

Winter 2016
Vol. 31, 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

Over 26,000 Bluebirds Fledged!

see page 3



Eastern Bluebird - female: Patrick Ready

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IS THIS YOUR LAST ISSUE? MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS ARE DUE!

A Word from the Prez

One thing is for sure, you can never tell what Wisconsin's weather is going to be like. We just had one of the longest, nicest, and warmest falls on record. Had our bluebirds known they could have gone for another brood in late summer!!

Well we didn't end up too bad for the year. I wasn't sure we would get past the mid-20,000s since the state experienced some very cold nights in April and one particularly cold night on May 13. To make it over 26,000 was a pleasant surprise. Thanks to all those monitors that helped make it happen. A few key players I'd like to recognize are those with sizable trails, coordinate trails and also go the extra mile to give presentations about bluebirds to groups around the state. Gene Birr and Steve Meyer up north of the Green Bay area build boxes, give presentations and coordinate the efforts in their county. Kent Hall does much the same in the Stevens Point area and surrounding counties! Leif Marking and Fred Craig oversee the Brice Prairie Conservation Assoc. trail up in the LaCrosse area. Bob Tamm takes care of the south-western part of the state coordinating several monitors and helping them on their trails plus he has social times when he gathers his group for breakfast a couple of times per year. Many of you know Carol McDaniel down in Darlington, former BRAW President, former NABS president, former BRAW board member and the leader for the Lafayette County Bluebird Society. They even have a store in downtown Darlington to educate kids and adults about nature. That's going the extra mile!



I might suggest to them that they may be going overboard with all they do but then I think 'heck I have 9 trails in Dane County' so who am I to talk!

Anyway a big thanks to these monitors and all of you as well. We couldn't get such good results if the individuals that monitor even just a few boxes didn't send in their data each season.

Many of the reports this year came in by our website form. So easy to use and nothing to mail.

Starting in January memberships and donations will be possible on our web site as well. Steve Sample has spent a lot of time setting us up with a PayPal account to make it easy to join, renew membership or simply to make a donation to BRAW. It will also allow using a major credit card for payment. The website is secure and safe for doing so.

The convention questionnaire we sent out to our email members was pretty much a draw. Some folks said they like Spring because Fall is too busy and they like kicking off the BB season. Others said Spring is too busy and they like Fall and enjoy hearing the results from the season past. So perhaps we can do both, alternate Spring then do one in Fall. I already have Spring in the works for 2017. I'm still trying to line up program speakers with topics of interest for our members. I plan to have the details in the Spring *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter. So save the date for April 1st in Madison at the La Follette High School on Madison's east side on Pflaum Rd.

Until then, Happy Holidays and Happy "Blue" Year!!

More Blues to all of you.
Patrick Ready
BRAW President



Many of you know that I enjoy bird watching and feeding the birds in my back yard. I also enjoy photographing birds every chance I get. It was a blustery day in early November here in Madison and when I looked out back to check for birds at my feeders but there were none to be found. I immediately suspected a hawk might be near by. I scanned the fence line and saw it sitting there. The wind gust hit it front on causing its feathers to ruffle. What does it make you think of? Perhaps Marilyn Monroe?!

26,000+ Bluebirds Fledged as Reported by our Wisconsin Monitors

Steve Sample, BRAW VP

The 2016 season Bluebird fledging numbers are lower than expected, but one trend is very encouraging!

2016 Season - 26,440 Bluebirds fledged 44,336 Total Species Reported Fledged

2015 Season - 31,170 Bluebirds Fledged 50,874 Total Species Reported Fledged.

Trail Monitors Reporting: 2015 – 354 monitors 2016 – 416 monitors.

Last spring, Wisconsin commonly saw Hell freezing over. Low fledging numbers can be attributed to the strange weather during April and early May. A warm April week followed by a very cold week and then repeating this same scenario in early May took out 55 bluebird eggs on my two trails alone. I'm not the only one for many other of our valued trail monitors made mention of this same phenomena throughout the state. Tree swallow appearance shortly after in May seemed to limit the ability of the bluebirds to recover in many reported

cases. I personally fledged double the number of tree swallows compared to any previous year.

Furthermore, this wasn't the best year to introduce my youngest daughter to monitoring a trail. Losing so many eggs and the lack of recovery by bluebirds was very discouraging. As a Cub fan, I have said for about 60 years to "wait until next year", but does that phrase work any longer? 2017 will be better!

Wait a minute, you said something about an encouraging trend!! Yes, the fact that we had over 50 more reporting trail monitors this year compared to the 2015 season says a great deal about the new reporting form. This was verified by the large number of monitors returning reports that refused to do so with the old reporting methods. Positive comment abounded about the new reporting system. We need to thank the county coordinators and the special trail teams such as those that Kent Hall manages, for they

were instrumental in making the new reporting system a success.

A couple of notes. First, Board member Steve Fallon will be taking over the data collection starting with the 2017 season so look for a new address to send your data. The reporting through our web pages has been extremely functional with many of our monitors using this new approach to filing trail results. Very helpful. Don't be concerned about where to send your data next year for all the old addresses, etc. will continue to function as a data repository.

Looking ahead to next Spring, NOAA climate predictions shows that Wisconsin can expect below normal temperatures right through March, with April being anyone's guess. Unlike daily weather predictions, climate predictions are much more reliable, unfortunately. Be prepared. Let's all be optimistic and say they're wrong!

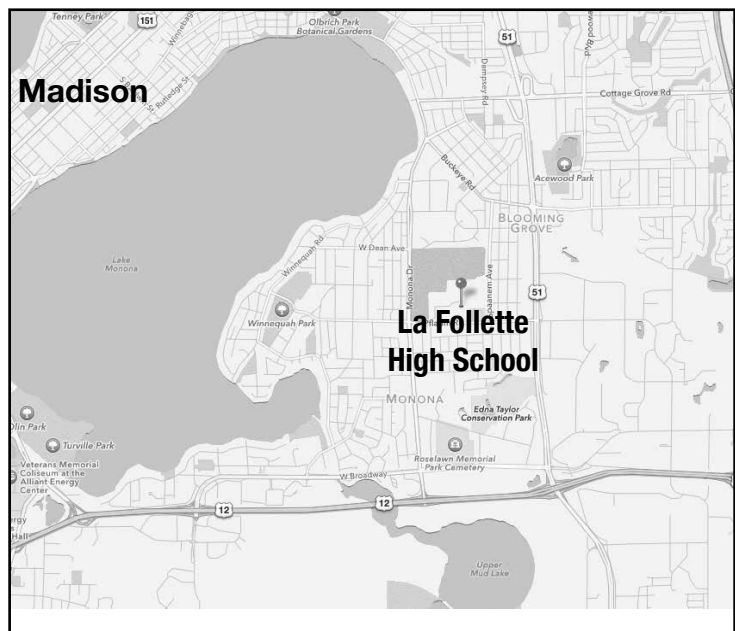
The Next BRAW Annual Meeting

will be at La Follette High School, Madison, April 1, 2017

- Steve Sample: All About Chickadees
- TBA
- TBA
- BRAW Awards
- Catered Lunch
- Silent Auction

**Save
the date!!**

More details will be in the next *Wisconsin Bluebird*. We hope to see you there!



