



41 Years

Summer 2026
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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 Dr. Lawrence Zeleny.

2026 BRAW Convention Set

See Page 3



Marjorie Rhine

Inside this issue:

President's Report - 2 • BRAW Convention - 3 • County Contact News - 4

Consider That First Flight - 5 • Cavity Nesters Guide - 6 • Can Bluebirds Do Well in an Urban Setting? - 8

Snakes Sneak a Bluebird Meal - 10 • Turf Wars - 11 • Fifty Years of Bluebird Recovery - 12

Supporting Bluebirds Through Community Effort - 13 • Bluebird Life Cycle - 16

Is It Time to Renew Your Membership?

President's Report

By Steve Sample

Right now (May 4th) feels more like March. The huge swing of temperatures from one day to the next can have a significant effect on nesting success. But I don't have to tell you that, I know.

We have found by looking at the last 10 years or so of data, fledging success rates have been impacted by the weather. Also, harsh winter weather in southern states, like Texas, can crimp the number of spring breeding bluebirds in Wisconsin.

But on the bright side, thanks to BRAW's 2026 Nest Box Replacement Program, returning bluebirds found 125 new nest boxes waiting for them. Free to members as of February 1st, funding came from your donations designated for nest boxes and trail building. A special "thank you"



goes to Mary Sobol, Val Van Winkle and Dave Lucey for distribution, and to Gene Birr for building the boxes.

Board member Tom Moser has volunteered to head a committee focusing on BRAW's trail building program in cemeteries called *Nest in Peace*. Gene Kroupa started the program years back which has proven very successful.

The committee has helpful information about getting permission and siting the nest boxes. Contact Tom at tmoser83@gmail.com. The fall state convention will feature Jay Utley talking about his experiences in starting, maintaining and monitoring cemetery trails.

Speaking of the fall convention on September 12th at the Horicon Marsh Education & Visitor Center, there will be a full slate of informative talks and plenty of time to ask our bluebird experts questions. Cost for attending and the meal will be a little higher, because the rental fee for the facility has jumped substantially. Hope to see you there! Steve

Summer 2026 Donations

Judy and Phil Loy, \$25 nest box
Carol Ramage, \$25 nest box
Jackie Rose, \$50
Laura Cominetti
and Steve Richter, \$15
Rodney Courtier, \$20 nest box
William Prue, \$55 nest box
Sharon Willoughby, \$1000
Len Place, \$50
Anne Gunther, \$25
Sally Reimer, \$100 nest box
Ken Jalowitz, \$150 nest box
Rita Gundry, \$30 nest box
Darlene Jakusz, \$10 nest box
Betty Dieckhoff, \$55 nest box
Christopher Jamieson, \$30 nest box
Mike Morgan, \$300 nest box
Sue Hunt, \$10
Sandy Rickey, \$40 nest box
Dale Luedtke, \$5 nest box
Maynard and Patti Nigbor, \$20 nest box
Visit Rome, \$250 research
Ruby Thomas, \$75 newsletter
Wild Birds Unlimited/Whitney
Froelich, \$50
Jay Brooks, \$50 nest box

James Heinen, \$25
Deb Pavick, \$10 nest box
Dale Marsden, \$10
Pat Horkan, \$50
Tom and Mary Nelesen, \$10
Rebecca Schmoll, \$10
Julie Melton, \$50
Mark Gruber, \$15 nest box
Ernie Schultz, \$30 nest box
Laurence Liegel, \$40 nest box
Mary Dahm, \$15 nest box
Bill Grise, \$25
Charles Jones, \$25
Kris Perlberg, \$30 nest box
Michelle Mellencamp, \$10 nest box
Sharon Johnson, \$45 nest box
John and Scarlet Sweeney, \$25 nest box
Melissa Hoff, \$25
Barbara Jones, \$25 research
Rich Swanson, \$10
Sara Sonntag, \$25

In Memory of John A. Zeinert
Carol Rosenberg, \$100

In Memory of Ruth Gertrude Meier
Schoenwetter, \$50

BRAW New Members

Savanna Dahl, Wisconsin Rapids
Kathryn Liesch, Wauwatosa
Bill Sonzogno, Verona
Mandy Sonzogno, Cross Plains
Debra Reak, West Bend
William Schlaak, Menasha
Sarah Skebba, Mequon
Rodney Kuczmarski, Rhinelander
Kimberly Paleka, Lake Geneva
Greg Grosser, Cedarburg
Dominick Reuter, Madison
Len Gracyalny, Green Bay
Mark & Gayle Boerschinger, Green Bay
Vicki Eckroth, Dousman
Mark Gruber, Hilbert
Emily Brookhyser, Waunakee
Jean Mansavage, Nekoosa
Sergio Marrero, Madison
Allysa Nash, Prairie du Chien
Violet Kipp, Kewaunee



**KEY STAT
ABOUT
BLUEBIRDS**

Thanks to member donations, bluebirds had 125 new nest boxes waiting for them this past spring. That's the number of free nest boxes distributed as part of BRAW's Nest Box Replacement Program which ended May 15th.

