

Fall 2025
Vol. 40, No. 3



Wisconsin Bluebird

Newsletter of the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, Inc.

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

BRAW Convention Is September 6th

See Page 3.

Nature Centers Are a
Natural for Bluebirds
See page 11.



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Is It Time to Renew Your Membership?

President's Report

By Steve Sample

Hi all!

As President, it is important that I stop once in a while and reflect on the status of BRAW. With more than 900 members and a strong speaker lineup set for the state convention, I couldn't be more optimistic.

And it won't be long before the 2025 nesting reports will start rolling in for our data director Steve Fallon to analyze the data. I'll especially be looking to see how folks who received free nest boxes as part of our Nest in Peace, Driftless Area Land Conservancy, Carol McDaniel Legacy, trail building and nest box replacement programs fared.

We have been very fortunate to be able to secure some grants, plus we have received generous donations from our membership. Our "pay as we go" budgeting has meant solid finances for current and future efforts.

As an all-volunteer run nonprofit, 97% of our funds go for purchasing and distributing nest boxes, poles and predator guards, as well as maintaining our website and producing information materials associated with communicating with and educating groups.

Our board of directors, county contacts and committee



chairs not only get things done, but they are the kind of folks you would welcome as friends. Likewise, nothing would be possible without monitors and their families who report on nearly 7,000 nest boxes.

Looking down the road, there will continue to be challenges regarding membership growth, financing programs and attracting volunteers for the board, as county contacts and on committees.

One thing we are never short of is ideas about how we can help bluebirds and other cavity nesters. We always welcome input from our members on what BRAW should be doing, and feedback about how well we are meeting expectations.

I look forward to the state convention for a couple of reasons. It's a time to meet and make new friends. And I always learn something from the speakers.

As usual, it's also when BRAW honors those members and others who have made outstanding contributions to helping birds, the environment and BRAW.

If you are planning to be there, consider bringing someone you want to introduce to bluebirding. Thanks for all you do for bluebirds and BRAW.

Hope to see you at the convention!

Steve

Register for the BRAW Convention, September 6th

The BRAW Annual Convention will be held on September 6th at Horicon Marsh Education and Visitor Center, Horicon.

Conference fees:

\$10.00: Registration without lunch per person

\$20.00: Includes lunch & registration per person

Lunch: Choice of ham & cheese or turkey & cheese on whole wheat or white bread (indicate preference), potato salad, dessert bar – cost \$15 prepaid.

If registering for more than one person, please indicate food choice for each person. Vegetarian available upon request.

Registration is paid in advance. Deadline:

September 1. Please include name / address of each person registering.

Mail check payment to:

BRAW

9773 Vermont Church Rd.,
Black Earth, WI 53515

Feel free to bring your own lunch if desired.

Register online!

Go to braw.org

BRAW 2025 Annual Convention

8:00-9:00 Registration

9:00-9:15 Welcome: Steve Sample, President

9:15-9:45 Pat Ready "Looking over 40 Years of BRAW"

9:45-10:30 David Drake "Flying Wildlife and Wind Energy"

10:30-10:45-break

10:45-11:30 Mariette Nowak "Best Plants for Bluebirds and Other Savanna Birds"

11:30-12:15 David Misterek "Experiences Starting a BB Trail"

12:15-1:15 Lunch and Silent Auction Participation (Pre-paid only)

1:00-1:45 Q&A Session w/ Bluebird Panel (Auction ends at 1:00 p.m.)

1:45-2:15 Silent Auction winners announced

2:15-3:00 Steve Betchkal "Free-Roaming Cats"

3:00-3:30 Closing Discussions & clean up

BRAW Convention Featured Programs

September 6th, Horicon Marsh Education and Visitor Center

Looking Over 40 Years of BRAW, Pat Ready

A short look back at the last 40 years and what BRAW evolved into. Did anyone expect this organization to go this long? What does the future hold?

Flying Wildlife and Wind Energy, David Drake

Until recently, renewable energy like wind was an increasing segment of the energy sector in the United States. Wind energy offers many benefits relative to fossil fuels, including no external costs like water and air pollution. However, the negative impacts to birds and bats as a result of wind energy remain. My presentation will highlight research my students and I conducted relative to birds and bats at a wind farm in Dodge and Fond du Lac counties.

David Drake is a Professor and Extension Wildlife Specialist in the Department of Forest and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His research and extension programs primarily focus on wildlife and wildlife damage management in human-dominated landscapes. David received his Ph.D. in Forestry from North Carolina State University, a M.S. degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences from Texas A & M University, and a B.A. degree in Biology from Macalester College.

Best Plants for Bluebirds, Mariette Nowak

Create the perfect habitat for bluebirds with our beautiful Wisconsin native plants. Learn about the best plants to provide a smorgasbord of bugs and berries for bluebirds. Gardeners and native plant enthusiasts can play a vital role in restoring & preserving native communities that support bluebirds and other wildlife. Discover, too, how native plants capture carbon and help reduce the devastating effects of climate change on wildlife, as well as we ourselves.

Mariette Nowak is the author of *Birdscaping for Wisconsin and the Great Lakes Region*, *The 50 Best Native Plants to Attract Birds to Your Midwestern Garden*, which was just published by UW Press, a follow-up to her previous book, *Birdscaping in the Midwest*. She is the former director of the Wehr Nature Center and is active in Wild Ones, a natural landscaping organization.

