

Spring 2020
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Wisconsin Bluebird

Newsletter of the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, Inc.

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

Fewer Data Reports + Fewer Boxes = Fewer Bluebirds in 2019

See Page 2



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Inside this issue:

President's Message - 2 • 2019 Data Report - 2 • Tree Swallow Nest Lessons - 5 • Become More Engaged - 5 •
County Coordinator Reports - 6 • Benefits of Trailing - 6 • Skylight Box Study - 8 • Membership Form - 10 •
BRAW Monitoring Form Info - 11 • Bluebird Life Cycle - 12

A Word from the Prez

Spring is right around the corner. Let the new nesting season begin! March is the time to get out and make sure your nest boxes are ready to go for bluebirds arriving back from down south. Remove any old nest and evict any mice if they took up residency over winter.



Take a good look at the bluebirds on the cover of this issue. Notice anything different about them? I took the photos in February when I was down in Arizona. These two Western Bluebirds greeted me as I walked out of a Walgreens in Sedona shortly after we arrived there. They were a good omen as we had a most enjoyable time there before we headed up to the Grand Canyon for a few days.

When I returned to the cold of winter in Wisconsin I began making plans for the next BRAW Annual Convention. This year the convention will be September 12 and it will be held at the Bay Beach Wildlife Center in Green Bay. I am contacting speakers for the day and don't

have a program set to go yet but more details will be in the next issue of the *Wisconsin Bluebird*. Bay Beach has a small zoo that is a nice family attraction and walking trails to get outdoors for some fresh air. A catered lunch is planned. You can mark your calendars and save the date.

I want to thank all of those who sent in the monitoring data for last year. Weather still plays a factor in declining numbers as once again spring had too many winter-like days. We also lost a couple of "big players" and lost reports from some larger trails so that plays a factor in lower results as well. Hopefully 2020 will begin an upswing for bluebirds in Wisconsin.

We could use one or two more members on our board of directors. Please consider volunteering for this wonderful organization. Claire Romanak retired as secretary and we need someone to take minutes for our meetings. There must be someone out there who could step up and help us out. Contact me for more details. Happy Trails!

Patrick Ready
BRAW President

Wisconsin Monitors Report Lower Bluebird Numbers for 2019

Steve Fallon, BRAW Data Director

The final statewide reported total for bluebirds fledged in 2019 is shown in the table below. The table also shows a comparison to the 2018 values.

		Number of boxes:	Boxes used by Bluebirds:	Bluebird eggs laid:	Bluebird eggs hatched:	Bluebirds fledged:	Tree Swallows fledged:	Chickadees fledged:	House Wrens fledged:	Total cavity nesters fledged:
Totals	2019	6454	3210	18524	15884	14743	8971	966	4216	28783
Totals	2018	7723	3899	22682	18706	19669	11309	1042	4763	36783
Difference		1269	689	4158	2822	4926	2338	76	547	8000
2019 % of 2018		84%	82%	82%	85%	75%	79%	93%	89%	78%

If the reasons for the declines sound familiar, I'm afraid it's because the conditions for the previous declines reappeared in 2019 as well. The fledged bluebird numbers were about 75% of the 2018 values.

Once again, the weather took a toll. A cold spring was reported by monitors to have delayed nesting, destroyed many of that were eggs laid, and actually starved adult bluebirds and tree swallows. The snow cover at this time made finding food difficult as well. Many monitors mentioned these same problems. Later in the year, blackfly issues were reported by some monitors. Wrens were also an issue later in the season.

A quick look at the table will reveal that lower counts of fledglings across ALL species, with the biggest drops in bluebird and tree swallow numbers. The numbers of wren and chickadee fledglings were less affected.



Fledgling bluebird by Patrick Ready

Unfortunately, there has been another declining trend, which is a decrease in the number of boxes maintained and monitored in 2019. The number

of nest boxes monitored in 2019 was only 84% of the 2018 value and represents a drop of nearly 1270 boxes. We need to recruit and develop additional people as nest box monitors, if maintaining larger populations of bluebirds is going to have a future in Wisconsin.

The challenges the birds face seem to be continuing. Hopefully 2020 will be a bounce back year. I very much appreciate the hours of work our monitors put in every year to help our feathered friends. Thank you! Please keep up the good work! And please spread the word, as our bluebird friends need the help.

Below, I've listed the monitors and their results by county. If you have any questions, corrections, or notice omissions, please feel free to contact me and we will try to rectify in future editions. Thanks again for your help!

