

Fall 2024
Vol. 39, No. 3



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: September 7, 2024

See Page 3



Enter the BRAW
Photo Contest

See page 10 for details.

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Is It Time to Renew Your Membership?

President's Report

By Steve Sample

It doesn't seem real that we are at the end of another nesting season. As of the first week of August, I had only two active nest sites with chicks all but fledged.

The most impactful aspect of this season from my perspective was the amount of rain, which did not take as much of a toll on productivity as I had initially feared.

I did find that some of my nesting boxes needed to be replaced. Many poorly constructed boxes were replaced early in the season, and the new boxes became functional with successful nesting. Just goes to show that continual monitoring during the season is important. Nesting box condition and location are paramount for success.

One problem did surface because of the rain and an article about how to approach wet nests and their replacements is included in this issue. Searching the Internet turned up several articles on this subject as well.

The bottom line is that wet bluebird nests can quickly lower temperatures of eggs resulting in the adults abandoning the nest. Chicks, younger chicks in particular, can experience hypothermia. Website Sialis.org is a good resource on this topic.



BRAW has been keeping count of the number of boxes given out this year, and we have reached a number far exceeding the goal of distributing a minimum of 200 nesting boxes. Best of all, the recipients will supply nesting data as part of our working agreement.

We have Board Member Emeritus Fred Craig and County Contact Coordinator Gene Birr to thank for their efforts in providing nesting boxes and predator guards. Speaking of predator guards, Director Dave Lucey not only made guards, too, but willingly transported a number of boxes to our membership.

The annual convention is coming up soon after you receive this issue. Director Pat Ready and Treasurer Joanie Haugen are responsible for the major effort in setting up the convention and running the Silent Auction as well. Consider donating something for the auction, but contact Joanie by September 1st.

Membership chairperson Val VanWinkle has been active in making sure all member support functions of the organization are in order. Webmaster and Director Andy Garcia-Rivera worked all summer to improve our website. It just goes to show that our volunteer Board members are active and willing to help BRAW meet its goals and serve our members.

Hope to see you at the convention!

Steve

Register for the BRAW Convention, September 7, 2024

The BRAW Annual Convention will be held on September 7th at Horicon Marsh Education and Visitor Center, Horicon..

Conference fees:

\$10.00: Registration without lunch per person

\$20.00: Includes lunch & registration 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

9773 Vermont Church Rd.,

Black Earth, WI 53515

Feel free to bring your own lunch if desired.

Register online!

Go to braw.org

BRAW 2024 Annual Convention

Program for 2024 BRAW

8:00-9:00 Registration

9:00-9:15 Welcome/BRAW Awards: Steve Sample, President

9:15-10:00 *The Buzz in Our Garden: Helping Threatened Bumble Bees:* Judy Cardin

10:00-10:30 *FUN in the Park:* Paul Noeldner

10:30-11:00 Break/Coffee & Snacks

11:00-11:45 *Back from the Brink – Managing Habitat for Grassland Birds:* Tim Hansel

11:45-1:00 Lunch! (Pre-paid only. Auction closes at 1:00 p.m.)

1:00-2:00 Q&A – Ask Anything Bluebirds Panel: BRAW

2:00-2:15 Silent Auction winners

2:15-3:00 *Bat Rehabilitation in Wisconsin:* Paige Pederson

3:00 – 3:45 Closing & clean-up

BRAW Convention Featured Programs

September 7th, Horicon Marsh Education and Visitor Center

The Buzz in Our Garden: Helping Threatened Bumble Bees



Our charming and peaceful pollinator needs our help. Join **Judy Cardin**, educator with the DNR's community science program Wisconsin Bumble Bee Brigade, to learn about bumble bees. Almost half of Wisconsin bumble bees species are threatened, and Judy will share how each of us can make a difference. Learn what is causing bee population declines,

and how to support their habitat and flower needs, and along the garden path we will learn to identify some of Wisconsin's 20 bumble bee species.

A Bluebird Trail Recipe for Parks & Partners



Paul Noeldner, BRAW Education Coordinator and Dane County Contact, will give a presentation about his one-page BRAW Bluebird Trail Recipe checklist to help new trail monitors connect with the right people, resources and information and get started cooking up lots of happy Bluebirds! Paul coordinates Madison FUN Friends of Urban Nature

and enjoys helping Friends groups collaborate with parks departments on Bluebird Trails and educating the public on free year-round Bird and Nature Adventures.

Back from the Brink: Managing Habitat for Grassland Birds



Tim Hansel is the education coordinator for the Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy, the education chair for the Empire-Sauk chapter of The Prairie Enthusiasts, and an instructor for the Wisconsin Master Naturalist program.

We delve into the critical conservation efforts required to protect and restore the habitats of grassland birds. As these species face threats from habitat loss, climate change, and agricultural practices,

the talk emphasizes the importance of thoughtful land management and collaborative conservation strategies.

We will explore case studies of successful habitat restoration projects, discuss the role of policy and community engagement in conservation, and provide actionable insights for individuals and organizations looking to make a positive impact on grassland bird populations. We aim for a deeper understanding of the challenges and triumphs in the field of avian conservation, equipped with knowledge to contribute to the preservation of these vital ecosystems.