Under the leadership of Mary Sobol, Val Van Winkle, Dave Lucey and Steve Sample, members could get up to three free new replacement nest boxes built by Gene Birr.

2025 Nest Box Data Corrections

By Steve Fallon, Data Collection

Try as I might to get things right, there are always a number of corrections to be made. This brings our total of bluebirds fledged to **16,621**. Thanks to all our monitors. Have a great season! -Steve

Name	County	BBs Fledged
Dale & Doris Moody	Iowa	264
Diane Morgan	LaFayette	53
Gary Riggle	Marinette	5

Save the Date!

2026 BRAW Convention

September 12th, Horicon Marsh Visitor Center

N7725 Hwy 28, Horicon, WI

Plan on a day of meeting friends and learning.

9:00 – 2:30 PM



Register for the BRAW Convention

The BRAW Annual Convention will be held on Saturday, September 12th at Horicon Marsh Visitor's Center, Hwy 28, Horicon, WI.

Conference fees:

\$15.00: Registration without lunch per person

\$35.00: Includes registration & lunch per person

Lunch: Choice of ham & cheese or turkey & cheese on whole wheat or white bread (indicate preference); cole slaw, dessert bar – cost \$15 prepaid. If registering for more than one person, please indicate food choice for each person. Vegetarian available upon request.

Registration is paid in advance. Deadline: September 7. Please include name/address of each person registering.

Mail check payment to:

BRAW
Joanie Haugen,
9773 Vermont Church Rd.
Black Earth, WI 53515

Program speakers for the convention

Jay Utley shares his experiences in his first season with his *Nest in Peace Bluebird Cemetery Tour*. He covers ideas and challenges that include: partnering with cemetery personnel, placing nest boxes, monitoring nest boxes, data recording, and journaling bluebird activity, plus ideas for showing gratitude for the Cemetery partnership.

Steven Thompson has always had a unique way of perceiving the world of nature. This innate ability drove him into photography, which in return, allows him to show others the little wonders in this world. He tries his hardest to show the boundless beauty of nature. Steven had a solo exhibition at **Thelma Sadoff Center for the Arts** in Fond du Lac.

Hillary Neff started falconry in 2016 and has successfully flown and hunted with multiple red-tailed hawks, American kestrels, merlins, and a Cooper's hawk. Her falconry journey started when she was a kid and read *My Side of the Mountain* written by Jean Craighead George and she was obsessed with birds and raptors ever since.

SILENT AUCTION

Are you creative with sewing, painting, woodworking, photography or other crafts? Use your imagination for the silent auction. It doesn't need to be bluebird related.

Help support BRAW with your donation or plan to buy an item and support BRAW's bluebird trail development.

Because of limited space in the room all items must be preapproved by chairperson Brad via email: brad.zinda@gmail.com

ANNUAL CONVENTION PRE-REGISTRATION FORM

Please indicate the number of lunches for your party at \$20 each: _____. **Include check for full amount.**

___Ham ___Turkey ___White bread ___Wheat bread

___Vegetarian ___ registration only (\$10) no lunch

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Return form with payment (to BRAW) by September 7 to:

BRAW c/o Joanie Haugen
9773 Vermont Church Rd., Black Earth, WI 53515

COUNTY CONTACT

NEWS

Gene Birr, CC Chair

Email: gbbird22@gmail.com

Cell: 920-461-0108

Most early returns I am receiving from other monitors and contacts are reporting good to average numbers of bluebird nests and eggs. This despite the late snowstorm in most of Wisconsin and the cold, wet spring that followed. But the seemingly early return of many bluebirds in late February and early March, has resulted in the death of some male bluebirds. I found 3 males dead in one box at the Patriot Golf Club in Abrams during my first monitoring in mid April. Barb Allen also is reporting the death of 3 bluebirds, each in a separate box. She suggests that perhaps we begin to count these deaths, along with those that are caused by sparrows, to determine how they and the harsh spring weather is affecting the overall bluebird production this season.

We have a need for a monitor who may be interested in the Riverside Golf Club in Clintonville in Waupaca County. The current monitor with whom I alternated weeks checking the trail last year is unable to do so this season due to his serious health concerns. If you are interested in this 25 box trail that has no house sparrows at all, contact myself or Brad, the Waupaca CC.

Portage, County, Waupaca and Wood Counties, Brad Branwell

This last fall and early spring I have been busy replacing and relocating boxes on several trails in central Wisconsin. One key to continued success in bluebird nesting is not only monitoring boxes but also maintaining the boxes as well. Over time, boxes start to crack or warp, allowing rain to get in the boxes and getting nests wet and cold. This is a big reason why BRAW offers the nest box replacement program, which was very successful this year. Another key is relocating boxes that don't produce bluebirds after a couple of years. Habitat can and does change, so moving a non-productive box can help increase blue-

bird production on your trail.