Name	County	Total boxes used	Bluebirds fledged	Name	County	Total boxes used	Bluebirds fledged	Name	County	Total boxes used	Bluebirds fledged
Myron Byers	Adams	50	153	Joni Crave	Dodge	18	31	Barbie Allen	Kewaunee	28	54
Carol Becker	Ashland	10	15	James Kronenberg	Dodge	10	4	Don Pritzl	Kewaunee	58	178
Beth Hoagland	Bayfield	18	0	Jerry Gerndt	Dodge	7	18	Steve Pearson	La Crosse	1	4
Bonnie Lumberg	Bayfield	5	7	Charlotte Lukes	Door	20	81	Fred & Mary Craig	La Crosse	45	241
Barbara Basten	Brown	18	17	Mark &				Dave Fonger	La Crosse	58	89
Steve Mayer	Brown	20	61	Michaela Holey	Door	4	14	Jan/Jim Brady	La Crosse	6	24
Stephen Zimmermann	Brown	15	51	Sarah Bonovich	Door	2	5	Fred & Mary Craig	La Crosse	58	307
Judith DeCaster	Brown	3	3	Ken &				Morgan Jostad	La Crosse	11	14
Phyl Reedy	Brown	6	9	Signe Onsrud	Door	79	276	Leif Tolokken	La Crosse	41	102
Aaron Vandenbusch	Brown	4	22	Glenna Peters	Door	6	18	Harry/Ellen Caulum	La Crosse	13	47
John Loehlein	Brown	43	39	Beth Bartoli	Door	8	9	Verdel Dawson	La Crosse	14	64
Barbie Allen	Brown	122	82	Raymond Osinski	Door	2	5	Ronald Parker	La Crosse	4	20
Susan Clairmont	Brown	6	4	Nick Anderson	Door	14	46	Steve Anderson	La Crosse	23	66
Warren & Julie Schultz	Brown	26	20	Marjorie Andrae	Door	8	13	Carol McDaniel	LaFayette	8	7
Melissa McNeil	Brown	34	99	Sandy and Ed Miller	Door	18	20	Dale			
Thomas Schlueter	Brown	7	8	Barbie Allen	Door	5	7	& Doris Moody	LaFayette	10	25
Sally Riemer	Brown	14	16	Brenda Keys	Door	17	46	Sue Cashman	LaFayette	46	92
Jon Beckman	Brown	15	36	Wendy Lukes	Door	20	46	James Barth	LaFayette	59	134
Gerry/Della Clabots	Brown	1	2	Susan Basten	Door	7	10	Karen Koebel	Manitowoc	7	7
Mary Jo Fleming	Chippewa	25	35	Mike Madden	Door	6	10	Claire Romanak	Marathon	22	63
Debbie Anderson	Chippewa	40	184	Eric Wickstrom				Keith Smith	Marathon	6	4
Mark/Sue Foote-Martin	Columbia	36	22	& Dennis Bley	Door	24	61	Elizabeth Atwell	Marathon	27	64
Mark/Jenny McGinley	Columbia	14	5	Charles Bergsten	Douglas	34	27	Al Lancaster	Marathon	2	10
Goose Pond Volunteers	Columbia	53	0	Joan Hoy	Eau Claire	2	0	Barbie Allen	Marinette	9	18
Amy Ihlenfeldt	Columbia	9	0	Joyce Playter	Eau Claire	6	8	Joanne DeVetter	Marinette	8	37
Frank Iltis	Columbia	16	0	Bernie Hoefgen	Eau Claire	13	31	Paul Stencel	Milwaukee	6	4
Michael Everson	Crawford	13	10	Phyllis LaPine	Eau Claire	30	19	Shari Kastner	Milwaukee	11	19
Dennis Kirschbaum	Crawford	19	57	Mavis Hermodson	Eau Claire	21	20	Barbara			
Stanley Starbuck	Dane	3	5	Rita Gundry	Eau Claire	41	67	Kellermann	Milwaukee	6	14
Gail Smith	Dane	14	9	Steve Schleitwiler	Florence	1	5	Lynn Crawford	Milwaukee	6	6
Mary Sobol	Dane	10	4	Memuna Khan	Fond du Lac	77	134	Ralph Konrath	Milwaukee	36	74
Allisanne Apple	Dane	6	4	Dorothy Messner	Fond du Lac	8	0	Karen Johnson	Milwaukee	12	13
Rebecca Zamora-Green	Dane	1	10	Janice Wittkopp	Fondulac	15	36	Mike & Ellen			
Eric Nelson	Dane	3	8	David Speigle	Grant	50	127	Helgren	Monroe	33	144
Steve Sample	Dane	33	61	Rodney Courtier	Green	11	32	Gordy Weber	Monroe	82	427
Pam Heilman	Dane	5	4	Kathleen Dreikosen	Green	26	47	Gordy Weber	Monroe	24	53
Ellyn Mohs	Dane	4	8	Dale & Doris Moody	Iowa	67	186	Don Nelson	Monroe	4	20
David Lucey	Dane	38	62	Gene Kroupa	Iowa	11	24	Gene Birr	Oconto	110	231
Patrick Ready	Dane	15	56	Kim Cates	Iowa	15	22	Barbie Allen	Oconto	74	82
Jeanne Mawbey	Dane	9	15	Marianne Jensen	Iowa	3	3	Susan Clairmont	Oconto	14	5
Sandy & Tom Schwab	Dane	38	58	Darlene Neisner	Jackson	17	75	Jerry Gerndt	Oconto	37	57
Lynne Haynor	Dane	10	15	Darrel Eberhardt	Jackson	134	533	Dick Paquette	Oconto	0	0
Sue Eagle	Dane	18	37	Greg Kruger	Jackson	13	33	Jerry Gerndt	Oconto	29	69
Kathie Brock	Dane	15	48	Larry Casper	Jackson	56	107	Dick Hanson	Oconto	0	0
Jean Lepro	Dane	13	14	Bill Schapfel	Jackson	20	64	Jerry Gerndt	Oconto	40	59
Kris Perlberg	Dane	6	8	Sheryl Gilbertson	Jackson	11	20	Kristen Laufenberg	Oconto	3	17
Gene Kroupa	Dane	5	4	Andy Chickowski	Jackson	65	115	Cordula			
David Roberts	Dane	11	5	Bill &				VanDenHeuvel	Oconto	1	4
Ann E S Wick	Dane	119	458	Dawn Rakestraw	Jackson	19	38	Kevin & Denise Judy	Oconto	15	12
Marianne Jensen	Dane	22	27	Jane Prindle	Jackson	4	14	Al Powers	Oconto	14	11
Jack Saltes	Dane	25	33	Tammy Frey	Jefferson	13	19	Joan Altergott	Oconto	14	40
Sylvia Marek	Dane	15	31	Jerry Gerndt	Jefferson	37	82	Neveah McLeod	Oconto	1	4
Steve Fallon	Dane	12	17	John &				Marsha Present	Oconto	1	3
James Mand	Dane	19	10	Patricia Heiden	Jefferson	11	56	Chantel McLeod	Oconto	2	7
Pam Duszynski	Dane	9	13	Kathy Oleson	Jefferson	6	8	Joe Watt	Oconto	2	0
Jim Goodno	Dane	8	3	Dennis Persinger	Kenosha	8	17	Don Denor	Oconto	4	16
Jim Goodno	Dane	24	30	Julie Milligan-Barr	Kenosha	14	30	Don Denor	Oconto	5	0
Sally Keyel	Dane	23	17	John Dixon	Kenosha	2	8	Don Denor	Oconto	3	4
Katherine Brock	Dane	15	48	Rosenstiel				Cordula			
Jean Druckenmiller	Dane	1	4	Krerowicz	Kenosha	16	36	VanDenHeuvel	Oconto	2	0
American Family	Dane	34	16	John Krerowicz	Kenosha	23	8	Virginia Behrend	Oconto	3	5
Mark Landmark	Dane	1	4	Ray Palenik	Kenosha	18	54	Keith Smith	Oneida	2	3
Ruth Witt Jensen	Dane	2	0	John R Meyer	Kenosha	57	49	Ray Mathey	Oneida	7	9
Paul Noeldner	Dane	12	9	Nathan Robertson	Kenosha	6	0	Steve Mayer	Outagamie	46	71

