bluebird, as well as maintain the legacy of Kent Hall into the future."

David Misterek

County Contact of the Year Award

Dave Misterek, of Oshkosh, received the 2025 County Contact of the Year Award. BRAW's statewide network of county



contacts plays a key role in educating the public and helping folks set up bluebird nest box trails. According to President Steve Sample, "Misterek sets a high bar for his field work in Winnebago County, as well as for putting on public presentations."

The retired DNR employee came by his love of birds from outings with his father. He went on to earn BS and MS degrees in biology from UW-Oshkosh. "There I learned respect for the environment which guided my 37-year career protecting it," said Misterek.

A long-time member of BRAW, Misterek is also active with the Winnebago Audubon Society, as well as the Fox Valley Wild Ones Chapter that focuses on native prairie restoration. He suggests that "if we enjoy and preserve the environment now, all birds and wildlife will prosper in the future."

In accepting the award, Misterek thanked all who made possible the recognition. His BRAW state convention presentation about "experiences starting a bluebird trail" is posted at www.braw.org.

Carl Schwartz

Communicator of the Year Award

Carl Schwartz, of Fox Point, received the 2025 Communicator of the Year Award.

The retired Milwaukee Journal Sentinel editor for national and international news was cited for his "efforts on behalf of birds, conservation and the environment."

According to BRAW president Steve Sample, Schwartz has "provided leadership in helping birds through his work with *Bird City Wisconsin*,



as well as being the longtime editor of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology's (WSO) newsletter, *The Badger Birder*."

Schwartz's interest in birds was initially sparked by watching birds come to his mother's feeders, especially hummingbirds. "We dubbed a dominant male 'the Little General' which returned every year," explained Schwartz. As an adult, seeing large waterbirds in Florida and taking workshops at the Schlitz Audubon Nature Center led to Schwartz's joining the WSO.

Along the way, he pointed to the guidance supplied by BRAW's Dr. Kent Hall and an invitation by Dr. Noel Cutright to join the Western Great Lakes Bird and Bat Observatory. Both have since passed, but their impact lives on.

In reflecting on his contributions, Schwartz noted: "After four decades in journalism, I was able to turn my avocation into a nearly full-time volunteer vocation as an avian conservationist."

To help birds now and in the future, Schwartz suggests "joining conservation organizations, like BRAW and WSO, that employ good science and hands-on work to make a difference for birds."

Upon receiving his award, Schwartz said: "I'm deeply honored and look forward to sharing with the birding community at large BRAW's valuable work on behalf of bluebirds and other cavity nesters."

James Marlow

Educator of the Year Award

James Marlow, of Dodgeville, received the 2025 Educator of the Year Award.

According to BRAW President Steve Sample, "Marlow has led the way in educating adults and campers about ecology and bluebird issues at Bethel Horizons Nature Center and Camp."

The full-time environmental education director said his interest in helping birds was sparked by his



grandfather, Eugene Woehler. A DNR employee who worked mainly with managing habitat for prairie chickens, Woehler also raised domestic show chickens.

At Bethel, Marlow puts on bluebird nest box building classes. Also, the "Breakfast with the Birds" event lets participants learn about and observe birds from behind camouflage curtains in the classroom. Bethel staff provide a warm breakfast for the students.

"We believe in letting students engage with birds in their natural habitat. So, the next step is to take them out on trails to check bluebird nest box activity," said Marlow.

Bethel has 550 acres of various types of bird habitats. Marlow said he "tries to make a difference for birds by blending his public education work with habitat restoration and invasive species control." He feels humankind can help birds through hands-on experiences in learning about and providing for their habitat needs.

In accepting his award, Marlow noted: "Partnering with groups like BRAW is a way folks can get the information and support needed to help birds."

Mike Crawford

Facilitator of the Year Award.

Mike Crawford, of Waunakee, received the *Facilitator of the Year Award.*



Crawford was recognized for providing audio-visual support for BRAW's state convention, plus producing and posting helpful educational videos online to inform bluebirders.

