

Summer 2024
Vol. 39, No. 2



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 - September 7th

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Is It Time to Renew Your Membership?

President's Report

Thanks to a generous grant resulting from the now disbanded Lafayette County Bluebird Society, coordinated by the Community Foundation of Southern Wisconsin, several of our volunteer Board members and a County Contact have installed 68 nest boxes with the help of the Driftless Area Land Conservancy. This enthusiastic organization's membership is willing to monitor all these boxes. We completed this project by mid-April over a six-week period. This major project led by Gene Kroupa has already brought news of nesting successes. As a matter of fact, bluebirds were building nests at the time the nesting boxes were being installed! All the well-made nesting boxes used were built by Gene Birr, our County Contact Coordinator. Fantastic!



On April 28th, Valerie Van Winkle, Gail Smith, and I manned a BRAW booth at the Madison Bird and Nature Festival. It was a cold and rainy day, but the public turnout was amazing. Besides this being a major BRAW public education effort, we gave out bluebird nesting boxes built by the Dane County 4-H club and signed up several new BRAW members. This was also a great opportunity to connect with like-minded birding organizations with the hope to have additional collaborations in the future. Thanks to Dane County Contact, Paul Noeldner, for organizing this impressive event.

Many, if not most, of our membership participated in the public voting on the resolutions put forth by BRAW through the Wisconsin Conservation Congress. Wisconsin is one of the very few states that have a process whereby citizens can have a voice to help regulate the many aspects of hunting, fishing, wildlife, and environmental issues.

Wisconsin realizes that the public often knows best! Any submitted resolutions must go through several different committees and if they are evaluated as relevant, are placed for public voting to approve, or reject. If approved by the public, then they are forwarded to the DNR or other agencies for possible action. I submitted a proposal for action that carried BRAW's name, and it has been overwhelmingly supported by the public throughout the state. It was item #30 in the voting and all proposals and voting results of the voting can be found at: <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/about/wcc/springhearing>.

My request is summarized as follows: "Title: The Eastern Bluebird and other Grassland Birds are declining at an unprecedented rate in Wisconsin.

Though this significant decline can be attributed to more than one issues, most can be resolved with a concentrated effort across the state with an emphasis on education. Using the resources of the WiDNR publications and state-wide network, posters at libraries, participation of the appropriate departments within our state university sites, seminars through 4-H and the Farm services, a continued effort to alert people of these issue (avoiding just a one-shot deal) may impact and help slow or correct the avian decline in our state, especially grassland birds."

If any of our membership is working for our cause by seminars, or whatever, please let me know. We are always looking for more partnerships to promote the increase of bluebirds. The more support, especially donations and memberships, the more we can do.

This all-volunteer organization really works! Of course, we are grateful for the support of our BRAW members and donors to make this all possible. Thank you all!

Best wishes for a great bluebird fledging season!

Steve

BRAW Welcomes These Members

Paul Didion, Jefferson Schlitz Audubon Nature Center, Bayside
Steven Bray, Wautoma
Tim Connaughty, Westby
Friends of Copper Falls State Park, Mellen
Debi Hornburg, Wild Birds Unlimited, Brookfield
Arthur Sonneland, Delafield
Karen Wagner, Allenton
Jason Schultz, Stanley
Mark Terreau, Oshkosh
The Ridges Sanctuary, Baileys Harbor
Carol Accola, Eau Claire
Antony Thompson, Colfax
Scott Johnson, Rhinelander
Kristal Kuss, Green Bay
Deb Rugg, Green Bay

Whitney Froelich, Wild Birds Unlimited, Green Bay
Eleanor Wages, New Berlin
Karen Burkeland, Barneveld
Judy Salus, Menomonee Falls
Eileen Bruno, Browntown
John Dietrich, Manitowoc
Niagara Public Library, Niagara
Robert Novy, Verona
Koshkonong Trails School, Cambridge
Todd Verboomen, Chilton
Barbara Bradley, OH
Emanuelson Family, Madison
Kassandra Beckman, Appleton
Sarah Black, Madison
Jennifer Beil, Madison
Tom Dahl, McFarland
Amy Larson, Middleton
Dretzka Golf Course, Milwaukee
John Hurd, Edgerton
DCHS Wildlife Center, Madison
Cynthia Hanson, MN



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

Save the Date!

2024 BRAW Convention

September 7th, Horicon Marsh Visitor Center

Officer Reports, Silent Auction, Morning Featured Program, Question & Answer Session.

Catered Lunch, Auction items, Afternoon Featured Program.

More details and schedule will appear in the *Fall Wisconsin Bluebird*.

Plan on a day of meeting friends and learning.

9:00 – 2:30 PM

Horicon Marsh Visitor Center
N7725 Hwy 28
Horicon, WI 53032



Register for the BRAW Convention

The BRAW Annual Convention will be held on Saturday, September 7th at Horicon Marsh Visitor's Center, Horicon WI.