Name	County	Total boxes used	Bluebirds fledged	Name	County	Total boxes used	Bluebirds fledged	Name	County	Total boxes used	Bluebirds fledged
Daniel Schultz	Outagamie	11	26	Dennis & Heather Jense	Racine	21	20	Mike & Jean Curran	Walworth	2	20
Steve Schleitwiler	Outagamie	5	5	Jon & Nate Straight	Richland	6	7	John Scholtz	Walworth	3	8
Ellen Lafouge	Ozaukee	28	101	Paul Klawiter	Richland	34	91	Lora Schreiber	Washington	11	19
Nick Gall	Ozaukee	49	27	Cindy & Jim Schwisow	Rock	2	9	Ray Pinter	Washington	70	98
Richard Albert	Ozaukee	9	9	Jim Brase	Rock	8	5	Jean Hamilton	Washington	2	4
Richard Albert	Ozaukee	4	4	Rodney Courtier	Rock	60	147	Madelynn Miezio	Washington	16	10
Jerry Gerndt	Ozaukee	5	17	Jacqueline Lindahl	Rock	9	31	Janet Heder	Washington	3	5
Cheryl Brickman	Ozaukee	34	21	Jack Freeman	Rock	1	13	Melissa Bruder	Waukesha	29	112
Mary Holleback	Ozaukee	24	13	William Fruin Jr	Rock	14	86	Shari Kastner	Waukesha	11	38
Judy Kolosso	Ozaukee	0	0	Michael Johnson	Rock	18	47	Walter Jost	Waukesha	35	84
Joan Sommers	Ozaukee	25	62	Steve Fallon	Rock	9	7	Anne Moretti	Waukesha	13	25
James Higgins	Pierce	9	22	Bruce & Ruth Marion	Sauk	25	149	Steve Vidmar	Waukesha	8	8
Ernie Schultz	Pierce	20	54	Gene Kroupa	Sauk	7	12	Donald & Debra Herrick	Waukesha	37	99
Jim & Dorothy Beix	Pierce	38	95	Evonne Kraemer	Sauk	44	126	Amy Bachman	Waukesha	9	56
Carol Forsythe	Pierce	9	38	Jan, Ted & Phil McGinnis	Sauk	115	653	Ilene & Paul Kronschnabel	Waukesha	36	50
John Hanson	Pierce	17	24	Sharon Stark	Sauk	7	24	Jon Frohling	Waukesha	9	43
Rodger Meyer	Polk	47	146	Renee Pierce	Sauk	8	5	Jerry Gerndt	Waukesha	14	9
Karen Dostal	Portage	23	47	Diane Chambers	Sawyer	40	170	Dan Savin	Waukesha	7	15
Konrad/Nancy Chojnacki	Portage	37	101	Ruthann Meiers	Shawano	42	97	Jerry Klingbeil	Waukesha	1	9
Jan Konkol	Portage	30	76	Janet Raddatz	Sheboygan	15	30	John & Patricia Heiden	Waukesha	49	17
Jim/Darlene Jakusz	Portage	37	78	Lee & Mary Lou Curtiss	Sheboygan	33	109	Waste Management	Waukesha	25	5
Jean Klein	Portage	17	20	Barbara Wehrle	Sheboygan	13	18	Ken/Megan Karth	Waupaca	29	88
Woody & Madge Bishop	Portage	30	83	Therese Wilk	Sheboygan	34	114	Mike O'Connell	Waupaca	6	8
Jan Ronchetto	Portage	12	34	Jim & Dorothy Beix	St Croix	50	74	Craig & Shelia Beyer	Waupaca	35	112
David/Patti Becker	Portage	28	62	Lowell Peterson	St Croix	31	90	Alice Chaney	Waupaca	35	122
Ken/Megan Karth	Portage	8	32	Pat & Steve Cox	St. Croix	2	0	Bob Fox	Waushara	97	128
Joe Schultz	Portage	48	101	James Higgins	St. Croix	35	73	Len Place	Waushara	29	68
Sunshine Buchholz	Portage	6	7	Debby Walters	St. Croix	40	15	David/Christine Misterek	Winnebago	37	47
Sue Hall	Portage	44	118	Stanley King	St. Croix	9	33	Mary Dahm	Wood	34	80
Diana Mrozinski	Portage	0	0	Mark Ritzinger	St. Croix	0	0	Karen Haralson	Wood	25	85
Kent Hall	Portage	148	371	Jim Wolf	St. Croix	24	39	Sand Valley Restoration Fund	Wood	40	46
Wyleen/Clark Hugh	Portage	12	25	Kathy Fredrickson	St. Croix	5	9	Tom/Amy Reitz	Wood	38	97
Mary Bratz	Portage	31	67	Lori Livingston	Talyor	16	21	Kim/Mary Ellen Marshall	Wood	18	32
Dick Stephens	Portage	0	0	Dwight Offord	Taylor	42	67	Ruby Thomas	Wood	15	33
Bill/Jill Ziehr	Portage	33	93	Fred & Mary Craig	Trempealeau	13	66	Tom & Gail Bartelt	Wood	30	96
Marilynn/Ken Slezak	Price	21	34	Eugene Lyons	Vernon	29	85	Fred Camacho	Wood	33	119
Jennifer & David Wenzel	Racine	20	24	Bill LeClaire	Vernon	5	15	TOTALS		6454	14743
Helen, Kathy Pugh, & Gabriel	Racine	18	42	Brian Logan	Vilas	2	4				
Tom & Karen Gavahan	Racine	21	22	Robert Butzer	Vilas	17	33				
Aszya Summers	Racine	9	0	Greg Olson	Vilas	2	5				
				Thomas Ganfield	Walworth	1	8				