Bat Rehabilitation in Wisconsin

Paige Pederson is an advanced wildlife rehabilitator and the Wildlife Operations Supervisor at the Dane County Humane Society's Wildlife Center (DCHS) in Madison, Wisconsin. DCHS is licensed through the DNR and USFWS to work with injured, ill, or orphaned native wildlife and rehabilitates over 150 different species each year, including bats! Learn about Wisconsin's bats, the rehabilitation process, a few patient highlights, and more at this presentation.



Ask Anything Bluebirds Panel Q&A by BRAW experts.

Need advice on trail management? What you can do to help Eastern Bluebirds more? Why you have eggs or chicks loss? Who can help you with bluebirds in your area? Ask the panel of experts with years of experience for these answers and more.

Plan on a great day of meeting friends and learning.

9:00 AM – 3:45 PM

Horicon Marsh Visitor Center

N7725 Hwy 28

Horicon, WI 53032

(920) 387-7893

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 (\$10) no lunch registration & lunch \$20 ea.

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

State _____ Zip _____

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

BRAW c/o Joanie Haugen,

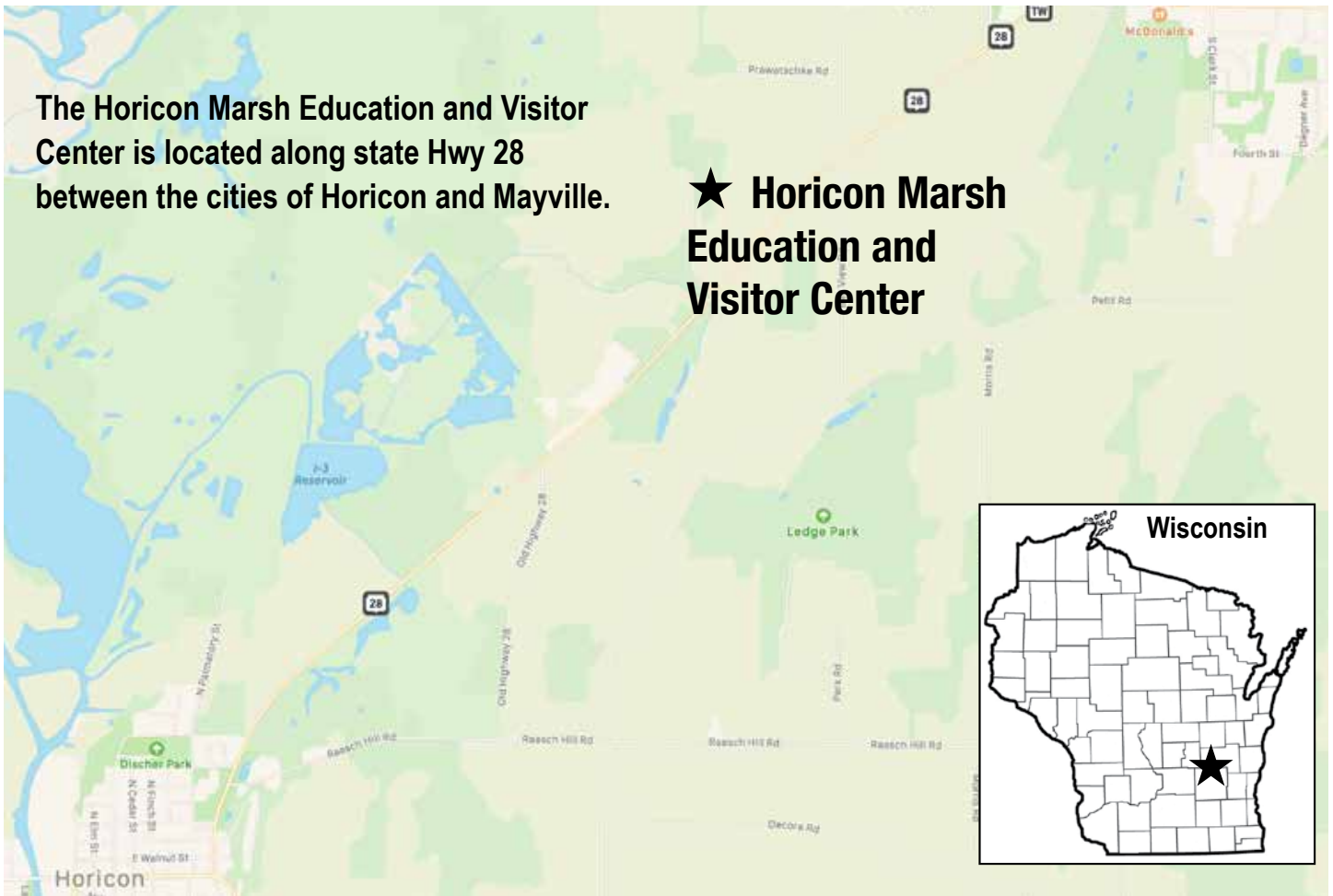
9773 Vermont Church Rd.,

Black Earth, WI 53515

or Online at BRAW.org

The Horicon Marsh Education and Visitor Center is located along state Hwy 28 between the cities of Horicon and Mayville.

★ **Horicon Marsh Education and Visitor Center**



**BRAW Convention
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.



Due to space constraints, this year all donated items must be pre-registered. If you can make a donation, please call, text or e-mail Joanie Haugen jlhcb@gmail.com or 608-438-8375.