Experiences Starting a Bluebird Trail, Dave Misterek

What is a bluebird trail? How many boxes make a trail? Where is the best place to set up a trail? Dave will cover these and many more ideas about creating a nest box trail for our native cavity nesters.

Dave Misterek was born and raised in Oshkosh. I graduated from Oshkosh West High School in 1965 and went on to receive both a BS and MS degree in Biology from UWO. I spent 6 years with the Wis. National Guard in Oshkosh. I enjoyed a 37 year career with the Wis. Dept. of Natural Resources in Oshkosh serving mainly as a Solid Waste Management Specialist. I currently enjoy retirement and belong to Winnebago Audubon, Fox Valley Wild Ones (prairie restoration group), and BRAW. I enjoy my hobby of managing my bluebird trail.

Free Roaming Cats, Steve Betchkal

Cats roam free and kill birds. This is a big problem. Steve is an award winning Journalist and is the author of several books on birding, and focuses on Wisconsin birds. Many of his writing involves humor and is exceptional entertaining.

Ask Anything Bluebirds Panel Q&A by BRAW experts.

Need advice on trail management? What you can do to help Eastern Bluebirds more? Why you have eggs or chicks loss? Who can help you with bluebirds in your area? Ask the panel of experts with years of experience for the answers and more.

Plan on a great day of meeting friends and learning.

9:00 AM – 3:00 PM

Horicon Marsh Visitor Center

N7725 Hwy 28

Horicon, WI 53032

(920) 387-7893

ANNUAL CONVENTION PRE-REGISTRATION FORM

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

Ham Turkey White bread Wheat bread Vegetarian

registration only (\$10) no lunch registration & lunch \$25 ea.

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

State _____ Zip _____

Return form **with payment (to BRAW)**
by **September 1** to:

BRAW c/o Joanie Haugen,

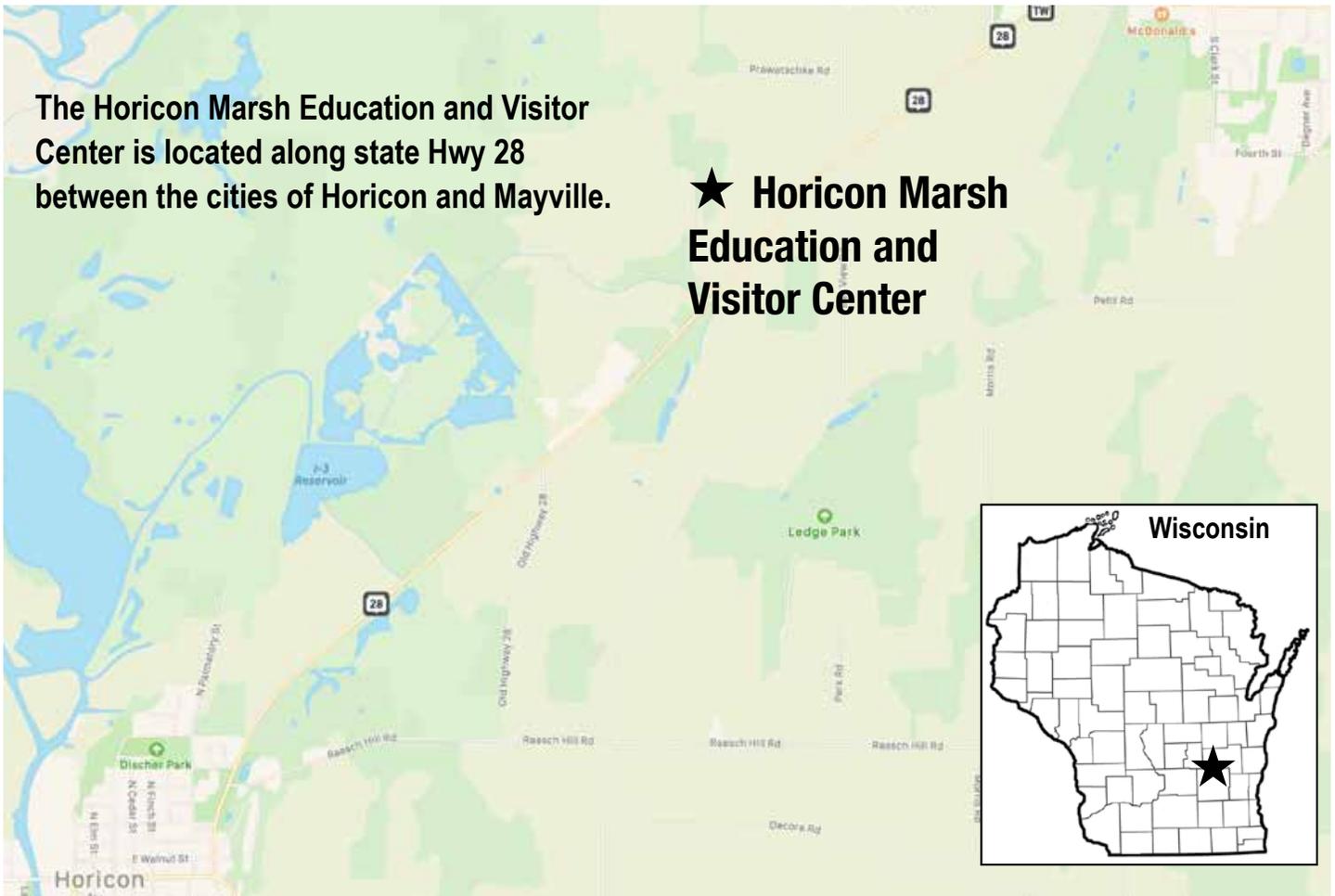
9773 Vermont Church Rd.,

Black Earth, WI 53515

or Online at BRAW.org

The Horicon Marsh Education and Visitor Center is located along state Hwy 28 between the cities of Horicon and Mayville.