BRAW Welcomes These Members

Barbara Smith - Argyle
 Benjamin Adams - Watertown
 Elizabeth McBride - Madison
 Jennifer Christensen - Dresser
 Leo Hoefgen - Dousman
 Mary Murrell - Monona
 Mike & Colleen Katzenberg - Burlington
 Pamela Moe - Watertown
 Thomas Pierce - Madison
 Chuck Lucas - Sun Prairie
 Mark L Olejniczak - Deerfield
 Julie Novander - Beaver Dam
 John & Judy Georgeson -

Oregon
 Jamie & Steve Eldred - Janesville
 Michael R Schwabe - Elkhorn
 Susan Kenney - Suak City
 Kelly Sadowski - Crystal Lake
 Pam Freedlund - Rockton
 Donna Mayes - Rockford
 Mike Crawford - Waunakee
 Robert Holley - Crivitz
 Craig Janssen - Green Bay
 Gary Kleppe - Monroe
 Dana Merriman - Omro
 Krista Goeller - Beaver Dam
 Patricia Hermsen - Oregon
 Allan Meinhandt - Clintonville

Dennis Monahan - Beloit
 Barry W Poole - Marion
 Denise Kermitz - Hortonville
 Jim Goodno - Madison
 Jenny Erso - Hartland
 Cindy Shallock - Mequon
 Carolyn Mertens - Belleville
 Kim P McDonald - Menomonee Falls
Donations:
 Aaron Vandenbusch - Greenleaf
 Donald Persons - Janesville
 Jim & Anna Kraft - Black Earth
 Joe V Franklin - Dixon

Marilyn L Michalski - Kimberton
 Michael Morgan - Fond du Lac
 Nick Snyder - Appleton
 Richard A Albert - Mequon
 Tina Bartholomew - Cassville
 Dawn Mathey, Rockton
 Chris Leubner, Menomonie
 Heidi Hoff, Mt Horeb
 Tim Frank, Deerfield
 Les & Mary Rhines, Plymouth
 Janet Evans, Sparta
 Antonella Pallozzi, Madison
 Heirli Borter, Monona
 Cory Wiedenhoefl, Janesville

Tree Swallows Learning Nest Making Lessons from Bluebirds

By Barbie Allen

This past year, I noticed many better-made nests in nest boxes than I normally see. I was very excited hoping and thinking I had an increased bluebird number occupying my nest boxes. To my surprise tree swallows constructed many of the nests. (Photos 1-4 are tree swallow nest). I jokingly began to say that the tree swallows must have migrated to a winter area where bluebirds were giving nest-making classes. Many of the nests were all pine needles even in areas where there were limited pine trees. The only telltale sign they were tree swallow nests were the white feathers, but I have also had bluebirds that lined their nests with feathers. (Photo 5).

My biggest complaint about monitoring tree swallow nest boxes (and I had 516 tree swallows fledged in 2019 alone), is the mess left from the chick's poop remaining on the walls, floor and nest of the nest box. Too bad they are not the diligent nest box cleaners that the bluebirds are. To my surprise when I went to remove and clean boxes after the chicks had fledged, the neater nest boxes made by the tree swallows were also cleaner than most tree swallow nests. Perhaps the bluebird nest box making lessons also included housekeeping lessons. I can't wait until next spring to see if this continues!



Becoming More Engaged

By Steve Sample, BRAW VP

Hello fellow Bluebird partners. As a statewide organization, BRAW welcomes input from birders across Wisconsin. One issue that needs addressing is that the BRAW leadership is primarily focused around Dane County.

Understandably, our state is large and traveling to meetings is definitely a hardship even with our Board meetings that are held in the central area of the state. However, Board members do not have to attend all meetings, as we regularly communicate online.

We welcome your ideas and voice in sharing our enthusiasm for supporting all native cavity nesters. Contact president Pat Ready if you can help either at the Board level or in your county or just want to share something.