Thank you for donating and for bidding on the auction items!

Call for Data! September 30 Deadline

Hi Fellow Bluebirders:

It's getting to be that time of year again. Although there's still some activity, the days are getting shorter and the bird houses are getting emptier.

I know that each of you has an idea on how well the bluebirds are faring on your trails, and how your hard work had helped them. But it's the time of year when you'll soon get to see how well the bluebirds are doing across the state. Well... in order to get that information to you, we need you all to share the data you have.

It's **Data Request** time! Please use our easy on-line form, or, if you prefer, you can submit by snail mail, by sending the printed form to me at the address, below. The electronic version is quicker, easier and cheaper (no stamps), but as long we get your data, we'll be happy!

Please submit your data before **September 30**. Thanks for all you do for the birds!

Steve Fallon
Data Director
974 Halcyon Days Court
Oregon, WI 53575

Fall 2024 Donations

Barbie Allen, \$50
Robert Stanley, \$25 nest box
James Heinen, \$25
Roger Brey, \$10
Hubert Cole \$50
Deborah Turski, \$100 nest box
Duane Schwab, \$100
Dale Wojciechowski, \$50 nest box
Kathleen Marsicek, \$25
Michael Morgan, \$25
Mike Ozanski, \$5
Jim Van Dreese, \$50
Deb & Charlie Knudsen, \$100
Greg & Beth Clabots, \$30
Jerome Woelfel, \$1000
In Memory of John A. Zeinert
Carol Rosenberg, \$100

In Memory of Kent Hall
Karen Dostal \$26.25

BRAW EZ Summary Form

Use this form to report your nest box results for the season.

DEADLINE: SEPTEMBER 30

_____ No. of boxes* _____ Boxes used by Bluebirds*
_____ Bluebird eggs laid _____ Bluebird eggs hatched
_____ Bluebirds fledged * _____ Tree Swallows fledged
_____ Chickadees fledged _____ House Wrens fledged

[] "I did not disturb any Chickadee, Tree Swallow or House Wren nests."

*County _____

Year: _____

*Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

*Phone (_____) - _____

*email: _____

* Required data. Please provide any other data or information.

Comments: _____

EZ Summary data can be emailed to: wisconsinbluebirds@gmail.com
Or mail to: Data Summary Director, 974 Halcyon Days Ct., Oregon, WI 53575

Form available at www.braw.org

Fall 2024 New Members

Sally Dahir, Highland
Carol Rosenberg, Ripon
Robert Novy, Verona
Governor Thompson State Park, Crivitz
James Backus, Eau Claire
Helen Smith, NY
Sandy & Wayne Geviss, NY
Ryan Ellifson, Helenville
Al Sherkow, Bayside
Dennis & Synthia Kaminski, Sobieski
Bonnie Hamer, Ft. Atkinson
Tina Preseli, Arpin
Jennifer Meyer, Oconto
Carrie Sypniewski, Edgerton



©Peggy Gieghart

BRAW Summer CC News

Gene Birr, CC Chair

Email: gbbird22@gmail.com

Our summer bluebird season is winding down now and many monitors and County Contacts have been reporting very good results of increased bluebird numbers. Some local folks have seen increases of double or triple of last year's numbers while others are finding their all-time best results. Here's hoping you achieved similar success with each of your trails this year.

The BRAW BOD and I would like to encourage each of you who may have received new nest boxes from BRAW this year to start a new trail or add on to your other trails, to report to us the results of your boxes and trails. We would like to hear the details of how and where your trail developed and how well it produced bluebirds and other cavity nesters. This goes for first time trail monitors or whether you were provided boxes from a CC or board member who encouraged you to start a trail and provided you with boxes and their expertise. We would enjoy hearing of your experiences and results.

We look forward to seeing each of you at the upcoming convention on September 7 at the Horicon Marsh Visitor Center. Before the many programs, speakers and information are presented, we will introduce each of the County Contacts in attendance there so everyone in the audience can learn of and locate their county's contact so they can identify them and reach out to them during the convention or at a later time.

Portage and Wood County, Brad Branwell

I am very pleased to be back in my hometown in central Wisconsin. Under the mentorship and guidance of Dr. Kent Hall, who unfortunately passed away earlier this year, I started my first bluebird trail just east of Stevens Point when I was in 7th grade. I monitored that trail of nearly 45 boxes for about 10 years until I got a field job while in college that wouldn't allow me to regularly monitor my



boxes any longer. So, my trail was taken over by another person who had monitored those boxes for a while until he decided to remove them and reduce his efforts. I had lived in Madison for a little while and this past spring moved back to the Stevens Point area. Fortunately, we had a very mild spring and I was able to pull all my boxes that I monitored in Madison in February and I installed them back in the same area I monitored before near Stevens Point. Since moving back to the area, I also decided to follow in Kent's footsteps and continue his legacy in central WI and became the BRAW county contact for Portage and Wood Counties. I have been able to reconnect with several monitors in the area that monitored under Kent's leadership and look forward to assisting existing and new monitors on their trials. If you are in the central WI area and need any assistance with moving or replacing any old boxes, or want to start monitoring a new trail, please contact me and I will be happy to help. I can report that my rein-

stalled "new" trail did well this year and produced lots of bluebirds. Also of note on my trail was an excellent year for Black-capped Chickadees. One box of chickadees had 10 eggs laid. All 10 successfully hatched and fledged! Talk about busy parents!

