

Winter 2024
Vol. 39, No. 4



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.

Improving Bluebird Numbers!

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BRAW
Photo Contest
1st Place
Peggy Gierhart



Peggy Gierhart

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Is It Time to Renew Your Membership?

President's Report

By Steve Sample

Greetings!

Many of our active members have enjoyed receiving nest boxes at reduced or no cost over the last few years. This is still true for our County Contacts, but it may be possible soon to again provide free nest boxes to our general membership.

The question you might ask is: How can BRAW do this as a non-profit organization operated by all volunteers? Generous members of BRAW have given additional funds specifically for nest boxes or undesignated donations as part of their joining or the renewal process.

We also received a significant memorial donation from Carol McDaniel's family upon her passing several years ago. Likewise, the Ray Cram family gives a significant annual donation through the Wisconsin Natural Resources Foundation.

Finally, we apply for grants. A Community Foundation of Southern Wisconsin grant provided the boxes, poles and hardware for our Driftless Area Land Conservancy program this year. That grant has been renewed for 2025.



We are grateful for all the support we have received. These funds help reduce or eliminate the cost of providing nest boxes and poles to our membership. Of course there is another important aspect of all this, and that is we have dedicated members willing to build nest boxes.

We require a standard design for building these boxes using the North American Bluebird Society's plan. Fred Craig, of Holman, has built boxes for decades now which continue to be the quality standard for their construction. Recently, boxes built by County Contact Coordinator Gene Birr and some others have helped boost our supply for the coming year.

Finally, our state convention was a success thanks to the over 100 attendees, and our many volunteers, especially Joanie and Eric Haugen, Andy and Pam Garcia-Rivera, Pat Ready, Mike Crawford, Gene Birr, Steve Fallon, Dave Lucey, Mary Sobol, Gene Kroupa, Paul Noeldner, Brad Branwell-Zinda, Gail Smith and Val Van Winkle. Also, thank you to the Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance of for its generous donation in support of the convention.

Thanks for all you do for bluebirds!

Steve

Deter House Sparrows From Bird Feeders

By Pat Ready

During the Q&A segment of the BRAW Convention at Horicon Marsh in September the topic of House Sparrows came up. I mentioned if anyone has nest boxes and also feeds the birds, avoid feeding House Sparrows!

I've been doing this for several years and this simple method works great. I tie short pieces of monofilament fish line to all my feeders. For some reason House Sparrows will not land on the feeders and eat bird seed. It doesn't matter what weight of line I use. Native species are not deterred from eating on any of my feeders.

I have recommended this to many of my friends and when I give my Bluebird talk I include this information. I almost always hear back that it works. A few have told me they tried but failed. My assumption is they may not be doing it right or some House Sparrows aren't deterred. In my experience new fledged House Sparrows will try feeding for a week or so but then they too avoid the fish line. I've even seen male sparrows fly at them on the feeder to make them leave. About once per year I may have to replace the fish line with new pieces. Old lines can fail sometimes.

There are products on the market called Sparrow Halos or Sparrow Away that can cost \$50 or more. I see no reason to buy those because fish line does the trick. Some people have used wire instead and found it works too.

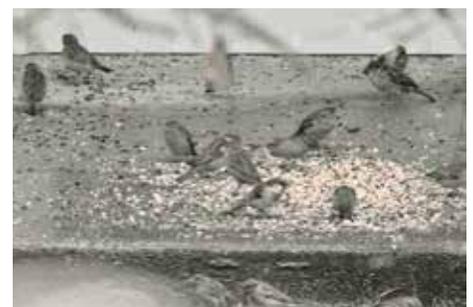
When I moved into my current residence in Madison my neighbor saw me hanging a feeder in my front yard. She came over and told me I'd only get House Sparrows. She also mentioned that very few neighbors bother to feed birds for that reason. I told her to get fresh bird seed, Oil Sunflower, Safflower and Nyjer and then put fish line on the feeders. She now has more feeders up than I do!



Above on my open "fly through" feeder I just tie the line to the center pole and short pieces down from the roof.

House Sparrows will eat a full peanut feeder in a day but not with 2 short pieces of fish line attached.

If you don't think I have House Sparrows in the neighborhood you'd be wrong. My neighbor behind me likes to feed cheap seed mix and attracts lots of House Sparrows!



Improving Bluebird Numbers Reported by Wisconsin Monitors for 2024

Steve Fallon, BRAW Data Director

The preliminary statewide reported total for bluebirds fledged in 2024 are shown in the table below.

These values are preliminary, because the data are still being compiled and additional reports are still coming in. However, I wanted to give an update of where we stand currently statewide, and make an appeal to those who have not submitted their data yet, to please do so. As of this writing, you can see, we've already surpassed last year's EAB Fledged totals. In general, we've seen another decent improvement from the numbers received thus far, with many monitors reporting good increases and others have roughly the same as last year. However, as usual, not all monitors experienced this increase.

Once again this year, I tried to get an idea of the population trends by comparing some monitors' early submissions. These data for the table below were compiled in early September. I took a subset of this early data, approximately 3000 boxes from early submissions, this year (2024) and compared it to a similar number of boxes from early submissions in 2023. The year over year data are captured in the tables below.

In the tables, the number of boxes is slightly higher in 2024 (by 0.23%), yet the number of boxes used by EABs is nearly 22% higher than the 2023 value. This led to more eggs laid, more hatchlings and more fledglings in 2024. It's a bit more difficult to generalize as to the success of other species so far, but the competition for nest boxes is showing that, at least in this analysis, EABs are more than holding their own and making up a greater portion of total cavity nesters, as the total cavity nester numbers are nearly the



Pat Ready

same for both years. As with any subset of data (think polling) we need to be careful about reading too much into any specific number generated, as many things can confound it, but this early analysis showed us having a 13% better year statewide average than last year. As the initial table showed, we have already surpassed these "predicted" EAB fledged numbers! Well done!

