



40 Years

Summer 2025  
Vol. 40, No. 2

# 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 6<sup>th</sup>

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© Patrick Ready

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**Is It Time to Renew Your Membership?**

## President's Report

Well, well look at this! BRAW has been around for 40 years this year. It's strange to me, because it just feels like it was only yesterday we were celebrating 35 years.

Our convention this year will partly focus on our 40 years, but it is more important and gratifying that we have members such as you that continue to support a most worthy cause of increasing bluebird populations in Wisconsin.

Yes! Forty years are noteworthy, but we are not working in the past and we must look at the future of BRAW. We have a written strategy and objectives of what we, as an organization, want to do and accomplish. Weather people can't predict the future, and we also do not have the crystal ball to do so.

What has been noteworthy this spring? One of our greatest successes has been our work with the Driftless Area Land Conservancy. Over the last two years BRAW and DALC have distributed 228 free nest boxes with mounting poles to landowners in southern Wisconsin. Funding for this program has come primarily from the Community Foundation of Southern Wisconsin.

BRAW has already distributed over 300 free nest boxes with mounting poles this year. We're grateful that we have so much support from you, our valued members, who



have donated extra money for purchasing these bluebird nest boxes and building new bluebird trails.

Our County Contacts, led by Gene Birr, as well as the Board of Directors, have been instrumental in getting nest boxes out the door for reviving old park trails and starting new ones. Much of the funding has come from the **Harold Raymond Cram, Jr. Bluebird Restoration Fund of the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin.**

One other person, BRAW's vice-president, Brad Branwell-Zinda, is working in the central area of Wisconsin as the County Contact for four counties. Unprecedented! Brad has continued much of the trail rejuvenation work in these same areas which were once famous for bluebird production in the past.

Our continued concern is that we have an aging group of monitors and retiring leadership volunteers. We are having a little trouble getting the younger generations to participate. Brad and some of our board are a grateful exception!

I'm sure the growing use of technology can be partly blamed for this, but the other part is that folks lead busy lives that leave little time for volunteering.

The BRAW Board of Directors appreciates our members' dedication and continuing commitment to the survival of native cavity nesting birds.

Hope to see you at our convention in September.

Steve

## BRAW Welcomes These Members

Jane Gustafson, Butternut Warner Park Nature Center, Madison

Susan Dvorak, Lone Rock Daniel Roth, IL

Darlene Nelson, Ripon

Doug Weiss, Montello

Becky and Mike Fernetto, Fennimore

Brian Woody, Viroqua

Ellen Henningsen, Madison

Julia Smith, Oregon

Mary Ellen Smith, Sturgeon Bay

John Maring, Egg Harbor

Michael Moore, Stevens Point

Scott Reimer, Green Bay

Linda Krzewina, Green Bay

Gloria Schneider, Lake Geneva

Barb Schaefer, Glenbeulah

Tom Flatley, Ellison Bay

Mary and Duane Wepking, Ridgeway

Francis MeterBrooks, New Glarus

Isaac Brey, Poy Sippi

Virginia Field, Berlin

Pamela Sable, Bayside

Nicole Schumacher,

Sheboygan Falls

Kate Gregory, River Falls

Jay Jacobs, Columbus

Greg Miller, Oconto Falls

Michael Spakowicz, Princeton

Teresa Bake, Oconto

Gunther Bahlaj, Mukwonago

Deborah Chasman, Madison

Jayne Fischer, McFarland

Betty Abney, Crandon

Ralph Forseth, Sobieski

Lynette Krueger, Crandon

Crandon Area Community Foundation, Crandon

Patricia Peltekos, Belleville



**Looking for more information about Eastern Bluebirds & setting up trails? Go to the BRAW website: [braw.org](http://braw.org)**

### Bluebird Tip

When checking your boxes and you find the nest is full of field ants, put a tablespoon of Cinnamon under the nest. The ants will leave. Or try a Bay leaf like you use for cooking. Put it under the nest. This is better than using pesticides!

Save the Date!

# 2025 BRAW Convention

September 6<sup>th</sup>, Horicon Marsh Visitor Center

**Officer Reports, Morning Featured Program, Question & Answer Session.**

**Afternoon Featured Program.**

More details and schedule will appear in the *Fall Wisconsin Bluebird*.

*Plan on a day of meeting friends and learning.*

9:00 – 2:30 PM

Horicon Marsh Visitor Center  
N7725 Hwy 28  
Horicon, WI 53032



## Register for the BRAW Convention

The BRAW Annual Convention will be held on Saturday, September 6th at Horicon Marsh Visitor's Center, Horicon, WI.