President Steve Sample noted that "through his work with Holy Wisdom Monastery, Friends of Wisdom Prairie, and Monarch Watch, Crawford is helping improve habitat for bluebirds, butterflies and other wildlife species." His interest in birds started at a young age. "My father and I monitored one bluebird box on our property. Also, I liked watching our feeder attract all sorts of birds," explained Crawford.

"One day a chickadee landed on my

hand to take food, something I will never forget." Today that early interest in birds has blossomed into Crawford's helping maintain and monitor 20 bluebird nest boxes at Holy Wisdom Monastery. Crawford observed that "with the loss of habitat in today's world, it is so important to focus on conservation and restoration of places for birds and insects." In accepting the award, Crawford thanked those persons who encouraged his passion for birds, as well as BRAW's support in this endeavor.

Joanie Haugen

Extraordinary BRAW Supporter Award.

Joanie Haugen, of Vermont Township, received the Extraordinary BRAW Supporter Award for 2025.



According to President Steve Sample, "there are volunteers who make a huge contribution to the success of any nonprofit organization, and Joanie Haugen is one of them."

Besides handling basic bookkeeping tasks for BRAW, Haugen helps provide financial direction for the organization. Her accounting skills have helped BRAW stay financially strong with 97% of funds directly directed at helping bluebirds.

"I became acquainted with BRAW by meeting Ann Wick, of Black Earth, a local leader in restoring bluebirds through putting up and monitoring nest boxes," said Haugen. Now, she has a trail of 18 nest boxes of her own.

In receiving the award, Haugen said: "Thank you to the BRAW organization."



BRAW Photo Contest Runner-Ups



Paula Avelleyra, Madison



Steve Querin-Schultz, Gays Mills



William Baader, Mukwonago



Paul Klinkhammer, Menasha



Janna Soerens, Sheboygan

Thanks to all who entered this year's contest.

Winter 2025 New Members

Carl Schwartz, Fox Point
Mike and Jamie Henschel, Sturgeon Bay
Paul Zillgitt, Spring Green
Paul Klinkhammer, Menasha
Ursula Muehlelehner, North Freedom
Mike and Mary Smith, Argyle
Jim Kneiszel, De Pere
Wood and Melanie Weller, Lone Rock
Jeremy Batson, Spring Green
Eric Preston, Arena
Rich Horbaczewski, Monroe
Sheila McGuirk and Paul Manley, Dodgeville

Michelle Citron, Dodgeville
Ginny Bean, Argyle
Wade Jeske, Oconto Falls
Ruth Dickinson, Kenosha
Naomi Jenkins, Allouez
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Urban Bluebird Trails Offer Challenges and Rewards

By Paul Noeldner

Dane County Contact

Creating a Bluebird trail in an urban area involves some extra challenges and special rewards! What's a Bluebird to do among rows of houses? What about the challenge of House Sparrows? Here are some thoughts based on my experiences in Madison and Dane County.

One advantage in urban areas is that Bluebirds don't mind human activity, and they like to have some short grass near boxes. They perch still like little hawks and can spot a bug at 150 feet!



BRAW member Deb Turski helped install new boxes at Pheasant Branch Highland Bluebird Trail.

The challenges presented by nearby urban buildings, bushy tree lines and retention ponds offer opportunities to focus on helping other desirable native species that need and use Bluebird trail houses like Tree Swallows, House Wrens and Black-capped Chickadees.

When boxes are used by wrens and

chickadees you can add a 1 1/8-inch hole reducer to help keep House Sparrows away. Let's look at some successful examples in the Madison area that may be useful for creating your own urban Bluebird trail.