I am still looking for a replacement monitor for a trail located in the Iola-Scandinavia area, north of Waupaca in Waupaca County. This is a 17 nest box trail located in prime bluebird habitat in the rolling countryside hills of Waupaca County. If you live in or near this area and are looking to start monitoring your own trail, or possibly expand your existing trail, please get in contact with me. Email: brad.zinda@gmail.com

Marinette and Florence Counties, Barb Allen

This year, I'm very excited to be training a few new monitors for Brown County. I also have one new monitor for Marinette County but am still looking for my first monitor in Florence County. Again, if you own property in Florence County and could monitor a trail, please give me a call.

With the unusual early warm weather in Wisconsin followed by the huge snow and then cold temperatures, our southern wintering bluebirds returned too early. I found three dead male bluebirds in three separate birdhouses in early April. I was thankful that there was only a single bluebird in these nestboxes as I have found as many as four male bluebirds dead in a single box in previous cold Springs.

This year I found something that I have never seen in my 20 years of bluebirding (see photo) - a nestbox with 2 inches of what looked like dried doo doo, but upon closer examination found it to be large mushrooms that had been dried for a winter snack. Investigating, I found out that squirrels eat mushrooms, even the poison type mushrooms that humans cannot eat. They often dry them in trees. Surprisingly, I found mushrooms in four different nestboxes in separate locations in two different counties. I also found a red squirrel who decided to nest in a nestbox. This box did have unusual nests that I found in the Spring and Fall last year.

It seems like this is the earliest I have had so many bluebird nests started and many already have eggs in them. I found one bluebird nest in early April with 2 very cold eggs one of which was broken and looked like a

frozen egg so I did remove the eggs and nest hoping the bluebird would start over when it gets a little warmer.

There also seems to be more tree swallows than I have ever seen in Northern Wisconsin. Hopefully there will not be too many fights for the nestboxes. Last year I saw a vicious fight between a bluebird and tree swallow where they ended up on the ground fighting. The temperatures can warm up so that all birds will find enough to eat so we can have a record total of bluebirds and other songbirds fledged. GOOD LUCK TO ALL OF YOU!!

Waukesha County, Steve Vidmar

Hello everyone, This April has been very wet and cold here. We set a record of over 9 inches of rain in April. All -time record in S.E. Wisconsin. Not good for Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, etc. that depend on insects. We have some egg laying going on, but has been very slow. As of today the weather is still cold. I attended the Brookfield Bird Bonanza in Brookfield at the Wildbirds Unl. Store. I had good company accompanying, and helping me. Amy Harriman and Christine McDaniel also came and made the whole day enjoyable! We had over 400 people stop at our table, hopefully got some new members, we raised some money for BRAW, and we also got a donation of 250 ft. Eastern Cedar to build more birdhouses for BRAW! Christine has the information along with several good photos taken during the event! I also want to give a shout out to the Waukesha Girl Scouts 10145 for building and donating 2 Cedar Bluebird Houses that they made themselves! They have already found a home to attract some more Bluebirds. Thank you for all the people that made this possible.

Racine County, Rick Fare

This looks like it will be a very productive season for bluebirds. So far, between my 2 trails I have 62 bluebird eggs laid. About 50% of my 41 boxes have bluebird activity. Normally I would be happy with 40%. I wasn't expecting a good year because of the bad weather in the south where the bluebirds wintered.

I will be busy this year giving 7 bluebird presentations. These include a box building event and a couple of box checking walks. Both Kenosha and Racine libraries will be partnering in some of them, along with 3 Nature Centers.

I wish everyone a fun and productive bluebird season.

Door County, Charlotte Lukes

I have only 20 monitors in the Door County group.

Several have moved away and I'm not sure if all of them will be checking nest boxes on a regular basis.

I was asked by one monitor to come there and help him with his nest boxes, which I did this week.

We made a few site changes and he will get back to me to see if these made for any improvements.

John and I are back to having 21 boxes in our trail.

Lukes-Maring nest box Report for May 3, 2026. We now have 6 empty boxes. One box had a complete nest for 3 weeks with no activity so we removed the nest. That will allow a new bird to use the box. A new bird in the area will not use a box if there's "someone else's" nest in there. That's why doing weekly monitoring and keeping good records will help the bluebirds.

Last week there were 7 boxes with

warm eggs (warm means the hen is incubating them) and this week we have 11 boxes with warm eggs for a total of 53 bluebird eggs.

Two boxes have cold eggs. The hen might still be laying. They lay one egg per day and do not begin incubating until all are laid.

One box has a complete nest of tree swallows and the pair was very defensive of us looking into the box despite the fact that there were no eggs yet!

One box has a few grasses, meaning there is interest in it.

That's it for our 21 nest boxes. Any other Door County monitors please call or email me if you want help with your nest boxes. 920-493-0187.

Brown, Oconto, and Outagamie Counties, Gene Birr

I presented my annual bluebird talk at the Wild Birds Unlimited store in Green Bay to ten people on March 21. On April 25 Steve Mayer and I manned a BRAW booth at the Earth Day event at the Mosquito Hill Nature Center in New London, along with 6 other bird focused conservation groups.

