

Winter 2020
Vol. 35, 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.

Bluebirds Bounce Back in 2020!

See Page 3



© Joan Eckhardt

Inside this issue:

President's Message - 2 • 2020 Data Report - 3 • County Coordinator News - 4 •

BRAW 2020 Awards - 8 • First Timers' Q's - 10 • BRAW Accomplishments - 10 • Save on Nest Box Poles - 11 •

Nest Box Usurpation 12 • NABS-Style Box Plan - 13 • Pass *WB* Along - 15 • Contest Photos - 16

Is It Time To Renew Your Membership?

A Word from the Prez



Season's Greetings to all. I think everyone is ready for this year to be over. The promise of a vaccine early next year gives us hope things will get better. Keeping my fingers crossed.

Obviously, I'm talking about the pandemic we are struggling through. I was hoping we might be able to have a Spring Thing in April but it's not going to happen.

Some counties may still have limits on public gatherings or limit them to 25 or 50. No one is booking speaking engagements and may not until matters get turned around safely for all. Even having a convention in fall would be optimistic. It takes months of planning and we need to be assured the virus is gone. I know this is disappointing, but we will get through this together and have a convention someday.

On the positive side BRAW has made some great strides despite this pandemic year. See the article on page 10 for some of our accomplishments in 2020. Thanks to all who made it happen.

BRAW held its first photo contest and it was a big hit. Over 50 photos were submitted. Thanks to Lori and Jim at the Camera Company in Madison for judging the winners. They commented they were very impressed with the entries. Both had never heard of BRAW before. The photo on the cover is the winner taken by Joan Eckhart.

On the back cover are the 2nd and 3rd place photos. Second place was taken by Steve Lang, third place by Mary Kohls-Blanke.

I find the winning photo interesting. A bluebird is in a marsh setting. Not where we typically think of seeing them. I recall having a pair at one of my state park trails that I often saw in cattails. When out birding I have also seen Downy Woodpeckers, Kinglets and Yellow-rumped Warblers in cattail marshes. These too are woodland species and seem out of place. They go where they find food.

Steve Lang says he took his photo at the UW Arboretum in Madison. Another unusual photo in my experience because it has an earth worm in its beak. I am more likely to see them with spiders, beetles, caterpillars and such not earth worms. Worms can be hard for young birds to digest and are not a primary food choice.

Mary Kohls-Blanke wrote she gets bluebirds right in her rural Elkhardt Lake yard. She enjoys having them so close and spends lots of time photographing them. Lucky her!

I know there were a few monitors that didn't want to risk going out when COVID 19 was spreading like crazy. Understandable and each of us has to do what we need to do to stay safe and healthy.

When the last issue of the WB was mailed the printer had a computer processing glitch that kicked down the wrong last name on several addresses. Out of our control but we sure did hear from several members regarding the error.

Happy BLUE Year!

Patrick Ready
BRAW President

Runners Up!

Here are a few runners up that were entered in the contest. Maybe these will give ideas to anyone thinking of entering next year's photo contest. Thanks again to all those that entered. Stay focused!



Above submitted by Bonnie Lumberg of Ashland



Above submitted by Sue Eagle of Oregon
Below submitted by Henry Koshollek of Stoughton



Above submitted by Joanne DeVetter of Crivitz

**Plan to enter
The 2021
Photo Contest!**

Below submitted by Dave Misterek of Oshkosh



Wisconsin Monitors Report: Bluebird Bounce Back Numbers for 2020

	Year	Number of boxes	Boxes used by Bluebirds	Bluebird eggs laid	Bluebird eggs hatched	Bluebirds fledged	Tree Swallows fledged	Chickadees fledged	House Wrens fledged	Total Cavity Nesters
Totals	2020	6757	3587	24485	20825	19385	7957	894	5067	33303
Totals	2019	6463	3230	18640	15964	14761	8985	996	4251	28993
Difference		294	357	5845	4861	4624	-1028	-102	816	4310
2020 % of 2019		105%	111%	131%	130%	131%	89%	90%	119%	115%

Steve Fallon, BRAW Data Director

The preliminary statewide reported total for bluebirds fledged in 2020 is shown in the table above, in comparison to the 2019 final numbers.