**Conference fees:**

\$10.00: Registration without lunch per person  
\$25.00: Includes registration & lunch per person

**Lunch:** Choice of ham & cheese or turkey & cheese on whole wheat or white bread (indicate preference); cole slaw, dessert bar – cost \$15 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**  
Joanie Haugen,  
9773 Vermont Church Rd.  
Black Earth, WI 53515

### 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's bluebird trail development.

### ANNUAL CONVENTION PRE-REGISTRATION FORM

Please indicate the number of lunches for your party at \$15 each: \_\_\_\_\_. **Include check for full amount.**

\_\_\_Ham \_\_\_Turkey \_\_\_White bread \_\_\_Wheat bread  
\_\_\_Vegetarian \_\_\_ registration only (\$10) no lunch

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

# BRAW Summer County Contact News

Gene Birr, CC Chair

Email: [gbbird22@gmail.com](mailto:gbbird22@gmail.com)

The warmer weather of early spring has finally reached our area bringing the return of our beloved bluebirds. Early reports are suggesting that the nesting season for bluebirds is off to a pretty good start. The first monitoring of my own bluebird trail was finding bluebird nests in one-third of my boxes with eggs in about a third of those as well. Many county contacts seem to be experiencing similar results. The following CC reports are telling of the many presentations that were given to those folks interested in learning more about bluebirds or establishing trails in their counties. I trust that each of us is excited for the season now in full swing and hopeful for a productive year and an abundance of young bluebirds.

## Racine County, Rick Fare

I just finished giving my third bluebird presentation this Spring. They were all fairly well attended. There is still one more remaining as part of the Natural Resources Foundation of WI field trip.

The monitors of 2 of our trails were unable to monitor them this year, but I was able to find volunteers for them. In addition, I was able to pair up 4 new monitors with existing monitors on their trails. It is important to have at least 2 people know each trail in case one gets sick or goes on vacation.

So far this year, I was able to visit 8 of our trails to replace and move boxes to different locations.

Looking forward to a good bluebird season. So far, I have one bluebird nest with 4 warm eggs on my trail. Hope everyone has an enjoyable and successful season.

## Dodge County, Elizabeth Herzmann

We have been working with the Mayville School District 4<sup>th</sup> grade classes to upgrade and maintain their bluebird boxes on their school prairie. The students are excited to see tree swallows investigating their nesting boxes. We also installed a purple

martin nesting structure at the school. Fingers crossed for them to be able to start a new colony!

## Marinette and Florence Counties, Barbie Allen

With the cooler, wet weather we have been getting, I am a little behind checking all of my 440 birdhouses. Brown county has been checked several times but in Door, Kewaunee,



Patrick Ready

Oconto, Florence and Marinette, I checked most in mid-April and there was little bluebird activity. I am hopeful that this has improved and I will have as good a year as I did last year. In Brown County, we have a very large crop of tree swallows. I invite all monitors, especially those in my counties, to text or email me so that I personally get to know all of you. Unless you contact your county contact, we do not have your contact information. I am looking forward to helping Gene Birr with his BRAW booth at the Purple Martin Festival at Oconto City Park on June 28th from 10-4. If you attend, please stop by.

## Oconto County, Gene Birr

In several other counties in NE Wisconsin, I have had an eventful spring involving several bluebird presentations and the excitement for the return of the bluebirds that come along with the warmer weather coming in early May.

On March 15, I gave my annual talk at the Wild Birds Unlimited store in Green Bay to about 10 folks, and signed up 2 new members to BRAW. Along with Outagamie CC Steve Mayer, I attended the Earth Day Nature Festival on April 26 at Mosquito Hill Nature Center in New London, where we provided information to interested dozens of people, sold a nest box and signed up one

new BRAW member.

Then on April 29, I drove up to Forest County to offer my help introducing BRAW to the interested bluebirders of the Crandon Area Community Foundation (CACF).

On June 28, I will be among the participants at the 15<sup>th</sup> annual Purple Martin Festival at City Park in Oconto from 10 to 4, representing BRAW. This daylong nature festival welcomes families to learn about purple martins, bluebirds, bees, butterflies, rocks and raptors. Everyone is invited to this free event, sponsored by Oconto Bird City and the Wisconsin Purple Martin Association.

On July 19, I will be working a BRAW booth, again along with Steve Mayer, at a Bird City event honoring Migratory Bird Day at Memorial Park in Appleton from 9 till 1, where we will be giving a brief bluebird talk in the morning.

## Forest County, Karen McMillion

On April 29, BRAW CC Chair Gene Birr, drove up to Crandon to advise us about BRAW. Our group from the Crandon Area Community Foundation (CACF) began last year providing nearly 20 nest boxes to about a dozen folks who set up trails on 8 public sites in Crandon. This year our area naturalist Ron gave an informative talk about bluebirds, before we offered another 40 boxes for sale to others interested in providing nesting opportunities in other areas. Gene offered other suggestions regarding our nest boxes and pointed out the importance of monitoring, and raccoon and house sparrow control. During his visit I have agreed to take the position of the Forest County Contact for BRAW.

## Door County, Charlotte Lukes

John and I checked our 20 boxes today and still have 5 empty boxes. But 3 have nests started and 5 have nests completed with no eggs. The good news is we now have 7 boxes with bluebird eggs for a total of 29 eggs.

Five boxes have clutches of 5 eggs each and 4 of them are warm and are being incubated. One box has 5 eggs that are still cold, so she might lay one more egg before beginning incubation.