Waukesha County, Steve Vidmar

Hello All, Bluebird numbers remain low in Waukesha County. We do not have the population of bluebirds as other western or central countries in Wisconsin. We had some success though. Many of my fellow bluebirders have had great success this year. We trapped house sparrows early this year to lower the population. I personally trapped several hundred. Many people here feed the birds and attract and feed house sparrows. Then they put up cheap birdhouses to attract house sparrows to nest. Talking to people to change their habits is extremely difficult. They think they are helping the birds and refuse to help the bluebirds. Some people tell me they never see bluebirds here and they just want to see some birds, so they continue to do what they do. Other bluebirders here have the same problem with people objecting to catching house sparrows. The only way to have success here is to lower the house sparrow population and try to educate people to stop feeding house sparrows. I had one bluebird hen lay 5 white eggs and all of them hatched. They all fledged, but one did not make it. The neighbor's dog got one baby on the ground unfortunately and killed it. Anyway we continue to raise the bluebird population.

Fond du Lac County, Memuna Khan

The Ripon College Nest Box Trail in Fond du Lac County is having an interesting year. We had a mixed brood in which Tree Swallows usurped an Eastern Bluebird nest after a single egg was laid. The Tree Swallows completed the clutch with their own eggs. All of the eggs, including the bluebird egg, hatched. The swallows fed all of the nestlings and eventually the Eastern Bluebird nestling and his adoptive siblings fledged. This nest box is now occupied by Eastern Bluebirds.

Have others observed mixed broods?

Door County, Charlotte Lukes

Hello Monitors,

We had to check only 8 boxes today and found two more had fledged bluebirds.

Next week we will have only 3 boxes to check.

The comparison of this year to last year's fledged birds is amazing.

EB=eastern bluebirds

TS=tree swallows

2023	EB	TS
Nests	35	3
Eggs	151	17
Hatch	81	14
Fled.	59	13

2024	EB	TS
Nests	38	2
Eggs	155	11
Hatch	109	11
Fled.	100	11

We have one nest with 4 warm eggs that should hatch this week and two other boxes with 8 chicks that should fledge in the next ten days.

That would bring our total hatch to 113 and then if they fledge, that total should be 112, well over our 2023 totals.

Waupaca County, Craig & Sheila Beyer

This summer will be remembered as a phenomenal nesting year for our beloved bluebirds. Not many empty houses in the 150 or so houses we monitored! The majority had 2 hatches, and we are anticipating even 3 in some.

We found that moving some just a few feet can trigger use by the bluebirds. Over time, sometimes it's just too much brush that has grown up around them. We didn't have any problems with predators or bugs this year. We did lose one nest of babies, we think the mother could have been killed on the road? We had a couple of mice and some ants that we evicted.

We have 40 cemeteries with at least one house in them and almost all produced bluebirds. The Weyauwega cemetery had two batches in two houses, that's just awesome! We also had good luck with the few houses that we raised the floor with hardware cloth.

It is just so rewarding to see all the

time and effort pay off for the bluebirds. Waupaca County is doing great as we are seeing other people putting up houses correctly, using predator proof poles, great location, etc... It's so good to see!

Okay, we'll cut this short as I could talk all day about the bluebirds! Happy Trails.

Grant and Lafayette Counties, Jim Hess

It has been a good summer for bluebirds in Grant and Lafayette Counties. Several of our monitors have reported increased numbers from previous years. Jim Barth, who monitors 67 boxes near the Fever River, has fledged 173 bluebirds as of July 24, which is better than average. And, on my 24-box trail near Lake Yellowstone, I have recorded a total of 68 bluebirds fledged by July 19, a 40% increase over my 5-year average year-to-date.

Unfortunately, both of our trails suffered serious losses in mid-July – Jim Barth lost 22 chicks and I lost 10 chicks. It is always frustrating and sad to find dead chicks in your boxes. We assume it was due to a combination of heat, rain, gnats and black flies. In one of my boxes, there were 5 dead chicks that on the last visit were within days of fledging. Now that milder weather has returned, we are hoping for better results.

Racine County, Rick Fare

On June 25, State Representative Greta Neubauer of Racine went on the Johnson Wax Waxdale bluebird trail with Barb Nelson, the trail monitor. This was part of the Bird Walk with a Legislator Program with the focus on protecting birds in WI. This was sponsored by the Government Affairs Association, Audubon Great Lakes advocating for the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program. Rep. Neubauer said she had a very enjoyable time.

Recently I gave a Bluebird Presentation at the Northside Library in Kenosha. The following week I took the program participants on one of our bluebird trails at Hawthorne Hollow, a local Nature Center in Kenosha. They were able to see active bluebird, tree swallow, and house wren nests. I showed them how a monitor keeps records.

So far, my trail this year will fledge more bluebirds than any other year. I'm looking forward to seeing the other monitor's results.

Iowa County, Dale & Doris Moody

We have similar experiences in Iowa and Lafayette Counties with over 30 young birds lost to black flies/turkey gnats in early to mid -July. We still have a great season going with high occupancy rates on houses.