Conference fees:

\$10.00: Registration without lunch per person
\$20.00: Includes registration & lunch per person

Lunch: Choice of ham & cheese or turkey & cheese on whole wheat or white bread (indicate preference); potato salad, dessert bar – cost \$10 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
Joanie Haugen,
9773 Vermont Church Rd.
Black Earth, WI 53515

SILENT AUCTION

Are you creative with sewing, painting, woodworking, photography or other crafts? Use your imagination for the silent auction. It doesn't need to be bluebird related. Help support BRAW with your donation or plan to buy an item and support BRAW's bluebird trail development.

ANNUAL CONVENTION PRE-REGISTRATION FORM

Please indicate the number of lunches for your party at \$10 each: _____. **Include check for full amount.**

___Ham ___Turkey ___White bread ___Wheat bread
___Vegetarian ___ registration only (\$10) no lunch

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

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

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

BRAW Summer CC News

Gene Birr, CC Chair

Email: gbbird22@gmail.com

The new bluebird season is well underway now and many monitors are reporting increased sightings of bluebirds returning earlier than the last couple of years and in increased numbers. On my trails in NE WI, I have already documented an improvement of nearly 100%. By the end of April, I had recorded 28 bluebird nests with 75 BB eggs after my second monitoring trip, compared to late May of 2023, nearly a month later, when I had only 14 nests and 51 eggs. Indications are that 2024 has the potential to be a very good year for bluebirds.

I wish to welcome two new County Contacts to BRAW's leadership. In Adams County, Judy Salus was recruited by our membership chair Val Van Winkle to join our ranks. And in Trempealeau County, Steve Banicki stepped up to volunteer his efforts there. We thank them both for representing BRAW to those interested in bluebirds.

Waupaca County, Craig & Sheila Beyer

Sheila and I have been working for weeks now, putting up new houses, moving the ones that haven't had bluebirds in them for the last couple of years, sometimes just a few feet makes a difference, sometimes to a whole new hopefully more productive spot. We now have over 40 cemeteries with a house or two installed, we keep adding to the NEST IN PEACE program! We have seen a lot of bluebirds here in Waupaca County and feel like it is going to be a good year for our beloved bluebirds! Some nests have been built already but no eggs seen yet (4/22). We picked up some new land and started a beautiful trail, we are excited about this one. We hope everyone has an awesome bluebird summer! Happy Trails!

Door County, Charlotte Lukes

I presented my Bluebird Nest Box program on March 16th in Baileys Harbor at the annual nest box building workshop of The Ridges Sanctuary. I continue to do weekly reports to

the other Door County monitors. The most recent report (April 23) showing that our trail has 9 boxes with bluebird eggs. There are 7 hens incubating with one more to probably start now. We have one complete chickadee nest. By Earth Day last year we had only 8 boxes with nests (14 this year) and last year we had only 8 eggs (42 this year). The warmer than normal winter has perhaps helped.



Photo: Peggy Gierhardt

Pierce County, Jim Beix

Area bluebirders Polly Jauquet and Jim Higgins and I joined Lowell Peterson (St. Croix Co. Contact) in St. Croix Falls for Saturday morning bluebird presentations. Jim Higgins of River Falls gave a presentation in Prescott when Lowell was unable to attend. Polly and I helped answer questions, demonstrate different nest box styles. Jim, Polly and I assisted Lowell at his St. Croix Falls presentation.

This Spring I moved 3 nest boxes that were unused after 3 years on a county highway. Several additional boxes need roof repair and 2-3 were stolen after the nesting season so replacement is needed. One of the boxes (10) at Kinnickinnic State Park was moved after 2 consecutive years of no nesting.

St. Croix County, Lowell Peterson

On Feb. 7, I conducted a bluebird presentation for the 4th grade class at St. Anne's School in Somerset. Thirty slides were shown along with nest box displays followed by a question and answer session. There are 3 nest boxes located on the school grounds and are monitored weekly by the students as a part of their science class. The 4th grade class has been doing this for over 12 years.

On Feb. 24, Jim Beix, Jim Higgins and I led a bluebird/cavity nesting birds presentation at Freedom Park in Prescott. Slides, displays, and hand-

outs were available for the attendees. The group was very enthusiastic and much time was spent with a Q and A session.

On March 2, Jim Higgins, Jim Beix and I were invited to present our bluebird "show" to a group of over 50 adults and children at the River Wood Nature Center in Star Prairie. Local conservation groups and interested folks in the area, led by Mike Reiter, cut out parts for over 50 bluebird boxes to be assembled by the children. Upon completion of the presentation, 30 students assisted by their parents and adults, assembled the nest boxes and each "future bluebirder" was able to take their own box home. Much planning and effort by the local groups made this program a tremendous success. Thank you to all.

Ashland County, Richard Becker

Not much in the way of bluebirds in this part of Wisconsin yet. (April 22)

Kewaunee County, Don Pritzl

Spring is here! A great time of the year! (April 28)

With my daughter's help, I checked all the BB boxes yesterday, was pleasantly surprised. I have 46 boxes on my trails and had 12 boxes with BB eggs and have 6 boxes with started or completed nests. A great start! I say I was surprised because I hadn't seen many bluebirds around at all this spring.