Charlotte Lukes April ten-year study of Nest Boxes  
North-Central Door County

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
1	Year	# NC	# EB eggs	Hi temp	60 + days	Low temp	32 or lower	snow days	solar days	rain	snow "	Notes
2	2016	10	20	73	6	18	13	7	8	1.94	2	
3	2017	5	28	70	5	30	4	0	14	3.55		
4	2018	1	0	64	4	14	22	7	18	1.38	39 inches	most snow ever in April
5	2019	13	22	67	3	23	11	2	5	4.46		
6	2020	14	7	60	1	22	13	5	9	3.2		
7	2021	4	3	73	9	21	8	3	17	4.88		
8	2022	6	23	66	2	26	16	6	11	4.7		
9	2023	9	7	84	7	24	12	3	13	2.34		
10	2024	12	50	70	10	28	3	1	17	2.87		we had a mild, little snow winter
11	2025	12	29	64	3	20	10	2	14	2.63		very cold spring
12		86	189	691	50	226	112	36	126	32		
13	average	8.6	18.9	69	5	22.6	11.2	3.6	12.6	3.2		
14		NC=nests complete										
15		EB eggs=number seen in April										
16		60+=number of days temp. were 60 or above										
17		32=number of days at 32 or lower										
18		RED numbers are the extremes										
19		compiled by Charlotte Lukes, northern Door County										

One box has 1 egg and another box has 3.

The weather is still rather chilly. March gave me 5.13 inches of rain plus 10 inches of snow. April so far has given me only 2 inches of rain. Insects are not fond of cold weather (I had ice on all three of my bird baths this morning).

Some of you have told me that you are seeing good nests and some with eggs. I hope you are going to find more bluebird activity on your trail in the coming week.

We heard our first house wren today and I saw another pair of tree swallows this morning near one of our boxes.

Someone asked me if the numbers of completed nests and the bluebird egg numbers this spring were average.

I had no idea, so I looked through all my weather and nest box records over the past ten years and made a chart of the results.

Charlotte and John – April 27, 2025

**Dane County, Paul Noeldner**

BRAW was present at the **Madison Bird Festival** held at Werner Park.

Steve Sample, Deb Turski and Pat

Ready were at our info booth. A good number of folks stopped by for information about cavity nesters. Pat gave a half hour talk about attracting native cavity nesters to yards. Many families

attended this event organized by Dane County CC Paul Noeldner.

Most questions were about back yards and if bluebirds can nest there in the city? Not likely but wrens and chickadees will.

Trails in Dane County are off to a good start this year.



# Bluebirding Tips: Save the Old Fencerows

By Gene Kroupa

Earlier this year I visited a property to check a nest box trail. Much to my surprise and dismay, what had once been a nearby vibrant old fencerow was now barren ground.

The diverse habitat of raspberry stems, low shrubs, native flowers, perennial grasses, grape vines, and trees was gone. Nothing was left for birds and other wildlife to use for shelter, food and nesting.

Unfortunately, this tale is repeated all too frequently throughout Wisconsin. It's hard to fault farmers who need to maximize income, but folks who just want a "clean looking" place should give the idea of removing fencerows a second thought.

As Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources conservation biologist Sumner Matteson noted: "This type of transition or border strip supplies safe travel corridors for wildlife by connecting to forest edges. Some might even offer stopover refuges for migrating songbirds."

Fencerows host a variety of insect species, such as bees and butterflies, that are beneficial to crops. In addition to common mammals, snakes and turtles also find them as being friendly confines. Shelter from predators and harsh weather conditions is another benefit for inhabitants and visitors alike.

Mix in a few soft and hard mast trees, such as wild cherry, oak and black walnut, and there is food for



An old, tree-lined fencerow benefits bluebirds using the nearby nest box. (Gene Kroupa)

squirrels and deer. Of course, a landowner has every right to cash out these valuable trees, but the birds and mammals will sorely miss them.

In a nutshell, by creating a diversity of habitat in a single strip, old fencerows attract a wider range of species. As Rod Doolen noted in the *Missouri Conservationist* magazine: "Fencerows are one of the most crucial habitats available to wildlife."

Research backs up this conclusion: There is more value to these fencerow strips than meets the eye. A review of related studies showed multiple benefits, including erosion control, increased biodiversity of species, and more biomass in general.

Additional research finds that fencerows are used by a wide range of birds, including Eastern Bluebirds, indigo buntings, cardinals, eastern screech owls, woodpeckers and red-

tailed hawks, to name a few.

Bluebirds benefit directly from nearby mixed habitat fencerows in at least two ways. First, the insect populations that inhabit them provide food for nestlings as well as the adults. Dried berries and wild grapes supply fall and early spring sustenance.

Second, trees supply drop-down perches for adults feeding their young. And once those chicks fledge, they can find safety from overhead predators in those same branches.

As bluebirders we can educate property owners about the value of maintaining diverse habitats like old fencerows for all forms of wildlife. While there is an ongoing effort to save snags, perhaps it's time to wave the public information flag about the value of retaining old fencerows.