Prescription for a healthy prairie

by Sue Cashman and Marci Hess

My hat goes off to folks who dedicate themselves to prairie restoration. There are numerous farmers in Lafayette County who have shifted some acreage from growing crops to growing prairie as well as many individuals who have dedicated resources to returning land to its natural state. The resulting benefit is having an area safe for pollinators, other invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, birds, and mammals, all of which are necessary parts of our environment. A friend who is a dedicated to his prairie described keeping a prairie healthy in two words: "hard work." The purpose of this article is to answer a question that was posed to Patrick Ready, editor of the *Wisconsin Bluebird*, "Does prairie burning destroy bird habitat?" The source for my information is Marci Hess. Marci and her husband, Jim, manage about 30 acres of prairie in addition to an area of woods and savannah in Lafayette County. It is a pleasure to know these two dedicated stewards of the land. Similar to how a doctor prescribes what is best for our health, conscientious prairie owners follow prescribed burning. It is not a matter of lighting a fire every year or two and watching it burn. According to Marci, "If done appropriately and at the right time, burning helps keep a prairie healthy...folks who burn indiscriminately every year or every other year and usually 100% of the area...are only concerned about plants and not the other biota in the

ecosystem." The goal of burning is to "remove the litter and duff layer and build up, especially when the habitat is mostly grass. If the prairie is never burned, this litter layer will mulch out the natives; and invasives (invasive plants such as the multiflora rose) and cool season grasses will take over. When this happens, it is not optimal habitat for birds because of the reduced plant (and insect) diversity. Without insects, birds have no protein to feed their babies, which babies REQUIRE in order to grow. Babies cannot thrive and survive with seeds or berries." The key element to burning is that "...one should NEVER burn an entire unit at one time. By keeping 2/3 of the unit unburned, the hope is that resident insects and herptiles (reptiles and amphibians) won't be killed off and will reinvade the burned area." Marci's recommendation is: "get out and check and measure the litter layer before deciding if the time is right. Leaving patches of unburned area within the burn unit is also wise." Careful planning is essential before a burn occurs. "Each burn unit will have fire breaks around it. The fire break should be 1.5 times wider than the tallest vegetation. Burn breaks are normally mowed paths but can also consist of roadways, streams or burned areas. The burn plan will define how much humidity and wind speed are acceptable. It will define a temperature range within which the burn can occur, and it will lay out how many people and how much equipment are required to

safely contain the fire." Ringing the unit is a typical technique. "The crew starts with back burning the area into the wind, then expands to burning the side areas; and when all of those burned areas are wide enough, the crew lights the head fire." Marci has come up with an acronym: "F-I-R-E: Follow-up Is Required Every time." Without a management plan after a prescribed burn, time spent on the burn has been wasted. Follow up would include overseeding, removing invasives, etc." What is the answer to the question that Patrick Ready was asked? With a careful plan of prescribed burning and follow up, the prairie will be an improved habitat for birds. Working at the Bluebird Nest Nature Center in Darlington has been a learning experience for me as well as the hundreds of people who have participated in our programming. It is exciting to learn that there are so many people who have invested their lives in keeping our environment healthy. Please check with our face book page or check out www.lafayettecountybluebirdsociety.wordpress.com to get a schedule of our 2017 programs, which will be available in December of 2016. If you are interested in further information about prairies, google a chapter of the Prairie Enthusiasts and check out www.driftlessprairies.org. My sincere thanks to Marci Hess for allowing me to quote her email about prescribed burns.



My Tree Swallow Trails

By Ray Pinter

I have finally come to accept the fact that my nest box trails cannot be called bluebird trails. They would more accurately be defined as tree swallow trails. I collect data on six trails in southeastern Wisconsin (Washington County), four of which I monitor, and the other two with helpers who report their findings to me. Over the past three years these trails have produced 554 tree swallows and 279 bluebirds, giving the tree swallows an almost 2:1 advantage over



the bluebirds. All of the trails are in prime bluebird habitat. However, that is also prime tree swallow territory. And where there is an abundant tree swallow population they will come to dominate most of the nest boxes on any trail. With their aggressive and swarming nature they will out compete the more docile bluebird for nest box occupancy. After seven years of monitoring I now accept their dominance in the nest box market and have actually come to like and admire these feisty little dive-bombers.

Bluebirds occupy only about 25-30% of the 70 nest boxes on my trails with tree swallows taking over the majority of the rest. It seems like almost nothing ever goes wrong with the nest cycle of the tree swallow. They lay 4-7 eggs, they all hatch, and they all fledge. Every box like clockwork. I've even had a single nest with 10 eggs. They all hatched and they all fledged. Maybe its because of their nature of having just one brood per nesting season that most everything must go right for the species to survive.

It seems that with bluebirds (multiple broods per nest season) much can and usually does go wrong with any one nest. (e.g., early season freeze out of eggs, wrens ruining their nest and/or eggs, only 2 or 3 eggs of a 5 egg clutch actually hatching, a cowbird laying an egg in their nest). These failures almost never happen to the tree swallow nest cycle. I've found single cowbird eggs in several bluebird nests (even two in one nest) but I've never found

one in a tree swallow nest. Do the cowbirds know not to mess with this vibrant little dynamo?

I have come to really admire this acrobatic little bird. And even though their population seems to be doing fine in Washington County, Wisconsin, their abundance is decreasing in North America as a whole. According to the North American breeding bird survey, the overall tree swallow population declined by 49% between 1966 and 2014. However, the population actually increased in central North America over this same time frame. The reasons for this overall decline (or increase in the Midwest) is unknown. Even though their overall population has fallen, their conservation status as of 2014 is listed as a species of least concern, rating 8 out of 20 on the Continental Concern Score. The Eastern Bluebird has the same least concern status and gets a 7 out of 20 on the CCS (the higher the number, the greater the concern). So, the tree swallow species is actually at slightly greater concern than the Eastern Bluebird species.

I have learned many interesting facts about the tree swallow, both through observation and from the Sialis.org website:

** Tree swallows may travel 20 miles or more from their nesting territory to capture insects on the fly.

** Males develop a brood patch and may help to incubate the eggs.

** I have observed them playing

with and catching feathers in mid-air before bringing them into the nest box to cushion and keep the eggs warm.

** They drink and bathe in flight, dipping down and repeatedly hitting the water surface

(I believe one of the reasons I have such a large tree swallow occupancy in my boxes is because my trails are in close proximity to large lakes and a river).

The following facts on their food consumption come from the NABS journal (winter 2006-07) researcher: Dick Tuttle

Each adult tree swallow will eat 2,000 insects per day during the nesting season.

They catch about 6,000 insects per day to feed their nestlings - this totals about 3000,000 insects consumed during the nesting cycle (for both adults and the chicks).

How do they deliver all these insects to their hatchlings? They combine many insects (avg.=18) into a tight ball called a bolus which they bring to their young. This is an efficient way of gathering multiple insects in a feeding area (e.g., the surface of a lake) that could be some distance from the nest box. Capturing and bringing just one insect at a time would be way too exhausting.

Like bluebirds, tree swallows do eat berries in the winter on their southern grounds. They migrate farther south than bluebirds, all the way to Central America and Cuba. In the U.S. a large population over winters in Florida and all along the Gulf Coast. In the non-breeding season they form huge communal roosts. Because they migrate farther south than bluebirds, their population is not decimated by snow and ice storms.