I had a booth at the "Bird City Algoma" event on Saturday, (4/27). There seemed to be a lot of interest about BBs and a lot of people who claimed they have boxes out and have bluebird nests. Hope they are right! Will stay in touch.

Oconto County, Gene Birr

I am finding nearly twice as many bluebird nests as of the end of April compared to last year.

Since I replaced all of my skylight boxes with solid roofs this year I am finding many more sparrows than in the recent past, which I am summarily dispatching with the use of a Van Ert trap. Even more impressive is the fact that I already have bluebirds nesting in the new roof boxes at 4 sites out of the 25 locations where I had skylights previously, I had no bluebirds at all nesting there during the last two years.

Brown County

On March 23, I gave my annual bluebird presentation at the Wild Birds Unlimited store on Oneida Street in Green Bay, now under the new ownership of Whitney and Neal. There were 25 people in attendance with much interest and many questions, and 3 of those chose to sign up as new members of BRAW. Several friends came by to hear my talk as well, and a couple of local monitors who I hadn't met before came up and introduced themselves and we talked bluebirds. I thank them all for attending.

In mid-April I was joined by CC, Steve Mayer, as we returned to Calumet County. There we met with Todd and Carrie, representatives of EnTech Solutions, a solar energy residential and educational facility near Stockbridge, on the eastern shore of Lake Winnebago. We had helped set up a 10 nest box trail at their location last fall and returned to show them how to monitor their bluebird trail, keep weekly records and control house sparrows.

On April 11, one of our most active monitors in Brown County, Della Clabots of Suamico, gave her first bluebird talk to the folks at her "Y" water aerobics luncheon, attended by 29-people-4 men and 25 women. She reports that her husband was amazed that the women were very silent, very interested and really paid attention. She then gave a brief history of the early plight of bluebirds and their need for nesting cavities and how BRAW was formed by the DNR and interested citizens in 1986. She included reference to our local pioneer, Vince Bauldry, and his influence on nest boxes in our area. She explained the other songbirds which may use our boxes and had examples of their nesting materials to show everyone how to tell what bird is nesting in a box. She talked about the problems with sparrows and raccoons and the need for conduit for a nest box mounting pole and other predator protection. Examples of good habitat were discussed and the things we look for and record when we check our boxes and the importance of the weekly monitoring with the motto: It is better to have NO box at all than an unchecked/monitored box for bluebirds.

Of course, she described life cycle of bluebirds and their nests, eggs and young; how they often nest a second time and then finally group up as a family and migrate south in the fall.

Her closing message to me was: "I have gotten lots of good comments on what they learned, and questions, too. The ladies felt they had learned so much. They are now Bluebird conscious and Bluebird watchers. We got lots of good PR with not a lot of effort."



Photo: Patrick Ready

Marinette County, Barbie Allen

Being a "snow bird", I was so anxious to get home to the bluebirds, seeing we had such a mild winter and hearing how early the bluebirds had returned. After doing my first and second nestbox checks, I've found 55 bluebird nests and 122 bluebird eggs. Hopefully the weather will continue to be nice and we will have a very productive year.

I am so happy to report that at Governor Tommy Thompson State Park in Marinette County, where 25 new nestboxes were placed last fall, there are 7 bluebird nests with 16 bluebird eggs already and 4 black-capped chickadee nests. A hike is being planned at the park on June 22nd.

With the help of Gene Birr, myself and Aaron McCullough, a Wildlife Biologist, we will have a nature hike and informal presentation promoting BRAW and bluebird monitoring. Gene and I will also be installing birdhouses at Cramer's Vernon Hills Golf Course in Peshtigo for Beth and Greg Goetzman to monitor.

Winnebago County, Dave Misterek

By early March, Gene Birr had built 20 nest boxes, supplied by BRAW funds, to retired biology teacher, Ryan

Walter, who met Gene in Green Bay to make the exchange of boxes. Then the following week on March 9, Ryan and Dave erected them along with 5 Peterson boxes that were made by the students. These boxes along with the conduit poles prepared by Ryan, were added to the grounds at the new Neenah High School campus of nearly 250 acres to establish the 25 box bluebird trail

Eau Claire County, Rita Gundry

My contribution to this column is from my brother, Larry Liegel, also a bluebirder and BRAW member. As you know, I have bluebird trails in both Eau Claire and Sauk Counties. Sauk County, where we grew up in the Town of Franklin, is in the midst of the Driftless Area in SW Wisconsin. Some of my boxes there are not normally accessible in late winter, due to the hilly terrain and isolated fields/meadows southwest of the Baraboo hills. But this spring, I was able to check these boxes in early March, due to the unusually warm weather in late winter. What a game saver that was, as THE BLUES arrived around March 20th this year in the town of Franklin. For the first time in many years, I had to replace panels on three boxes this spring where woodpeckers drilled holes in the sidewalls and a squirrel had enlarged the entrance hole in another box. I moved a few boxes and got rewarded nicely.