I'll have more to say regarding the geographic differences when I map the "final" numbers in our next newsletter, but we all know by now the effects local weather and predation can have on our local populations of birds. Please don't be discouraged if the numbers were down in your area. Many monitors reported egg and chick losses, that suppressed the fledged numbers. My own trails suffered from egg infertility and losses to wrens and other predators, so I understand the frustration. That being said, I'm heartened by the success of others and the fact that the birds seem to be increasing statewide.

Congratulations! Once again, thanks are due to the many hours our monitors put in to help the birds. Your efforts toward setting-up, checking, fixing, cleaning, educating, AND reporting, make all this possible!

Total Preliminary Data for 2024

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
6723	3658	22908	19210	17436	8684	1035	4055	31210

Early Sample Data for 2024

Number of boxes:	Boxes used by Bluebirds:	Bluebird eggs laid:	Bluebird eggs hatched:	Bluebirds fledged:	Tree Swallows fledged:	Chickadees fledged:	House Wrens fledged:	Total Nestbox fledged
3038	1626	10010	8412	7625	4448	556	1850	14479

Early Sample Data for 2023

Number of boxes:	Boxes used by Bluebirds:	Bluebird eggs laid:	Bluebird eggs hatched:	Bluebirds fledged:	Tree Swallows fledged:	Chickadees fledged:	House Wrens fledged:	Total Nestbox fledged
3031	1331	8358	7067	6753	4718	508	2448	14427

Differences	7	295	1652	1345	872	-270	48	-598	52
% difference	0.23%	22.2%	19.8%	19.0%	12.9%	-5.7%	9.4%	-24.4%	0.4%

BRAW CC News

Gene Birr, CC Chair

Email: gbbird22@gmail.com

After experiencing an outstanding bluebird season and a very successful fall convention, I trust that most of us are feeling good about the future of BRAW and bluebirds, as we look forward to their return next spring. The next few months give each of us the time to consider what more we can do to improve the nesting opportunities for bluebirds in our own areas. Perhaps it is expanding our own trails or promoting other folks to start new trails by giving talks and presentations to interested groups. Maybe deciding to build nest boxes or predator guards to provide to other monitors in your county in addition to enhancing your own trails. The following reports of several County Contacts can perhaps give us all ideas of what more we can do to improve our outreach and continue to increase the number of bluebirds in Wisconsin.

Eau Claire County, Rita Gundry

My trail this season, surpassed last year's total, even with the loss of 15 chicks/eggs due to wren and bear damage. I have 3 nest boxes to remove by next spring due to a lack of activity for a few years.

Being a mason beekeeper, I especially enjoyed the information on bumblebees at our recent convention. BRAW remains a diverse source for matters of nature education.

Marinette County and Florence County, Barbie Allen

It's been a great bluebird year both for my record number of 666 bluebirds fledged, but more so for the surprise and honor of receiving the Carol McDaniel Bluebird Award for 2024. I'm so thankful to Gene Birr, as I couldn't do what I love without keeping him busy building bluebird houses for my many new trails. I am hopeful that I can locate someone interested in starting a trail in Florence County. I did meet someone who lives in Marinette County who has bluebird houses on his hunting land in Florence County but he only checks at the beginning and the end of the season to clean out the houses. Please call

me if you are interested in starting a trail in Florence County (920-737-2633). In Marinette County, I'm sure we had one of the largest county increases in bluebirds fledged thanks in part to Jo DeVetter, Kathy and Kevin Drews and others; and to Chris Mazur who started a new trail this year. My totals increased from 125 to 331 bluebirds fledged this year in Marinette County.



Ryan Walter installed boxes with the help of David Misterek.

Winnebago County

My name is Ryan Walter and I've been a BRAW member for several years. I'm also a high school math teacher and have been employed by the Neenah School District since 2007. In April of 2020, the district passed a referendum to build a new high school on a 220 acre site in Fox Crossing. Once this referendum passed, I started to think about starting a Bluebird trail on the new property. I talked to the woods teacher and had his students build 5 Peterson houses. Last year, 2023 was our first year in our new school. I remember driving up to the property thinking there was enough space for many more than 5 Bluebird houses.

I contacted our superintendent and principal to make sure it would be okay to put up many more houses on the property. Luckily, they were both on board, so I met with the head of the grounds crew to find out what locations were okay. After this meeting, I then contacted David Misterek, the Winnebago County Contact for BRAW. David and I walked the grounds together in October of 2023 to get an idea of how many boxes we could put up.

David and I decided to go with 20 boxes, so we would have a total of 25 boxes. I got in touch with Gene Birr to see if he could build me 20 houses. Gene came through and in early

March of 2024 David and I put all 25 houses up. In one location, we put up one house and then moved 100 yards away to put up another house. When we looked back to make sure we were about 100 yards away, there was a Bluebird on the house we just put up. I was so excited to start to monitor my trail that I started in March, which ended up being too early.

On April 13th, I found three houses that had Bluebird nests. After that, things got more active and by May 10th, 16 of the houses had either Bluebird or Tree Swallow nests. This past year, there has been a lot of construction still being done on our playing fields. Sadly, one of my boxes disappeared, so I was down to 24. By the end of the season, 23 of the 24 houses either had a Bluebird, Tree Swallow or House Wren nest. I had 46 Tree Swallows, 28 Bluebird and 35 House Wrens Fledge. That's an average of 4.54 birds per box. This past week, Gene Birr was kind enough to make the trip to Neenah high school to walk the property and provide me with predator guards and a couple of Van Ert traps. On a side note, I got in contact with a company that is helping us with eco restoration of the property. We hope to convert 40 some acres of planted grass to native prairie. My plan is to expand my trail on our property by 5 -10 houses in the future. I wanted to thank David Misterek and Gene Birr for all they guidance and help in making this trail happen.