★ Horicon Marsh Education and Visitor Center



**BRAW Convention
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 bluebird trail development.



Due to space constraints, this year all donated items must be pre-registered. If you can make a donation, please e-mail Brad at brad.zinda@gmail.com.

Thank you for donating and for bidding on the auction items!

Call for Data!

October 31st

Deadline

Hi Fellow Bluebirders:

It's getting to be that time of year again. Although there's still some activity, the days are getting shorter and the bird houses are getting emptier.

I know that each of you has an idea on how well the bluebirds are faring on your trails, and how your hard work had helped them. But it's the time of year when you'll soon get to see how well the bluebirds are doing across the state. Well... in order to get that information to you, we need you all to share the data you have.

It's **Data Request** time! Please use our easy on-line form, or, if you prefer, you can submit by snail mail, by sending the printed form to me at the address, below. The electronic version is quicker, easier and cheaper (no stamps), but as long we get your data, we'll be happy!

Please submit your data before **October 31**. Thanks for all you do for the birds!

Steve Fallon
Data Director
974 Halcyon Days Court
Oregon, WI 53575



Pat Freedy

Wisconsin Bluebird

BRAW EZ Summary Form

Use this form to report your nest box results for the season.

DEADLINE: OCTOBER 31

_____ No. of boxes* _____ Boxes used by Bluebirds*
 _____ Bluebird eggs laid _____ Bluebird eggs hatched
 _____ Bluebirds fledged * _____ Tree Swallows fledged
 _____ Chickadees fledged _____ House Wrens fledged

[] "I did not disturb any Chickadee, Tree Swallow or House Wren nests."

*County _____

Year: _____

*Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

*Phone (_____) - _____

*email: _____

* Required data. Please provide any other data or information.

Comments: _____

EZ Summary data can be emailed to: wisconsinbluebirds@gmail.com
 Or mail to: Data Summary Director, 974 Halcyon Days Ct., Oregon, WI 53575

Form available at www.braw.org

Fall 2025 New Members

Justine Miller, South Milwaukee	Gary Kiedrowski, Hatley
Penelope Shackelford, Milton	Nancy Boeddicker, Green Bay
Joe Hubert, Madison	Gerry Giese, Pound
Timothy Hahn, Pewaukee	Gene Avery, Two Rivers
Bill Gerndt, DePere	Ken Scheiderer, Edgar
Duane Warner, Baldwin	Mike Anzalone, Crivitz
Alice Clausing, Grafton	Peggy Watson, Waunakee
Cindy Carter, Appleton	Samantha Humes, Pewaukee
Joe and Joyce Wallace, Burlington	Beverly Greunke, Green Bay
Al Colvin and Donna Schmit, Mt. Horeb	Raji Subbarayan, Neenah
Scott Karl, FL	Steve and Sherri Bacovsky, New Berlin
Joann Laufenberg, Mt. Horeb	Heidi Bolton, Wind Lake
Paula Kiel, Mishicot	
John Eichholz, East Troy	

BRAW Fall County Contact News

Gene Birr, CC Chair

Email: gbbird22@gmail.com

As we continue to celebrate the successful recovery of bluebirds during the 40th year of BRAW, I begin my 10th year of coordinating the activities of all of our County Contacts represented by this column. I thank each of you for the many years of dedicated service in your communities and your efforts to reach out to and educate those among us who are interested in providing nesting opportunities for our bluebirds and the other cavity nesting songbirds in Wisconsin.

I especially want to thank Barb Allen for helping me with the BRAW information booth during MartinFest in Oconto on June 28, where we met with dozens of interested bluebird folks, sold several nest boxes and other items and recruited 8 new members to BRAW. Also, thanks to Steve Mayer for spearheading our participation in a similar Bird City event at Schleg Gardens in Appleton's Memorial Park on July 19, where we sold several bluebird items and gained one more member for BRAW.

It is through efforts like these and the many CCs and bluebirders that actively participate in recruiting new members to BRAW, that we continue to grow the numbers of bluebirds and nest boxes across the state.

Eau Claire County, Rita Gundry

The following article was submitted to Rita by one of our members.

Bluebird houses along the Chippewa River Trail

Twenty years ago while biking the Chippewa River Bike Trail I noticed several rundown and unusable bird-houses strung out along the trailside. After talking to Larry Liegel, the local bluebird guru, a plan was hatched to replace these with 13 bluebird houses at miles 8 and 11. With Larry's help we set them up along the trail and in the Town of Brunswick Cemetery. This was accomplished after talking to the Town of Brunswick personnel and the Department of Natural Resources. The houses were placed far from

farms to avoid sparrows and away from brush to limit wren occupancy.

Larry said, "Don't set up the houses unless you plan to monitor them every week". This seemed extreme but quickly became apparent why that was necessary because of the constant changes in the occupancy and conditions. So for the past 12 to 15 years I have been going on the 22 mile bike ride nearly every week. Thankfully, e-bikes became available.