In the Village of Loganville, near brother Rod's Diesel Repair Shop, I moved his box away from a brushy fence line to the middle of his back lot. As of April 23rd, I have a clutch of 5 BB eggs in that box. It pays to listen to the experts at the Q & A sessions at our annual BRAW meetings!

As of April 26th, I have 72 eggs in 15 boxes of my 30-box trail, with more completed nests awaiting egg laying. This is the best start I have had in several years. The nemesis, of course, is Mother Nature's freezing nighttime temps in the last 2 weeks. Our brother, Mark, helped me out by installing nightly hand warmers in boxes where incubation had not yet begun. Hopefully, we have minimized the loss of some of these exposed clutches. I expect to have nestlings by May 7-8.

continue next page

In Eau Claire County, where winter comes earlier and stays later, my Sky Park Industrial trail is off to a slower start. I have just 3 boxes occupied with 10 eggs, but it's still early, so I remain optimistic. Here's hoping for a banner year of BB production for us all. I am also grateful for the assistance of Bernie and Karla Hoefgen, et al, of Eau Claire who faithfully monitor the Chippewa River State Bike Trail each year. Thanks guys/gals.

Dane County, Paul Noeldner

The **11th Annual Free Madison Bird and Nature Festival** was on Sunday April 28 Noon-4pm.

Bird watchers, nature lovers, friends, families and kids attended this City Wide Celebration of Earth Week, Arbor Day, and International Bird Day hosted by Madison Parks and Nature Groups!

Between noon and 4pm Hawks and Owls up close at the ongoing Open Door Bird Sanctuary Live Raptor Show in the big Community Room at Warner Park Center, had no lines and different birds all afternoon.

Attendees enjoyed food carts, music,



educational nature exhibits, face painting, free kites and lots of fun hands on nature activities for the kids!

Many learned how to 'Grow Native' and enjoy more beautiful birds, bees, trees, and wildflowers in their yard while also helping cool our city as the climate heats up, clean our air, reduce carbon costs and runoff into our lakes, and sustain the urban nature ecosystem we share.

Pat Ready informed me that the Sun Prairie Golf Course was sold last year to Harbor Athletic Fitness. The new owners are redesigning part of the course and plan to build a new

club house in the future. A few nest boxes that were put in by Kent Hall of BRAW over ten years ago required moving. New course director Pete Simon was on hand to help move boxes to areas not under construction. Trail Monitor Sally Keyal was on hand to help at now Prairie Pines Golf Course.

Request for Contact people

The following counties are not represented by a BRAW contact person. Contact people are nothing more than that - a local person to talk to about bluebirds and trails. It is true that several of our counties would be hard pressed to see bluebirds due do the scarcity of viable habitat. None-the-less, if you are willing to represent any of these counties, please contact Gene Birr, our county contact coordinator. He is listed at the back of the *Wisconsin Bluebird*. Thanks for considering!

Barron, Bayfield, Buffalo, Burnett, Calumet, Clark, Crawford, Dunn, Green Lake, Iron, Jefferson, Juneau, Langlade, Manitowoc, Menominee, Price, Pepin, Polk, Richland, Rusk, Sauk, Sheboygan, Taylor, Vernon, Washburn, and Waushara.

Becoming a Bluebirder

By Joanie Haugen

Eighteen months ago, I was asked to join the BRAW board. Not because of any bluebird expertise, but for my accounting skills. I knew that monitoring bluebird trails was a "thing" thanks to conversations with the legendary Ann Wick, but that was the extent of my knowledge. Six newsletters and one annual conference later, my husband and I decided we had learned enough to try our hand at being trail monitors. We're five weeks in and we're loving it.

Our trail contains 18 boxes in the recently restored Vermont Prairie. Board member Dave Lucey was instrumental in getting the boxes installed and the GPS coordinates recorded. The first week, most boxes were empty. A few contained a piece or two of grass, but no nests. Would the bluebirds find these new nest boxes? Should we be doing something to attract bluebirds to our trail?



Imagine our excitement week 2 when we discovered 3 complete nests. We attached the 'Dave Lucey design' predator guards to the boxes with nests.

Week three, two of the nests were full, five eggs in each. We were as excited as new parents, taking photos of the eggs to show our friends and family. By week five, 9 eggs had hatched and two more nests were full of eggs! Yes, we had officially become 'bluebirders'.

Being new at this, we still have questions. Fortunately, the BRAW board

members and County Contacts are incredibly knowledgeable and willing to answer questions from newbies like us. If you are interested in becoming a bluebird trail monitor, we strongly encourage you to do so! Your trail may contain one box or many. If you live in an urban area, ask if you can put up boxes at a local cemetery, park or farm. If you have questions as to where to put up your boxes, how to monitor them or best practices for keeping bluebirds safe from predators, the BRAW board and County Contacts are here to help. Also check braw.org.



These Old Nest Boxes

By Gene Kroupa

While driving down back roads, walking through local parks, or visiting rural cemeteries, it's not uncommon to see dilapidated, stick-stuffed bluebird nest boxes. Oh, the stories they could recall about once enthusiastic monitors checking on nesting bluebirds.