The improvements in 2020 show a bounce back to about the 2018 numbers. Monitors checked on 5% more boxes, and blue birds used 11% more boxes than in 2019. The result was an improvement of ~30% for bluebird production.

There are probably a variety of factors involved. Spring weather may have been hard on the tree swallows. If my trails are any evidence, I found dead adults in several houses as a result of a late spring snow and cold

snap.

The reduced nest box competition may have given the bluebirds a leg up. Many monitors in the western part of the state reported much better bluebird production this year compared to last year.

Later in the year, blackfly issues were reported by some monitors, and wren predation of eggs remained an issue for some. That being said, many monitors reported one of the best years for bluebirds in quite a while.

In the above table, the 30% bluebird increase made up the majority of the 15%, year over year, cavity nester increase, and was followed by a nearly 20% increase in the reported

production of wrens. Tree swallow and chickadee numbers took a bit of a tumble, both around 90% of the previous year, perhaps due to nest site competition.

As always, hats off to our monitors! They took on more boxes this year and the birds responded. The increase in the previous years' box numbers gave the birds more opportunities to breed in the state and leads to more opportunities for everyone to enjoy them. Our monitors should be proud of their efforts. Well done!

Editor's note: You can still send in your 2020 data. Online: braw.org An updated final report will be in the Spring WB.

BRAW EZ Summary Form

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

DEADLINE: ASAP!

_____ 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

County Coordinator News

By Gene Birr, CC Chair

Now that another successful bluebird season is behind us, it is time to relish in the satisfaction that we have accomplished bringing many more bluebirds onto the landscape, as we were reminded each time we see a bluebird brood gathered on the electric wires as we traveled along a country road in September and October. It is this same satisfaction that I trust soon awaits the two volunteers who have chosen to serve as new County Coordinators in Lacrosse and Waukesha counties.

Scott Kinninger will represent **Lacrosse County**, now replacing long-time director Leif Marking. Scott is located at N3155 Barre Lane, West Salem, WI and can be reached at kinny939@gmail.com or phone 608-385-6594.

Michael Gutschenritter at 3 Brothers Farm, N87W34229 Mapleton Rd., Oconomowoc, WI will serve from **Waukesha County**. He can be reached at 3brothersfarm@gmail.com or phone 262-470-4429.

We welcome each of these monitors who are excited to learn all they can about bluebirds and trails and eager to share their knowledge and enthusiasm with others in their county.

Walworth County

John Scholtz has updated his information. His address is N4236 County Rd. NN, Elkhorn, WI 53121. He can be reached at johnscholtz@hotmail.com

Marathon County, Claire Romanek

Hi Gene! I did not have a very good bluebird season, in fact it was the worst ever. I did however have one unusual experience with my trail. I had only five nesting pair of bluebirds on my trail, the lowest ever, so every nesting was important to me. In one of my boxes, the female laid 5 white eggs and began incubating on June 5th. Everything was progressing normally until the next check when I discovered an empty nest. I heard a wren calling from nearby which told me all I needed to know about the

culprit. That bluebird pair moved to another box and had a new nest built by June 17th. When I checked the box again on June 24th there were 4 white eggs, warm to the touch, so I knew that she was done laying and was incubating. On the morning of June 29 disaster struck them again. I could see the box from the house and as I looked out in the early morning I could see the box was laying down, the conduit being bent all the way to the ground. I rushed out to see the damage and found the box not destroyed, the nest intact, but three of the four eggs were on the ground, cold to the touch. I never did find the fourth egg. I bent the post back up and placed the cold eggs back in the nest. I did not see any feathers so I hoped that the female got away from what was obviously a bear attack during the night. I was certain that the eggs would not hatch even if she came back and also certain that they would not re-nest again this late in the season. I was surprised to see that as soon as I had everything back together and walked back to the house, the female flew in and went into the box. From that point on she continued incubating, although I had no hope of anything coming of it. I did not check the box again until July 17th, although I saw the bluebirds were still going in and out of the box. Much to my surprise, one of the eggs had actually hatched and there was a fat little nestling alongside the two unhatched eggs. I was overjoyed to see this, as I expected none of those eggs would hatch. That one nestling, a male, successfully fledged and he hung around eating mealworms with his parents until it was time to migrate to their winter territory.