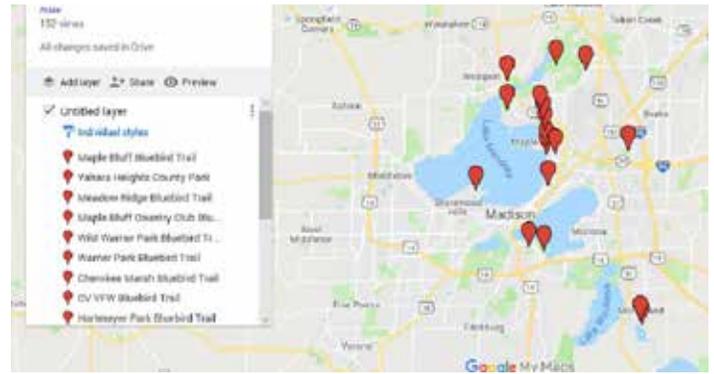
One advantage of doing a Bluebird trail in an urban area is public parks. Madison has over 250! Most city and village parks have mowed recreation areas like playgrounds and soccer fields surrounded by some natural area borders. Parks offer good opportunities for active public engagement in creating Bluebird trails and easy nearby access for weekly monitoring.

Scouts love to help put up Bluebird trails and Friends of Parks group volunteers enjoy supporting Citizen Science by actively monitoring a nearby trail and reporting data to BRAW.

Public enjoyment of Bluebird boxes in parks offers great nature recreation, the endless fascination of watching nature do its thing. Many people love to watch Bluebirds and other native birds and their nesting activity at boxes placed along public paths just as much as they enjoy watching a baseball game.

Bluebird boxes in public parks also offer opportunities for nature education and signage. Using Bluebird boxes as teachable moments is a popular activity on Madison area Bird and Nature Adventures with both adults and children. Bluebird boxes help teach kids a lesson in empathy by visually saying 'nature is welcome here, and we humans love to help.'

Wisconsin Bluebird



Madison FUN Bluebird Trails Google Pin Map. We also maintain maps for each trail with box locations.

They help educate adults about Bluebirds and other native species that need human provided nest boxes. Plus, trails build support for restoring and providing habitat including native trees and plants in every park and natural area which also benefits butterflies, bees and many other species.



Jennifer Vaughan installing her new urban Bluebird Trail at Madison Greentree Chapel Hills Park with support by Madison Parks and boxes from BRAW.

Madison Parks staff have suggested new Bluebird trail locations and helped Friends of Parks volunteers, such as Eagle Scouts, fill out required Wildlife Habitat Permits. The permit requires identifying an adult weekly monitor who will report data to BRAW and remove any House Sparrow nests which is especially critical for urban nesting success.

One example is a Bluebird nest box placed next to the Warner Park Community Recreation Center that is a hot spot for House Sparrows. With persistent monitoring Bluebirds successfully nested there! Replacing traditional landscaping with native plantings at that location and other urban parks is helping reduce sparrow habitat and box competition.

Dane County Parks Department has been a big sup-



New Monitor Val Van Horne attended a Madison FUN monitor class and took over trails at Odana Hills Golf Course and Odana Hills Park.

porter of Bluebird trails in local parks bordering urban areas. Friends of Parks groups like Friends of Cherokee Marsh, Wild Warner and Friends of Pheasant Branch are active sponsors of Bluebird trails.

Be sure to connect with local Friends groups! Urban and suburban businesses, golf courses and university campuses have facilitated a number of Madison area Bluebird trails. The best approach is to work closely with grounds managers. Most recognize that Bluebird boxes are part of helping provide needed habitat along with native trees and plants.

One of the oldest trails in Madison is Sylvia Marek's Bluebird trail at the UW Arboretum. The UW-Madison Lakeshore Preserve features a Bluebird trail as an ongoing Friends group Citizen Science research project.

The American Family corporate campus has had great success with its extensive Bluebird trail. AmFam's staff eagerly sign up to be volunteer weekly monitors. Natural areas next to walk paths are a favorite location for urban Bluebird trail boxes, because they don't interfere with mowing and recreation, plus provide easy access for weekly monitoring.

Some older Bluebird trails in Madison Conservation Parks are being updated to move boxes closer to walk paths to avoid creating unauthorized paths into natural areas. Other things you can do that help Bluebird trails succeed in urban areas are: 1) solicit expert advice from local bird groups, like BRAW and the Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance, 2) engage with local nature centers like the Aldo Leopold Nature Center, and 3) learn as much as you can by going to websites like www.braw.org and www.northamericanbluebird.society.org.