## Summer 2025 Donations

Anonymous, \$90  
Walter Kugler Jr., \$5  
Stephen and Pat Cox, \$25  
Bridget O'Brien and Mark Nelson, \$25  
Tom and Mary Nelesen, \$25  
Wayne & Jackie Pauly, \$100  
Ruby Thomas, \$200  
Ken Jalowitz, \$150 nest box and research  
Michael Everson, \$25  
Susan Dvorak, \$25 nest box  
Steven Bray, \$50

Judy Selof, \$30  
Deb Turski, \$260 nest box  
John and Mary Lammers, \$20 nest box  
Harry Hellen, \$20 nest box  
Willi Lehner and Kitas McKnight, \$10  
Jay Brooks, \$50 nest box  
Isaac Brey, \$20  
Kathie Brock, \$75 nest box  
Jeffrey & Arlene Koziol, \$40  
Mary Cullen, \$25  
Jan Willman, \$25  
Deborah Chasman, \$15

Betty Downs, \$20  
Greg Miller, \$25 nest box  
Gunther Bahlaj, \$25 nest box  
Deborah Chasman, \$5  
Patricia Peltekos, \$25 nest box

*In honor of Dave Misterek*  
Jeffrey Bahls, \$100

*In Memory of David Speigle*  
Sarah Worley, \$25  
Vada Kalie, \$50  
Many friends of, \$675

# 10 Points to Cover With Newbies

By Gene Kroupa

As experienced bluebirders, we sometimes take for granted what those new to bluebirding need to know. Questions asked at public presentations, workshops and one-on-one field sessions indicate there are some must cover topics.

## 1. Box design and construction are keys to success.

North American Bluebird Society (NABS) approved nest box designs are recommended for several reasons. Chief among them is safety for the nestlings and durability over time. Poorly constructed nest boxes lack thick enough wood, have wrong sized holes, don't have roof overhang all around, and use brads or staples.

## 2. Nest box location & opening direction are critical.

Bluebirds find capturing insects easier in short grasses. Having access to an adequate supply of insects is critical to adult and nestling survival. Storms and accompanying winds generally come from the west or north. Facing nest boxes east or southeast welcomes the morning sun and helps keep nests dry. Being near to trees yet away from bushes is important.

## 3. Posts and guards provide protection against raccoons.

Predation can be minimized by using T-posts or 3/4-inch metal conduit for mounting the nest boxes. Use of predator guards on the nest boxes provides further protection against the long arm of raccoons. They do not keep away House Sparrows nor House Wrens.

## 4. Monitoring is necessary to boost production.

Monitoring, i.e. looking inside the nest boxes on a regular basis, is needed to check on nesting progress and for problems. A seven to 10-day interval is recommended. Hens are typically not bothered, but too frequent checking prior to chicks' fledging risks having them escape. Getting used nests cleaned out after the first fledging is paramount to encouraging a second nesting.

## 5. Bluebirds have multiple clutches.

Bluebirds will return for second and even third nestings if the nest box is cleaned out after the prior clutch leaves. Old nests



House Wrens can wreak havoc on a bluebird nest and peck holes in the eggs. (Gene Kroupa)

harbor ectoparasites, such as lice. Removing the used nests from the site prevents predators from zeroing in on the nest box.

## 6. Pests need treatment to save hatchlings.

Throughout the nesting season various pests will torment and possibly kill nestlings if not controlled. Both natural and commercial products applied to the outside of the nest box and on the post or pole discourage ants, black flies, gnats and critters.

## 7. Sparrows are killers; wrens are villains.

House Sparrows will kill bluebirds, but they can be thinned out with the use of the Van Ert and other traps. House Wrens will peck holes in eggs and pitch them out of the nest box. Sparrows are an invasive species while wrens are a native species protected by law. Picking nest box sites away from these species is the best solution.

## 8. Cleanliness is preferred by nesters.

Nest boxes cannot be kept too clean, as research has shown that bluebirds prefer them to soiled ones. Always remove old nests after chicks fledge. Keeping nest box doors open in the winter in colder climates discourages field mice from using them.

## 9. Bluebirds overwinter in the USA.

Contrary to popular belief, bluebirds remain in the US and do not migrate to other countries in the winter. As a result, severe weather in southern states can impact the size of the population returning north in spring. Some northern bluebirds don't migrate to warmer southern states. Installing a heated birdbath and providing dried mealworms help them survive.

## 10. Resources you can use to learn more.

Websites that provide plenty of good information about hosting bluebirds include: [www.braw.org](http://www.braw.org), [www.nabluebirdsociety.org](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org), [www.sialis.org](http://www.sialis.org) and [www.birds.cornell.edu](http://www.birds.cornell.edu).



A predator guard will protect eggs and nestlings against raccoons, but not House Sparrows and Wrens. (Gene Kroupa)



Gene Kroupa explains the basics of installing a bluebird nest box to Richard & Joan Laufenberg, of Mt. Horeb.

Wisconsin Bluebird

## An Ice Age Trail Bluebird Trail

By Rainer Dronzek, Guest Writer and  
Member of the Dane County Chapter

The Ice Age Trail Alliance's 124.9-acre Valley View Preserve in Dane County provides an ideal setting for a Bluebird Trail, a monitored series of strategically placed bluebird nest boxes.