Lafayette County, Jim Hess

Here is my year-end report for our Lafayette Co. members plus an interesting story about a bear. Attached are the 2020 bluebird trail results for Lafayette County. 579 bluebirds were fledged, averaging 2.98 per box. Not bad considering we were not able to monitor the Yellowstone BB Trail this year. We are looking for a volunteer to monitor this trail next year. It is a beautiful walk through the Yellowstone Savanna State Natural

2020 Lafayette Co. Bluebird Report				
Trail	# of boxes	Young	Fledged	Flgd/bx
Barth	59	209	198	3.32
Cashman	52	92	92	1.77
Erickson				
Wetland	11	28	28	2.55
Hess	26	93	80	3.08
Hidden				
Valley	22	102	86	3.91
Lindell	2	13	13	6.5
McDaniel	8	44	32	4.00
Moody	10	44	44	4.40
Schultz	3		4	1.33
Weckerly	1		4	4.00
Total	194	625	579	2.98

Area, just north of Lake Yellowstone on N. Lake Road by the dedication plaque. We have a volunteer that will help with the maintenance and placement of the boxes, but is unable to do the weekly inspections. Please let me know if you're interested.

One interesting incident this year was on the Moody Trail. Doris and Dale Moody monitor 10 boxes in Lafayette County, north of Belmont near Hwy 151. On June 6 they found three of their occupied boxes on the ground with the eggs and young gone. One box was torn off the 2 inch PVC pipe, which they put over t-posts, and the other t-posts were



broken off at the ground. There had been a bear sighting in their area and they concluded the damage was done by this bear. They re-installed these boxes and soon had fledglings.

Pierce County, Jim Beix

If the pandemic permits, Spring time will allow **Jim Higgins and Lowell Peterson (St.Croix Co. coordinator)** to give presentations in Pierce and St.Croix Counties in early Spring. The usual locations are Ellsworth/Prescott, WI and St.Croix Falls, WI.

I had success avoiding Black Fly predation using Bounce tissues and Permethrin spray during weekly monitoring of nest boxes. It's October 21 and bluebirds are still seen along roadsides in Pierce Co.

A member of the MN Bluebird Recovery Program gifted me many parts for Peterson nest box construction. He said his wife told him to clean out their garage where his wood working tools are. Am making these sides/roofs available to local BB trail monitors.

Eau Claire County, Rita Gundry

My phenology calendar tells me WI bluebirds are well into their migration now, so it's time to reflect on this past year and look ahead to 2021 and what we may accomplish for the "blues."

As soon as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, my brother, Larry Liegel, also a BRAW member, and I, will be giving a bluebird presentation to my Master Gardener Chapter in Eau Claire.

A new member to BRAW, summer 2020, Rachel Urban of Eau Claire will be spearheading a few bluebird nest box placements at Pinehurst Park near her home. Larry and I will gift her a few bluebird houses, Noel guards and poles along with some assistance with proper placement and a folder of information we have collected for her perusal. I have decided to move my trail of 10 nest boxes located near the Strum, WI, airport, placing them nearer my home, where the wren population is lower. This winter, I will be pining for a repeat of spring 2012, my last great bluebird year!

Oconto County, Gene Birr

Great summer weather helped me to fledge 303 bluebirds on my trails this season, the most in the last 5

years and my third best year ever. The addition of another dozen skylight boxes helped to lessen the number of boxes bothered by sparrows to 2 and decreased by half the number that I had to capture and remove.