A week earlier I had assisted Alicia and several other volunteers from Mosquito Hill in setting up a 6 box new bluebird trail at Daufen Memorial Park in Dale, WI near the

park's prairie garden on April 15. On May 9, I will be in attendance at a booth representing BRAW at the 1st annual Apple Blossom Festival at the USA soccer complex in Appleton during this 3-day family fun event which is expected to draw at least a thousand visitors. The WPMA will be alongside represented by Dick Nickolai, with whom Steve and I also be participating in a Bird City event at the Schleg Gardens in Veteran's Memorial Park, also in Appleton, on July 18.

Dane County, Pat Ready

The spring weather here has been like Jeckle & Hyde! Nice for a day or two and then back to winter like conditions. However the Bluebirds seem to be okay and nesting has been going on with only a few reports of failed nests.

As of May 17, I have one nest of 5 fledged! They stayed all winter and got an early start. Not sure where they were finding food at times but somehow they managed!

On two of the trails I check I am down a pair compared to recent years. May have been due to some bad weather on their winter sites. I did not see any reports from the southern states of poor conditions and winter losses.

Consider That First Flight

By Dave Lucey

When BRAW sells or gives away a bluebird box, we often get two questions from the new owner. One is "where should I put it" and the other often is "what direction should I have the opening of the box face"? Of the first, there is usually no disagreement – the box needs to be in an open area, low cut grass near by, and several other considerations. The second question can result in several different compass directions given, with southeast the most often provided. This is usually chosen as it is the less likely direction that wind driven rain and cold to be entering the box. Although I would agree with that advise, I would like the new owner and existing owners to consider something else.

When the young leave that box for the first time, it has been my experience that they can fly in straight line for only short distances before they get exhausted and have to land. A box facing a prairie, marsh, or worse yet, a pond, will result in the fledgling landing in a terrain that may make it difficult to emerge and get in flight again. Accordingly, I face my boxes toward what is considered a target – a tree, shrub or something where they can hope-



fully land above ground and be easily fed and tended to by the parent. Those deep into high vegetation may struggle to reach a safe elevation where they can attempt a second flight. Boxes properly constructed with sloping roofs, recessed bottoms, and vents that can be closed in cold weather, will address the concern about inclement weather. Consider what the young will face on their first big adventure and plan accordingly.

Nest Guide to Cavity Nesters

by Patrick Ready/BRAW

Eastern Bluebird

Fine or coarse grass, pine needles, lined with fine grasses. Eggs are light blue or rarely white.



Wisconsin Bluebird

Tree Swallow

Similar to bluebirds, grass & straw, lined with feathers when eggs are laid. Eggs are white and elongated.



Black-Capped Chickadee

Moss, fine grass, lined with animal hair. Chickadees sometimes cover their eggs with the fur when they leave the nest. Eggs are white with fine brown speckles.



House Wren

Sticks and twigs jammed in tight. Lined with a small amount of fine grass. Often builds dummy nest with a few sticks but no grass lining.



House Sparrow

Grass, straw, feathers, paper, plastic, etc. and they usually swirl the grass upward to fill the box, then tunnel down in. Sometimes when a nest is first started it may be hard to tell what species is nesting. Wait a day or two to see how the nest develops. Feathers and wrappers early on with some grass pieces are definite signs of House Sparrows.



Above: Peterson box filled with straw, grass, and garbage indicate a House Sparrow nest.



Middle: Eggs-white or grey with brown specs



Left: Beginning nest. Similar to bluebird and Tree Swallow but note chicken feathers and debris = signs it's a House Sparrow.

Species Identification of cavity nesters

Male & female Eastern Bluebird



Female & male Tree Swallow.



Black-capped Chickadee, sexes similar.

House Wren, sexes similar.



Can Bluebirds Do Well In an Urban Setting?

By Gene Kroupa

There are over 154 parks in Milwaukee alone, as well as another 307 in Madison covering 6,000 acres, not to mention thousands more in towns and cities across the state.

Add in another 2,190 public schools, 24 University of Wisconsin system campuses, 16 technical and 23 non-profit independent colleges, plus business parks and corporate grounds, and you come up with plenty of urban places where bluebirds could find a home.

But the question arises: How well will bluebirds do in an urban environment filled with people, predators and noise? One would think that the quiet solitude of open spaces like rural pastures, roadsides, fields and cemeteries would suit their needs better.

"Not necessarily so," says Professor Kiersten Newtoff of Montgomery College (MC) in Germantown, Maryland. Professor Newtoff and her honor student researchers have looked at different aspects of how urbanization affects bluebirds.

They monitor and analyze data from 75 nest boxes located in trails on three college campuses. When these data are compared with those gleaned from more "ideally" placed nest boxes, they tell a surprising story.

"Our most disturbed site, UM Baltimore Campus, had a 60% fledging rate compared with only 32% at West Friendship Park which has very little human activity," noted Newtoff.



Banding nestlings will help Professor Newtoff conduct bluebird site fidelity research. (Kiersten Newtoff)



Banded bluebirds will supply subjects for site fidelity research. (Tom Bawroski)

Success meant having at least one fledgling exit a nest box.