While bluebirds thrive in open, grassland habitats with short grasses and suitable perches—such as fence rows or tree branches for hunting insects (their primary food source)—they rely on cavities in old or dying trees to build their nests. Unfortunately, habitat loss caused by urban and suburban development, removal of hedgerows, and the transition from wooden fence posts to plastic or metal alternatives has significantly reduced their natural nesting options.

This makes nesting boxes an essential resource for their survival. Given bluebirds' territorial nature—requiring nest boxes to be spaced at least 100 yards apart—a Bluebird Trail needs a large area, like an Alliance-owned preserve!

### A Trail Beside a Trail

What makes this Bluebird Trail unique? Three of the eight nesting boxes are installed alongside the Valley View Segment of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail. This thoughtful placement aligns with bluebirds' foraging behavior and increases the chance hikers will catch glimpses of their vibrant blue feathers. (For those lucky enough to spot them, please maintain a respectful distance and use binoculars to observe their activities without disturbing them.)

Another distinguishing feature of this trail is its collaborative foundation. It represents a partnership between the Ice Age Trail Alliance (Alliance) and the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW).

As a proud member of both organizations, I proposed and now manage this Bluebird Trail. Living near the



A bluebird feeds its young.

Valley View Preserve, I saw an opportunity to combine my passion for bluebirds with the conservation mission of the Alliance. Claire Finucane, Property Steward for the Alliance, enthusiastically supported the idea and prepared a Land Use Agreement. Patrick Ready, Director of BRAW, lent his expertise to design the trail and oversee the installation of the boxes. Built by BRAW volunteers using North American Bluebird Society plans, the cedar boxes include entrance guards to deter predators such as snakes, raccoons, and squirrels. Mounted on steel poles and positioned near short grass and trees, the boxes are carefully placed away from dense tree cover to minimize threats from predatory birds like house sparrows.

As a volunteer, I visit the boxes weekly during nesting season to monitor their status, count eggs and hatchlings, and document outcomes. I also clean and maintain the boxes to ensure a safe and welcoming environment for the birds.

### 2024: A Banner Year for Bluebirds

In March, 9 bluebird boxes were installed, and by the end of July, 48 birds had fledged, meaning they left their nests after being cared for by their parents for about 20 days. This included 32 Eastern bluebirds, 11 black-capped chickadees, and 5 tree



A robust clutch of bluebird eggs nestled in a nesting box.

swallows. Some boxes even hosted two broods, with fledging occurring in May and again in July.

Of the 58 eggs laid during the season, 8 did not hatch or were lost to predators such as house sparrows or house wrens. Additionally, two hatchlings did not survive due to predation, parasites, or weather. While any loss is unfortunate, achieving an 84% fledge rate in the first year is an excellent result, consistent with Wisconsin's state averages.

To track my observations, I use NestWatch, an app created by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. This tool helps me log data during box visits and complete submissions for the BRAW Annual Bird Nesting Survey.



A cedar nest box installed in the Valley View Preserve provides a home for a bluebird family.



### Map of Bluebird Trail

My results contribute to the state tally, which recorded 17,436 bluebirds across 6,723 monitored boxes in 2024. The data also supports research conducted by Cornell University.

### A Gift for Birds and Hikers

This Bluebird Trail not only aids in the conservation of bluebirds but also enriches the natural experience

for those hiking the Ice Age Trail. For me, it is deeply fulfilling to contribute to environmental preservation while offering outdoor enthusiasts a chance to enjoy these vivid birds.

As March approaches, bluebirds will return to Wisconsin. Some may revisit the Valley View Segment Bluebird Trail, where their nesting boxes will be clean and ready to welcome them home.

Welcome home, bluebirds!

### About Rainer Dronzek

Rainer is an engineering consultant eyeing retirement, at which time he hopes to rack up more Ice Age Trail miles. He and his wife Nancy live on the Ice Age Trail at the eastern boundary of the Driftless Area. Rainer combines his Trail interests with Bluebird restoration and native prairie maintenance.

*This article first appeared in the Spring 2025 issue of Mammoth Tales, the thrice-yearly magazine of the Ice Age Trail Alliance*

## Thanks for the Memories

In 1995 we became new members of Brice Prairie Conservation Club. Leif Marking got Fred started on a small bluebird trail of four houses. Eventually our interest in bluebirds grew rapidly to such a point that it took us 2 days to monitor all of our houses. Leif had never been to a BRAW meeting before, so he invited Fred to go to one with him. At that meeting, Fred and Leif made a number of comments about the monitoring practices they were using. Carol McDaniel was club president at that time and was impressed with their comments. After the meeting she met with Leif and Fred and strongly encouraged them to join the BRAW organization. After a short time, Leif and Fred came on board and enjoyed many years as Board members. Mary was technically never a Board member, but she may as well have been, traveling to each meeting. Through the years the discussions ranged from monitoring, ventilation, round or oval holes, the house shape, to predators, etc. BRAW is known around the coun-



try more than people realize. Fred still gets calls from different states with questions about our monitoring practices. They obviously knew BRAW. I guess this is kind of our "swan song" saying goodbye to the hobby we got so much enjoyment out of for so many years (since 1996) and all the wonderful people we could see several times a year to share our love of monitoring with. Keep up the good work everyone! Wishing you all continued success in the years ahead!