Kewaunee County, Don Pritzl

Good year for bluebirds!

I had a combined total of 52 boxes, 171 eggs laid, 160 bluebirds fledged and 91 Tree Swallows fledged. I had a friend and neighbor take over a trail with 9 boxes. He did a great job of monitoring the boxes and his results are in the combined totals above. Had very little sparrow pressure this year. The wrens seem to be arriving and nesting earlier each year. It's hard to monitor wren nests in a Peterson box so I estimated about 50 wrens fledged. My neighbors also had a Great Crested Flycatcher attempt in one box but it was unsuccessful.

I will be taking a few boxes down and moving some but it's difficult with the extremely dry conditions and

hard ground. From the reports of other county contacts in the bluebird newsletter, it appears to be a good year state-wide. Good News!

I had a booth at the Ag Heritage Days at Luxemburg on September 25-26. Got some good comments and gave out some box plans. Working on finding someone to take over my trails; at 83 years old, it's hard to climb in and out of the roadside ditches. We'll see what happens. Thanks what you do for the County Contacts, Gene. Keep up the good work.

Waupaca County

With the help of Brown and Outagamie County CC Steve Mayer, and Oconto CC Gene Birr, a new 25 nest box trail was installed at the Riverside Golf Course in Clintonville, in eastern Waupaca County. One of the course co-owners, a longtime BRAW member, and Gene will be monitoring this golf course bluebird trail in the upcoming year. Anyone near the Clintonville area of Waupaca

County that may be interested in monitoring this trail next year or beyond, is encouraged to reach out to CC's, Craig and Sheila Beyer and share their interest with them.

Oconto County, Gene Birr

My trails this summer experienced their second best production ever of bluebirds fledged, 325 bluebirds from 140 nest boxes. Only our record year from 2012 produced more bluebirds in Oconto County. Like the CCs in Kewaunee and Marinette counties, I too experienced finding the nest of a Great Crested Flycatcher, which apparently nested successfully, in one of my Wood Duck boxes that I checked in late October.

I will finish building the last 60 nest boxes of the 400 I have built since last winter, supplying many to BRAW's nest box expansion efforts, in addition to the many trails added in Marinette County by their CC, Barbie Allen, leaving me an inventory of 75 for future use.

Fall 2024 New Members

Susan Brookhyser, Madison
Mary Dahm, Wisconsin Rapids
Mike Ozmanski, Pulaski
Melissa Hoff, Suamico
Ann Whitaker, Madison
Megan O'Shea, Milwaukee
Jay Hutchinson, Greenville
Vicky Wegner, IL
Wendy Vredenburg, Blue Mounds
Erika Lusthoff, Sheboygan
Open Door Bird Sanctuary,
Sturgeon Bay
Marilynn Cech, Delafield
Carrie Jones, Summit
Christine Hill, IL
Robyn Jacobchick, Sheboygan
Karl Timm, Oconomowoc
Donald Plumb, Stockholm

Where Do All The Boxes Go?

By Gene Kroupa

The main goal of BRAW is to get more nest boxes put up, maintained, and monitored in support of bluebirds and other native cavity nesters. "2024 was a banner year in meeting this goal," said President Steve Sample.

Funds for this purpose come from grants, legacy money and donations from members who designate trail building for their use. Nest boxes and predator guards are built mostly by volunteers like Fred Craig, Dave Lucey, and Gene Birr, plus groups, such as 4-H clubs, Bird City clubs and Scouts.

BRAW nest boxes are built to North American Bluebird Society plan standards. Purchases of boxes are geared to reimbursing sources for materials used in their construction. Donated older nest boxes are refurbished by Dave Lucey for use again.

"Here are some examples of where the nearly 500 nest boxes distributed this year by BRAW and its County Contacts went," noted Sample.

Schools – With the assistance of Gene Birr, a 25-box new trail was

installed and monitored by Ryan Walter at the Neenah High School in Winnebago County. Michelle Mellencamp and speech-language pathologist Megan O'Shea installed four nest boxes at Alexander Hamilton High School in Milwaukee.

Cemeteries – As part of its "Nest in Peace" program, nest boxes went to Stan Parsons for placement in the Mauston City Cemetery, St Patrick's Cemetery, and the New Lisbon City Cemetery. He fledged 22 bluebirds at these cemeteries.

Parks & campgrounds

Thanks to Michelle Mellencamp, Milwaukee County parks have received boxes to refresh old and establish new trails. Barbie Allen added 111 nest boxes throughout Marinette County, including Twin Bridge Park,

(continued next page)



Wendy Vredenburg puts up a nest box in the Evanson-Ryan Prairie Park in the Village of Blue Mounds. (Gene Kroupa).



Megan O'Shea installs a nest box at Alexander Hamilton High School in Milwaukee. (Michelle Mellencamp)

(continued from page 5)

county boat landings and private campgrounds. She uses Google Maps to find best places to site nest boxes. The Pheasant Branch Conservancy in Middleton received five nest boxes which will be monitored by Gail Smith.

Seminaries/sanctuaries – Mike Crawford added to the 20-box trail at Holy Wisdom Seminary, in Middleton, which was used as part of a House Sparrow deterrent study.

The Bethel Horizons Nature Center, near Dodgeville, and the Sinsinawa Mound Center, in Sinsinawa, added nest boxes to their properties.