Since my trails have such an abundance of tree swallows I have begun experimenting with pairing of boxes, with hopes of a bluebird taking one of the two. So far, my early findings are that the boxes must be placed no farther than 15-20' apart, otherwise



the swallows will take both boxes. It seems that one mated tree swallow pair will not tolerate another pair closer than this 20' radius. Tree swallows do not seem to have any problems with bluebirds adopting the vacant box. On a couple of my trails I would not have any bluebirds if I didn't utilize this strategy. I realize this reduces the bluebird per box fledge rate, but without the pairing of boxes on these tree swallow dense trails, I

would have zero bluebird success. Maybe a better way of determining the bluebird fledge rate would be counting bluebirds fledged per site (2 boxes no farther than 20' apart) instead of per box. I think this would be a more accurate way of determining bluebird reproductive success on trails with high tree swallow saturation.

Last year I observed an interesting occurrence during the final stage of a tree swallow hatchling becoming a fledgling. In one of my boxes a tree swallow chick was poised in the opening of the box, hesitant to take the final leap. To encourage the reluctant chick, an adult hovered just outside the box with an insect in its beak. In a nearby dead tree, 6 or 7 swallows, some adults and, I assume, some of the reluctant one's previously fledged siblings, were perched watching the show. They

seemed to be cheering for the hesitating chick and offering their encouragement in its leap to freedom.

For seven years I have been continually dive-bombed by tree swallows when I check their boxes, and by more birds than just the adult pair bonded to the box. Sometimes, as many as 6 or 7 swallows will come at me from all angles, shrieking in my ear. I have learned to ignore these harassing aerial maneuvers because I have never been so much as even grazed by one. In fact, when not bothered by at least one pair of dive-bombers when checking their eggs or nestlings, I get worried about the well-being of the parents. They are probably just out collecting insects at a far distance from the nest box, forming them into a bolus to deliver to their growing brood.

So, if you have an overwhelming number of tree swallows on your "bluebird trails," don't hate, but learn to appreciate these supreme aerialists and take comfort in the fact that you are helping another diminishing bird species.

County Coordinator News

By Carol McDaniel

Greeting bluebirders,

Another year of monitoring bluebird trails has come to an end. Most accounts reports that there weren't the bluebirds fledged like other years, but there was still a healthy number that assures that the bluebird is in good shape in the state. Our County Coordinators work hard to increase the bluebird production and encourage others in their counties to do the same. Winter is a good time to make plans for starting new trails or adding to existing ones. More and more people are enjoying having bluebirds in their backyards. Our CCs strive to give the best advice for successful bluebirding to new bluebirders. Printable handouts for best practices, as well as, a complete list of CCs and contact information can be found on the BRAW web site. The following reports were sent to me by county coordinators. Several counties do not have CCs and they are listed on the BRAW web site. If you would like to take over the duties for a county, please contact me at cjmcd_98@yahoo.com or call 608-922-2473.

Larry Liegel for Sauk County: Evonne Kraemer, of rural Spring Green, began her bluebirding activities in 2015, on a small scale, with my assistance. In 2016, she expanded to 24 nesting boxes and this year fledged 64 bluebirds and 13 Tree Swallows. Like many of us, she dealt with strong competition from house wrens and sparrows. She began experimenting with a sparrow trap box, which I lent to her. She was very diligent in her weekly monitoring, learning along the way that she needed to re-locate several boxes to more suitable BB habitat. She is looking forward to 2017, hopeful that she will increase her BB occupancy rate in first nesting.

Marv and Kath Ruhland, who own a tract of land in Franklin Township, began bluebirding in 2016. I have provided them with information from the BRAW website. They are planning to build several nest boxes this off-season by duplicating a NABS-style nest box I built, which they won at a family reunion auction in 2015. I am looking forward to assisting them in March

2017 with sighting these new boxes on their property.

Each year, St. Luke's Parish in Plain, WI, honors its Golden Alumni Class with a special recognition dinner at the parish hall. About 135 graduates of St. Luke's High School, dating back to 1934, attended the dinner this year. This year, the Class of 1966 was honored. The class of 1965 sponsored the event in October 2016. I donated 4 NABS-style cedar nest boxes as door prizes which were claimed by attendees pretty quickly! With each box, I provided written information on the BRAW organization and the basic information needed to properly locate a BB box. I hope this will help recruit more bluebirders for the upcoming nesting season.

Rod Liegel provided 3 nesting sites at both his home in Franklin Township and his business in Loganville. Two of these boxes fledged a total of 15 bluebirds in 2016. Jon and Marcia Crary of Hillpoint, WI installed one of my NABS boxes near their garden in 2016 and raised a family of bluebirds.

In the 2016 nesting season, I fledged 145 bluebirds from a total of 31 boxes and had two boxes with three broods successfully fledged. My Sauk County BB trail is located in Franklin Township near an historic ghost village which is named White Mound Settlement.

Folks can contact me by email at: ljiegel@charter.net or at my home phone: 715-835-1403.

Kent Hall for Portage, Wood, Waupaca and Monroe Counties (also reporting for Marathon, Clark and Adams) all participated in monitoring for the Audubon Bluebird Trail (ABT) of Portage Co. in the 2016 season.

The ABT developed bluebird trails around 6 schools in Portage and Wood Counties. Kent Hall made presentations about cavity nesting songbirds before the start of each season in each school. Afterwards, the schools had one grade of students monitor the boxes until school was out. A total of 200 students participated at these schools.

The 2016 season was the 15th season for the ABT. We fledged 5,289 EABL's, for an average of 3.88 per box. We have now fledged about 57,299 bluebirds in our 15 year history. This fledging number moves us into the #1 position all-time for bluebirds fledged from one trail in Wisconsin.

In addition, we fledged 1,289 Tree Swallows, 237 House Wrens and a record number of 421 Black-capped Chickadees. Our all-time totals for swallows is 13,295, for wrens is 2,346 and for chickadees is 2,390.

The ABT had a total of 41 routes, 74 monitors and 1,367 nest boxes in the 2016 season.

Kent Hall is the Coordinator for the Audubon Bluebird Trail

Rich and Carol Becker for Ashland County: Hi from the North. Carol and I are putting together a presentation about Bluebird Trails for next year's Birding and Nature Festival. We will of course mention Braw during our talk and use BRAW handouts. We plan to show a PowerPoint program that Carol McDaniel has put together about bluebird trail best practices.

Stan Rosenstiel for Kenoshas and

Racine Counties: Rick Fare does the programs in Kenosha and Racine counties. He gave a BB presentation at the Southwest Library in Kenosha at the Burlington Garden Center and at Hawthorn Hollow NC in March and April. A new trail was started at Kestrel Park Landfill prairie.

Rita Gundry for Eau Claire County: The cold snap this spring sure set the blues back. I had completed nests that stood empty for a few weeks, waiting for the sun to shine! This summer was the poorest for me since I started reporting to BRAW due to too many sparrows and wrens trying to share the bluebird boxes. Will be moving some boxes in the spring, for sure, and hope for a better year in 2017. Did start our next door neighbor out with a box and he has it ready for the new year.

Charlotte Lukes for Door County: Charlotte retired as Door County CC when her husband, Ray, was ill. She is back and you can contact Charlotte if you have any Door County bluebird questions.