Fred & Mary Craig



## Attracting Purple Martins

**Educate Yourself. Learn everything you can about Purple Martins.** Visit the web site [www.purplemartin.org](http://www.purplemartin.org) of the Purple Martin Conservation Association (PMCA).

**Choose the Right Location.** Martin housing should be in the center of the largest open spot available, about 30-120 feet from human housing.

**Put Up Manageable Housing.** Your chances for success will be better if your housing is easy to manage. Choose a pole that telescopes, or is equipped with a winch or rope & pulley, and housing that has easy access to the compartments.

**Open Housing at the Right Time.** At active sites, the first martins usually return within a week or two of the previous year's arrival dates.

**Increase Your Chances.** Offer a combination of houses and gourds. Play a dawn song recording. Add a Purple Martin decoy or two.

**Don't Close It Too Soon.** Keep your house open until late August, as fledglings will be searching for next year's breeding sites in late summer.

**Protect Your Housing from Predators.** Once you attract Purple Martins, don't assume that because you never see any predators there are none around; so install a pole guard, too. External guards on the housing itself protect against aerial raids by hawks, owls, and crows.

**Conduct Weekly Nest Checks.** Nest checks will not cause martins to abandon their young. Record your data.

# Bluebird Nest Box Program Update

By Gene Kroupa

BRAW's bluebird nest box program in partnership with the Driftless Area Land Conservancy (DALC) in southern Wisconsin continues to grow.

According to BRAW president Steve Sample, "We've more than doubled the number of free boxes distributed this spring compared with last year."

"Fifty-three DALC members and supporters received 160 nest boxes, plus poles and predator guards," said Gene Kroupa, BRAW's program coordinator.

Paul Zillgitt, one of the recipients, is shown below getting his nest boxes at the Bethel Horizons Camp & Nature Center, near Dodgeville.

The Community Foundation of Southern Wisconsin supplied most of the funding. Here are some photos submitted by this year's recipients.



Jay Brooks, New Glarus



Sheila McGuirk & Paul Manley, Dodgeville



Jackie Gennett, Monroe



Paul Zillgitt, of Spring Green, gets his free nest boxes. (Gene Kroupa)



James Marlow, Dodgeville



Susan Webb, Mineral Point



Ginny Bean, Argyle



Paul Zillgitt, Spring Green

# 2024 Financial Report

BRAW receives most of its revenue from membership dues. For \$25 per year, a member receives a printed copy of the quarterly newsletter, *Wisconsin Bluebird*, full of tips and information on supporting bluebirds throughout the state, \$20 per year if the newsletter is e-mailed.

At the Annual Convention and at the Garden Expo in Madison, BRAW presents informative sessions and shares recent research findings. Nest boxes and supplies are also available for sale at these events

BRAW receives grants and donations that are used to promote nest box trails and to fund research on the best ways to support bluebirds in Wisconsin.

Key grants were received from the **Harold Raymond Cram, Jr. Bluebird Restoration Fund of the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin, and the Community Foundation of Southern Wisconsin.**

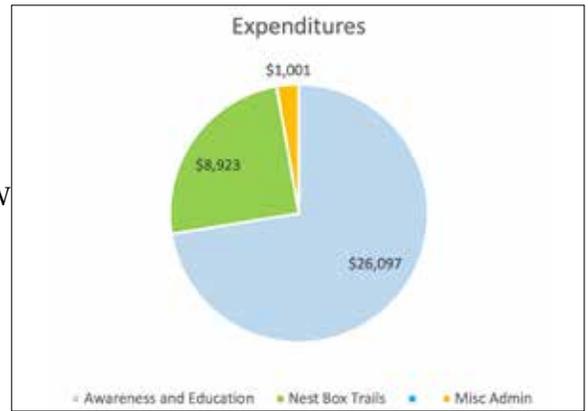
The volunteer Board of Directors, Committee Chairs and County Contacts allow BRAW to use over 97% of funds raised to support the mission of the organization.

Quarterly newsletters, the braw.org website and presentations throughout the state provide education and awareness of the needs of bluebirds and other cavity nesters in WI.

Nest boxes and predator guards are sold or given to volunteers willing to monitor nest box trails.

In 2024, BRAW distributed nearly 500 nest boxes and helped set up a record number of trails with new trail monitors.

Support Bluebirds in Wisconsin



## More Nest Boxes for BRAW!



Oakwood Village Prairie Ridge Handy Residents built 50 more boxes for BRAW trail use. BRAW paid for the materials and the resident craftsmen spent an afternoon making the boxes to our specifications. These boxes will go to trails throughout the state. Funds come from donations by BRAW members for trail development.

Wisconsin Bluebird

April 1, 2025

David F. Speigle - a member of BRAW - passed away on Friday, March 7, 2025 at the VA Hospital in Madison. He was 89 yrs old. He was an active member of BRAW. He built the 60-65 bluebird houses and put them up in cemeteries, golf courses, roadsides and house yards. He monitored them regularly, tried to check each bluebird house each week. In his obituary he requested Memorials be given to BRAW. David had 252 young Bluebirds fledge from his Bluebird houses last year, 2024. If possible have this info put into the next WI Blue Bird Newsletter.