Prairies/savannas – Dave Lucey assisted with the installation of an 18-box trail at the Vermont Prairie in Dane County. He also helped the Savanna Institute near Spring Green



Philip Sobol gets set to put up nest boxes received from BRAW. (Mary Sobol)

start a trail. Three nest boxes were installed by Mary and Peter Sobol for BRAW member Wendell Brookhys on the Knowles-Nelson stewardship property east of Madison.

Youth Programs – Paul Noeldner did a bluebird presentation for Pawsitive Bits 4-H Club in De Forest. Then he helped distribute the 14 nest boxes they made to start new bluebird trails. Paul also helped them install and monitor six of their nest boxes to start a bluebird trail at Orchard Ridge Equestrian Center which hosts the 4-H Club. He and his partners running Madison’s FUN in the Park program introduced children and parents to bluebirding via workshops and by distributing nest boxes.

Rehabbing old trails – Brad Branwell-Zinda replaced 70 old nest boxes in trails located in Waupaca, Portage and Wood counties with new ones. Patrick Hermsen received six nest boxes which were used to refresh an existing trail in the Oregon Park District.

Land Trusts – Members and supporters of the Driftless Area Land Conservancy, located in southern Wisconsin, received 68 nest boxes, plus predator guards and poles. Over 100 bluebirds and cavity nesters fledged from these boxes. Gene



Retired teacher Wendell Brookhys, along with Mary and Philip Sobol, installed new boxes on the Knowles-Nelson stewardship property east of Madison. (Mary Sobol)

Kroupa directed the program.

Golf Courses – Pleasant View Golf Course in Middleton received seven replacement boxes to upgrade the trail of 45 nest boxes monitored by Steve Sample. New nest boxes were also supplied for trails at the Oaks Golf Course, Cottage Grove; Riverside Golf Course, Clintonville; and Dretzka Park Golf Course, Milwaukee which should produce bluebirds next year.

These efforts require lots of volunteer time and funding support. If you are in position to help, please contact Steve Sample, ssample@gmail.com. Donations can be made when you renew your membership, online at www.braw.org, or sent directly to: BRAW
PO Box 628492
Middleton, WI 53562



Wren Guard

If you are having problems with House Wrens raiding your bluebird nest box you may want to try adding a simple wren guard. Wait until 1 bluebird egg is laid so hen is committed to the box. Then simply screw a board to the roof as shown. Make sure the board is long enough to extend below the entrance hole. Another option would be to hinge the guard to the roof so you can flip it up to rest on the roof when not needed.

A BRAW study conducted by Ripon College students showed raids from House Wrens were less frequent when a guard was installed.

Bluebirding Tips: Lessons Learned Boost Production

By John Clendining

The late Dr. Kent Hall will never know the effect he's had on me or the bluebirds of southern New Jersey, but we owe him a lot. I tried calling him a couple years ago but was told that he was no longer taking calls. Sadly, I had missed my chance to talk with the Wisconsin bluebird guru. I just thank God that he and BRAW had left me a roadmap.



I started my bluebirding adventure in 2017 with 43 nest boxes split between our two farms. I built 10 different styles: one-half of them NABS style, plus one-half a mix of other styles. I placed them approximately 100 yards apart. When the bluebirds started showing up, my family and friends were in shock because most of them had never seen a bluebird.

After the second year, I realized that about every other box was being used and the Gilwood boxes were producing more than twice as many fledglings. So, I increased the spacing to 200 yards and built another 42 Gilwood boxes. As a result, in 2019, my bluebirds fledged per box number increased from an average of 2.5 to 4.18.

My current design is a Gilwood style nest box with a 4 1/4 inch x 4 1/4 inch floor, a 5-inch drop, and a large 9 1/2-inch x 12-inch roof which is plywood, covered by aluminum trim coil.



I use a fiber plant pot as a nesting cup to hasten nest building and facilitate cleaning.

It was right around 2019 that I also found the BRAW website and Dr. Hall's "Guidelines for Successful Monitoring of Eastern Bluebird Nest Boxes." Thanks to him, I'm now monitoring 460 nest boxes and have fledged over 9,000 bluebirds in the last five years, plus hovering right around 6.0 bluebirds fledged per box per season.

Things that I learned from Dr. Hall include:

Don't pair boxes. If you want to fledge a lot of bluebirds, then tree swallows, although beautiful, are not your friend. They will occupy your nest boxes for almost two months.

Don't be afraid of roadsides. Almost all my boxes are on roadsides. The birds love perching on the electric wires and the faster I can get to the boxes, the more bluebirds I can fledge. Efficiency is key. With 460 boxes, if it took an extra minute to get to each box, it would add over 7 1/2 hours to



my weekly monitoring.

Make the mounting post your predator guard. I use 1/2 - and 3/4-inch EMT conduit. In areas with known predator problems, I use a 10-inch galvanized stove pipe with a half-inch screen at the top.

Don't be afraid to relocate boxes. I hate to see empty boxes. I relocate boxes often, sometimes 30 feet can make a real difference.

Remove nests that haven't changed in four weeks. If I'm monitoring every seven days, the fourth time I see a nest that hasn't changed, I dump it. Don't be afraid. If bluebirds really want to, they can build a complete nest in a day. It's amazing how often you will have nesting activity within a week of dumping a nest.

Use a nest box design that works.

It's hard to get data on bluebird nest box preferences for a region. You need to have numerous nest boxes, very close together, replicated many times. And after all that testing, if the bluebirds need a home, they will nest in pretty much anything we give them. I've seen them nest in farm machinery, on top of a pivot irrigation tower and even in a doggy waste bag dispenser! The bottom line is to give them a dry nesting place safe from predators.

I owe my success to Dr. Kent Hall and BRAW. I am now a Lifetime Member of BRAW, and I can't thank the organization enough for all the help they have given me. The bluebirds and I thank you.