Vilas County, Bob Butzer

Today I checked my bluebird trail here in Vilas County. So far the 20 Peterson boxes have 32 bluebird eggs with 11 hatched and 61 TS eggs with 19 hatched. I've gone back to putting most of the boxes in pairs. I will report again later.

Oconto County, Gene Birr

I am experiencing an outstanding year on my trails this summer. I had about 45 active bluebird pairs this year compared to only 18 on my 140-box trail last year. I am on schedule to fledge 325 bluebirds compared to just 130 previously.

During late July I helped Outagamie CC Steve Mayer redo a trail for Wendy Bekx at the Grand View Golf Course in Hortonville. There we replaced 11 boxes that had been mostly skylights with new solid roof boxes. A week later I assisted Barb Allen in Marinette County helping set up 2 small trails—one at Harmony Gardens in Peshtigo and another for a fellow BRAW member near Crivitz. Several recent weeks have been spent building 50 nest boxes for BRAW and preparing many boxes and conduit poles for Barbie Allen's multiple trails in Marinette County, as well.

Marinette County, Barbie Allen

This has truly been a crazy year. The weather started warmer than usual so the birds came earlier. Many of my birds made nests but were slower to lay eggs. Then we had lots of rain and then came the hot weather. I still ended up with a high percentage of bluebirds having a second brood. I did find many bluebird's nests that were built but never used. I had many tree swallows and black capped

continued next page

CC Reports

continued from page 7

chickadees that had late nestings making me wonder if they were second broods or if they just had to wait for a nestbox to open up to nest. There was also a lot of nest stealing by all birds where I'd have eggs from one species and the next week I'd find a new nest with eggs of another species. The wrens didn't seem to be too active until late in the season but then were aggressive. I had one nest that shocked me with 12 black capped chickadee eggs. I took a photo as it seemed so odd. Unfortunately, after two chicks hatched, the nest was abandoned. It would have been almost impossible for the chickadee pair to keep 12 chicks adequately fed. I have so many weird surprises in my nestboxes. There were so many boxes with mouse nests or a mouse taking over the bird's nest. There were also



flying squirrels and chipmunks in the boxes and I'm sure this was due to all the rain we had, they were looking for a dry place to have their young. This was also the first time I had bear problems with many knocked down poles and houses.

I have had so much fun this year and will have a record year on bluebirds, tree swallows and black capped chickadees with about 675 fledged bluebirds. I have met so many nice people.

Bluebird Paradise in Marinette County

By Barbie Allen

If you haven't been to Governor Tommy Thompson State Park located just sixteen miles northwest of Crivitz off Ranch Road and Paust Lane in the picturesque Twin Bridge area of Marinette County, it is truly worth the trip. Along with the Governor Earl Peshtigo River State Forest, the properties cover 15,000 acres of recreational land along Caldron Falls, High Falls and Johnson Falls Flowages. There is 16 miles of mowed hiking trails to explore and Woods Lake a 48-acre non-motorized inland lake along with a boat launch on Caldron Falls.

I was so excited last fall when with the help of Gene Birr, we installed 25 new bluebird houses along the trails, park, prairie and roadway areas at the park. I felt it was the perfect area for bluebirds, but Gene admitted to me this year that he thought I would be lucky to get a couple pair of bluebirds the first year as there were no birdhouses in the area prior. In mid-April, I had 3 bluebird nests present. On April 29th, I had 7 bluebird nests with 4 nests having 3-5 eggs already laid. There were also 3 nests of black capped chickadees and 3 tree swallow



nests meaning half of the boxes were occupied before May 1st. By May 15th, all the nestboxes were occupied with 10 pair of bluebirds. I decided to install 5 more birdhouses in case there were any more bluebirds still looking for a box. Indeed, there were and I ended with 13 pair of bluebirds with an estimated 71 bluebirds expected to fledge this year.

The only difficulty I am experiencing is a bear problem. I have had numerous houses knocked down. This bear is 1 1/2 years old and is not that interested in the eggs. He just enjoys knocking the houses down and the force of the initial blow breaks the eggs. If anyone has any suggestions I can try, please text me at 920-737-2633 or email me at barbiebluebird@gmail.com titling the subject "Bears". I installed the new style Noel guards on my boxes, so

Milwaukee County, Michelle Mellencamp

We were able to partner with Emilie Burmeister, Conservation Biologist, Milwaukee County Parks, to locate unmonitored Eastern Bluebird boxes early in the season. Emilie sent all of the maps for the BRAW boxes in the Milwaukee County Parks. 6 total- Currie, Dretzka, Greenfield, Lake, Lincoln, and Whitnall.

We found the following link helpful to locate some of the unmonitored nest boxes. We trained new Bluebird monitors, extended Bluebird trails and did lots of repairs/replacements. Here is the link: <https://arcg.is/1ufPj5> Waukesha Bluebird Monitors were also very helpful in covering Milwaukee County territories. We do continue to look for experienced monitors.

raccoons haven't presented a problem. I tried a peanut/pepper concoction recipe I found online from Sialis by David Richmond of peanut butter, cayenne pepper and red pepper flakes which he found to help with his bear problems out West. He would place the peanut butter mix at the base of the pole and this is supposed to be repeated 2 times a week until the young bluebirds fledge. Since my permanent house is in Green Bay and I monitor over 400 houses, this would be impossible for me to do.