That was yesterday, but today the boxes tell sad, but true tales about neglect. Now, no one is checking on their condition nor contents. And bluebirds aren't using them.

But summer is a perfect time to do something about this situation. And maybe BRAW can lend a helping hand. Here's what you might consider:

- **Record the location.** Jot down the name(s) of nearby roads, GPS coordinates, and names of parks and cemeteries along with the closest towns, cities, or landmarks. Take photos with your cellphone of the boxes, road signs, and park or cemetery entrance signs.
- **Identify the owners.** If possible, find out who or what entity owns the property where the nest boxes are situated. Google Maps, onX Hunt and Land id are useful software packages,



Report neglected nest boxes that need replacement to BRAW.

(Gene Kroupa)

Wisconsin Bluebird



A happy bluebird pair enjoys their new home thanks to a BRAW member.

while county platbooks are also helpful for this purpose. For parks, checking with a city, town, county, or state government office works. Contacts for cemeteries can be obtained by calling local funeral homes. Knocking on doors and asking about ownership of private properties involves risks that you should keep in mind.

- **Contact BRAW.** Even if you would feel comfortable in replacing and monitoring new nest boxes on your own, BRAW would still like to know about the welcomed reclamation project. Also, we might be able to supply free replacement boxes and poles. Otherwise, please report as much information as you are able to gather to a BRAW director or officer as listed on the website www.braw.org or in this newsletter for follow-up action.

If fresh boxes can be put in place soon, it is possible that bluebird pairs will attempt a second nesting in them yet this year. Plus, the boxes will be ready for returning bluebirds next spring. Think what future stories they will tell their fledglings about the new digs they found thanks to you.

Keep in mind that the nest boxes shouldn't be put up unless there is someone who agrees to monitor them on a regular basis.

In Memoriam: Kent Hall

By Brad Branwell-Zinda

Dr. Kent D. Hall, 86, passed away on May 19th, 2024 at River View Lodge Assisted Living in Stevens Point.

Kent was a biology professor for 30 years at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. Kent's love of



birds was sparked as a young child in his home state of Missouri where he would spend hours watching bluebirds nest and raise young in wooden fence posts on their property. After retiring from the university, Kent decided to give back to the bluebirds that helped lead him to his career in biology by developing and coordinating the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society Bluebird Trail (ABT) in central Wisconsin. Over his 18 years of coordinating, the ABT became the largest bluebird trail in North America with nearly 1,400 nest boxes placed across 6 counties and with 130 volunteer monitors throughout that time. In total, 72,000 Eastern Bluebirds were produced in those 18 years.

Kent also became involved with BRAW, serving on the board for 11 years. He served as Vice-President and for nine years was the data collection and analysis coordinator. He helped Wisconsin become the top-producing bluebird state in the nation and maintained that status for eight years. Kent also helped several elementary schools develop bluebird trails for students to monitor and hopefully develop an attachment to birds as Kent did as a child. Many of these trails are still being monitored by student bird clubs today.

It goes without saying that Kent's efforts towards the conservation of the Eastern Bluebird in Wisconsin is unparalleled and he will be deeply missed.

2023 BRAW Financial Update

By Joanie Haugen, Treasurer

BRAW receives most of its revenue from membership dues. For \$25 per year, a member receives a printed copy of the quarterly newsletter, Wisconsin Bluebird, full of tips and information on supporting bluebirds throughout the state, \$20 per year if the newsletter is e-mailed.