# 40 Years and Still Going Strong!

By Pat Ready, Editor

It's hard to believe that I've been the editor of the Wisconsin Bluebird for 20 years now. When I took over this position, I never expected to be doing this for 20 years. I don't know if the founders of this organization ever thought we would be around this long. I assume they figured once we got Eastern Bluebirds returning and in good numbers, we would no longer need this organization. That is not the case. I think due to many of the hazards that bluebirds still encounter today, that we monitors will need to continue our efforts. We will also have to continue to educate others to follow in our footsteps.

I believe this publication is one of the main ways that we can get out important monitoring information and new methods to share with others. Our board of directors continue to be dedicated to this effort.

BRAW was started by the WI Department of Natural Resources to jump-start a bluebird recovery campaign statewide. The first three years it was free to join. The DNR organized workshops over several weekends in spring to get information to anyone interested in nest box building and trail development. I attended one of these in Mount Horeb. As I recall there were about 25-30 attendees, mostly farmers. They had the land with fields for getting trails set up. Many good questions and advice were exchanged.

I went home and made three nest boxes and my friend Henry put them up on a farm where he lived at the

time. We had no luck the first summer. I don't think he ever did get bluebirds there and he moved to New York a few years later.

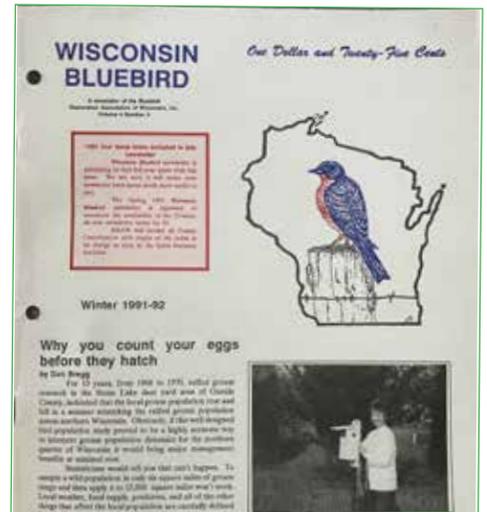
After the first three years the DNR made BRAW a non-profit organization. A board of directors was created and a small annual fee was charged to cover newsletter printing.

In the first 10 years or so the concentrated effort was on building the best nest box to successfully attract bluebirds and produce young. Deep boxes like the Hill Lake design were popular in the 1990's - mainly because they were difficult for predators to get into. But they were not predator proof! Some box designs claimed not to attract House Sparrows, such as PVC Box or the Slot Box. Over time sparrows figured them out or hung around harassing the bluebird pair using them, many times, killing one of the adults. The Van Ert Trap seems to be the best House Sparrow control method used today. The in-box trap is triggered when the sparrow enters the box causing a metal plate to block the entrance so the sparrow can't get out. The monitor watches as the sparrow gets trapped and removes it. If a native species gets caught the monitor releases it back to the wild.

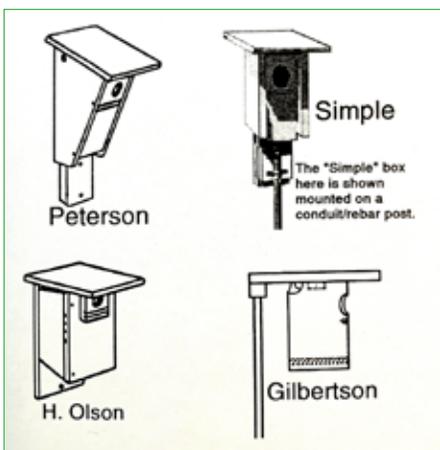
Competition from other cavity nesters was another consideration many monitors faced. The idea of pairing boxes was promoted. The thought was bluebirds would use one box and Tree Swallows or Chickadees would use the other box-placed ten to twenty feet apart. A BRAW study led by Joe O'Halloran proved this method didn't increase bluebird numbers in Wisconsin. (The idea is still promoted by many North American Bluebird Society affiliates.) BRAW has promoted widely spaced single boxes of 100 yards apart for over 20 years now. I know some monitors still pair boxes in Wisconsin.

BRAW has done many studies over the years. Studies covered nest box preference, black fly issues, fish line on boxes to deter House Sparrows, vented boxes vs unvented boxes, wren guards and many more. Some studies were funded by donations to BRAW and some were done by individuals.

One can only venture to guess



how long BRAW will continue into the future. We need younger members to help the cause and spread the word. If you enjoy bluebirds as many of us do, spread the word to family and friends. Consider a gift membership to BRAW for one year or a Lifetime! Happy Trails!



## Tips on Cleaning Out Nest Boxes:

As this issue was about to go to press there were a few days in May that were wet and cold throughout the state. Many of us trail monitors found dead bluebird chicks in wet nests. When this happens for any reason in the nesting season here are suggestions for what to do.

- Remove nest and contents and dispose of far from the nest box.
- (Option) If you want to use a spray solution and brush mix Bleach and Water, 1 part bleach to 10 parts water. Spray all sides and bottom and scrub with brush. Rinse with plain water.
- Wear gloves and mask as desired.
- End of nesting season remove all nest material.