In addition to this improvement in reducing sparrows on my own trails, success was also achieved on a trail in Oconto. This is a 5-box trail on two neighboring medical clinics where the monitor there was plagued with many House Sparrows in the last few years. This spring, Cordula Van Den Heuvel, of BRAW and Bird City, and I replaced these boxes with new skylight boxes in an attempt to lessen the sparrow problem. This year the designated trail monitor became ill and was unable to monitor the trail at all. Neither Cordula nor I had the time or remembered to monitor the trail either. When we finally got around to it in September, we were very pleased to find bluebird nests in 2 of the boxes, wren nests also in two and a TS nest in the fifth box. There was no evidence at all of any sparrow nesting. This was an outstanding result considering that these boxes went unmonitored all season in an area that had always had sparrow problems before.

In Brown County, in late October I added 3 boxes to a trail at Pulaski High School and relocated 3 others, moving them alongside the new fencing that was added to the enlarged sports fields which more than doubled the size of the high school campus recently. Later, Steve Mayer helped me redo a neglected trail on the St. Norbert Abbey campus in Depere, where we replaced the 12 boxes with skylight boxes in an attempt to lessen the sparrow problem there.

Kenosha County, Stan Rosenteil

I have been a member of BRAW for a while. I appreciate everything the organization and members have done for bluebirds. I read the newsletter each time and enjoy it.

BRAW has suggested that paired boxes are a waste. This may be true in the central and northern parts of the state. John Krerowicz and I have had success with paired boxes. We

Bluebirds in Southeast WI

Year	BB	TS
2020	42	6
2019	36	21
2018	29	20
2017	25	30
2016	16	44
2015	8	41
2014	10	46

regularly had 6 or more boxes of 15 used by tree swallows and typically 3 to 5 BB pairs. In 2017, seeing that half or more of our boxes were used by ts, I felt we had little to lose in going to pairs. I put up 8 pair. We started to see an improvement right away and each year has gotten better.

We had 7 active BB pair this year in 8 paired box locations and just two TS pair.

Dear Stan,

Thank you so much for your article and column highlighting the success you have had with pairing boxes on your trail since 2017.

I know that there is a strong feeling on the BRAW BOD that has disapproved of paired boxes ever since I joined BRAW in 2008, and before.

But I have often felt like you, that in areas with high TS numbers many bluebirds are deprived of a nesting cavity when there is only one box available— in ideal bluebird nesting habitat— and it is taken first by swallows.

Your steadily improving numbers of bluebirds in paired boxes is strong evidence that they are effective in doing just that— improving bluebird numbers in the face of competition by Tree Swallows.

I appreciate you sharing this and I will definitely submit it for inclusion in the upcoming Winter edition of our newsletter. It is from the sharing of differing ideas and practices that we learn ways to meet the challenges that are encountered by bluebird monitors in different areas of the state. It is also important to be reminded that nearly every other BB society in the country encourages the pairing of boxes; and that Wisconsin is about the only one that doesn't, contrary to the recommendation of the North American Bluebird Society (NABS) of which we are an affiliate member. -Gene Birr

Kewaunee County, Don Pritzl

A good year for bluebirds!
I have a total of 59 boxes on my

routes, the majority are Peterson boxes with a few NABS boxes and 5 are PVC. I had a total of 60 BB nests, 16 were second broods and one was a third batch. 245 eggs were laid and 220 hatched. I had no batches lost after hatching and the whole 220 fledged. I also had 95 Tree Swallows fledge.

I had very little sparrow pressure this year, for whatever reason, but had more wrens than usual. It seemed the wrens nested earlier than normal. Some of my box sites are getting kind of brushy. I'll probably have to move them although it's getting harder to find good habitat.

When monitoring one box, I found an unusual nest with 5 white eggs with brown streaks, a little larger than a bluebird egg. After watching the box for a while, I checked my bird book and determined it was a Great Crested Flycatcher, the first one I ever had. All 5 eggs hatched and fledged. I didn't have any chickadees this year. I don't plan to add any boxes in the future. I hope I can continue to monitor what I have.

On a somewhat related subject, I had an exceptional year for orioles! They seemed to have had a very successful nesting season and it was a delight watching them come to my jelly feeder.

Waupaca County, Craig & Sheila Beyer,

2020 was an amazing year for our Bluebirding!