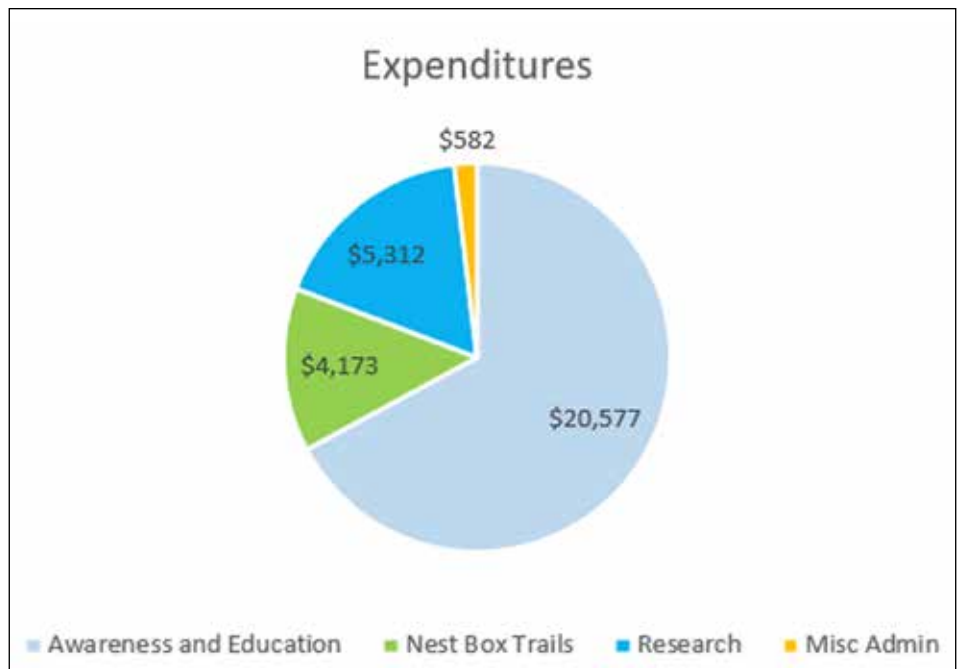
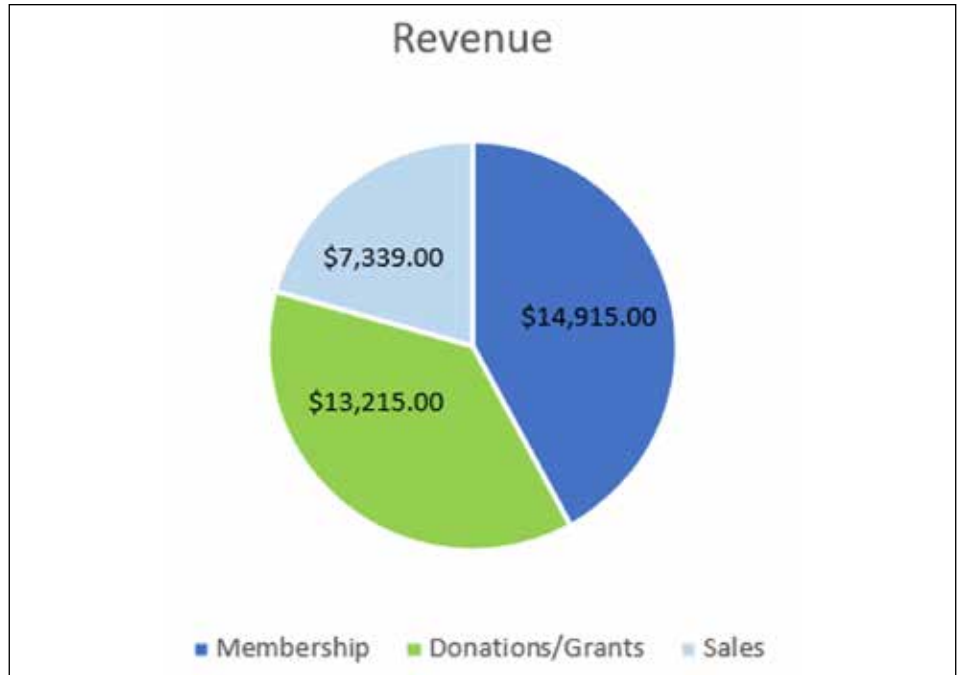
At events like the Annual Convention and at the Garden Expo in Madison, BRAW presents informative sessions and shares recent research findings. Nest box supplies are also available for sale at these events

BRAW receives grants and donations that are used to promote nest box trails and to fund research on the best ways to support bluebirds in Wisconsin.

The volunteer Board of Directors, Committee Chairs and County Contacts allow BRAW to use over 98% of funds raised to support the mission of the organization.

Quarterly newsletters, the brow.org website and presentations throughout the state provide education and awareness of the needs of bluebirds and other cavity nesters in WI.

Research on nest boxes and predator guards allow BRAW to recommend and provide products that give bluebirds the greatest chance of survival. These products are sold or given to volunteers willing to monitor nest box trails. BRAW distributed over 300 nest boxes and 50 Van Ert traps in 2023



2024 SUMMER DONATIONS

Mike Moran, \$25 research
 Jacob Martinus Valentine III, \$21.20
 Joan Hoy, \$15 nest box, \$10 research
 Todd & Betty Berens, \$25
 Mary Kritz, \$15 nest box, \$15
 Karen Haralson, \$15 nest box
 Ken Jalowitz, \$100
 Bonnie Knoedler, \$25 research
 Michael Everson, \$50
 Mike Olejniczak, \$25
 William Grise, \$15 nest box
 Steve Mayer, \$20

Don Pritzl, \$75
 John Dietrich, \$5 research
 Robert Novy, \$100
 Gene Birr, \$25
 Michele Rivers, \$10
 Amy Larson, \$10
 Kim Marshall, \$15 nest box
 Jon & Diane Koenig, \$25
 Nicholas Traxler, \$26.25

*In Memory of Ken Studnicka
 David Spiegle, \$50*

DALC Program Up & Running

By Gene Kroupa

Back in February, BRAW and the folks at the Driftless Area Land Conservancy (DALC) in Dodgeville agreed on a joint program to increase the number of bluebirds in the Driftless Area of southern Wisconsin.

DALC focuses on conserving healthy and diverse habitats, clean waters, productive and sustainable working lands, and scenic open spaces. The land trust works in Iowa, Lafayette, Richland, Sauk and parts of Grant, Green and Dane counties.

Since there are 40 land trusts devoted to preservation of natural resources in the state, BRAW hoped to learn more about this avenue for reaching like-minded landowners. DALC knew many of the landowners they work with were interested in restoring bluebirds to their properties.