This is truly a monitor's dream come true except for the bear. I did see a momma bear and 3 cubs cross the road in front of my car at the park and they were so cute. I enjoy every minute of my time at the park. There is so much interest and questions from people at the park each time I am there. It is my favorite trail to monitor.



Bluebirding Tips: Boosting Second Broods

By Gene Kroupa

For some monitors, this year has been a tough one for second broods. While many bluebird pairs successfully nested again, their broods didn't make it to fledglings.

A variety of factors led to the demise of the nestlings. Gnats were a major killer, while wet nests and predators contributed to losses. In some cases, wrens and sparrows continually took their toll. What to do?

As always, it's important to remove the first nest because it is often infested with ectoparasites, such as mites. These pests bite the young to get blood and can cause death. This should be done even if a second nest has been started on top of it.

In a rainy season like this one was, making sure that nest boxes are tight with roof overhangs protecting all four sides of the nest box is critical. The box bottom needs to be recessed at least 1/2 inch so the overhang keeps water from being "wicked up" into the nesting material.

Wet nests are a triple threat because they can result in hypothermia, host a deadly fungal infection and attract gnats.

These three threats are most likely the cause of sudden death syndrome in bluebird nestlings. One day the chicks are healthy and a week later they are dead. Besides making sure that the nest box is weather-proof, taking other preventive steps helps.

Affixing a vanilla scented Christmas tree like those used in vehicles to the inside back of the nest box before a second nesting seems to work in warding off gnats. Gnats don't like vinegar, vanilla, pine oil, peppermint, lemon, eucalyptus, and lavender. If gnats get a jump on you, spraying the nest box with a homemade vanilla and other essential oils recipe will help.

Ventilation, i.e. getting air flow through the box, is important when outside temps soar. Some nest boxes allow for adjusting the door panel down to let hot air escape and cool air to enter. Holes drilled in the upper

part of a side panel serve the same purpose.

Sometimes second nesting eggs fall victim to wrens wanting to use the nest box. The rascals peck holes in eggs and remove them from the nests. At times, wrens will also pull out the chicks. Soon sticks cover the grass or pine needle bluebird nest.

For some reason, wrens can become more of an issue during the second nesting period that needs addressing. Wrens often begin their first brood at the same time that some bluebirds are doing a second, hence the competition that develops.

Keep in mind that wrens are protected songbirds under the law. So, relocating the nest box is one option.

Sparrows pose an even more serious threat as they nest multiple times, but they are not a legally protected species. Using a Van Ert trap to pare down the sparrow population is an effective solution.

Sometimes nestlings just disappear. While sparrows or wrens can be the culprit, it's more likely that a predator was able to grab the

chicks. Without knowing for certain, one option is to make sure that all nest boxes are equipped with a Dave Lucey Improved Predator Guard. This type of guard has a wooden landing platform that makes it easier for bluebirds to enter the protected box opening.

Loss of second nesting production is particularly disappointing because the fledglings can help make up for any poor first nesting results. And when those initial numbers are good, bonus fledglings from second broods add to the annual bluebird production.

Bottomline, closely monitoring nest boxes and taking preventive actions to protect second nesting attempts will payoff next season.



Gnats killed these nestlings before they could fledge.
(Anne Connor)



Predator guards help thwart hungry predators. (Gene Kroupa)

Tips on Photographing Birds for the BRAW Photo Contest

- Make sure the photo is tack sharp.
- Action shots are more interesting.
- The closer you can get the better.
- Use a telephoto lens.
- Cars and houses make good “blinds” so birds won’t see you.
- Meet the deadline: September 30.



Peggy Gieghart



Looking for more information about Eastern Bluebirds & setting up trails? Go to the BRAW website: braw.org



Pat Ready



SHOW US YOUR BLUEBIRDS! Enter our member photo contest.



Show Us Your Bluebirds!

Enter the BRAW 2024 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 2024**

No mail-in photos please.

Long & Short of Grass Height Study

By Gene Kroupa

Does grass height matter when it comes to producing more bluebird fledglings? Research conducted in Wisconsin suggests short and long grass habitats produce similar results.

This University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee study focused on “food abundance or foraging success in relation to grass height and how these factors might influence reproductive success.”

Conducted in Ozaukee and Dodge counties in 2009 and 2010. Two short and two long grass areas in each county supplied the testing grounds. Short grass which was regularly mowed was defined as being about 2 inches or less high. Long grass was identified as being taller than 2 inches and was never or infrequently mowed.

Examples of short grass habitat included: golf courses and parks. Long (tall) grass nest box sites included: hayfields and roadsides.

In 2009, 29 occupied boxes near mowed areas of two golf courses and 23 boxes in hayfields or along roadsides provided data for comparisons. In 2010, 32 occupied boxes in short grass and 18 long grass sites supplied data. Sample sizes were boosted by adding in data collected by volunteers in Dodge County from 2001-2006 and 2009-2010.

All nest boxes were of the North American Bluebird Society (NABS) design and were mounted 5-ft above ground level on ¾ - inch metal electrical conduit poles. Sheet metal cones or PVC pipe guards provided added protection against predators.

A sweep net was used to collect arthropods (includes insects, centipedes, millipedes, spiders & mites) at active nest box sites to estimate food abundance. Sampling was done weekly from the start of nest building until a brood fledged.