Editor's Note: John Clendining is a 4th generation farmer from southern New Jersey who loves helping bluebirds and building nest boxes. His interest in bluebirds started with his mother, who always loved them. John has been helping increase the bluebird population since 2017. He's always willing to help fellow bluebirders or answer questions. Contact him at jclbluebirds@gmail.com.



BRAW Convention Highlights

The 2024 BRAW Annual Convention was well attended with over 100 participants. Four excellent speakers presented interesting talks on a variety of topics.

Coffee and morning snacks were provided by Rita Gundry and her sister and brother to start the day.

An excellent lunch was catered by LeRoy's Meats of Horicon. Following lunch the Silent Auction ended and items were distributed to those with highest bids.



President Steve Sample kicked things off with a greeting to members and County Contacts and thanked everyone for promoting and helping bluebirds.

'24 Convention Donors

- Carol Wilson
- Andy Garcie-Rivera
- Julie Novander
- Kathleen Hawkins
- Eric & Joanie Haugen
- Rita Gundry
- Steve Sample
- Gene Kroupa
- Randy & Karen Cooper
- Pat Blakeslee
- Fred Craig
- Barbie Allen
- Della Clabots
- Mark Resch
- Jo Devetter
- Dorothy Messner
- Nancy Herbers
- Wild Birds Unlimited-Madison
- Ruby Thomas
- Craig & Sheila Beyer



Judy Cardin gave a very interesting program on native bees and their life cycle. She pointed out how much we depend on bees for pollinating fruit trees, vegetables and flowers. Many species are threatened in the state due to pesticides and loss of habitat.



Silent Auction seekers were looking for deals on items they cherished. Many fine donations and money raised to help with cost of putting on the convention. Thanks to all who contributed to the success of the auction!



You can watch the program speakers on our YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@bluebirdrestorationassocia8670>



Paul Noeldner gave his list of steps to help new trail monitors connect with the right people, resources and information to get started for a successful bluebird/cavity nester trail.



Paige Pederson discussed bats, so many interesting facts about native bat species found in Wisconsin. She rehabs injured and orphaned bats and returns them to the open skies to fly and live free again.



Tim Hansel discussed conservation efforts to protect and restore the habitats for grassland birds. Many species are threatened by climate change, habitat loss and agricultural practices but restoration efforts are paying off.



The Q&A Panel of Experts consisted of County Contacts Brad Branwell-Zinda, Barb Allen, Gene Birr & Steve Mayer. Many good questions were asked of the panel. Nest failures were a main concern by many monitors. A wet summer statewide, black flies and House Sparrow problems were discussed. (Gene Kroupa)

A Legacy of Impact

Have you considered what your legacy will be? Legacy gifts given to the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW) will help us promote the bluebird population for years to come.

Legacy gifts can be earmarked for Nest Box Trails, Education or General Support.

Nest Box Trails gifts are used to cover the cost to make boxes that meet the NABS requirements, and for accessories like conduit, predator guards, etc. It also includes the cost of shipping/delivering boxes to members who agree to monitor bluebird trails.

Education gifts cover the cost of educational speakers at the annual convention, local speaking engagements and the brochures/hand-outs



Pat Ready

which educate the reader on how to support bluebirds in their area. This fund also includes the quarterly *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter.

General Support includes all other activities that support bluebirds and other cavity nesters in Wisconsin. Specifically, the work of our County Contacts in encouraging/supporting new trail monitors in their county and

research projects to determine the best design and location of nest boxes in order to support bluebirds and discourage predators.

BRAW, Inc is a volunteer-run organization. Over 98% of funds donated go directly to support the mission of BRAW.

When thinking about year-end gifts, note that you are 70 ½ or older, you can make a qualified charitable distribution to BRAW, Inc from your IRA and satisfy your required minimum distribution without incurring income tax.

Donations can be sent to BRAW, Inc.
9773 Vermont Church Rd.,
Black Earth, WI 53515

Contact Joanie Haugen jlhcb@gmail.com if you have any questions.

BRAW Honors 2024 Awards Recipients

By Gene Kroupa

As an exceptional year for bluebirds comes to a close, BRAW pauses to recognize the contributions of those who have made special efforts on behalf of bluebirds, the environment and the organization.

"I'm always thankful for the dedication exhibited by these individuals to the restoration of the Eastern Bluebird and protection of our environment," said President Steve Sample. Here are the 2024 BRAW awards recipients:

Michelle Mellencamp

Bluebirder of the Year Award

Michelle Mellencamp, of Milwaukee, received the 2024 Bluebirder of the Year Award. According to President Steve Sample, "She is a leader in restoring and starting new bluebird nest box trails in the Milwaukee area." Mellencamp currently monitors 57 bluebird nest boxes on her own trail.



A Master Naturalist volunteer, Mellencamp points to "wise grandparents and parents who taught me to embrace nature" for sparking her interest in birds.

"Our actions have a major impact on the environment," she added. "Organizations like BRAW and the Wisconsin Wetland Association demonstrate what successful conservation looks like."

To help birds now and in the future, Mellencamp suggests we "learn about how interconnected we are with our environment, plus support conservation organizations."

In accepting the award, Mellencamp said: "It is an honor and surprise to be recognized by the state's leading bluebird organization."

Jim Hess

Lifetime Achievement Award

Jim Hess, of rural Blanchardville, received the 2024 Lifetime Achievement Award. President Steve Sample noted: "Jim has served as a County Contact in Lafayette and Grant counties for many years. He has educated countless numbers of folks by hosting monitoring events."



Hess and wife, Marci, have focused on environmental issues at their 60 acres in Lafayette County. "We have worked on restoring the native prairies, oak savannas and oak woods," noted Hess.

As the Conservation Chair for the Southern Wisconsin Trout Unlimited Chapter, he leads workdays to clear invasive plants, plus plant native trees, grasses and forbes to create habitat for birds.