Bob Tamm for Waukesha and Milwaukee Counties: I invited any interested bluebirders from southeast Wi. to join me on October 1st, 2016, at the Machine Shed Restaurant in Pewaukee for our second such gathering. I'm appreciative if even a handful show up, so I was more than happy when 14 showed up for a nice leisurely breakfast and lots of good bluebird talk. The general consensus concerning bluebird production in 2016 was that

it was a so-so year... not the worst, but not the best either. Definitely room for improvement, so that is our challenge here in SE Wi. for 2017.

These informal gatherings are proving quite popular - with Machine Shed Restaurant being a great venue. Nice atmosphere, and large enough that you are not rushed... Some of us were still there 2.5 hours after arriving! We likely will do it again once or twice in 2017!

Mary Holleback for Washington County: We did a box building workshop at the end of Aug. for ~50 people and will do another one in November for ~40 kids during our Handmade of the Holidays program.

Don Pritzl for Kewaunee County: I had a booth at the annual Kewaunee County Agricultural Heritage Days in Luxemburg. Quite a few people stopped to talk. I was surprised at how many of the said they "had bluebirds. I hope it's true. I'm also scheduled to give a presentation to the Kewaunee Garden Club in January 2017. I will continue to try to spread the word about the beautiful bluebird.

I had a successful year on my bluebird trails in 2016. Of a total of 64 boxes, 39 were used by bluebirds, 224 eggs were laid, 188 bluebirds hatched and 176 fledged. 144 Tree Swallows were fledged along with about 20 wrens.

This is not a record year but is about average in bluebird fledged per box. I have some boxes that have not had BBs in them for two consecutive years



Bob Tamm and a group of bluebirders at the Machine Shed in Pewaukee.

and these will be moved next year. There were no unusual problems during the year. However, in two boxes, a speckled egg was found with the BB eggs. The eggs seemed to be bigger than sparrow eggs. I suspect a cow bird, although I don't know if a cow bird would go in a box.

Darrel Eberhardt for Jackson County: This year Jackson County had a great year of bluebirding with 2067 birds fledged. Our best year ever was in 2012 with 2464 birds fledged. After 2012 came the black fly invasion. Now we spray with Permethrin as a preventative for black flies.

I trapped 27 House Sparrows with the Van Ert trap. This year the percentage of males to females was higher. That was a good thing because the males are the real trouble makers.

We had trouble with bears destroying bluebird houses again this year. Badger Mining Corp. had ten houses destroyed. One of our top monitors had bear damage after the bluebird season. He sprayed Liquid Fence while monitoring and noted that it kept raccoons and bears away. When he stopped spraying Liquid Fence, two houses were destroyed by bear.

Jackson County sets up bluebird trails differently, because we have such a low density of people. We begin our trails at the monitor's houses and go in the a circular trail. This helps us save gas and prevents us from doubling back and having dead ends on our trails.

Dale Moody from Iowa County: Dale reported having 410 BB eggs and 279 BB fledged from his trail in Iowa County. Each year his has a bluebird



Darrel Eberhardt from Hixton took this photo of a raccoon that didn't make it to the bluebird box. His wife, Marilyn, monitors every day and said none of the eggs were missing.



Linda Augustine from rural Argyle took this photo of unknown nestlings in one box. They are too blue to be bluebirds. Adult Purple Grosbeaks were seen entering the box and sitting on a nearby branch. The eggs were brownish and larger than bluebird eggs.

trail hike in June and members from the Driftless Area Land Conservancy attend.

Carol McDaniel for Lafayette County: The final Bluebird Trail count reported to me for Lafayette County for 2016 totals 662 Eastern Bluebirds fledged. I received reports from 17 trails. I trail is located in Walworth County, fledged 5 BBs and is monitored by Tammy Pettijohn. Walworth does not currently have a county coordinator. Compared to last year's count of 884, this year's count is much lower. I wasn't physically able to check trails this year, but if I add in what wasn't reported this year that was reported last year on my trails the number would be very close to the same. Last year, I reported 177 bluebirds fledged from my three trails: Yellowstone Lake State Park Trail, Hill Trail and McDaniel Trail. Christine Hill, who lives in Illinois, reported 18 fledged from the Hill trail that I reported 45 fledged from last year. She visited the trail twice during the season. Dallas and Linda Augustine checked the Yellowstone Lake State Park Trail once on August 6. They did not report any fledged birds, since this was the only trail check. I reported 112 bluebirds fledged last year from the Yellowstone trail. Last year, other monitors reported 47 bluebirds fledged and I did not receive counts from them this year. So, if the trails were reported the same as last year, the count would have been 873, only 11 bluebirds short

of last year's count. Here are a few of the more active Lafayette County trails: Jim Barth has his trail following the Fever River that runs in the Lead Mine/New Diggings area. This is the historic area where Wisconsin began. He battles House Sparrows and has been successful with the Van Ert trap. He fledged 246 BBs. Linda Augustine reported 51 BBs fledged and she had a lot of wren activity. She reported 5 large brown unknown eggs in one box. The box was visited by Purple Grosbeaks at and near the box. She watched the young fledged and observed the wingbars that are evident on the young of Purple Grosbeaks. A photo of the young in the box is included with this write up. Jim and Marci Hess reported 98 BBs fledged on their prairie trail near Blanchardville, Sue Cashman reported 91 BBs fledged from her Darlington/Apple River area trail, Velma Klenke's trail located in the city of Darlington fledged 66 and Dale Moody from Belmont fledged 44 BBs.

Patrick Ready, Dane Co.: I was asked to help redo the nest box trail at Lake Park in Milwaukee in November. They also asked me to give my presentation on Eastern Bluebirds. It was a beautiful day and we got most of the trail work done before lunch. The trail monitor Barbara mentioned to me they didn't have any bluebirds nest this year. She is hoping the placement of the boxes in more open areas will help bring them back in 2017.



Roy Lukes, 86, died on

June 26

By Patrick Ready, WB Editor

When I was in college my room mate was from Door County. We lived in an apartment on the east side of Madison. My room mate's mother would mail him the *Door County Advocate* so he could keep up on the local news. I read it as well and especially enjoyed articles about nature written by Roy Lukes. My roomy knew Roy because he had him for a teacher when he was in high school.

It would be many years before I actually got to meet Roy. I believe it was at one of the BRAW conventions. BRAW awarded Roy & his wife Charlotte with the BRAW Merit Award in 2010. On a visit to Door County my wife and I were browsing a used book store in Ellison Bay and I found 2 of Roy's books and bought them. I called Roy and asked if he would mind signing them if he wasn't too busy. He said "Sure, come on over." We had a nice visit and he gave us some tips for viewing wildlife in Door Co. That's the kind of guy he was. Making time for others and sharing his love of nature.

One night I was browsing the internet and discovered an article about Eastern Bluebirds that Roy had written for one of his newspaper columns. I sent him an email asking if I could reprint it? He had to refuse my request due to contractual obligations with his newspaper syndicate. But he offered I can write something for you about Bluebirds in Door County. And so he did. Apparently this relit the fire in him for helping Eastern Bluebirds as he became more involved with trails in his area and he and Charlotte became County Coordinators. They even hosted the BRAW Convention in 2012 which was one of our best attended events.

BRAW is just one of many organizations that will miss Roy Lukes and his endless energy to spread the word about Wisconsin's natural world.

Here in part is the obit that appeared in the Door County Pulse last summer:

He was born in Kewaunee, WI to Adolph Lukes and Esther (Skala) Lukes on August 5, 1929. He married Charlotte Koch on May 27, 1972 in



Wauwatosa, WI. She survives him.