©Peggy Gieghart

Tree swallows have been the dominant species in the houses, but bluebirds, wrens and chickadees have also been regular guests. One time a roving cowbird laid an egg in a wren nest. This would have been interesting to follow but I tossed it. Next time I will leave it.

The excitement this year was the perfect grass nest with four white eggs. The absence of feathers, which would have indicated tree swallows, meant it had to be bluebird eggs and this proved to be accurate when four blues hatched. This is one of the many adventures and oddities that has made the weekly checkups so much fun.

One side benefit is the opportunity to take photos and send reports to our daughters and their families in California and North Dakota. The four grandsons have been able to join me on the bike ride once or twice. One of these years it will be time to recruit a replacement to keep up the monitoring, but at age 83 I hope to continue for a few more years.

Bernie Hoefgen

Kewaunee County, Don Pritzl

Greetings from Kewaunee County!
(6-13-2025)

I am having a good year with my bluebirds. I have 42 boxes and have 27 Bluebird nests. Three on their second batch. So far 65 have fledged from 15 boxes. Tree Swallows have taken many of the other boxes. Haven't had a lot of sparrow pressure so far. The first two times I was able to monitor the boxes myself, but since then my daughters and their friends have taken over. Barb Allen has also inquired a couple of times to see if anyone was covering my boxes. I appreciate her concern.

Went around yesterday and cleaned out a number of boxes so they could be ready for a second batch. I still get a kick out of finding a nice, neat nest with 5 blue eggs.

On a sadder note, my brother Norbert, who got me started on the bluebirds, passed away last month. He was 99 ½ years old and a longtime member of BRAW.

Gene, thanks for all you do for BRAW. Keep up the good work! P.S. I understand you are acquainted with Lisa Leiterman from your dental office.

She is like another daughter to us and has been helping monitor my nest boxes. We love her!

Brown & Outagamie Counties, Steve Mayer

Weather has caused some mortality rate issues across both counties this year. I have received calls from concerned BB landlords about finding dead chicks in what was a perfectly fine nest the week before. These same issues have affected some of my nests as well. After cleaning out these boxes the BB's have again started new nests / eggs etc. Proving they are resilient. On Crystal Springs Golf Course I was pleasantly surprised to find many new late nest starts, however I'm guessing overall the numbers of fledged BB's will be down this season.

On July 17, I met Wendy Bekx (Grandview GC trail monitor) and Paul Klinkhammer at Grand View Golf Course in Hortonville, to introduce Paul to our monitoring practices. Paul is working on an electronic Form 22 that would allow Wendy and Paul to share monitoring next year by use of a shared electronic form. I would be curious if others are

already doing something like this? On July 19th Gene Birr and I spent the day at a Appleton Bird City event which took place at Appleton Memorial Park (The Scheig Center Gardens) This park has impressive gardens and a beautiful setting. We were invited to this event by Richard Nikolai (Purple Martin expert) as he is working with the city of Appleton on promoting Bird City. This event gave us the opportunity to share our BRAW information to many. A big Thank You to everyone that helped set this event up, so glad we were invited and treated so well. After the nesting season is over, plans are to meet with Wendy Bekx at a winery in the Hortonville area to refurbish a nest box trail. The trail was put in place many years ago so boxes will need to be moved and placement evaluated. It's a good time to start planning for success in 2026!

Marinette and Florence Counties, Barb Allen

I was very happy with the success of my first broods of bluebirds and many have successfully started or fledged a second brood. I have found larger broods this year than I normally have seen. I had 62 nests of tree swallows with 6 eggs, with 10 nests of 7 eggs and one with 8 eggs. I also had 6 bluebird nests of 6 eggs and 5 of these fledged all 6 chicks. Sadly, I lost 7 entire nests of tree swallow chicks during my mid-June nest checks which is probably due to wet, cold weather we had during that week and 2 more in early July. This was my first experience with carrion beetles which feast on decaying chicks. Several boxes were full of them making our monitoring a very disgusting chore. Thankfully this doesn't happen that often and it makes the need for monitoring essential! We are all needed!! I had fun helping man the BRAW booth at the Purple Martin Convention in Oconto with Gene Birr. We sold quite a few bluebird houses and BRAW memberships, too.

Waukesha County, Steve Vidmar

Hello everyone, This year has been mostly successful. I did get some calls though of lost broods due to wet and cold weather early in the season. This

is due to nest boxes taking on water during extended rain cycles and soaking the nest. The wet nesting material chills the bluebird young and some died of hypothermia. Please check nest boxes after extended rain periods and heavy rain. Supply dry



©Patrick Ready

nesting if necessary to save the young. Caulking all joints, especially the back of nest box and under the roof and extending the length of the roof all helps. Also if you put up blue bird-houses, please monitor them. Simply putting up blue bird houses and then not controlling house sparrows is not doing the bluebirds any favor. It makes everything worse for the bluebirds by not controlling the house sparrows. I would like to give a shout out to --Samantha Humes from Pewaukee WI--who contacted me about building 5 bluebird houses for a course project for 2025 WI. Master Naturalist application. She built 5 X style bluebird houses (front door opening) and donated all the houses with the poles. I have to say she has excellent skills in wood making and the boxes are very nice. She has also joined BRAW for 2 years. Thank you Samantha - we need more people like you. Good luck with your WI Master Naturalist.