"Mark Martin, Goose Pond manager, Arlington, gave us our first bluebird and kestrel boxes," recalled Hess. "The late Carol McDaniel of the Lafayette County Bluebird Society was a great mentor, too."

For two decades, Hess has monitored a 25-nest box bluebird trail, as well as 10 kestrel houses. "Growing up I was fascinated with purple martins that used the house my parents erected for them," said Hess.

He now participates in two Christmas Bird Counts each year. "While we often see new bird species, we're also counting fewer bird numbers," Hess observed.

In noting that birds need insects, Hess said: "We should plant and restore native habitat with insect conservation in mind."

Darrel Eberhardt

Lifetime Achievement Award

Darrel Eberhardt, of Hixton, received the 2024 Lifetime Achievement Award. President Steve Sample noted: "Over the last 17 years, Darrel has fledged over 10,000 bluebirds in his nest boxes. He has educated countless numbers of folks about how to monitor their own trails."



A retired milk hauler, Eberhardt was a delegate to the Wisconsin Conservation Congress and Wisconsin Wild Turkey Study Committee for many years.

"I was introduced to bluebirding by the late Dr. Kent Hall of the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point," said Eberhardt. He got his first five bluebird nest boxes from a member of the Jackson County Bird Club.

Now he has 116 bluebird nest boxes which he regularly monitors. "The best thing people can do for bluebirds is to start a trail and properly manage it," said Eberhardt. "Give 'em a home!"

He is also a believer in joining and being active in bird and conservation groups. "They provide lots of good information, help and camaraderie," Eberhardt added.

In accepting the award, he said: "I appreciate this award and BRAW's work on behalf of bluebirds."

Barb Allen

Carol McDaniel Bluebird Award

Barb Allen, of Green Bay, received the 2024 Carol McDaniel Bluebird Award. Carol McDaniel was a past president of BRAW, plus a statewide and national leader in rescuing the Eastern Bluebird from the brink of extinction.

According to President Steve Sample, "the purpose of the award is to recognize persons who have demonstrated a strong dedication to the restoration of the Eastern Bluebird."

The retired dental office manager recalled that her



interest in birds started when she was very young. “My sister and I would often get up at 5:00 a.m. just to see and hear the birds,” Allen noted.

She started setting up bluebird trails in 2010 with the help of Dr. Kent Hall, one of BRAW’s founders. From a modest start with 30 houses, Allen now monitors 428 nest boxes in five counties. This

year those boxes fledged 666 bluebirds, plus many other cavity nesters.

Sample noted that: “As a BRAW County Contact, Allen has worked diligently to increase the number of nest box monitors and boost blue production in Marinette, Brown, Door, Kewaunee, Florence and Oconto counties.”

Allen suggested that folks can carry on McDaniel’s legacy “by supporting bird conservation groups, plus cutting back on their use of pesticides to increase food producing plants for insects and birds.”

Les Rhines

Educator of the Year Award

Les Rhines, of Plymouth, received the 2024 Educator of the Year Award.

According to President Steve Sample, “Rhines has led the way in educating the public about the Purple Martin and environmental issues.”

The retired Lakeshore Technical College instructor’s interest in birds started at a young age. Rhines recalls the yellow canaries his grandmother raised and sold for extra income. His father maintained a flock of English Trumpeter show pigeons.

Rhines’ parents also hosted Purple Martins in a high-rise apartment style nest box. Today he is president of the Wisconsin Purple Martin Association (WPMA).

As for as helping birds today and in the future, Rhines said: “It is essential that organizations like BRAW and WPMA educate folks about our changing climate and how best to help birds.”

In accepting his award, Rhines noted: “Like most of us, we don’t expect accolades for what we do. We just do it because we love birds.”



Tim Eisele

Communicator of the Year Award

Tim Eisele, of Madison, received the 2024 Communicator of the Year Award. The long-time contributing writer for the *Wisconsin Outdoor News* was cited for his “efforts on behalf of birds, conservation and the environment.”

According to President Steve Sample, Eisele has “worked to educate the public about birds and their habitat needs.”

In reflecting on his contributions, Eisele noted: “Throughout my career, I have always been interested in writing about birds and conservation organizations that help birds.”

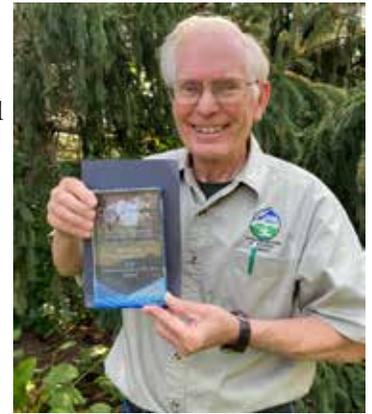
Eisele’s interest in birds began on family outings. “Those outdoor trips really opened my eyes to all species of birds,” he said.

Graduate studies at UW-Madison with Professor Joe Hickey, and Drs. Fred and Fran Hamerstrom, plus working at the Wisconsin DNR “increased my appreciation for all natural resources,” he added.

Eisele and his wife, Linda, installed bluebird nest boxes on their Crawford County property, which features a restored prairie.

To help birds now and in the future, Eisele suggests “joining good conservation organizations, standing up for habitat protection, and supporting candidates who do.”

Upon receiving his award, Eisele said: “This award is a very nice honor. I will continue to share knowledge about land management practices that can help birds.”



Sumner Matteson

Facilitator of the Year Award

Sumner Matteson, of Madison, received the Facilitator of the Year Award. President Steve Sample noted that “Matteson has helped inform the public about birds by working with the Wisconsin DNR’s communication staff.”