From all the samples, food abundance for each habitat type was estimated by comparing the dried biomass of arthropods collected with the amount commonly consumed daily by bluebirds.

Observations of ID-tagged blue-
Wisconsin Bluebird

birds’ foraging behavior at short and long grass sites were used to determine if “habitat type influenced foraging success.” Two 20-minute observations were conducted mostly on days 10 and 11 after chicks had hatched.

Reproductive parameters included egg laying date, clutch size, and fledging success. Additional data collected as indicators of reproductive success were number of eggs hatched, number of chicks fledged, and total number of broods per female.

Various statistical modeling and comparison methods were used to test the hypotheses concerning food availability, foraging and reproductive success. Results showed that short grass habitat provides lower food abundance, but they confirmed that it was easier for bluebirds to capture prey.

On the other hand, longer grasses harbor more food that is tougher to harvest. However, total daily captures were not significantly different in short and long grass habitat.

No difference was found in the number of bluebird fledglings produced in nest boxes sited in both types of habitat. So, the long and short of it for bluebirders is to place nest boxes where bluebirds have easy access to abundant food.

Personally, I find siting nest boxes where short and long grasses meet to be very productive. Examples include: pasture fence lines where there is a long grass travel lane along them, rural cemeteries with adjacent hayfields, golf courses with fairway roughs, and Conservation Reserve Program properties with mowed accesses or other short grass ground next to them.

As a footnote, this research effort was supported by grants from the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW), the American



Roadside nest boxes can be sited where short and long grasses meet. (Gene Kroupa)



Golf courses and parks are examples of short grass habitats. (Patrick Ready)

Ornithologists Union, and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Department of Biological Sciences.

Also, BRAW members who provided use of their trails were Elyn LaFouge, and Mary Hollenbeck. Kent Hall donated the nest boxes. Joan Sommer allowed access to her trail, while Jack Bartholmai supplied several years of Dodge County monitoring data.

Undergrad student Audrey Bechette did the hands-on field work along with Dr. Medhavi Ambardar. She is now an associate professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at Fort Hays State University in Kansas.

Editor’s Note: Information for this article was taken from “Reproductive and foraging success of the Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) in relation to vegetation height,” co-authored by Medhavi Ambardar, Peter O. Dunn, and Linda Whittingham, and published in *The Wilson Journal of Ornithology* 130(2): 362-370, 2018.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow

Nests in Nest Box

By Jim Otto

The Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance's Columbia County sanctuary properties have several songbird nest box trails. While visiting the Goose Pond Sanctuary on June 29, 2024, I photographed what I assumed to be a male House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). However, when I looked at my albeit poor quality photo later that day, I discovered that I had photographed a Eurasian Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*). I returned to the Goose Pond Sanctuary that afternoon with my spotting scope and a little more patience. This time, I found an adult Eurasian Tree Sparrow with a beak full of insects (photo A). The bird appeared to be waiting for me to leave before proceeding to the nest box, which was located between my location and where the sparrow was perched.

Four days later I watched from a comfortable distance and saw the adults arrive regularly to feed the young in the nest box. The staff of the Goose Pond Sanctuary had inspected the nest box and found that it contained at least three nearly grown young. The young would fledge soon. By July 8 the young had fledged, but the family was still in

the area. The only activity at the nest box was to occasionally use the box as a perch. Since the birds had fledged, on July 12 Sanctuary resident manager Mark Martin photographed the nest (photo B), and cleaned out the box. The nest was very similar to the nest of a House Sparrow, containing grasses and some feathers.

I checked the area on July 24, and saw no Eurasian Tree Sparrows, ... but surprise, there was a new nest in the box (photo C). It was like the original nest, containing grasses and feathers. At the end of July, the sparrows were still in the area. I suspect they are nesting a second time this summer.

According to Nicholas Anich of the WI Breeding Bird Atlas Project, and the WI DNR, this is the fourth confirmed nesting attempt by Eurasian Tree Sparrows in Wisconsin, and only the second to produce young. Nest box monitors should be aware that the Eurasian Tree Sparrow may nest in nest boxes, building a nest that looks much like that of the House Sparrow. Even though it is not a native species, Eurasian Tree Sparrows are protected by the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (photo D).

Thanks to Mark Martin and the staff of the Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance's Goose Pond Sanctuary for their encouragement and assistance.



Wet Bluebird Nests and the Importance of Monitoring

By Steve Sample

Wisconsin was declared one of the few drought-free states back in June, and this does not surprise anyone living here. At this writing, the rain seems to fall almost daily.

I have heard from several monitors that had active nest boxes saturated with rainwater, which has taken a toll on the chicks. Personally, I have lost the young of tree swallows in three nest boxes this year. I had already planned to replace these poorly constructed boxes.

Obviously, I failed to replace them fast enough! The driving rain we have experienced was able to penetrate these particular boxes. The well-constructed NABS boxes developed and made by Fred Craig (BRAW Board Member Emeritus) and Gene Birr (BRAW County Contact Chair) and others showed no such issues.

Mary Ward of Juneau County called me about her attempt to replace a wet nest with live bluebird young with a dry nest of white pine needles that she constructed. These nestlings successfully fledged! Kudos to Mary!