As not only a scientist but also a realist, Newtoff ascribed the better performance of bluebird pairs in high human traffic urban settings to lower predation. "We routinely found Black Ratsnakes in boxes with lost eggs and chicks," she said. "The nearby habitat of tall grasses and wide-open fields with very few humans around is what Ratsnakes favor."



Nestboxes sited on college campuses by Professor Newtoff have proven highly productive. (Kiersten Newtoff)

Bottomline, this and other projects conducted by Newtoff point to a key conclusion: "The research shows that we should be taking advantage of urban lands for siting more bluebird trails," observed Newtoff.

But Newtoff wants to take the initial findings several steps beyond predation. She wants to see how urbanization affects nesting bluebirds' behavior, such as **boldness** in defending eggs and nestlings, by measuring the distance allowed in approaching the box before the female flies away.

A possibly related defensive personality trait is **aggression**. Perhaps urban bluebirds are better at recognizing threats, thus triggering more aggressive behavior to ward off predators.

And finally, Newtoff wants to look at **site fidelity** by returning bluebird pairs within and between nesting seasons.

In order to check site fidelity and other behavioral aspects, Newtoff became a federally permitted bird bander. She and her students expect to band at least 100 adult bluebirds and 500 nestlings this season to help answer questions about returning bluebirds and their use of the same nest boxes for first, second and third nesting attempts.

Meanwhile BRAW is doing its own field research about placing nest boxes in an urban environment. Paul Noeldner, Dane County contact, with help from the Madison Parks Department, has been leading an effort to recruit volunteers and conduct regular monitor training sessions.

So far, Noeldner and his volunteer Madison Friends of Urban Nature (FUN) Bird Buddies team have helped start or maintain 43 trails with over 400 nest boxes. A fact sheet (*Bluebird Trail Recipe*) about setting up bluebird trails in urban spaces is available from BRAW that outlines the steps needed.

Placing nest boxes in public spaces allows city dwellers to see a native species up close. "Our biggest challenge for urban bluebirds is House Sparrows," said Noeldner. "Regular monitoring of nest boxes and early removal of sparrow nests is the key to controlling them. We don't recommend placing boxes in home yards."

Anecdotal feedback suggests



Special signs mark urban trails in Madison. (Paul Noeldner)



Madison Parks District, Friends of Urban Wildlife Bird Buddies and BRAW conduct nest box building sessions. (Paul Noeldner)

that plastic fringe attached above and around the box opening might deter House Sparrows from entering. "BRAW is working with Ripon College to study this non-lethal method of House Sparrow control," said Dave Lucey, program coordinator.

Professor Newtoff plans to do urban bluebird boldness and aggression studies. (David Kinneer).



Professor Kiersten Newtoff gets set to release a study bluebird. (Kiersten Newtoff)

inator. Funding comes from member donations designated for research.

With an abundance of school grounds, BRAW is also working with staff on siting trails. Michelle Mellencamp, a BRAW County Contact in the Milwaukee area, has helped staff start trails at schools. "I've found that the bluebirds do well despite all of the noisy human activity," said Mellencamp. "However, sometimes we need to move unproductive boxes."

Mellencamp has also identified abandoned park trails in the Milwaukee area. "By refurbishing these trails, we are bringing bluebirds back to this important urban setting," she noted.

As far as introducing bluebird trails to corporate campuses, BRAW has helped American Family (AmFam) run a 34-nest box trail on its corporate campus by Madison. "Even with some nest boxes near walking trails with



Ratsnakes pose a bigger predation problem on less urban sites. (Kiersten Newtoff)

heavy human traffic, the bluebirds are still quite productive," said Wayne Rayfield, AmFam's Senior Facilities Land Management Specialist.

"The annual nesting results report for the season is a useful tool to measure urban trail productivity," concluded Steve Fallon, data director. "BRAW stands ready to help bluebirders who want to establish urban trails," added Steve Sample, president. Contact Sample at ssample@gmail.com.

Editor's Note: Funding for Newtoff's urbanization research came from the science department at Montgomery College and through different grants. Dr. Kevin Omland, of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, supplied helpful guidance for the project during her dissertation.



Bluebirding Tips: Snakes Sneak a Bluebird Meal

By Gene Kroupa

One day you open a nest box to see a healthy clutch of eggs or bluebird nestlings. A week later, nothing! It's a mystery where they went, but the culprit might be one we seldom think about: snakes.

Snakes can wriggle up a mounting pole and slip into the nest box opening, even one protected by a predator guard. But in protest you might say: "I've never seen a snake in a box or around the area."

Like cows, Wisconsin has quite a variety of snakes – 21 by one count, but only two venomous ones, the Eastern Massasauga and the Timber Rattler. In addition to the Butler's, Common and Plains Garter snakes, our state hosts the North American Blue Racer.

Appropriately, the Dairy State is home to the Milk Snake, as well as DeKay's Brown, Lined, Northern Ring-Necked, Eastern Ribbon, Prairie Ring-Necked, Eastern Hog-nosed, Queen, Red-Bellied, Smooth Green, and Western Ribbon snakes. Only the Common Water snake plies our waterways.