Though I've been building and putting up houses for 25 years, it seemed to all come together this year. Mostly because I'm retired now and have the time to do it up right! It takes a lot of time and travel to monitor a county-wide bluebird program. We built 60 new houses this year and donated them, along with proper predator posts, to people with proper habitat and no cats. We insist on installing them ourselves to insure optimum success. There was a couple times when we'd put up a new house and see bluebirds sitting on them the next day!

If sparrows could be a problem we put up PVC houses as sparrows don't like them much! But, the bluebirds do and almost always win out!

Otherwise we prefer the wood houses, always made of cedar.

When I say we, I'm including my wife Sheila, who also loves Bluebirding!

We put over 3,000 miles on this year doing sometimes daily monitoring! We were pleased and shocked how fast the new houses filled up with beautiful bluebirds!

We have found that golf courses, airports and cemeteries are ideal habitat!

We enjoy hearing from the people who benefited from our work and enjoyed seeing bluebirds in their yard. We explain to people the importance of cleaning out houses. We used to leave the nests in for the second hatch, believing it would save stress on the parents, but now we like to remove nests after the first batch fledges, unless the nest is clean and dry we may leave it. The birds quickly make another nest and we had so many double hatches, and even 3 sometimes.

Well, now that fall is here, we are already building and planning more expansion for 2021! Anyone in **Waupaca County** that would like a house put up, contact us at **715-281-7783**. Happy Trails!

Here are a couple pictures we took this year

Lacrosse County, Scott Kinninger

Hello everyone I'd like to introduce myself, my name is Scott Kinninger and I am the new county coordinator for LaCrosse County. My wife Kris and I are both long time bird lovers, I've had at least one bluebird house up since I built my first one during my high school days, more than 30 years ago. Currently I still enjoy building bluebird houses and have a small trail that I monitor, last year was a great year with 25 bluebirds fledged, 5 house wrens, and no known losses of



Craig & Sheila Beyer photos

any birds.

I'm looking forward to the opportunity to help other people interested in bluebirds and getting new people educated and involved in our efforts. I helped a few people get started earlier this year and we had excellent results, so if you've got questions, need advice, need help with your birdhouses, or anything else please reach out.

Text or call 608-385-6594
Email kinny939@gmail.com

St. Croix County, Lowell Peterson

2020 started out kind of slow again in St. Croix County. It was late April before the first bluebird babies appeared in one of the nest boxes. My 2020 nest results were: 100 bluebirds fledged, along with 49 House Wrens, 44 Tree Swallows and 17 Chickadees, resulting in a total of 210 cavity nesting songbirds fledged.

I had an experience with one of my nest boxes that had not happened before in my 25 years of monitoring. On April 27, when I opened one of my boxes I saw a mouse-like face looking at me. The animal jumped out. I real-

ized then that it was not a mouse but a flying squirrel! I looked at the nest and saw 3 babies, probably 2 or 3 days old. I closed the door without touching the nest. I went back the next day and the babies were gone. I removed the nest. When monitoring the next week, that box had a bluebird nest with 2 eggs. I am pleased to report that this box fledged 5 bluebirds on June 12 and 4 bluebirds on July 25. Nature is **amazing**.

My county coordinator activities were reduced because of the Corona Virus. Most of my scheduled presentations were canceled, but I did have a few phone inquiries.

Dane County, Patrick Ready

Fall is a good time to assess trails and make changes, repairs and decisions. One trail performed so bad the last 2 seasons I decided to pull it. The trail never was a great one for bluebirds but it usually got 1-2 pairs. I think the trail was too close to Lake Waubesa and the Tree Swallows were just too competitive. It used to get a few House Sparrows but I managed to deal with the. My monitor reported she seldom saw or heard bluebirds when she checked this trail. Now I will try a new spot away from the lakes around here.

At the Sun Prairie Golf Course where Sally monitors, I met her there and we removed boxes that became overgrown in trees and bushes and were only getting House Wrens. I wasn't prepared for the number we had to remove but the maintenance guy gave me a utility cart so we managed. This trail continues to do pretty well for Sally.