After graduating from Kewaunee High School he played trumpet in a dance band and played with the Green Bay Packers Lumberjack Band for two years.

He attended the Door-Kewaunee Teacher's College for two years and continued his education at the State Teacher's College in Oshkosh, now known as UW-Oshkosh, graduating in 1953 with a Bachelor's Degree in Education. He then entered the U.S. Army and served two years at Fort Sill, OK.

He taught elementary science at Shorewood Hills School in Madison for 4 years while working to earn a Master's Degree in Education by 1959 and went on to teach in Wisconsin Rapids, Cottage Grove and eventually back to the Door-Kewaunee Teacher's College. It was while teaching there that he learned of a summer job at The Ridges Sanctuary in Baileys Harbor, WI.

Starting in 1966 Roy taught science at the Fish Creek School and Gibraltar School and then developed his own Environmental Education classes which he taught at Gibraltar, Sevastopol and Southern Door Schools until 1976 when The Ridges Sanctuary job became fulltime.

He was the first resident manager and naturalist of The Ridges in 1964 and increased the trail system as more land was purchased and created an educational program, quarterly newsletters, summer tours, early morning bird hikes and Thursday evening nature programs and held the job and President of the board of Directors for nine years. He resigned from The Ridges on September 1, 1990.

Roy began writing weekly nature articles in the summer of 1968 for The Door County Advocate. Later he added the Green Bay Press-Gazette and the Appleton Post Crescent to his weekly writing. He also wrote nature

stories for NewMonth magazine and the Door County magazine. In 2008 he began writing for the Peninsula Pulse and Door County Living magazine. He has written over 3,000 weekly nature articles for local papers.

He wrote five books: *Once Around the Sun, a Door County Journal*; *Out on a Limb, A Journal of Wisconsin Birding*; *The Ridges Sanctuary*; *Toft Point a Legacy of People and Pines*; *Tales of the Wild, A Year with Nature*.

He loved teaching on nature hikes and in classes at The Clearing and Lawrence University's Bjorklunden. Roy enjoyed nature photography from 1958 to 2015 and used that skill to illustrate his newspaper and magazine stories. He has matted, framed and sold many of his photographs and exhibited in numerous venues in northeast Wisconsin.

Lawrence University in Appleton presented Roy with an honorary Doctor of Science degree in June 2002. In 2003 UW Oshkosh honored him with a 50th alumni anniversary award and he received the UW O Chancellor's Medallion in December 2004.

The Gathering Waters Conservancy presented him with a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2014 and the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology gave him a Lifetime Achievement award in May of 2015. He received many other civic, literary and environmental awards over his lifetime.

Roy was a life member of The Ridges Sanctuary, The Clearing, the Door County Historical Society and the Friends of Toft Point. He had a close relationship with Miss Emma Toft and the Toft family and was instrumental in forming the Friends of Toft Point, Inc., helping the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay to preserve the wildness of this State Natural Area.

Memorials can be made to The Door County Land Trust (PO Box 65, Sturgeon Bay, WI 54235), The Nature Conservancy (633 W Main St., Madison, WI 53703), Birch Creek Music Performance Center (PO Box 230, Egg Harbor, WI 54209), The Peninsula Music Festival (PO Box 340, Ephraim, WI 54211) or to the nature organization of your choice.

Roy exemplified this: **To be a good teacher, never stop learning!**

Production of Eastern Bluebirds in Monitored Houses

Annual Report - 2016

Brice Prairie Conservation Association

By Leif L. Marking,
Project Manager

Production of Eastern Bluebirds in Monitored Houses

Introduction: Bluebirds are cavity-nesting songbirds that are unable to create their own nesting cavities. Natural cavity availability declined significantly when non-native House Sparrows and European Starlings were introduced to this country over 150 years ago. They are victorious competitors for nest cavities and vicious predators of bluebird eggs and young. However, bluebird populations have been increasing since the birth of the North American Bluebird Society (NABS) in 1978 followed by many state chapters such as the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW). Our Brice Prairie Conservation Association (BPCA) members have recorded our bluebird production activities since 1992 and annually reported the numbers to the above organizations. Technical information and instructions for producing bluebirds are available from websites of NABS (www.nabluebirdsociety.org), BRAW (www.BRAW.org), and BPCA (www.briceprairieconservation.org). The purpose of this report is to summarize the numbers of bluebirds produced by club members this year, recognize increases or decreases over previous years, identify problems that influenced production, and evaluate procedures to increase future production.

Procedures: We have selected the NABS-style house to promote bluebird production because the design is practical, they are easy



to construct, maintain, and clean, and bluebirds readily occupy them. These cedar houses are mounted on 7-foot steel T-type fence posts that

are covered with a 5 ft. section of 1-1/2" PVC pipe treated with car wax for mammalian predator control. The houses are usually placed 200 yards or more apart to respect the territorial nature of bluebirds and to encourage maximum production of bluebirds. New houses are built with convertible air vents, so the vents can be closed on site to reduce mortality of eggs and young during sustained cold spells in early nesting and to avoid black fly mortality. Site and habitat selection favors bluebird ecology with large, open, grazed or mowed areas where bluebirds

Consolidated Nest Box Summary 2016

Brice Prairie Conservation Association – Individuals

Monitor's Name	Nest Boxes	Bluebirds Fledged	Bluebird Production Rate	Other Species Fledged			Total Other Species	Total Birds Fledged	Overall Production Rate
				TS	CH	HW			
John Adank	8	30	3.75				0	30	3.75
Iler Anderson	107	331	3.09	153	26	5	184	515	4.81
Steven Anderson	23	117	5.09	18	5	11	34	151	6.57
Bill Balmer	9	51	5.67		7		7	58	6.44
Fred Craig	78	507	6.50	30		34	64	571	7.32
Dan & Gail Filzen	9	34	3.78			17	17	51	5.67
Dave Fonger	65	312	4.80	23	16	6	45	357	5.49
Brad Foss	5	8	1.60				0	8	1.60
Leif Marking	95	442	4.65	17		3	20	462	4.86
Peter Tabor	1	4	4.00				0	4	4.00
Leif Tolokken	48	236	4.92	71	4	4	79	315	6.56
Joni Welda	8	30	3.75	5			5	35	4.38
Associates	152	458	3.01	69		42	111	569	3.74
	608	2,560	4.21	386	58	12	566	3,126	5.14

Species Key: TS - Tree Swallow, CH - Chickadee, HW – Wren

Consolidated Nest Box Summary 2016

Leif Marking Bluebird Associates

Associate's Name	Nest Boxes	Bluebirds Fledged	Bluebird Production Rate	Other Species Fledged			Total Other Species	Total Birds Fledged	Overall Production Rate
				TS	CH	HW			
Jan and Jim Brady	6	38	6.33	11			11	49	8.17
Louis Benchina	24	62	2.58	7		8	15	77	3.21
Harry & Ellen Caulum	25	62	2.58			24	24	86	3.44
Verdel Dawson	14	71	5.07				0	71	5.07
Ron Parker	13	30	2.31	17			17	47	3.62
Morgan Jostad	5	8	1.60				0	8	1.60
Tim Knudson	10	30	3.00	29			29	59	5.90
Stephanie Lubinsky	15	63	4.20				0	63	4.20
John & Louise Leary	9	39	4.33	5			5	44	4.89
Mary Dresser	9	18	2.00				0	18	2.00
Jean Ruhser	9	7	0.78				0	7	0.78
Fred Schaldach	13	30	2.31			10	10	40	3.08
	152	458	3.01	69	0	42	111	569	3.74