Rock County, Rod Courtier

I had a great start this spring in spite of the cold nights. There were a lot of nests, eggs were being laid, some were hatching. Things seemed be going great for the early nesters. When I checked houses on April 28 I started finding nests where all the young were dead, and the eggs were cold. In all there were 13 nests abandoned, 64 eggs and young gone. It was not just a small area it was several miles between houses , and most

of the occupied houses in that area.

I have never experienced anything like this in all of my years of Bluebirding.

The only I can think of is many cold nights caused a shortage bugs.

The good news is the adults started nesting quite soon after the houses were cleaned out.

Did anyone else have this happen to them?

I hope everyone is having a great BB season

Racine County, Rick Fare

Hope everyone is having a successful season. This year my trail isn't doing as well as last year, which was my best season for bluebirds (92). This year I may reach 50, if all my chicks fledge. The total number of boxes used by bluebirds this year was the same as last year, but the numbers fledged were smaller. In addition, there were 5 boxes with full bluebird nests that no eggs were laid in.

Tree swallow numbers fledged were the same as last year (23), but 40 eggs were unaccounted for. Some losses could be attributed to house sparrows or other predators, but maybe the weather could be blamed. We had a stretch of cool, windy, and rainy days which made it difficult to find flying insects. Birds sometimes will eat their own eggs if they have a difficult time procuring food. Could this have been the reason for the loss of tree swallow eggs? It would be interesting to see if others had this same experience.

This year I monitored a second trail because the regular monitor had major health issues. After much searching, I was able to locate all 16 of his boxes. 7 of them contained full house sparrow nests. I ended up relocating all of them, and no longer have house sparrow problems. All but one fledged bluebirds and tree swallows. My goal now is to pair up all our trails in case this happens in the future.

The season will soon be over. I'm looking forward to seeing how the other trails did, and plan on visiting some to replace worn boxes.

Lafayette County, Jim Hess

Bluebird trails in Lafayette County are reporting mixed results. The Jim

continued next page

CC Reports

continued from page 7

Barth "Hatch" Trail (58 boxes), located in the SW area of the county, is experiencing normal numbers as compared to previous years. As of 7/23, the trail has fledged 176 bluebirds and has 21 active nests with 21 eggs and 32 young. This trail always produces big numbers.

The Dale Moody Trail located in the NW area of the county is expecting lower numbers due to the cold weather in May and predators. The predator situation is under control and all is going well now, but the numbers will be down. Dale also reports that with his trail in Iowa County the prolonged wet cold weather on May 20 and 21 with strong winds out of east and southeast caused him to lose 15 active nests due to hypothermia! He says it is his worst weather event with Bluebirds in 25 plus years. And the Jim Hess Trail (24 boxes) in the NE corner of the county is experiencing above normal numbers for the year. However, there has been a definite decline in Tree Swallows, with only one nest that fledged 3 chicks. As of July 25, the trail has fledged 85 blue-



©Patrick Ready

birds, but with the heat and humidity, activity has dropped off.

Oconto County, Gene Birr

We had a very successful and rewarding day with our BRAW information booth and display as part of MartinFest in Oconto, along with Bird City and the WPMA, on June 28. With the great assistance of Barb Allen we sold several nest boxes and recruited 8 new members to BRAW.

My bluebird numbers are running about 1/3 lower than last year's and I am likely to help fledge about 100 less bluebirds than I did then.

I worked alongside CC Steve Mayer at the Bird City event in Appleton on July 19 where we met many folks interested in learning about bluebirds.

Nest Box Choice: Cleanliness Is Preferred

By Gene Kroupa

Bluebirds are tidy creatures that dispose of their nestlings' poop by removing it from the nest box in little sacks. So, when a pair finishes with its first nesting what do they do if given a choice of nest boxes?

Do they go back to the familiar nest site with the old nest material still inside? Or do they prefer the same nest box only if it has been cleaned out first?

Used nests can be riddled with ectoparasites, most commonly fleas, mites, lice and blowfly larvae. As a result, we are taught to clean out the box and disinfect it to increase chances of reuse. Also, bluebirds are smart enough to weigh the risk of nesting in a soiled box.

Research by Mark T. Stanback and Anne D. Dervan of Davidson College confirmed that cleanliness wins



Cleaning out a nest box increases the chances of a bluebird pair's use in a second nesting attempt. (Gene Kroupa)

out. Bluebird pairs prefer to reuse a cleaned-out box where they have had a first successful nesting attempt, even

Alas, after my third year of attempting to attract a colony of Purple Martins to nest in my backyard,

I have been unsuccessful even after erecting a gourd rack and another house. I did have 8 birds arrive on June 2, and 5 more arrived on June 29, but none of these stuck around, although I do get an occasional lone visitor from my nearby neighbor's colony. Hope remains eternal for them to stop in again during migration in August and return to nest next spring.

Door County, Charlotte Lukes

John and I had only 8 boxes to check today. All the others are empty and we don't expect any activity there for the remainder of the summer.

One more box of 5 bluebirds fledged this week. We have four boxes with young and 3 boxes with eggs. Our total number of bluebird eggs now is 163, with 87 hatched and 66 fledged. Our newest nest is in a box which fledged tree swallows and there is now a complete nest with one egg. So that one might have a brood of 4 eggs by next week.

We hope you are having good results with the warmer weather.

over an identical unused one at the same site.

In their 1997 study of 32 nesting pairs, 24 chose a cleaned out previously used box and 8 picked a nearby unused nest box for their second attempt. So, timely cleaning does lead to a high rate (75%) of choice for reuse.