BRAW was well represented at the Madison Garden Expo in February. We always find people who are interested in learning about bluebirds. Pat Ready finds good size audiences for his talks, and we talk with a lot of folks at our booth. We would like to get more folks statewide to work with our county coordinators in putting on seminars, workshops, meeting with 4-H and FFA members, and participating in events and shows.

Again, we would welcome your help even if it's just letting us know about speaking opportunities. Contact Steve Sample if you are interested.

There is another trend developing that may make our organization change its focus. We are seeing more individuals with small trails, some with one or two boxes; and they are not sending in bluebird production data. As a manager at a Wild Birds Unlimited store, I find numerous people with small trails who are not members of BRAW, and they do not report their successes. This is an untapped resource and we need ideas about how to encourage and educate these small monitors. Again, we could use your help.



Garden Expo Promotes Bluebirds!

BRAW once again had a double booth space at the WHA Garden Expo in Madison in early February. Thanks to Dave Lucey for overseeing this and to all the volunteers that helped out during the 3 day event. Melissa McNeil, Gene Birr, Kristine Vaughn, Bob Fulton, Gene Kroupa, Dave Misterek, Will Vail, Gordon Weber, Steve Sample, Mary Sobol, Ellen Helgren, Mike Helgren, Rod Courtier, Marianne Jensen, Steve Fallon, Karen Lucey and Dave Lucey all gave their time to make this a successful venue to promote bluebird conservation to those who passed by our booth and attended our seminar on Saturday morning. And a special "thank you" to the 35 folks who joined BRAW at the Garden Expo.

County Coordinator Reports

By Gene Birr, CC Chair

Early Spring greetings to each of you, I am Oconto County Coordinator Gene Birr, and I have been asked by President Pat Ready, and past CC Chair Carol McDaniel, to succeed her in continuing her column, collecting and sharing the experiences and activities of each of our statewide County Coordinators. I would like to thank each of our coordinators for their efforts in reaching out to anyone interested in providing nesting habitat for bluebirds. We all know how important an active and passionate person can be advocating for bluebirds while serving as a County Coordinator.

As past Lafayette CC and recent CC Chair, Carol has been one of those individuals who has served each of us with BRAW well, pursuing every opportunity to improve the nesting habitat for bluebirds. I also take this opportunity to acknowledge her many years of service to BRAW, and thank her for her faith in me following in her footsteps while continuing this column.

Dane County - Patrick Ready

Spring is a busy time getting ready for the new nesting season. I gave two presentations at the Wild Birds Unlimited store in Madison at the end of February.

One of the county dog park trails is losing its monitor so I will be showing the new monitor what to do and try to keep the trail House Sparrow free and continue as a productive bluebird trail. In April I will be giving a Cavity Nester box building seminar at Olbrich Gardens in Madison. A short program on attracting bluebirds will be given. Participants will build a NABS-style box to take home. Kits will be provided by BRAW.

Unfortunately I missed the Garden Expo this year as I was in Arizona soaking up some sun.

BRAW did give a program on Attracting Bluebirds & other cavity nesters on Saturday morning. Steve Sample took my place and did a fine job promoting bluebirds to over 100 expo participants.

BRAW had a booth on the main

floor educating hundreds that passed by with questions about bluebirds.

Door County, Charlotte Lukes

I will give a power point program about cavity nesting birds and about BRAW and the importance of weekly monitoring on Saturday, March 14th. This will be for The Ridges Sanctuary's annual nest box building workshop at the Cook-Fuller Center on State Highway 57 in Baileys Harbor, WI. It begins at 10 AM, people must pre-register and there is a fee.

Eau Claire County, Rita Gundry

The "blues" keep sailing on course in Eau Claire County with Larry Liegel at the helm. On October 16, 2019, he gave a presentation to Chippewa Valley Learning in Retirement, CVLIR. He instructed them on establishing a trail and stressed the importance of monitoring, if you have a trail or even a box or two in your backyard. During March 2020, he will be bringing this same information to another group in the CVLIR and, on separate occasion, to the Eau Claire County Master Gardener Association. Rita Gundry accompanies these talks with help on nest differentiation among the cavity nesters, including eastern bluebird, tree swallow, house wren, black-capped chickadee, and house sparrow.

The two dog parks in Eau Claire are blessed with five bluebird nest boxes in each park, and five boxes in reserve for a third dog park in the works. Larry made the cedar boxes with all the amenities and Bernie Hoefgen, a fellow bluebirder and BRAW member, fashioned a Noel guard for each one and did most of the siting and installation labor for the nest boxes.

Iowa County, Dale Moody

Doris and I have sponsored several "bluebird walks" through the DALC(Driftless Area Land Conservancy) and the WNRF (Wisconsin Natural Resource Foundation) field trips. At this time we don't have any planned for 2020. Our largest trail is very near the WI River in Iowa Co. and black flies are a serious problem some years. Last year the black flies problem surfaced in

late May and early June, earlier than most years, and caused early nestling losses.

Monroe County

I am Charlie Lautermilch and Kent Hall shared your email to him with me. I can not claim to be the Monroe County Coordinator. I consider myself to be the Ft McCoy Coordinator. Ft McCoy is federal property and located within Monroe County. I thought I would share with you the history of the Bluebird Program on Ft McCoy.

Bluebird Project Background History

Ft McCoy is about 63,000 acres located in Monroe County and is a great environment for wildlife, bluebirds in particular.