While some of these snakes might dabble in raiding nest boxes, it's more likely that their bigger cousins do the bulk of stealing. At the top of my suspect list are the Black Ratsnake, Bullsnae, and Eastern Fox.

Two of these snakes are listed as being a "species of special concern," which means they are not yet protected as being "threatened" or "endangered." They are often identified as residing in restricted or fragmented habitats. The Eastern Fox snake is listed as "common." However, it is illegal to harm or kill any of them.

The **Black Ratsnake** is a prime candidate for "Nest Robber of the Year" because numerous photos show it in the act or hanging out, gorged with bluebird nestlings or eggs. Sometimes called a Central or Gray Ratsnake, this powerful constrictor's preferred diet includes birds, rodents and lizards. It is found mainly in a few counties along the Mississippi and Wisconsin



Where present, Black Ratsnakes can pose a threat to nestlings. (Andrew Weitzel)

River valleys, featuring bluffs, prairies, oak forests, and agricultural land. At 5 to 6 feet in length, the Black Ratsnake is a skilled climber.

The **Bullsnae** is another large snake (5 to 7 feet) that has a taste for birds, small mammals and lizards. Most of the time you'll find it hidden away in a burrow in search of rodents. As a school-age kid walking behind a plow in search of fishing worms, I was shocked to have a Bullsnae thrown back against my legs. It's blotchy earthtone colored skin pattern, similar to that of a timber rattler, made me think for a split second that I was doomed. You are more likely to find a Bullsnae in the southern and western parts of Wisconsin.

Finally, the **Eastern Fox Snake** is another constrictor that is 4 to 5 ½ feet in length. The snake inhabits a wide range of habitat as it hunts birds and rodents. It can be seen in the afternoon looking for its main prey. When disturbed, the snake emits a pungent odor that helps with identification. Although found throughout Wisconsin, there is a particularly high concentration in the eastern part of the state, including the Green Bay / Door County area and Great Lakes shoreline marshes.

So, what to do if you suspect that a snake has snatched eggs or chicks? Cleaning out the box and wishing the bluebirds better luck with their next attempt is one option. Or to prevent future losses, you might try slipping a slick stove or vent/duct pipe baffle about 2 to 3 feet long down over the

top of the post (with a cap on top of the pipe). Wider 8-inch pipe is considered better than the 6-inch variety. Leave room for mounting the nest box above the baffle.

Snakes will wind their way up the pole and go inside the pipe where they should get stopped. The outside is slippery enough to also prevent raccoons, squirrels and cats from climbing up.

Plans for building the baffle are available from the Cornell University's NestWatch at <https://nestwatch.org> and the Ohio Bluebird Society at <https://ohiobluebirdsociety.org/about-bluebirds/bluebird-nestbox-baffles/>.



Snakes can be thwarted by installing a stove pipe baffle on the pole. (Karen Smith, Cornell University NestWatch)

Turf Wars!

By Patrick Ready, WB Editor

For the past 10 years or so I have been monitoring nest boxes on a private property along Overland Road in south-western Dane Co. In all those years I never saw a Tree Swallow around the nest boxes. For one thing there isn't any river, stream nor pond around to attract them to nest. While down there recently I witnessed several Tree Swallows fighting over a box the bluebirds had claimed after they fledged their first brood. I parked along the side of the road and captured some of the action. Hopefully on my next visit I will find the bluebird nest with eggs as they have a second brood.



Use the Van Ert Trap to Solve Your House Sparrow Problems



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

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



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

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



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



Fifty Years of Bluebird Recovery: Remembering Dr. Lawrence Zeleny

By Christene Mcdaniel

Many people who care about bluebirds today owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Lawrence Zeleny.

Often called the father of the modern bluebird conservation movement, his work inspired thousands of people to build nest boxes and establish bluebird trails across North America.

Through his writing, research, and personal dedication, he helped spark the recovery of the beloved Eastern Bluebird.

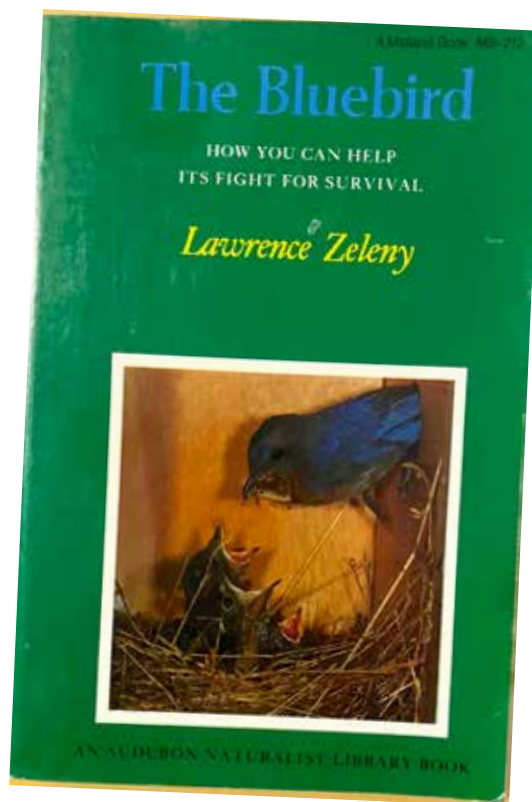
For me, however, Dr. Zeleny will always be remembered not only as a conservation pioneer, but also as a kind and generous mentor to a young girl who needed help.
A Childhood Memory

In 1979, when I was a young girl, a nesting pair of bluebirds at my home was killed by a neighbor's cat. Their tiny nestlings were still alive in the nest. I couldn't bear to leave them, so I carefully brought them inside and decided I would try to raise them myself.