Significantly, Matteson supports a continuing effort started in 1986 by the DNR and BRAW’s citizen scientists to restore a declining population of Eastern Bluebirds in the state.

He recalls first expressing his passion for birds in pre-school: “My pre-school teacher helped me make a guide to birds. Then in sixth grade, my math teacher scolded me for being more interested in a Scarlet Tanager outside than the lesson inside.”

A long-time researcher of shorebirds and colonial waterbirds, Matteson observed that in bird conservation: “We need to be proactive in identifying and protecting habitats that birds need for nesting, migration stopovers, and over-wintering.”

“Being able to work with nearly 50 conservation groups and state agencies on behalf of bird conservation has been a privilege,” added Matteson, an avian ecologist with the DNR.

In accepting the award, Matteson cited the importance of groups like BRAW in educating the public about threatened cavity nesters.



Bluebirds Like Golf Courses!

By Peggy Gierhart and Ellen Neal

Last year, on a cool November day, birding friends Peggy and Ellen decided to visit one of Peggy's old golfing haunts looking for Red Crossbills that had been reported there recently. Peggy knows the golf course well, as she used to regularly coach a women's golf team at that location, which was helpful as the grounds are massive. The City of Madison-owned property includes two 18-hole courses and a beautiful habitat for a variety of bird species. Pat Ready joined us that morning to bird, and as we walked the grounds Pat started talking about the open habitats bluebirds prefer and thought the golf course could make for a successful bluebird trail.

Earlier that year, Ellen had monitored her first trail at a Madison park with several successful tree swallow nests despite persistent house sparrows. Pat had been encouraging, telling her it was a great trail to "earn her stripes" in bluebird monitoring! Since then both Peggy and Ellen had been looking for an established trail to co-monitor, that would be more promising for bluebird nests. They had not considered starting a new trail from scratch, but with Pat's knowledge and Peggy's old connection to the course we were quickly granted permission to install bluebird boxes throughout the Yahara Hills Golf Course that fall.

We installed six beautiful houses mid-November supplied by BRAW. We borrowed golf carts and scouted locations on the edge of large mowed lawns avoiding shrubs that attract



wrens, but with larger trees nearby for potential bluebirds to perch. At the start of spring we were ready! Every 7-10 days Peggy and Ellen monitored the trail together or took turns riding solo, borrowing a golf cart to maneuver around golfers and visit our 6 boxes. Often, we were approached by curious golfers, which provided a lot of opportunities to educate them about our native bird species.

One of our favorite moments this season was when a successful bluebird family was still visiting the box after fledging. Mom was already laying new eggs for her second brood, while her recent fledglings were sitting on the roof. It was a grand family affair that Peggy captured in the included photo.

Ultimately, our new bluebird trail was incredibly successful in its first season! 4 out of our 6 boxes were used by bluebirds, with two of the nesting pairs having a second brood. There were 28 eggs total, with some eggs/chicks lost to a presumed raccoon attack and then a wren attack. A total of 21 bluebirds fledged with an additional 21 tree swallows. We opted on not placing boxes near the

golf course's clubhouse, which likely contributed to no house sparrows attempting to nest in any of our boxes. Wren activity increased mid-summer when vegetation got taller and tree swallows still dominated at least 2 boxes through the season. We moved one house mid-summer, but plan to move 2 more boxes to continue reducing these incidents.

Having the opportunity to be bluebird monitors and establish our own trail provided Peggy and Ellen with an incredibly enriching and educational experience. It was fun to meet up weekly and visit our bluebirds, tracking their progress and watching the parents fiercely protect their homes while working together as a team to care for their chicks. We are proud of the trail's success and are excited to take what we learned into next season!



Peggy Gierhart, Pat Ready and Ellen Neal mount a new nest box at Yahara Golf Course.

Special thanks to Pat Ready for your ongoing support. We could not have done it without your bluebird wisdom!

Fall 2024 Donations

Duane Schwab, \$100
 Norman Lange, \$5
 Melissa Hoff, \$25
 Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance, \$150
 Jeff and Lynn Dodge, \$10
 Len Place, \$25
 Dave and Sandy Fonger, \$10
 Mary Sobol, \$300
 Virginia Behrend, \$25

Jane Prindle, \$50
 Norbert Pritzl, \$30 nest box
 David Gugger, \$75
 John and Cindy Loehlein, \$25
 Darrell Zietlow, \$20
 Mike Trieschmann, \$30
 James and Cynthia Saladino, \$10 research
 William Rumpf, \$10
 Kevin Freson, \$10
 Laurel Heil, \$25

In Memory of
Ruth Anne Monaghan
Paul and Bonnie Biehl Family,
\$206.46
In Memory of Robert Holtz
Michael Schultz, \$103.48
William Holtz, \$87
Jeffrey Lehrmann, \$50
Salzman Laboratory, \$75
In Memory of Dr. Kent Hall
Charles Lautermilch, \$51.99

Garden Expo 2025!

Once again BRAW will be at the WHA Garden & Landscape Expo in Madison February 7-9. Look for our double booth in the main exhibit hall. We plan to present *Attracting Eastern Bluebirds and Other Cavity Nesters* on Saturday and Sunday in one of the large meeting rooms.

Volunteers are needed to help at the booth any of the three days. Contact Steve Sample at 708/606-8070 or ssample@gmail.com for more information.