There has been a Bluebird effort on Ft McCoy since the mid-1970s when Kim Mello, then the Ft McCoy Biologist, started the program. Kim was the one of the founders of the organization Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW)

In 1997 after over twenty years of maintaining about 100 Bluebird birdhouses on Ft McCoy, Kim Mello was joined by volunteers Charlie Lautermilch and Bessie Kmiecik and they took over the monitoring duties. In 2005 a relationship was established with Kent Hall of BRAW. In 2006 Ft McCoy Biologist Kim Mello instituted Phase 1 of a Bluebird Upgrade Project and received approval to emplace one hundred twenty (120) new Bluebird (BB) birdhouses donated by Kent Hall of BRAW. These 120 BB birdhouses replaced about 80 existing old BB birdhouses. Kent Hall was instrumental in implementing this project and the following phases.

In 2007 before Kim retired, Kim instituted Phase 2 of the Bluebird Project and received approval to emplace 47 BB birdhouses on North Post in areas that had no previous BB birdhouses. David Beckmann, the new Ft McCoy Biologist, initiated Phase 3 in 2009, a continuation of the Bluebird Project and the emplacement of 60 BB birdhouses. In 2016 Phase 4 added more BB birdhouses.

Currently in 2019 there are 282 Bluebird birdhouses on Ft McCoy. All boxes have numbered tags and during the nesting season from the end of March to August each box is monitored weekly. Some 11 volunteers

monitor six trails and document the nesting progress. In 2019 these 282 nestboxes fledged 1,297 Bluebirds (Bluebird reproduction: BB fledged/# boxes= 4.6) and 231 other songbirds.

Oconto County

Last September 19, **Gene Birr** presented "How to Attract Bluebirds to Your Yard" to 15 folks interested in hearing about bluebirds at the Oconto Falls Community Library.

Each of them took home a NABS-style nestbox that I had provided along with all the proper tips to help them successfully fledge bluebirds. It marked the first time I had presented a bluebird talk entirely on my own. Most often I have been accompanied by my friend Steve Mayer who serves as the CC in **Brown** and **Outagamie** counties. On February 13, along with BRAW monitor Cordula Van Den Heuvel, who is also Oconto Bird City Coordinator, I presented a program: "Bringing Back Bluebirds" to a group at the True Value hardware store in **Shawano County**, as part of their spring customer series. The last time I appeared in the audience at a similar event there 3 years ago there were nearly 120 people in attendance learning about bluebirds.

A week later we presented another bluebird talk to her Bird City gathering in Oconto. In the coming weeks I'll be assembling nest boxes, skylight boxes and Noel Guards in preparation for the new bluebird season.

Melissa McNeil led a nice group from **Brown County**, volunteering to work the BRAW booth on Friday afternoon at the Madison Garden Expo, where she also helped out last spring. She has monitored a trail of 35 nest boxes in the village of Howard for the last 5 years, having taken over the trail first established by our former Brown CC, JoAnn DeVetter. Melissa will no longer be able to continue to monitor this trail so we are seeking someone to take it over. If you are interested in considering to monitor a trail in NE WI, please contact me.

Pierce County, Jim Beix

BRAW member Jim Higgins and I join Lowell Peterson of Somerset for

presentations in Pierce and St.Croix Counties.

The director from Freedom Park in Prescott asked for a presentation as did people from Ellsworth. Lowell asked the Ellsworth folks to join us at Freedom Park on March 7th for a combined audience. The towns are both in Pierce County, about 10 miles apart.

On March 15 we plan on our annual presentation at Inter-State park south of St.Croix Falls. Pre-cut nesting boxes are assembled after this presentation. A local senior citizen does the wood working.

St. Croix County, Lowell Peterson

Jim Beix, County Coordinator for Pierce County and I have been conducting bluebird sessions for the past several years, sharing props, slides and personal experiences, which has worked well. Thus far, we have sessions scheduled at Interstate Park in St. Croix Falls on March 13 and Freedom Park in Prescott on March 7. These sessions have been coordinated with the park rangers and are always quite well received and attended. Bluebirds are an easy "sell". In addition, I am co-chair of the School and Youth Coordinator Committee. I work with area schools and conduct presentations with elementary age students. I have not scheduled sessions yet, but will be doing so soon.

Vilas County, Bob Butzer

Vilas County where I live is mostly wooded, but there are 3 old farms (mostly grassland) near my home. I maintain 17 Peterson houses there. As I recall, last year 31 bluebirds fledged and many more Tree Swallows too.

Washington County, Mary Holleback

I'm on the staff at Riveredge and have monitored their bluebird trail for years.

I have nothing to report other than to announce that we will be running a bluebird workshop at Riveredge on Sat. March 14th from 1:00-2:30 PM. Home Depot in Grafton donated materials to build 20 boxes. Please promote the program if possible.

Benefits of Trailing

By Gene Kroupa, Director

A friend recently shared a list of things to do to age well. As I went down the list, it occurred to me that bluebird trailing fulfilled many of the suggestions. For example:

- 1. Doing moderate exercise like walking.** By the time I've checked my trails, I figure I've put in my 10,000 steps for the day. Along the way, I got lots of fresh air to boot.
- 2. Keeping a positive attitude.** As I move from one nest box to the next I generally have a sunny outlook. Nothing beats seeing a new batch of eggs or a clamoring clutch of hungry chicks that weren't there last week.
- 3. Staying mentally active and continually learning.** One thing about trailing, not only does it keep you alert, problems spark a desire to look for solutions. This season I'm going to try plexiglass covered roof opening in my garden nest box. I want to see firsthand if more light in the box discourages pesky House Sparrows from settling in.
- 4. Having a circle of friends.** Being involved with BRAW and introducing folks to the joys of helping native cavity nesters has greatly expanded my circle. These are nice folks who like to share tips, do good things and enjoy their role as conservationists. They are like an extended family.
- 5. Eating good food and living independently.** Many of my trailing friends are also gardeners who value growing fresh fruit and vegetables. Likewise, the landowners I meet enjoy getting things done on their own. Many remain self-sustaining and independent into their 70s and 80s.