The Madison FUN (Friends of Urban Nature) partnership of Parks, Environmental and Friends groups helps provide communication and contacts for Bluebird trails across the urban area. Monitors that are part of the Madison FUN Bird Buddies team help to share advice, do installations and maintenance, and provide backup monitoring when needed.

Look for and help create connections with Parks staff, Friends groups and Environmental organizations in your urban area and watch Bluebird trails sprout up like mushrooms!

Bluebird Time - Promotional cartoon created by Paul Noeldner.



Paul Williams demonstrates checking a Bluebird Box on a free educational "Bluebirds and Martins" Bird and Nature Adventure with Friends of UW Lakeshore Nature Preserve. The T post in the background was added by monitor Jeff Koziol to offer a perch since there is no tree nearby.

Use the Van Ert Trap to Solve Your House Sparrow Problems



Install the trap and set it per instructions. Watch to see if you catch a House Sparrow or return to the box after a short time to check to see if the trap was sprung. You don't want to trap a bluebird and leave it trapped. To check caught bird use a large, clear plastic bag over the box and slightly open the side. The trapped bird will fly to the top of the bag for you to see what you have. Release bluebirds and remove House Sparrows.

Figure 1—Installation is quick and simple provided there is a screw intact.



Figure 2— The visible red bullseye invariably suggests a trapped House Sparrow.

**Order traps online from
Van Ert Enterprises at: vanerttraps.com**





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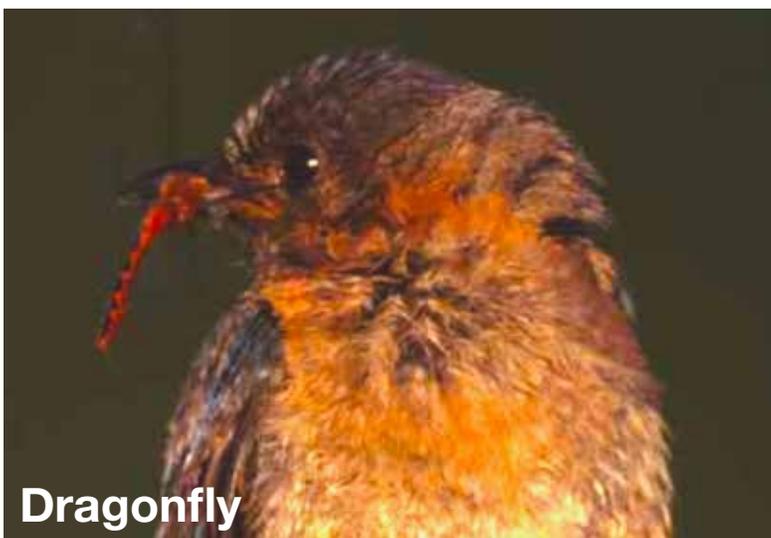
- Fact Sheets
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MISSION:

To engage in such educational, scientific and charitable pursuits as may be beneficial to the prosperity and well being of the three species of bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting bird species.

Bluebird Menu Has Variety

These photos from Jack Bartholmai of Beaver Dam show the variety of food bluebirds use to feed their young. The images indicate how the food changes as the season progresses as well as how the fledglings develop and demand more and larger foods. In the last photo notice the multiple prey brought to the ready to fledge young with voracious appetites.



Membership Renewal Information

By Valerie Van Winkle, Membership Services

If the address label of your *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter reads Winter 2025 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 February and will be mailed in March. Memberships received after February 15 may not be processed in time to receive the Spring 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)
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*BRAW sends out nest box deal promotions and "time to renew" reminders via email.

Donation (optional)

\$25 for nest box construction/post & predator guard

\$100 for nest box trail

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In addition to my membership dues, 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.

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2025 Data Report
See page 2

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Menomonie, WI

3rd Place
Joan Eckhardt
Okatie, SC