The offer presented to their more

than 300 newsletter recipients was simple: three free nest boxes and poles, along with siting and installation help from BRAW volunteers on suitable properties.

Nest box recipients agreed to monitor their boxes, record visit results, and then send a summary report at season's end to be included in BRAW's annual nesting data report.

Funding for materials would come from a grant that BRAW had received from the Community Foundation of Southern Wisconsin on behalf of the former Lafayette County Bluebird Society.

Gene Birr, county contact chair, built the sturdy NABS style nest boxes from 100-year-old, storm-felled white pines. BRAW volunteers included: Jim Hess, Mary Sobol, Dave Lucey, Paul Noeldner, Steve Sample and Gene Kroupa, overall project coordinator.

Jennifer Filipiak, executive director, guided DALC's efforts. Dale Moody, board chair, and Mark Mittelstadt,

board member, added their insights.

Bottomline, the team's efforts resulted in 68 nest boxes and poles being put up the last two weeks of March, plus the first week in April. Some bluebirds adopted a box while others were still being sited.

By mid-April, photos were arriving in my email first showing nests and then eggs. Accompanying comments included:

- "The best part...one house had 3 bluebird eggs, and another had 5 bluebird eggs." Karen B. 4/21/24
- "Hi Gene, we have a nest in every box and 11 eggs total. I am filling out my forms!" Anne C., 4/23/24
- "WOW! The bluebirds love Michael's prairie!" Kerry B., 4/23/24
- "We are really enjoying the activity out there. At least three nesting pairs. Mike made 13 more boxes." Vicky & Mike S. 4/24/24

What a wonderful reward for all involved to the share the joy of bluebirding. We will keep you posted.



Ideally located nest box soon hosted bluebird nest.
(Anne Connor)



Eggs began filling nests by late April and hatchlings in May.
(Anne Connor)



Kerry Beheler & Dr. Michael McDermott install nest box at Brigit's Rest. (Gene Kroupa)

Gene Birr unloads nest boxes he built for the program.
(Gene Kroupa)



Habitat Key to Fate of Fledglings

By Gene Kroupa

Nest boxes sited in an urban setting with high forest and canopy cover, close trees and little grass were more likely to produce fledglings that survived predation from hawks.

That's the overall conclusion of a study conducted by researchers near Williamsburg, Virginia who focused on the managed landscapes of three golf courses, three parks, and one college campus.

Many of the 190 nest boxes being monitored had been in place since 2003. "...most were placed in one of three habitats: along wooded recreational trails, at ecotones between forest and field, or in open fields, such as cemeteries, pastures and athletic facilities." A pole-mounted predator guard protected each box's inhabitants.

Specifically, the researchers wanted to "determine if there were differences in habitat structure between nest boxes where fledglings were quickly preyed upon by hawks and those where fledglings survived."

In 2008 and 2009, the researchers monitored 473 nests in the boxes every six days during the nesting season. Six in 10 nests successfully fledged at least one young. All nestlings were identified with a USGS metal band, as well as a combination of three colored plastic bands. Ultimately, 922 nestlings were handled.

Before fledging, one nestling from each of the 186 broods was fitted with a radio transmitter using an elastic harness. Only 156 ended up remaining viable study subjects. Sample fledglings were later located with a hand-held GPS unit.

Fledglings were declared dead only if the researchers retrieved the transmitter with the body and found some cause of death evidence. However, 16 transmitters totally disappeared, and the fledglings were not included in the final data analysis.

Mortality was then evaluated in relation to the associated type of habitat within 30 to 100 meters of the fledgling's home nest box. The five vegetation structure variables included: 1) canopy cover, 2) shrub cover, 3)



Nest box on golf course has nearby tall trees where fledglings can escape hawks. (Pat Ready)

distance to nearest tree, 4) diameter at breast height of nearest tree, and 5) height of lowest perch on nearest tree. Measurements were made as close as possible to the day of fledging for each study subject.

On average each fledgling was tracked for 40 days postfledging.

Without delving further into the data collection and analysis methodology, suffice it to say that the researchers followed sound procedures in producing data upon which to supply these key results:

- There was no "effect of site on daily survival rates (either due to predation or other causes) in our study population, leading us to consider differences in micro-habitat that might influence predation risk."

- "...the micro-habitat around the nest box has a stronger impact on fledgling

survival than large-scale landscape features."

- Greater amounts of open habitat in the area close to a nest box increased the likelihood that its fledglings would be killed by hawks.

- "...studying nestling output alone will not provide an adequate measure of nest box productivity on golf courses or other urban landscapes without also considering the rest of the annual cycle, including fledgling survival."

Bottomline, bluebirders should place nest boxes close enough to dense overhead tree cover so that fledglings can escape hawks. Parks, golf courses and cemeteries can be good areas to site nest boxes in as long as that protection exists.

Editor's Note: Information for this article was taken from "Habitat near nest boxes correlated with fate of eastern bluebird fledglings in an urban landscape" co-authored by Allyson F. Jackson, Joshua P. Froneberger & Daniel A. Cristol. First published online 3 October 2012 in Urban Ecosystems — Volume 16, Number 2—pp. 367-376.