Not knowing what to do, I went to the local library looking for answers. There I found a book written by Dr. Zeleny titled "The Bluebird: How You Can Help Its Fight for Survival". I read the book cover to cover, hoping it would tell me how to care for the fragile little birds now depending on me.

In an effort to save the tiny birds, I searched our fields for larva and then proceeded to dig up our family garden searching for earthworms, which I had to cut into small pieces to feed them.

Before long my family joined in the effort. Together we carefully gathered worms, determined to give those fragile nestlings every chance to survive. But I still had questions. In those days there was no internet, and I didn't know how to contact the author. So I did the only thing I could think of: I called the operator and asked if she could connect me to Dr. Zeleny. To my amazement, she did...



I still remember the kind, caring voice on the other end of the line. Dr. Zeleny asked me questions about the nestlings and patiently walked me through what I should do, step by step, to help them. He spoke to a young girl as though her efforts truly mattered—because to him, they did!

That brief conversation stayed with me for the rest of my life. It showed me that Dr. Zeleny was not only a scientist and conservation leader, but also someone who deeply cared about anyone willing to help bluebirds. From Minnesota Boy to Bluebird Champion Dr. Zeleny's love of bluebirds began early. Born on April 30, 1904, in Minneapolis, he grew up fascinated by birds. One of his earliest memories, he later recalled, was watching bluebirds splash in a bird-bath when he was a young boy. Even before entering high school, he was already building bluebird nest boxes. His passion for birds continued during his time at the University of Minnesota, where he studied chemistry and biochemistry, earning a B.S. in 1925, an M.S. in 1927, and a Ph.D. in 1930. Although professionally he worked as a biochemist with the USDA beginning in 1935—evenually becoming Chief of the Grain

Division—his passion for bluebirds never faded.

The Beginning of the Bluebird Revival In the 1950s, while working at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center in Maryland, Zeleny noticed something troubling: bluebirds were disappearing from the grounds. The arrival of non-native birds like the European Starling and the House Sparrow had created intense competition for nesting cavities.

In 1955 he built his first nest box outside his office. It was the beginning of a movement.

After retiring in 1966, Zeleny devoted himself fully to bluebird conservation. The following year he established a bluebird trail at the research center, beginning with just 13 nest boxes.

Eventually the trail stretched more than ten miles and included over 60 boxes.

A key feature of his design was the entrance hole—precisely one and a half inches in diameter. This size allowed bluebirds to enter while preventing starlings from taking over the nest. That simple but effective design is still widely used today.

Inspiring a Continent

Dr. Zeleny spread his message tirelessly. In 1968 he wrote *Bluebirds for Posterity*, followed in 1976 by his influential book *The Bluebird: How You Can Help Its Fight for Survival*. All proceeds from the book were donated to the North American Bluebird Society. His article "Song of Hope for the Bluebirds," published in *National Geographic* in 1977, brought national attention to the bluebird's plight and inspired thousands of people to install nest boxes and create bluebird trails.

In 1978 he founded the **North American Bluebird Society** and served as its first president. Under his influence, thousands of miles of bluebird trails were established across the United States and Canada, helping the species recover from a serious population decline.

Continuing the Trail

Today, the work begun by Dr. Zeleny continues across North America

through the dedication of volunteers, educators, and conservationists. In Wisconsin, members of the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin maintain thousands of nest boxes along roadsides, parks, cemeteries, golf courses, and nature preserves—bluebird trails that trace their origins directly to Zeleny’s vision.

Each spring when a pair of Eastern Bluebirds chooses a nest box along one of these trails, it is part of a living legacy. The simple wooden boxes monitored by Wisconsin volunteers reflect the same idea Dr. Zeleny championed decades ago: that ordinary people, working together, can make an extraordinary difference for wildlife. Every checked box, every recorded nest, and every fledgling that takes its first flight continues the work he began.

For those of us who place nest boxes, monitor trails, and celebrate the return of bluebirds each



Patrick Ready

A simple idea by Dr. Zeleny to place nest boxes along roadsides help save the Eastern Bluebird.

spring, we are not just caring for birds—we are carrying forward the legacy of a man whose passion helped bring bluebirds back to us.

A Lasting Legacy

Dr. Zeleny passed away on May 27, 1995, but his legacy continues. Today he is widely credited with helping reverse the decline of eastern bluebirds and with launching what is often called the “nest box movement”.

For many people, his legacy is measured in bluebird trails, research grants, and conservation organizations.

For me, it will always include something more personal: the memory of a compassionate man who took the time to help a young girl trying to save a handful of tiny birds. And in doing so, he helped inspire yet another person to care deeply about bluebirds.