Species Key: TS - Tree Swallow, CH - Chickadee, HW - Wren

Bluebird Production in Houses of Different Types

Year	Number		Production Rate	Predominant House Type
	Houses	Fledged		
1992	29	62	2.1	Hill Lake
1995	42	80	1.9	Hill Lake
1996	54	109	2.0	Tree Branch
1997	65	145	2.2	Tree Branch
1998	78	212	2.7	Tree Branch
1999	91	265	2.9	Herman Olson
2000	101	324	3.2	Herman Olson
2001	142	544	3.8	NABS
2002	285	1,138	4.0	NABS
2003	506	2,001	4.0	NABS
2004	741	3,066	4.1	NABS
2005	880	4,233	4.8	NABS
2006	858	4,756	5.5	NABS
2007	916	5,399	5.9	NABS
2008	977	4,228	4.3	NABS
2009	1,019	5,252	5.2	NABS
2010	1,001	4,915	4.9	NABS
2011	936	3,294	3.5	NABS
2012	862	4,679	5.4	NABS
2013	796	2,884	3.6	NABS
2014	724	2,668	3.7	NABS
2015	657	2,938	4.5	NABS
2016	608	2,560	4.2	NABS
Total		55,752		

can forage for ground insects. House Sparrow competition was diminished appreciably by avoiding active farm and livestock feeding operations. Houses were placed at least 200 feet from woods and thickets to minimize House Wren competition. Weekly observations were recorded in notebooks of choice, and those results were transferred to spreadsheets for calculations, evaluations, and presentations. These spreadsheets accumulate numbers of eggs, numbers hatched, and count of bluebirds and other cavity-nesting songbirds fledged. Finally, the numbers are consolidated for each member's totals as well as individual and total production rates for all club members and bluebird associates.

Results and Discussion: We monitored 608 bluebird boxes this year, 49 fewer than last year. Those boxes produced 2,560 bluebird fledglings, a decrease of 378 compared to the previous year. Our bluebird production rate also decreased this year (4.21 fledglings per box), primarily due to the late spring season that delayed nesting activity and discouraged third nesting later in the year. Cold temperatures in early spring interfered with first nesting that resulted in poor hatch rates and nestling mortality. This delay offered competitive House Sparrows, Tree Swallows, and wrens opportunities to dominate boxes normally used by bluebirds. Some nestling mortality was due to Black Fly gnat infestations. A dilute solution of Permethrin spray was used with good success to combat the black flies.

We also produced a total of 386 Tree Swallows, 58 Black Capped Chickadees and 122 House Wrens. These cavity nesting species readily occupy the bluebird boxes, especially if they are located on the edge of bluebird habitat. House Sparrow attacks were more numerous for many trails and restricted bluebird production. The bluebirds prefer diversified agriculture, mowed, or grazed areas, and if the boxes are properly located and spaced the bluebirds will occupy them before the swallows (serious competitors) are capable of nesting in early spring.

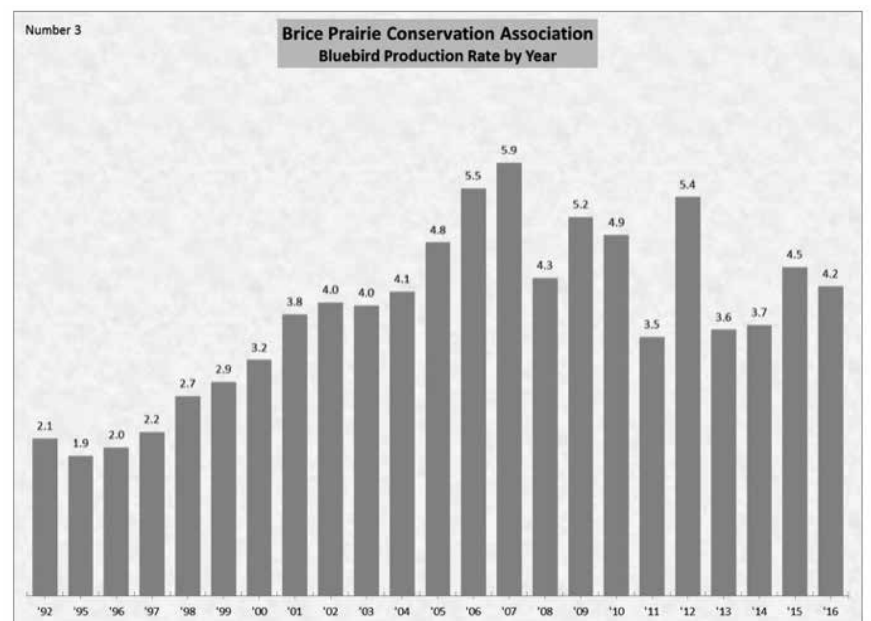
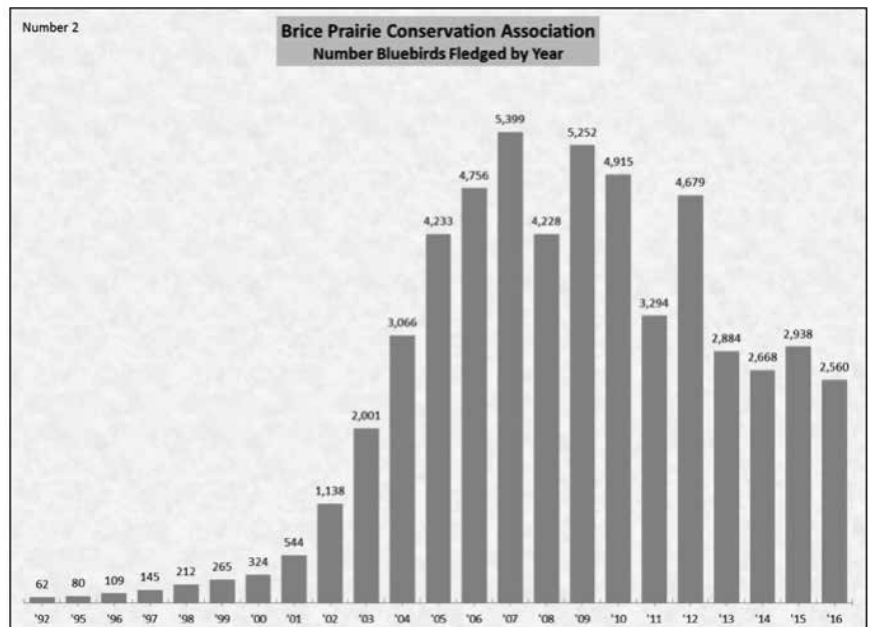
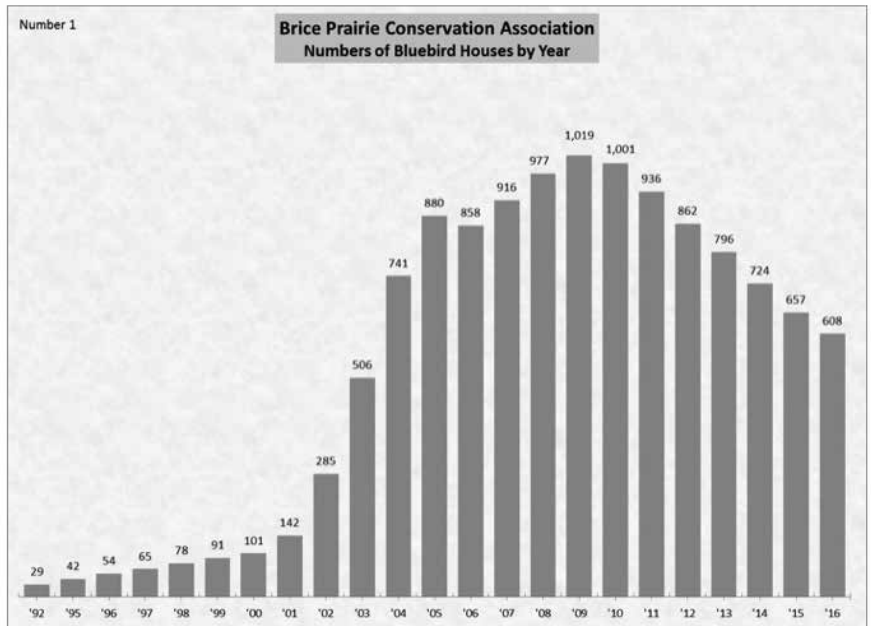
In addition, my 12 bluebird associates produced 458 bluebird fledglings, 69 Tree Swallows, and 42 House Wrens