Now is a good time to introduce the next generation to the aging well benefits of trailing. And if you want to establish a new trail or take over one from an old-timer, just contact any BRAW director for help. Happy trails to you!

2019 Skylight Box Field Test Study Results

By Gene Birr, Oconto County Coordinator

During the summer of 2017 while researching ideas for House Sparrow and predator control, I stumbled on the website, bluebirdconservation.com. This linked me to several videos featuring Dr. Dean Rust, the current President of the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania and author of the new book "The Charismatic and Beloved Bluebird". In these he stated the virtues of having an open -top nest box that allowed extra daylight into the nesting cavity, but was covered with plexi-glass to keep out the rain—what he called the "skylight box". He has been using these skylight boxes for several years now on many of his trails with very good results. So I decided that I would experiment with using them myself.

2018 First Trial Test

In the 2018 season I replaced 3 of my boxes with new skylight boxes. From these 3 boxes I had trapped and removed 13 House Sparrows in the previous 2 years. That year no box was bothered at all with sparrows and I raised a brood each of Tree Swallows, House Wrens and bluebirds. I never saw any sparrows and never had to set a Van Ert trap or remove any birds from them. This was strong evidence that the extra light in these boxes had indeed kept the sparrows from using them, when they had been the boxes that had seen my worst sparrow trouble before. That gave me the encouragement to enlarge my study and test their effectiveness on a larger scale.

By the early spring of 2019 I had prepared 40 boxes with skylight roofs to be used by other local monitors and myself. While some of these monitors replaced boxes that were actively dealing with House Sparrows beginning to nest in them, for the most part I simply traded out boxes that were in high- density sparrow problem areas before the nesting season began.

In October, 2018 I had just placed 4 new boxes onto a trail requested by Aaron VandenBusch on his home property in rural southern Brown County. As I set up the trail I noticed



Gene Birr holds a Skylight Box at the Annual Convention last year.

all the existing bird houses that he and several neighbors had placed in the past. Later Aaron commented that he wasn't comfortable with removing sparrows with a Van Ert trap, as I was recommending. So I decided that this site, which was a high risk area for sparrows, would be ideal to test these new boxes and I replaced them two weeks later. At the end of the 2019 nesting season Aaron reported that 3 of those boxes fledged 14 bluebirds and the other remained empty. None of his 4 boxes were ever bothered with sparrows.

Failure Reported

In a larger test, I replaced all 10 boxes that were set up 3 years ago on the grounds of Pulaski High School. This trail was established under the guidance of Ag instructor Kaleb Santy and has been monitored ever since by now senior student, Kayla Reed. The school campus is located on the edge of the city of Pulaski, bordered on one side by an open agricultural area and the other side is adjacent to a residen-



tial neighborhood where several of the neighbors are feeding the birds and hosting sparrows. Each year Kaleb, Kayla and I have removed 8 to 10 sparrows from these boxes with a Van Ert trap. Because this is a newer trail with quite an active sparrow problem, bluebirds have been quite infrequent so far. Each of the last 2 years only 2 of the boxes have had bluebird nests and the rest have had Tree Swallows or sparrows. This year the bluebirds didn't appear at all in any of the 10 boxes, and swallows dominated most of the rest while several stayed empty. The box closest to the school continued to be used by sparrows even after removing a completed House Sparrow nest and a sparrow with a trap. This was the strongest case in my study that showed that some sparrows are not deterred by a skylight over the nesting cavity.

More Success

In contrast, my 9 box trail on the Oconto Falls High School campus in Oconto County continues to be my most productive for bluebirds even though it is similarly located on the edge of the city. But because it has a cemetery on one side there are fewer neighbors and somewhat fewer sparrows around. Still there is a constant presence of these pests in my boxes that requires their regular trapping and removal. But last year I replaced the two boxes most often bothered by sparrows. One had a hint of sparrow nesting activity 2 weeks in a row, but not significant enough to bother setting a trap, just removing a little nesting material. By the third week a bluebird had begun nesting in this box which had always had bluebirds in other years. The second box, where sparrows had always been constant, was occupied this year by Tree Swallows. The sparrows which had always bothered this box now moved onto the next box nearby which usually had bluebirds. Now I had to trap sparrows from this box. Next year I will replace every box at the high school with skylight boxes in another attempt to reduce sparrow use at the campus. Most years bluebirds occupied 4 or 5 of the nine boxes; last year with a couple skylight boxes on site, bluebirds used 7 of the 9.

Others give it a try

Several NE Wisconsin BRAW monitors were interested in experimenting with the skylight box as well. Of the 5 boxes Jon Beckman used on his Brown County trails only one was bothered with sparrows, then fledged 4 bluebirds after he trapped the sparrow out of it. Steve Mayer worked with 3 skylight boxes. One remained unused, one was used by a Tree Swallow, and the third welcomed a bluebird pair which fledged 4 young. None of his 3 boxes was troubled with sparrows even though he had placed each of them where sparrows had bothered them in the past.