Photo: Gail Smith

## MARTINFEST 2025 15th Annual Free Event

June 28, 2025  
10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Oconto City Park  
5182 County Highway N  
Oconto, WI 54153

Gene Birr,  
Oconto County  
Contact for  
BRAW, will give  
a talk on  
Eastern  
Bluebirds.



## SHOW US YOUR BLUEBIRDS! Enter our member photo contest.



### Show Us Your Bluebirds!

Enter the BRAW 2025 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](mailto:birdsready@gmail.com). Subject line: **BRAW Bluebird Contest 2025**

**No mail-in photos please.**

# Membership Renewal Information

By Valerie Van Winkle, Membership Services  
If the address label of your *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter reads Summer 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 August and will be mailed in September. 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](http://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

**A BRAW membership makes a great Anytime gift!**  
\$10 includes Online Newsletter  
Give the gift of Bluebirds!

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)

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

\$100 for nest box trail

\$\_\_\_\_\_ for bluebird research

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](mailto:ripvws@gmail.com).

## BRAW ELECTED & APPOINTED OFFICERS

**President Steve Sample**, 422 Shepard Ter., Madison, WI 53705  
708/606-8070 • [ssample@gmail.com](mailto:ssample@gmail.com) (term to 12/25)

**Vice-president Brad Branwell-Zinda**, 2446 Town Line Rd.  
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**Secretary Gene Kroupa**, [gkroupa@tds.net](mailto:gkroupa@tds.net) (term to 12/25)

**Treasurer Dan Schroeder**, N4028 Morgan Drive, Waupaca, WI 54981 •  
920-475-8525 • [brdanjoe@gmail.com](mailto:brdanjoe@gmail.com) (term to 12/26)

**Director Steve Fallon**, 974 Halcyon Days Ct., Oregon, WI 53575  
[stevfall50@gmail.com](mailto:stevfall50@gmail.com) (term to 12/25)

**Director Dave Lucey**, Cross Plains, WI • [dklucey@chorus.net](mailto:dklucey@chorus.net)  
(term to 12/26)

**Director Mary Sobol**, 5205 Broadhead St., McFarland WI 53558  
[msobolontime@gmail.com](mailto:msobolontime@gmail.com) (term to 12/26)

**Director Mike Crawford**, 817 5th St., Waunakee, WI 53539  
608/213-1806 • [mike@marieandmike.com](mailto:mike@marieandmike.com) (term to 12/25)

**Director Patrick Ready**, (Past President) 815 Sky Ridge Dr., Madison, WI  
53719 • 608/239-0791 • [birdsready@gmail.com](mailto:birdsready@gmail.com) (term to 12/26)

**Director Amy Harriman**, Madison, WI • [Amytharriman@gmail.com](mailto:Amytharriman@gmail.com)  
(term to 12/26)

**Director Sharon Johnson**, Madison, WI • [BEDBY8@charter.net](mailto:BEDBY8@charter.net) (term to  
12/26)

**Director Andy Garcia-Rivera**, 10 Darien Circle, Madison, WI 53717 •  
[agarciarivera@gmail.com](mailto:agarciarivera@gmail.com) (term to 12/26)

**Director Gail Smith**, Middleton, WI 53562 • [gsmithbird@gmail.com](mailto:gsmithbird@gmail.com) (term  
to 12/26)

### APPOINTED OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS:

**Data Collection Officer: Steve Fallon** (see above)

**County Contact Chair: Gene Birr**, 3698 Morgan Marsh Rd.  
Oconto Falls, WI 54154 • 920/461-0108 • [gbbird22@gmail.com](mailto:gbbird22@gmail.com)

**Finance: Joanie Haugen**, 9773 Vermont Church Rd., Black Earth, WI 53515  
• [jlhcb@gmail.com](mailto:jlhcb@gmail.com)

**WI Bluebird Editor: Patrick Ready** (see above)

**Membership: Valerie Van Winkle**, PO Box 628492, Middleton, WI 5356 •  
[ripvws@gmail.com](mailto:ripvws@gmail.com)

**Public Relations: Gene Kroupa** (see above)

**Website: Andy Garcia-Rivera** (see above)

**Student and Youth Outreach Committee: Lowell Peterson**, 1860 45th St.  
Somerset, WI 54025 • (715) 247-3243

### BRAW LIAISONS:

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

## Shop the BRAW Online Store

Check out the new BRAW Online Store! T-shirts, sweatshirts, hats, and lots more all with the BRAW logo on them. Items can be ordered online at <https://stores.inksoft.com/brawstore/shop/products/all?page=1>



southern wisconsin  
BIRD ALLIANCE



formerly Madison Audubon



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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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Madison, WI 53719  
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## BRAW Convention!

See page 3

Check the address label. If it says "Summer 2025," then you need to RENEW membership now.

### Life cycle of the Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) by Patrick Ready.



Pair select box and female builds the nest.



Within a week or two 3-5 eggs are usually layed in the nest.



The male stands guard.



After 13-14 days of incubation the chicks hatch.



After 16-22 days old the chicks are ready to fledge.



The chicks grow quickly being fed by both parents.