Eastern Bluebird: Leif Marking

as identified in the second table. These folks are not members of BPCA, but they like bluebirds and our technology for producing them, so they are willing to monitor and contribute to our efforts. They realize their efforts also benefit the bluebird population so we are thankful. This associate concept encourages more people to get involved in serious monitoring and keeping good records. Associates also reported more competition and predation with House Wrens and House Sparrows this year.

We attribute our success for producing bluebirds to providing a box with a cavity size and shape that appeals to them, selection of ideal habitat for box location, spacing the boxes at least 200 yards, providing predator prevention for every box, moving boxes that fail to attract bluebirds after one year, and monitoring weekly to ensure the cavities are available to bluebirds that are searching for a home. House Sparrows interfered with bluebird nesting in many locations. In fact, 34 of my 95 houses were invaded, some multiple times. Van Ert sparrow traps were used to eliminate 75 House Sparrows on my trail. House Wrens again were important predators and competitors on many bluebird trails. Our technology for bluebird production is effective, and we feel satisfied and rewarded with the bluebird responses to our efforts with 55,752 fledges reported since 1992.



Tis The Season!

By Patrick Ready, WB Editor

The gift giving season is upon us so I thought I'd share some new book titles of interest to everyone young or old.

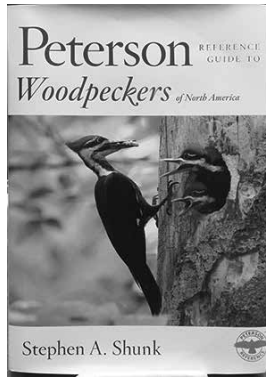
Winter is a good time to get outdoors and look for signs of wildlife. While hiking I almost always find tracks in the snow or mud. I like to study the different sizes and shapes and try to identify what was there before I came along? So I put some books on helping figuring out what left tracks for us to find.

Not everyone likes to get outside in winter or sometimes it might be too cold or windy to safely get out doors. That's the time to grab a good book or magazine and sit back for some good reading.

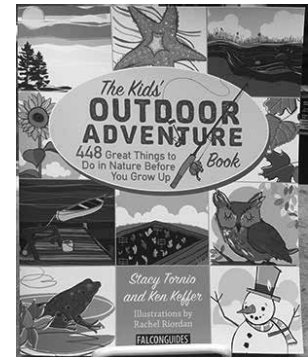
For parents or grandparents wanting to get kids interested in outdoor wildlife there are many good books geared for all ages with games and puzzles to peak their interest.

Many of us like to feed the birds especially in winter and with feeding birds we all know eventually squirrels will join in the feast. There are many ways to try to foil their efforts and just as many ways for them to amaze us how they still manage to get to the feeders meant for birds!

Have a good read while you wait for the bluebirds to return.



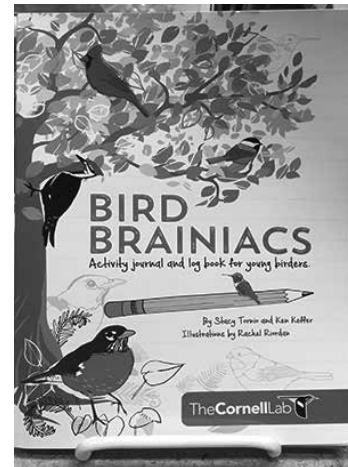
One of the Peterson series that are almost a coffee table type book but definitely some of the best photos and details about the topic. This one covers all the woodpeckers in North America.



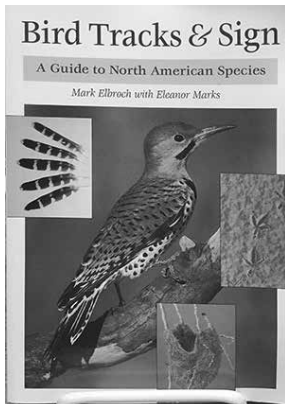
These days too many kids find adventure by playing games on a TV screen or computer. This book makes getting outdoors an adventure for kids of all ages to enjoy. Nothing wrong with some fresh air and exercise and having an adventure besides!



Some say it can't be done. Many have tried and failed. Me included!! This book has all kinds of ideas worth trying to keep those pesky critters away from the bird feeders.



This book encourages kids to write, draw, and give their opinions about anything and everything related to birds. Games, quizzes, fill-in-the-blank activities, nature truth or dare and other experiments and real national citizen-science projects they can participate in.

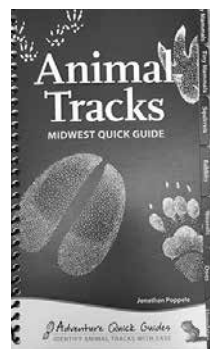


Bird Tracks & Sign is definitely on my Christmas list. This book has so much information about birds it makes a great resource for any birder's library. It even has photos of hawk and owl pellets to help ID what bird barf up! How cool is that?!

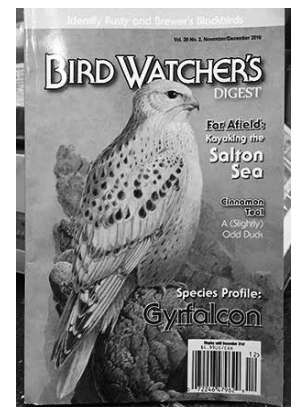


A delightful story about Black-capped Chickadees meant for small children.

Some tracks are big and some are very small. Some can be easy to identify like deer and raccoons. But there are many critters out there leaving their foot prints behind leaving us to wonder what was here and where was it going? This little guide can be just the right thing to carry around and figure out what is lurking around out there. Just be careful if you go out in bear country!!



If you like to read about birds consider a subscription this *Bird Watcher's Digest*. Each issue is filled with stories, articles and places and events for any bird enthusiast. The editors are well-known nation-wide and support bird conservation efforts including bluebirds!