But what intrigued me about the study was: when bluebirds were forced to choose between a soiled but successful nest box and a fresh nest box site of equal quality, 71% opted to move to the clean unused nest box.

Out of 45 bluebird pairs, 32 went with the clean unused box, and 13 stuck with the soiled nest. Again, cleanliness won the day even when competing with a familiar nest box but the risk of ectoparasites.

While not its main purpose, the study also reinforced the case for timely nest monitoring. Getting nest boxes refreshed as soon after the first hatch has fledged sets the stage for a successful second attempt.

What Happened And Why

By Barbie Allen

I have been monitoring bluebirds for only 15 years, but I always question myself when I find unusual things occurring. I try to figure out “the why” and “what happened” to decide if there is anything I can do to help or to prevent it from happening in the future.

I was fortunate to have a nest of both blue and white bluebird eggs (9 in total) and had to figure out what happened. (See *Wisconsin Bluebird Summer 2017* for article). I have seen a bluebird incubate eggs for close to a month and had to remove the nest to get her to start a new brood as these eggs were infertile or non-viable. I



also had a bluebird pair that gave up incubating their first brood by burying the eggs in the nest after about three weeks and laying more eggs on top of the old buried eggs. I found this again recently, however the circumstances were different. I found a new bluebird nest in a box on May 15. On May 26th, there were 5 eggs but they were still cold. I assumed that the bluebird hen was still going to lay a 6th egg which I found happening more frequently this year than ever, with 6 nests of bluebirds laying 6 eggs for their first brood. Five of these broods successfully fledged all 6 of their chicks! Unfortunately, when I returned, the five eggs had vanished. (picture 1). The nest looked undisturbed, so I investigated further finding the eggs buried under new pine needles. (picture 2). I decided to let nature continue and left the nest as it was. When I returned on June 11th, there were 4 new eggs that were warm. (pictures 3 & 4). The 5 old eggs were still under the new eggs. There were 5 warm eggs when I returned on June 19th. I am not sure if this is the same bluebird pair, but assume it was with the short amount of time between egg laying. I just can't explain why they gave up on their first brood, or if another pair of blue-

birds stole the nestbox and built their new nest on top of the other bluebird's eggs.

Another odd happening that occurred on June 26th was that I found 3 nestboxes with a dead adult bird with eggs below them, all within a one block radius. The first was a dead male bluebird with his head pecked on top of 5 bluebird eggs; the second was a wren with 5 wren eggs again

with head trauma, and the last was a dead tree swallow with 6 tree swallow eggs. It appeared to be a very aggressive sparrow that could have attacked these birds but no new nests were found in the boxes when I returned except for the wren nest where I found sticks the following week.

I know I will continue trying to figure out “the why” or “the what if” in my future bird monitoring. Nature is truly fascinating!



Fall 2025 Donations

Jon Frohling, \$25 nest box
 Shaun and Vicki Abshere, \$10
 Robert Stanley, \$25 nest box
 Anna and Jim Kraft, \$10
 Al Rosenthal, \$20 research
 Tina Bartholomew, \$100
 Duane Schwab, \$25
 Shelly Culea, \$100

Sue Smith, \$25 research
 Deb Walters, \$100 nest box
 Anonymous, \$2000
 Karen Haralson, \$10
 Kim Marshall, \$25 nest box
 John Skach, \$10 research
 Jan and Jim Spredemann, \$25
 Elaine and Severin Swanson, \$25
 Sharon and Jerome Woelfel, \$1000

The Harold Cram, Jr. Bluebird Restoration Fund of the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin \$2291.50

In Memory of Bob Oleson
 Gerald and Donna Gerndt, \$25

Tips on Photographing Birds for the BRAW Photo Contest

- Make sure the photo is tack sharp.
- Action shots are more interesting.
- The closer you can get the better.
- Use a telephoto lens.
- Cars and houses make good “blinds” so birds won’t see you.
- Meet the deadline: September 30.



Peggy Gieghart



Looking for more information about Eastern Bluebirds & setting up trails? Go to the BRAW website: braw.org



Pat Ready



SHOW US YOUR BLUEBIRDS! Enter our member photo contest.



Show Us Your Bluebirds!

Enter the BRAW 2025 Photo Contest for a Chance to Win a \$50 Amazon Gift Card and MORE!

The contest is open to all BRAW members. Photos of bluebirds are preferred but photos of other cavity nesters are also accepted. There will be first, second and third place winners.

RULES:

Open to BRAW Members only.
Original photography please.
Up to 3 submissions (photos) per person.
Photos do not need to be from the current year.
Photos will be judged on composition, image quality and subject matter. Judges will not be affiliated with BRAW.

FIRST PLACE

A \$50 Amazon Gift Card.
Your photo on the cover of the *Wisconsin Bluebird* Newsletter - Winter Issue.

A **free, one-year subscription** to the newsletter for yourself, a friend or family member.

SECOND PLACE

A \$25 Amazon Gift Card.
A **free, one-year subscription** to the newsletter for yourself, a friend or family member.

THIRD PLACE

A **free, one-year subscription** to the newsletter for yourself, a friend or family member.

Submission deadline is September 30.

Please email your photographs (JPEG file) with **your name, location and any other information** that you think others will find interesting to: Patrick Ready at birdsready@gmail.com.
Subject line: **BRAW Bluebird Contest 2025**

No mail-in photos please.