In Stoughton I removed some PVC boxes for Kris and put in wood boxes that are easier to monitor. This small trail at Racetrack park does okay for bluebirds in a city park.

On the far west side of Madison I had a small trail in a city park for the past 3 years. It's not too far from Pope Farm Conservancy where there is a successful bluebird trail so I had hopes it would succeed. But all I got were Tree Swallows and attempts by House Sparrows. I dealt with the sparrows but always seem to have a pair in the area causing trouble. The nest boxes will find a new location this spring.

The WPT Garden Expo rejected us for their virtual event in Feb. I plan to do some ZOOM presentations in spring.

See how that goes.

Photo on right shows a box that was damaged by squirrels I believe. Red Squirrels are more likely to gnaw on boxes but I have seen young Grey Squirrels do this type of work. They do the damage but they can't live in them as they are too small for Grey Squirrels at least. I have seen where Flying Squirrels have moved into a nest box but they don't chew on the wood like that. This box was located in an area that had become overgrown with trees so had to be removed anyway.

At least monitoring my trails got me outdoors this year and kept me from going stir crazy. I felt safe walking or biking my trails and wasn't exposed to the virus.



BRAW Welcomes These Members

BRAW welcomes these new and returning members. For the Blues!

Ernie Schultz, River Falls
 Bessie Kmiecik, Warrens
 Dave Siegler, Neosho
 David Gugger, Cottage Grove
 Darcy Keplin, Fond du Lac
 Jill A. Ponasik, Wauwatosa
 Michael Gutschenritter, Oconomowoc
 Beverly Gutschenritter, Oconomowoc
 Dave & Barb Noeldner, Medford
 Victoria Marquardt, Green Bay
 Christopher Jamieson, Racine
 Annette Troshynski, Wauwatosa
 Rushes Wilderness Foundation, Baileys Harbor
 Jerry & Jill Wendt, Suring
 Susan Alden, Lena
 Patrick Enright, Waupaca
 Joseph A. Martin, Appleton
 Barbara Mitchell, Pardeeville
 Mary Ward, Juneau
 Bill & Janice Seybold, Plover
 Martha Hoepfner, Waukesha
 David Keene, Warren
 Sharon Weisenberger, Pardeeville
 Donna Freeman, Hartford
 Stan Parsons, Mauston
 Debra Pavick, Evanston, IL
 Michael Martin, Fort Atkinson
 Dave Heyrman, Suamico
 Stephani Storkson, Middleton
 Tim Scottberg, Oshkosh
 Mary Blanke, Elkhart Lake
 Roger Liegel, Hillpoint

Jennifer Kupczyk, Ashland
 Kathleen Drews, Pound
 Shellee Botts, Madison
 Leslie Livingston, New Brighton, MN
 Caroline Moes, Green Bay
 Deborah Nicholson, Black Earth
 Ernie Perry, Middleton
 Carolyn Aita, Shorewood

Donations:

Deborah Zierke \$10
 Christopher Jamieson \$25
 Patrick Enright \$15
 Bill & Janice Seybold \$50
 Bernie Hoefgen \$25
 Beverly Gutschenritter \$40
 Joanne Madsen \$100
 Jerry Klingbeil \$100
 Judith & Philip Loy \$25 nest box
 Patriot Golf Course \$25
 Michael Martin \$15
 Phyllis Feiner \$20
 Jan & Jim Spredemann \$25
 Amy Bachman \$40
 Jeff Thomas Freye \$25
 Evelyn Psenicka \$25
 Laurence Liegel \$50
 Dale Marsden \$15
 Jerome & Sharon Woelfel, \$200
 Tom & Kim Walz, \$40
 Ernie Perry, \$30

BRAW Gives Awards to Seven Outstanding Members

By Patrick Ready, President

At the annual convention we usually give out the BRAW Awards to members of the organization that go over and above the norm to promote bluebird conservation. Since we didn't have a convention this pandemic year the BRAW board decided to give the awards anyway and mail them direct to the recipients. Some were nominated by family or fellow bluebirders and some were decided by board members. All that received an award were surprised, overwhelmed and very pleased they were chosen. Press releases were sent to their local newspapers announcing their accomplishments.