I took a different approach with the only bluebird hatchlings that were sitting in a wet nest. I just removed the nest and left the young on the dry base of the inside of the box. I'm not recommending this approach, but I did not have any options at that time. These bluebirds did successfully develop and fledged. It would be an interesting study to see if something like a nonabsorbent material would serve as a nest replacement. I personally would make a mess out of using pine needles!

Throughout the season I was reminded that most new bluebirders need some education about monitoring. For example, experienced monitors know the importance of checking nest boxes frequently. We commonly do this in 7- to 10-day intervals. Why? Assessing poorly placed boxes and moving them to better locations, trapping and eliminating House Sparrows, removing nesting materials due to a predator interference, determining the status of the young and eggs, checking for abandoned nesting attempts, counting fledged birds, removing successful nests to encourage a second (or occasionally third) bluebird nesting attempt, and of course, dealing with wet nests are common reasons.

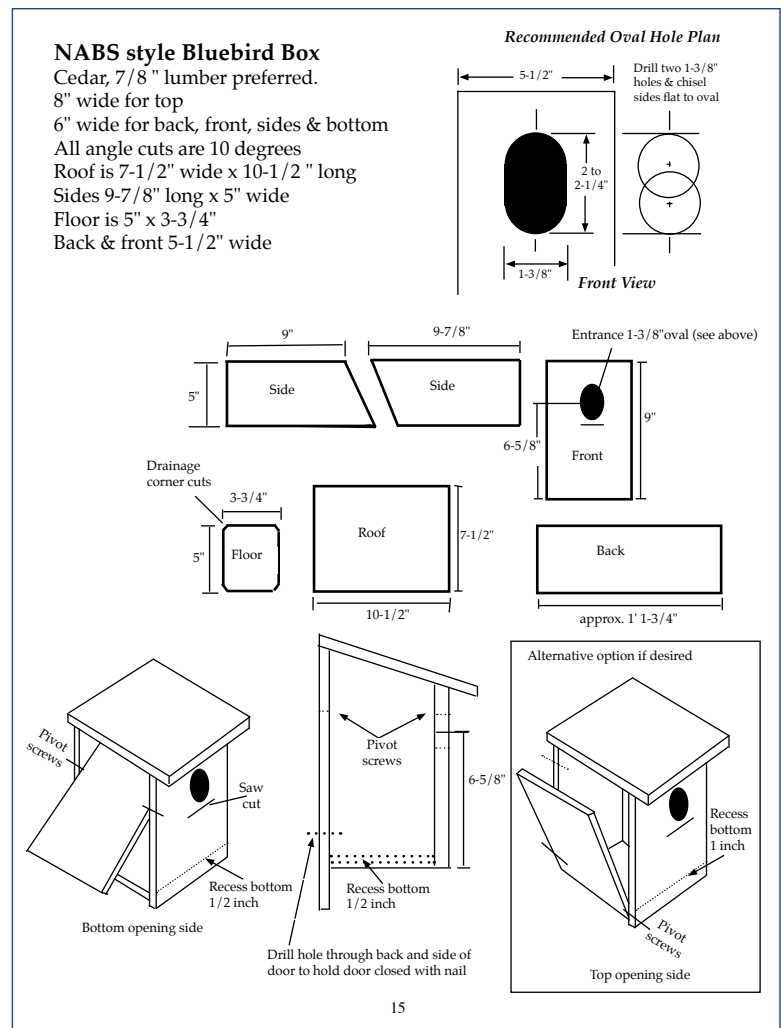
There is one other item that I know is of concern to some monitors. Yes, you can touch the eggs and young (if necessary) without fear of the adults abandoning the clutch. Pat Ready (Past President) talks about moving young from one nest to another for whatever reason, and the surrogate parents will raise them as their own. I found at one of the talks I gave this spring that this information was not known to many individuals attending. I, too, recall being told at a young age that adult birds would not return if the

eggs or young were disturbed.

Sometimes we all need to be reminded of the best practices in what we do as a hobby. I acknowledge all your hard work to keep our bluebirds thriving come rain or shine.



The NABS Style box above has a long roof overhang to prevent water from entering and soaking the nest. ©Peggy Gieghart



Membership Renewal Information

By Valerie Van Winkle, Membership Services

If the address label of your *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter reads Fall 2024 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 November and will be mailed in December. Memberships received after November 15 may not be processed in time to receive the Winter 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.

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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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Register for the BRAW Convention!

See page 3

Check the address label. If it says "Fall 2024", then you need to RENEW membership now.

Net Serve!

By Patrick Ready

Over the years my bluebird trails have mostly been in parks. Typically large parks with areas of mowed grass. I know these areas will be attractive to bluebirds.

One thing I noticed years ago at Lake Kegonsa State Park near Stoughton is bluebirds like to be near volleyball nets. It seems to be the perfect height for them to sit and look down in the grass or sand to see food.

At Brigham County park near Blue-mounds I have a nest box along the bike trail and near a volleyball court. One day as I was monitoring my boxes there I noticed bluebirds on the net. The adults were feeding one of the recent fledglings. I stood behind a tree and was able to get a few photos of the activity.

A few weeks later the pair nested a second time in a nearby nest box and fledged four more young. I often saw one of the adults sitting on the net hunting for food to feed their chicks.

When looking for a nest box location I like to see places where bluebirds can sit to guard the territory, hunt for food or preen their feathers. Fences, small trees and volleyball nets suit them fine.