Fledglings have overhead protection when sitting among dense tree branches. (Annie Heidekoper)

Tips on Photographing Birds for the 2024 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.



Photo: Patrick Ready



Photos: Peggy Gierhardt



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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 2024**

No mail-in photos please.

Bluebirding Tips: Location, Location

By Gene Kroupa

Summer is a great time to see if the locations of your bluebird nest boxes need tweaking. Occupancy is the key sign that boxes are in the best place for the right reasons. Acceptable usage can range from one-third to one-half or more annually.

Lack of occupancy over a couple years by bluebirds can mean many things. But chances are good that there is something missing that bluebirds want or need. For example, are there grassy areas where bluebirds can catch enough insects for their hungry nestlings?

Take a stroll through short cover in the area to check for insect forage. Low CRP grasses can offer accessible food for first broods, but may be too high as a reliable food source by mid-season. Pesticides used to control in-

sects in adjacent crops might seriously deplete a key food source in nearby grassy areas.

Are there trees 20 to 30 yards away that will provide a safe refuge for fledglings? Bluebirds need overhead leafy protection from hungry hawks. Also, bluebirds like to perch near the nest box before flying in.

Yet, boxes should not be located near brushy cover preferred by hostile House Wrens. Since bluebirds are territorial, making sure that nest boxes are at least 100 yards apart might boost occupancy.

Is the location safe from competition? In addition to egg-destroying wrens, House Sparrows will kill the bluebirds if they want a nest box badly enough. Keeping nest boxes away from livestock feedlots, horse stables, and dairy barns, plus homes will help avoid sparrow usurpation problems.

While other desirable cavity nesters, such as Tree Swallows and



Trees nearby offer bluebirds protection and safe areas for fledglings to go to when they leave the nest box. (Pat Ready)

Black-Capped Chickadees, might get to a box first, keep in mind that they only nest once a season. Simply cleaning out the nest box as soon as their young fledge will open it up for use by bluebirds.

Are predators, such as raccoons and out-



Barren boxes are sometimes best relocated. (Gene Kroupa)

door cats, likely to visit nest boxes in their search for food? Equipping nest boxes with predator guards will usually mitigate access. Mud on support poles and claw marks on boxes might also mean it's time to move them.

Sometimes once productive nest boxes turn barren. For one reason or another, they just don't attract bluebirds. Maybe there is a resident Cooper's Hawk in the neighborhood. Perhaps a once quiet place has turned noisy. Possibly black gnats, blowflies, annoying ants or bothersome wasps make the box uninhabitable.

Tragically, adverse weather events in over-wintering areas in the south can deplete the northern breeding populations. As a result, it might take a few seasons to return to normal box occupancy rates.

However, making sure that regularly monitored nest boxes remain in good repair and facing east throughout the season might be all it takes to attract residents. If you still can't solve the non-occupancy riddle, then it's time to move on – now!

Corrections 2023

Dear Monitors-

We have a few corrections this year. As our 2024 season will already be well underway by the time you receive this, I want to thank all of you, once again for last year's efforts and hope you have a successful season. Below is a list of corrections for the year 2023. These corrections bring our state totals up to nearly 15,200 bluebirds fledged!!

Corrections	County	EAB Fledged
Michael Johnson	Rock	85
RF, County Coordinator correction	Racine	81
RF, County Coordinator correction	Kenosha	305
Debbie Pavick	Richland	62
Sally Riemer	Brown	28

Congratulations on a job well done!
Thanks and regards,
Steve Fallon
BRAW Data Coordinator

Membership Renewal Information

By Valerie Van Winkle, Membership Services

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

The next issue of the *Wisconsin Bluebird* goes into production in July and will be mailed in August. Memberships received after August 10 may not be processed in time to receive the Fall newsletter. Consider an extended or one-time \$300 Life Membership.

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:

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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 mission and purpose of the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, Inc. is to broaden the base of state residents to help Eastern Bluebirds and native cavity nesters by erecting, maintaining and monitoring nest boxes.

Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin

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BRAW Convention!

See page 3

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



Bluebird Battles!

By Pat Ready

On rare occasions there can be too many bluebirds for your number of trail boxes. That's when the fighting begins! A friend of mine was birding in a Dane County park where I have 5 nest boxes and she witnessed this skirmish over one of my boxes.

These fights seldom end in serious injuries or death but they can get pretty nasty! Ironically when I went to do my weekly nest box check the box where this occurred didn't have a bluebird nest. In fact the box was empty!

The fighting pair apparently decided it wasn't worth fighting over. One of my boxes north of the battle scene had a nest with 5 blue eggs and one south of there had a nest with 4 blue eggs.

As I continued to monitor my other boxes in the park I found two more bluebird nests. So of my five boxes four were occupied. On top of that I found another surprise . . . one box had white bluebird eggs! It has been over ten years since I had a white egg laying hen and that was at Lake Kegonsa State Park. Only 5% of bluebird hens lay white eggs.

Bluebirds fighting photos taken by Ruth Smith.