Wing Wave by Patrick Ready



Val Cunningham Receives 2020 Communicator of the Year Award

Val Cunningham, of St. Paul, has received the 2020 Communicator of the Year Award from the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW).

BRAW cited Cunningham's efforts in educating readers about the ways and wonders of nature in support of conservation and restoration efforts.

A dedicated birdwatcher, Cunningham describes bluebirds as "many peoples' gateway bird, one that catches their eye and prompts them to want to conserve all species."

"As a nature writer, I am dedicated to the idea of helping readers fall in love with birds," said Cunningham. "One thing we all can do is make sure we provide habitat for birds and the insects they eat," she added.

Cunningham maintains and monitors a trail consisting of a dozen bluebird nest boxes. "I got hooked on birds many years ago, and I'm still trying to help them through my writing," she noted.



Stephen Lang Receives 2020 Bluebirder of the Year Award

Stephen Lang, of Madison, has received the 2020 Bluebirder of the Year Award from the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW).

Lang was cited for his contributions to BRAW's Trail Builder program for new members. He built and donated 125 nest boxes with predator guards, which were used to establish and restock bluebird trails.

He and his wife, Mary, monitor 70 nest boxes on two trails in Dane County parks. "The boxes are used by bluebirds, tree swallows, chickadees and wrens," said Lang. "This year those boxes produced about 360 fledglings."

Sue Hall Receives 2020 Teacher of the Year Award

Sue Hall, of Stevens Point, has received the 2020 Teacher of the Year Award from the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW).

Hall was cited for her 35 years of teaching children to enjoy nature. She has installed bluebird nest boxes at six area grade schools. "The children are amazed at how the nests and eggs look, as well as how quickly the chicks grow," said Hall.

In addition to helping monitor a trail with 40 nest boxes, she volunteers with bluebird displays at the local Children's Museum, Boston School Forest, Monk Gardens in Wausau and Fall Family Festival at the Mead Wildlife Area near Milladore.

Hall assists husband Kent in giving a presentation "Learning to Think Like a Bluebird" at the Portage County Library and for the Natural Resources Foundation. They both have served on the BRAW board of directors.





Gene Birr Receives 2020 Lifetime Achievement Award

“I would like to express my appreciation to BRAW and its BOD for honoring me with the Lifetime Achievement Award for 2020,” said Birr

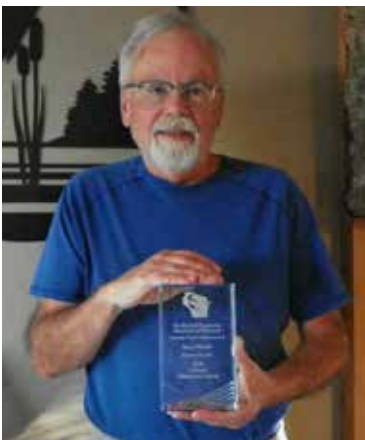
It has been my distinct pleasure to spend these last dozen years helping to advance the status of bluebirds and other cavity nesting songbirds by providing nest boxes and establishing bluebird trails while being a BRAW member since 2008, he added. “While speaking to individuals and groups about helping bluebirds, I have improved my comfort in public speaking and honed my writing and computer skills when preparing articles for our newsletter,” noted Birr.

“My greatest satisfaction has come from sharing my field studies where I have tested the effectiveness of using Noel Guards for predator protection and Skylight boxes to limit house sparrows. By making these items the success rate of the hundreds of NABS-style nest boxes that I have built and supplied to dozens of bluebird monitors in NE Wisconsin has improved greatly. I thank each of them also for helping to expand the nesting opportunities for bluebirds with their participation in our endeavor,” Birr concluded.

Andrew Struck Receives 2020 BRAW Achievement Award

“I am very humbled by this great honor and award... I could not believe it when I received the letter and now have also received the beautiful award! I am so grateful to organizations like BRAW and volunteers and partners like Ellen Lafouge who have made our work possible! Truly, it has been a privilege to have such a great organization behind the work we do in Ozaukee County. I am so thankful to other BRAW members like Kent Hall as well for their advice and encouragement,” Struck said.