Nature Centers Are a Natural for Bluebirds

By Gene Kroupa

There are at least 31 nature centers scattered about Wisconsin. A key focus of most of them is to educate visitors about our ecology, environment and the conservation of creatures in it.

Many centers employ trained naturalists and educators to fulfill this role. Some provide interaction and experiential learning opportunities for children and adults.

This function dovetails nicely with one of BRAW's key missions – educate folks of all ages about bluebirds. While some are operated by the Department of Natural Resources, such as the Horicon Visitor & Education Center, others are run by private nonprofit groups.

One such property is the Bethel Horizons Nature Center & Camp located outside of Dodgeville. James Marlow is the fulltime environmental education director and naturalist who started bluebird trails and puts on programs geared to birds.

"This 550-acre property is blessed with many types of habitats that are welcoming to different bird species," noted James. Trails provide easy access to the various areas so visitors can see firsthand what is being discussed in programs.

"Our programming emphasizes engagement with the environment," explained James. "We have hundreds of young campers, as well as adults, who get to absorb the information and interact with the birds in their habitat."

Bethel's avian programming includes classes about "Building Bluebird Boxes," where participants can assemble pre-cut nest boxes to take home for siting. "Our box parts are based on the basic North American Bluebird Society's nest box plan, with tweaks supplied by BRAW," said James.

The nest box building class also covers the ecological significance of bluebirds and other cavity nesters, their preferred habitat, how and where to site nest boxes, managing a



James Marlow and center staff members who helped with a box making workshop.

(James Marlow)

trail, dealing with pests, and monitoring boxes to obtain data.

"Our flagship event is 'Breakfast with the Birds,' noted James. Participants can observe birds at close range from behind camouflage mesh curtains in the Nature Center's classroom. Then they head to the field.

"Students can check out what's going on in our 10 active bluebird nest boxes on two trails," said James. The stops at nest boxes give James a chance to reinforce points made in the classroom. Likewise, engagement lets students get a feel for what is involved with managing a bluebird trail.

"At first students are surprised at how brilliant blue the eggs are," observed James. "Then as the eggs hatch and nestlings grow, they marvel at the whole development process. And sometimes they witness what can happen in nature when eggs are destroyed or nestlings die," he added.

BRAW provided Bethel with its first nest boxes and mounting poles, plus guidance about locating, maintaining and monitoring them as part of its Driftless Area Land Conservancy (DALC) program. This year Bethel served as a distribution site for over 100 free nest boxes, poles and predator guards.

"Partnering with BRAW has also supplied us with the content and expertise we needed to teach classes and operate trails," said James. And BRAW has also benefitted. "We find



Nestlings prepare to fledge from a nest box supplied by BRAW. *(James Marlow)*



Bethel Horizons Nature Center & Camp served as a distribution site for nest boxes.

(Gene Kroupa)

that working with nature centers is a win-win situation, because of their support for our bluebird education objectives," concluded Steve Sample, president of BRAW.

If a local nature center near you wants to start a bluebird nest box trail, needs a speaker about bluebirds, or requires some handout materials for its programs, contact: Steve Sample, at ssample@gmail.com or text him at 708.606.8070.

Bluebirding Tips: In Search of the Perfect Nest Box

By Gene Kroupa

Over the years, BRAW members Fred Craig, of Onalaska, and the late Lief Marking, did much of the pioneering research about bluebird nest box design and construction.

We can thank them for the standard ¾-inch wall thickness that provides better insulation during hot and cold spells. And their recommendations about light vs. dark colored paint, as well as providing ventilation holes or slots, help ensure cooler boxes during hot periods. Fred swears by cedar as his wood of choice.

One of Fred's earlier designs included an adjustable door panel that could be moved up or down to let in or close off air flow. He has since lowered the left side and cut the bottom off to match the right one. Now, there is no need for any other adjustment. Everything else stayed the same.

The ventilation slots can be filled with tubular foam weatherstripping which is easily installed or removed depending on the temperature. Some folks drill three, half-inch holes and insert foam plugs in them. However, vent holes might invite wasps.

Fred prefers to check his nest boxes by raising the door panel up from the bottom, because he wants them as high off the ground as possible. By making it more difficult for predators to reach the nest, Fred has never lost eggs nor chicks using this access method.

But as Fred himself once said: "Bluebirding is a constant process of trying to make the good better." In this spirit, Dave Lucey, of Cross Plains, among others, has tweaked the standard North American Bluebird Society's (NABS) nest box plan (available at www.braw.org).

"I prefer to have the door swing down rather than up for a number of reasons," said Dave. "Foremost, this positioning makes it easier to look into the nest without fear of the nestlings, especially wrens, escaping," he explained.

"It also makes it easier to clean the box and leave the door open at the



Fred Craig, of Onalaska, continues to tweak his nest boxes. (Mary Craig)



Tubular foam weatherstripping can be inserted or removed from ventilation slots.

(Mary Craig)

end of the season," he noted. Dave chooses to use pine in box construction, because "it is easy to work with and is one-third the cost of cedar."

Note: If you use pine, take a propane torch and lightly scorch the box. Then use a clear spray on the box, which will extend its life by quite a margin.

But the most significant change Dave has made is in the design of the predator guard. "I make the standard Noel guard longer, with a smaller

opening, and include a strip of wood. When the ½-inch hardware cloth is stapled on, the guard becomes more rigid and harder to remove," he explained.