Barb Allen is the leading monitor in our area. She shared these thoughts about her use of skylight boxes last season:

At the Woods Golf Course in Brown County, I have always had a big problem with sparrows. Gene suggested that I try the skylight nest box house. I heeded his suggestion and put in the only skylight house I had in a location I had the greatest sparrow problem in the past. This house was changed prior to bluebirds arriving in the area in early spring. It worked great as I had no sparrow activity and a tree swallow occupied this house. In early June, Gene gave me another skylight house and I changed another nest box. To my amazement, the sparrows avoided it and a tree swallow moved in. I am so impressed with these results that I plan to replace at least a dozen of my boxes next year with new skylight houses.

Jerry Gerndt monitors boxes in Dodge County and near his home farm near Suring in northern Oconto County. He placed 10 skylight boxes, each box after sparrows started building nests. The nests were removed, the old box was removed and the new box was installed. In his 10 skylight boxes sparrows persisted in one box but they avoided the other 9. One was used by bluebirds and the other 8 by Tree Swallows. A young girl acquaintance first suggested the use of skylight boxes to Jerry a year before the rest of us became aware of them. She reported to him that of her 7 skylight boxes last year there were no sparrows. 4 boxes fledged bluebirds and 3 had swallows.

Jerry agrees with some of the findings that Kent Hall reported recently where he found that the skylight boxes appeared to be used less often by bluebirds than swallows or our other boxes. But he states *“my boxes are 185 miles apart, they don't get checked every week. If the bluebird numbers are a little less, but there are no sparrows, then that is a success to me.”* Jerry reports that he again will install skylights where he has sparrow problems next spring.

I now have on my trails 6 skylight boxes: 2 at the OFHS, one in my front yard and the 3 others I have had the prior 2 years. Last year 2 of them were used by bluebirds, 2 by Tree Swallows, one by House Wrens, and one remained empty.

I believe that some of the empty boxes and lack of use by the bluebirds can be attributed to the bad weather that brought heavy snowfalls and late springs here the last 2 years. Bluebird numbers were down by 25% in 2018 and 15% in 2019 on my trails. Yet my bluebird nestbox occupancy rate rose from 38% to 51% during those same years. That puts it near my normal occupancy rate of 50% to 60%, which might indicate that the addition of skylights boxes is having only a slight effect on bluebirds using these new boxes.

My results seem to show that the skylight box is very effective in controlling House Sparrow nesting. Like any practice we try to control sparrows and predators there are always instances where what we try isn't totally successful. But I think the results from my trail and the testimony of each of the others who have used them show quite decisively that they offer us another means to deter House Sparrows from using nest boxes intended for bluebirds. Those of us who are comfortable using Van Ert traps to remove sparrows will undoubtedly continue to do so and I continue to recommend the practice. But perhaps for those who just can't see themselves doing that, the skylight box offers us a useful alternative to lessen the negative effects of House Sparrows using nest boxes, freeing them to be used by native songbirds.



Attracting Purple Martins

Educate Yourself. Learn everything you can about Purple Martins. Visit the web site 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 years' 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.

Membership Renewal Information

By Mike Ray, Membership Services

It may be time to renew your annual membership to the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW), so that we can update our mailing list with the least cost and effort.

Look at the address label on your newsletter. The number group following your name indicates the month and year of expiration. If your label reads Spring 2020 your membership will expire with this issue.

You will also be able to join as an Online Paperless member and get the newsletter by email. We will send you the issue electronically. This will save us postage, reduce printing cost and conserve paper. You can print it if you desire.

Fill out the membership renewal form below and send it with your check or money order to **BRAW Membership, c/o Mike Ray, PO Box 628492, Middleton, WI 53562**

If we do not receive your renewal April 24th, your membership will begin with the next issue after payment is received. *We will no longer mail out back issues and back date memberships.*

The basic \$25 Individual / Family membership covers the

cost of printing and mailing the quarterly *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter.

The next issue of the *Wisconsin Bluebird* goes into production in February and was mailed to arrive the second week in March. Memberships received after April 24th may not be processed in time to receive the Summer newsletter. Consider a one time \$300 Life Membership in BRAW. **Life members do not have to renew.**

Consider the Special \$10 Gift Membership (Online only).

Please complete the membership renewal form provided here and return it to BRAW as soon as possible. **Now you can renew your membership at www.braw.org and use PayPal or a credit card and you don't need to mail anything in.**

All Renewals/New Memberships received now will begin with the Summer issue.

New members can use the form below to join BRAW.



.....

Wisconsin Bluebird Subscription and BRAW, Inc. Membership

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

Subscription/Membership contribution:

- \$10 Gift Membership (Online via email)
- \$15 Student/Teacher (Online via email)
- \$20 Online paperless issue via email**
- \$25 Individual or Family Annual (hard copy mailed)
- \$100 Corporate Annual
- \$300 Life Membership

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Email Address: _____

Telephone: () _____

County of residence: _____

- \$15 to nest box construction with post & predator guard
 - \$100 for nest box trail
 - \$_____ for educational research (Master's thesis)
 - In addition to my membership contribution, I wish to contribute: \$_____
- (Contributions to BRAW are tax deductible)*

Check appropriate boxes:

- This is a renewal.
- This is a new subscription/membership
- This is a GIFT subscription.

Enclosed please find my check \$ _____

Mail this membership/subscription request to:
BRAW, Inc.
Mike Ray
 PO Box 628492
 Middleton, WI 53562

Please note: This form appears in this newsletter as a convenience for all who wish to obtain membership. Memberships expire as noted on your mailing label and should be renewed immediately to ensure continued access to newsletters. If you renew or join during the year you will be on a quarterly membership basis and *will not* receive back issues of *Wisconsin Bluebird*.

Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin

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2019 Monitor Data Report

see page 2

Check the address label. If it says "Spring 2020"
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
laid 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.