Supporting Bluebirds Through Community Effort

By Christine McDaniel

Recently, BRAW had the pleasure of participating in a special event sponsored by **Wild Birds Unlimited of Brookfield**. Representing BRAW were Amy Harriman, Tom Moser, Steve Vidmar and myself. It was a wonderful opportunity to connect with the community and share our mission of supporting and sustaining eastern bluebird populations.

We are especially grateful to Wild Birds Unlimited for their generosity, as a portion of the event’s sales will be donated to BRAW. Their support helps us continue our work monitoring nest boxes, promoting conservation, and ensuring healthy habitats for bluebirds.

One of the highlights of the event was the involvement of local Girl Scout troop 10145. As part of their Bronze Award project, girls scouts, (pictured from left to right) Karlees Harrison, Madison Slepovic, Nisha Bhat, Talia Townsend, Natalie Weber, and Luisa Wehmeier, built and do-



nated two bluebird nest boxes to our organization. Their hope is that these boxes will provide safe nesting spaces for the bluebirds.

We would also like to extend our sincere thanks to David Moser, who generously donated enough cedar to build 100 additional bluebird boxes. This contribution will significantly expand our ability to provide safe nesting sites and support the continued growth of the bluebird population.

It was an inspiring weekend that showcased how community partnerships-between local businesses, youth groups, and conservation supporters-can make a meaningful impact. Together, we are helping to keep



bluebird populations stable and thriving for future generations.



Membership Renewal Information

By Valerie Van Winkle, Membership Services

If the address label of your Wisconsin Bluebird newsletter reads Summer 2026 next to your name, then your membership expires this month, and you need to renew immediately. If you are an online member, you won't see this clue so please consider marking the expiration date on your calendar when you sign up. We don't want you to miss a single newsletter!

The next issue of the Wisconsin Bluebird goes into production in August and will be mailed in September. Memberships received after August 15 may not be processed in time to receive the Fall newsletter. Consider an extended or one-time \$300 Life Membership.

Please fill out the membership renewal form on this page and send it with your check or money order to: BRAW, Inc., Valerie Van Winkle, PO Box 628492, Middleton, WI 53562

You can also renew your membership at www.braw.org 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)
- ☐ \$50 Individual or Family Annual Membership for 2 years (Printed copy mailed)
- ☐ \$75 Extended Individual or Family Annual Membership for 3 years (Printed copy mailed)
- ☐ \$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: _____

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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 dues, I wish to
contribute: \$_____

(Contributions to BRAW are tax deductible.)

Check appropriate boxes:

☐ This is a renewal.

☐ This is a new membership.

☐ This is a GIFT membership.

Enclosed please find my check \$ _____

Mail this membership request to:

BRAW, Inc.

Valerie Van Winkle

PO Box 628492

Middleton, WI 53562

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

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

BRAW ELECTED & APPOINTED OFFICERS

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

Vice-president: Position open

Brad Branwell-Zinda, Stevens Point, WI 54481 • brad.zinda@gmail.com
(term to 12/27)

Secretary Amy Harriman, Madison, WI • Amyharriman@gmail.com
(term to 12/26)

Director Tom Moser, Brookfield, WI 53045 tmoser83@gmail.com
(term to 12/26)

Director Steve Fallon, 974 Halcyon Days Ct., Oregon, WI 53575.
stevefall50@gmail.com (term to 12/25)

Director Dave Lucey, Cross Plains, WI • dklucy1@gmail.com
(term to 12/26)

Director Mary Sobol, McFarland WI 53558.
msobolontime@gmail.com (term to 12/26)

Director Mike Crawford, Waunakee, WI 53539.
608/213-1806 • mike@marieandmike.com (term to 12/26)

Director Patrick Ready, (Past President) Madison, WI 53719 • 608/239-0791 • birdsready@gmail.com (term to 12/27)

Director Sharon Johnson, Madison, WI • BEDBY8@charter.net (term to 12/26)

Director Andy Garcia-Rivera, Madison, WI 53717 • agarciarivera@gmail.com
(term to 12/26)

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

Director Christine McDaniel, cebmcDaniel@gmail.com (term to 12/26)

APPOINTED OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS:

Data Collection Officer: Steve Fallon (see above)

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

Finance: Joanie Haugen, 9773 Vermont Church Rd., Black Earth, WI 53515
• jlhcbcs@gmail.com

WI Bluebird Editor: Patrick Ready (see above)

Membership: Valerie Van Winkle, PO Box 628492, Middleton, WI 5356 • ripvws@gmail.com

Website: Andy Garcia-Rivera (see above)

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

BRAW LIAISONS:

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

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Check out the new BRAW Online Store! T-shirts, sweat-shirts, hats, and lots more all with the BRAW logo on them. Items can be ordered online at <https://braw.checkoutstores.com/>



BRAW supports
these bird friendly
organizations.



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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 erect-
ing, maintaining
and monitoring
nest boxes.



2026 Convention

See page 3

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Check the address label. If it says "Summer 2026," 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.