The wood strip also serves as a landing platform for the parents when feeding nestlings. And later it becomes a launch pad for fledglings about to leave the nest.

"I initially waited until a nest was built or an egg laid before attaching the guard," added Dave. "But bluebirds readily accepted the device. Now, I leave the guard on year-round, and they have no problems in finding the cavity in the spring."

Gene Birr, of Oconto Falls, supplies BRAW with nest boxes made of 100-year-old, storm-felled white pines that he had sawn into 1-inch, rough-cut lumber. "I make my boxes with a wrap-around roof to keep rainwater away from entering on all sides," noted Gene. This feature works well when using either a metal conduit pole or T-post, because it also prevents a nest box from sliding down if the mounting brackets or U-bolt should come loose.

Another feature Gene has incorpo-



Dave Lucey, of Cross Plains, developed the improved predator guard with a landing platform. (Dave Lucey)

rated in his nest boxes is a choice of either a left- or right-side opening door. This is a handy option when

putting a trail along a barbed wire fenceline or any place that formerly required rotating the box to check its contents.

One thing these three BRAW nest box builders have adopted is the use of screws to secure all panels to prevent warping and separating.

It is likely that bluebirders in other states have made similar tweaks, and no one is claiming "first" rights. Maybe you have come up with some other improvements in design, construction or mounting. Please e-mail a description and pho-



Gene Birr, of Oconto Falls, builds nest boxes with wrap-around roofs and left- or right-side doors. (Pat Ready)

tos to me so they can be shared in the spirit of seeking perfection in our nest boxes – gkroupa@tds.net.

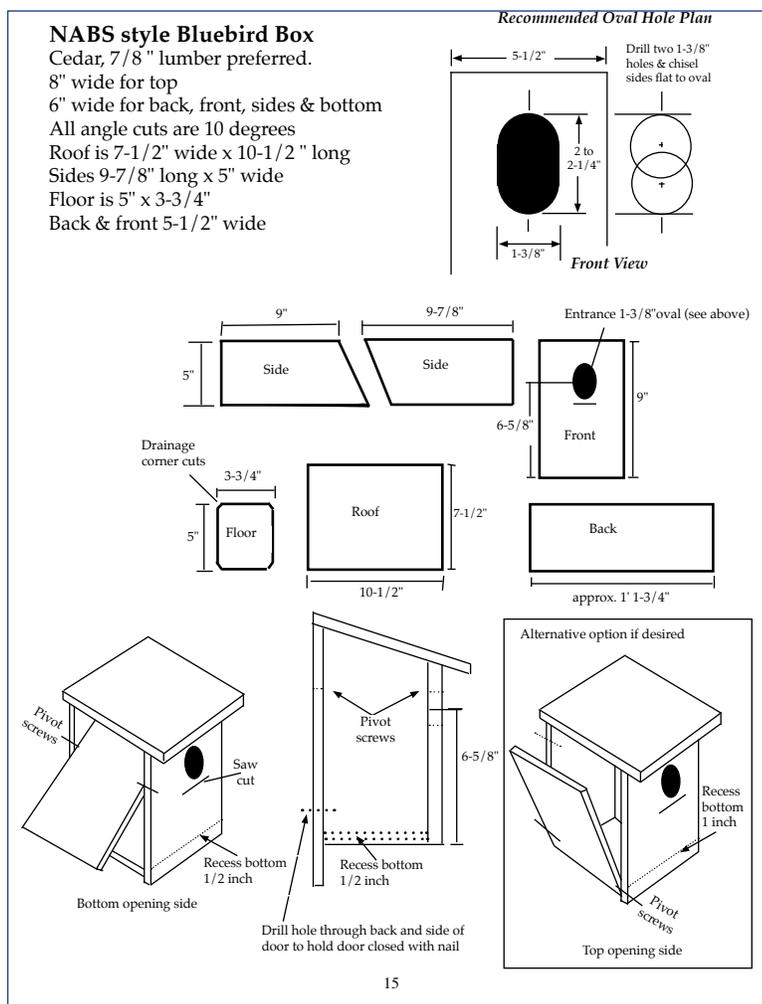
Use the Van Ert Trap to Solve Your House Sparrow Problems



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 bulls eye invariably suggests a trapped sparrow.



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

Membership Renewal Information

By Valerie Van Winkle, Membership Services

If the address label of your *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter reads Fall 2025 next to your name, then your membership expires this month, and you need to renew immediately. If you are an online member, you won't see this clue so please consider marking the expiration date on your calendar when you sign up. We don't want you to miss a single newsletter!

The next issue of the *Wisconsin Bluebird* goes into production in November and will be mailed in December. Memberships received after November 15 may not be processed in time to receive the Winter 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)
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A BRAW membership makes a great Anytime gift!
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Give the gift of Bluebirds!

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*BRAW sends out nest box deal promotions and "time to renew" reminders via email.

Donation (optional)

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

\$100 for nest box trail

\$_____ for bluebird research

In addition to my membership dues, I wish to

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(Contributions to BRAW are tax deductible.)

Check appropriate boxes:

This is a renewal.

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Mail this membership request to:

BRAW, Inc.

Valerie Van Winkle

PO Box 628492

Middleton, WI 53562

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

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

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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.

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Register for the BRAW Convention!

See page 3

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

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



Pair select box and female builds the nest.



Within a week or two 3-5 eggs are usually 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.