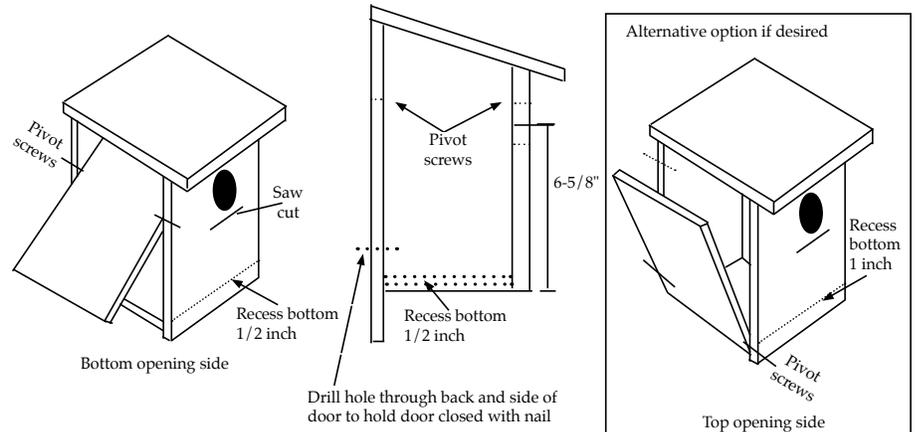
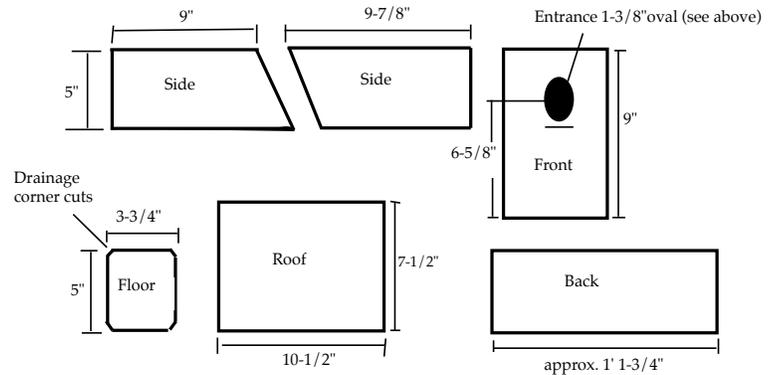
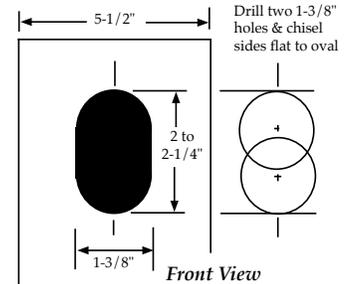


Winter is a good time to build new nest boxes for next spring.

NABS style Bluebird Box

Cedar, 7/8" lumber preferred.
 8" wide for top
 6" wide for back, front, sides & bottom
 All angle cuts are 10 degrees
 Roof is 7-1/2" wide x 10-1/2" long
 Sides 9-7/8" long x 5" wide
 Floor is 5" x 3-3/4"
 Back & front 5-1/2" wide

Recommended Oval Hole Plan



Use the Van Ert Trap to Solve Your House Sparrow Problems



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

Order traps online from Van Ert Enterprises at vanerttraps.com

Approximately \$10.00 + Shipping

Installation is quick and simple provided there is a screw intact.

Membership Renewal Information

By Valerie Van Winkle, Membership Services

If the address label of your *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter reads Winter 2024 next to your name, then your membership expires this month, and you need to renew immediately. If you are an online member, you won't see this clue so please consider marking the expiration date on your calendar when you sign up. We don't want you to miss a single newsletter!

The next issue of the *Wisconsin Bluebird* goes into production in February and will be mailed in March. Memberships received after February 15 may not be processed in time to receive the Spring newsletter. Consider an extended or one-time \$300 Life Membership. **Please fill out the membership renewal form on this page and send it with your check or money order to: BRAW, Inc., Valerie Van Winkle, PO Box 628492, Middleton, WI 53562.**

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

BRAW, Inc. Membership and Wisconsin Bluebird Subscription

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

- \$10 Gift Annual Membership (Online subscription)
- \$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)

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

\$100 for nest box trail

\$_____ for bluebird research

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

(Contributions to BRAW are tax deductible.)

Check appropriate boxes:

This is a renewal

This is a new membership

This is a GIFT membership

Enclosed please find my check \$ _____

Mail this membership request to:

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

We do not share or sell BRAW's membership list.

If you have any questions, please contact Valerie at 847-302-5684 or ripvws@gmail.com.

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Vice-president Brad Branwell-Zinda, 3342 Wilson Ave., Plover WI 54467
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Secretary Gene Kroupa, gkroupa@tds.net (term to 12/25)

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

Director Dave Lucey, Cross Plains, WI • dklucey@chorus.net
(term to 12/24)

Director Mary Sobol, 5205 Broadhead St., McFarland WI 53558
msobolontime@gmail.com (term to 12/24)

Director Mike Crawford, 817 5th St., Waunakee, WI 53539
608/213-1806 • 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 (term to 12/24)

Website: Director Andy Garcia-Rivera, 10 Darien Circle, Madison, WI 53717 • agarciarivera@gmail.com (term to 12/24)

Director Gail Smith, Middleton, WI 53562 • gsmithbird@gmail.com
(term to 12/24)

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

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>



BRAW supports these bird friendly organizations.

southern wisconsin
BIRD ALLIANCE



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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

Patrick Ready
815 Sky Ridge Dr.
Madison, WI 53719
www.braw.org



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Improving Bluebird Numbers!

See page 3

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

BRAW Photo Contest Winners

By Patrick Ready

This year there were 24 photos entered in the contest. The winner appears on the cover and here are second and third place photos as well as two Honorable Mentions. The **Camera Company** of Madison judged the contest. No BRAW board or members were part of the decision process. I want to thank Tim and his staff at the Camera Company for the difficult decisions they made.



Second place went to Ruth Smith of Madison.



Third place went to Molly Winder of Green Bay.



Janna Soerens of Sheboygan.



Jenny Bailey of Mazomanie.

THE CAMERA COMPANY