Membership Renewal Information

By JP Lafouge, membership services

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

Most BRAW memberships are on a calendar year basis, which means that regular memberships expire on December 31, **except for Life Members.**

Look at the address label on your newsletter. The number group following your name indicates the month and year of expiration. If your label reads I12/16 your membership will expire with this issue. If your label reads H12/17, then you are paid ahead for another full year. H12/17 means you are paid through December 2017, and so on (The letter before the date number is used by the computer for sorting purposes.)

Fill out the membership renewal form below and send it with your check or money order to BRAW Membership, c/o JP Lafouge, 9154 N. Fielding Rd., Bayside, WI 53217.

If we do not receive your renewal by February 1, 2017, your membership will begin with the Summer issue of the *Wisconsin Bluebird*. We will no longer mail out back issues and back date memberships.

The basic \$20 Individual /Family membership covers the cost of printing and mailing the quarterly *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter.

The next issue of the *Wisconsin Bluebird* goes into production in February and is mailed to arrive to you the first week in March. I need time to process membership renewals and prepare the mailing list so the sooner I receive your renewal the better.

Consider a onetime \$300 Life Membership in BRAW. **Life members do not have to renew.**

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

By renewing now you will receive all four issues of the 2017 Wisconsin Bluebird newsletter.

**A BRAW
subscription makes
a great holiday gift!**

Give the gift of Bluebirds and have a
Happy Blue Year!

.....

Wisconsin Bluebird Subscription and BRAW, Inc. Membership

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

Subscription/Membership contribution:

- \$20 individual or Family Annual
- \$25 Contributing Annual
- \$100 Corporate Annual
- \$300 Life Membership

Print clearly

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Email Address: _____

Telephone: () _____

County of residence: _____

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

Check appropriate boxes:

- This is a renewal.
 - This is a new subscription
 - This is a GIFT subscription.
- Enclosed please find my check \$ _____

Mail this membership/subscription request to:
 BRAW, Inc.
JP Lafouge
 9154 N. Fielding Rd.,
 Bayside, WI, 53217

Please note: This form appears in this newsletter as a convenience for all who wish to obtain membership. Most membership renewals (Life members excluded) are due as of January 1 each year.

BRAW ELECTED & APPOINTED OFFICERS

President Patrick Ready, 815 Sky Ridge DR., Madison, WI 53719 • 608/239-0791 • birdsready@gmail.com (term to 12/19)

Vice President Steve Sample, 422 Shepard Ter. Madison, WI 53705 • 708/606-8070 (term to 12/19)

Secretary Claire Romanak, 7175 Nehrbass Rd.; Athens, WI 54411 • 715/257-1905 • ribriver2@wildblue.net (Term to 12/19)

Treasurer Dan Schroeder, PO Box 133, Waupaca, WI 54981

• 920-475-8525 • brdanjoe@gmail.com

Mike Helgren, 1013 Georgetown Circle, Beaver Dam, WI 53916

• 920/885-4050 mhelgren@charter.net (term to 12/15)

Director Fred Craig, 3308 Nathan Lane, Holmen WI 54636 •

608/783-2225 266marycraig@gmail.com (term to 12/15)

Director, Brad Zinda, Stevens Point, WI • 3416 Soo Marie Ave., Stevens Point, WI 54481 • (715) 570-9587 • brdzinda@charter.net (term to 12/18)

Director, Steve Fallon, Oregon, WI • 974 Halcyon Days Ct., Oregon, WI. 53575 • scfallon@charter.net (term to 12/18)

APPOINTED OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS:

Data Collection Officer, Steve Fallon (see above)

County Coordinator Chair: Carol McDaniel, 9320 Wicks Rd., Gratiot, WI 53541 • cjmcd_98@yahoo.com • 608-922-2473

Funding: Dan Schroeder (see above)

WI Bluebird Editor: Patrick Ready, (see above)

Membership: JP Lafouge, 9154 N. Fielding Rd.,

Bayside, WI, 53217, brawwebmaster@braw.org

Nest Box Designs: Fred Craig, (see above)

Student and Youth Outreach Committee:

Co-Chairpersons: Lowell Peterson, 1860 45th St., Somerset, WI

54025 • 715/247-3243; and, **Mary Holleback**, 720 Madison St., West Bend, WI 53095-4136 • 262/335-9843

Website: JP Lafouge, 9154 N. Fielding Rd.,

Bayside, WI, 53217, brawwebmaster@braw.org

BRAW LIAISONS:

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

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

Use the Van Ert Trap to solve Your House Sparrow Problems



Figure1-- Installation is quick and simple provided there is a screw intact.

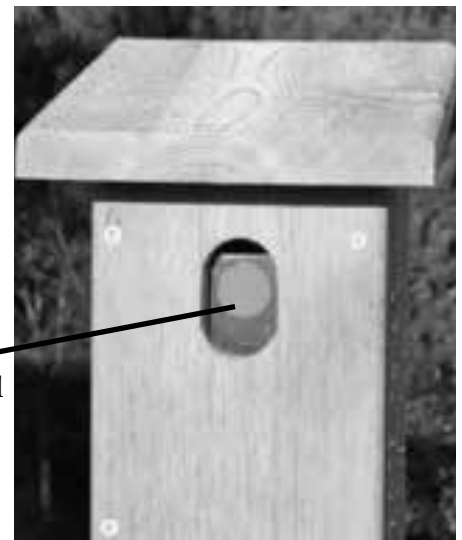


Figure 2-- The visible red bulls eye invariably suggests a trapped sparrow.

Wisconsin Bluebird • Volume 31, Number 4 • Winter 2016

Published by the **Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, Inc.**

Editor, Designer, Photographer

Patrick Ready, 815 Sky Ridge Dr., Madison WI 53719
608-239-0791 • birdsready@gmail.com



CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Contact Membership Chair **JP Lafouge**, 9154 N. Fielding Rd., Bayside, WI, 53217, brawwebmaster@braw.org

Wisconsin Bluebird is published quarterly by the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, Inc. (BRAW) 815 Sky Ridge Dr., Madison WI 53719. Subscription price is included in membership dues. Subscriptions and renewals should be sent to JP Lafouge, 9154 N. Fielding Rd. Bayside, WI 53217. Issues are dated Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. Deadlines for submissions to the editor are due the 15th of January, April, July, and October.

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The mission and purpose of the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, Inc. is to monitor and increase the production of Eastern Bluebirds and other native cavity nesters through a coordinated statewide nest box construction and monitoring program.

Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin

Sue Schultz, Membership Chair
5221 Cheryl's Dr.,
Plover, WI 54467
www.braw.org



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**Next Annual Meeting
set for April 1, 2017
See p. 3**

**Is this your last issue?
MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL!
See p. 14**

Shop the BRAW Online Store for the holidayze!

By Julie Milligan-Barr, Store Manager

Give the gift of Bluebirds!

Check out the store for T-shirts, tank tops, sweatshirts, hats, mugs, aprons, bumper stickers, and lots more all with bluebirds on them.

Items can be ordered online at www.cafepress.com/braw or by calling toll free at 1-800-964-9491 Monday through Saturday from 8am-8pm CST. As always, a portion of the purchase price of items goes directly to BRAW to help fund bluebird conservation programs.



Check out the wide variety of sweatshirts and T-shirts in sizes from kids to adults. Pets too!

Cards now available in packages of 10 or 20.

www.cafepress.com/braw