“When I received your letter, it was so ironic because I was working with an AmeriCorps North Central Conservation Corp Team to install 9 new bluebird houses at Virmond County Park in Mequon and another 11 new houses at Tendick Nature County Park in Saukville. We have been working on native prairie restorations in both of these parks over the last several years and the bluebird boxes were a culmination of some of this restoration work! We continue to manage the bluebird houses at Mee-Kwon County Park and Golf Course and also Hawthorne Hills County Park and Golf Course.”



Raymond Pinter Receives 2020 Lifetime Achievement Award

Raymond Pinter, of West Bend, has received the 2020 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW).

Pinter was cited for his many years of helping hundreds of residents start their own bluebird nest box trails.

He now maintains and monitors trails with 70 nest boxes of his own. As Pinter noted: “Each nesting season brings new challenges but also new opportunities to learn about these fascinating cavity nesters.”

Some of his trails are located on the Cedar Lakes Conservation Foundation and Ozaukee-Washington County Land Trust properties. “The trusts provide the habitat and BRAW supplies the knowledge – a great recipe for helping the birds we love,” said Pinter.

Rita Gundry Receives 2020 Lifetime Achievement Award

Rita Gundry, of Fall Creek, has received the 2020 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW).

Gundry was cited for her many years of conservation work with bluebirds, bees, bats and butterflies. Her concern for declining populations has been matched by positive actions to restore them.

Her family has maintained and monitored bluebird nest boxes since the 1980’s. She also volunteers as a bat counter for the Wisconsin DNR, and as a member of Monarch Butterfly Watch she raises and tags them.

In reflecting on her contributions, Gundry said: “I play a small part with these activities in hopes my grandchildren will enjoy the species as much as I do and continue my work when I am unable to do so.”



First-timers' Trail Q's

By Gene Kroupa, Director

First-timers new to trailing have a lot of questions. They want to do things right and enjoy success by attracting bluebirds to their nest boxes. A poll of BRAW directors produced a list of questions they most frequently get.

Here are the top five I've chosen from their list which should get newbies off to a great start for seeing fledglings their first year.

- 1. What kind of nest box should I choose?** Pick a type that is approved by BRAW, the North American Bluebird Society (www.nabluebirdsociety.org) and those recommended by a store serving birders, e.g. Wild Birds Unlimited. Models with skylight plastic panels seem to deter House Sparrows from using the box.
- 2. Do I need to add a predator guard?** Absolutely! Either the wire version or the wooden block extension should keep the long arm of racoons from the nest. Directions for making your own guards are available at www.braw.org. Keep boxes away from fences or wooden posts that give predators a leg up.
- 3. What kind of pole or post should I use?** Three-quarter

inch metal electrical conduit or a steel post with PVC pipe over it works well. Five to six feet above ground is an ideal height. Grease the pole to prevent climbing. Face the nest box opening East to get morning sunlight and protect against blowing rain which usually comes from the West.

- 4. What is the best location?** Place nest boxes out in the open with easy access to insects-supplying low grass and weeds. Trees and protective cover for fledglings should be 20 yards or so away. Stay away from feedlots, barnyards and other places that attract House Sparrows and starlings. If bothered by these non-native birds or wrens, you'll need to move the nest box.
- 5. How far apart should nest boxes be placed?** One hundred paces is a good rule of thumb. Some folks say more is better. Others find less works for them. Bluebirds usually aren't highly territorial, but you still want to give them a big enough area to collect insects to feed their young.

The overall key to success is regular monitoring every week to 10 days to see what is going on, clean out boxes for second nestings and to make adjustments in your trail as needed.

What BRAW Accomplished in 2020

Despite limitations placed on normal activities, such as the State Convention, Spring Thing and speaking engagements, BRAW was able to accomplish the following things:

1. Completely revamped and updated the www.braw.org website to make it more user friendly and informative.
2. Revised and reprinted both the large and condensed versions of information packets.
3. Initiated a Trail Builder program that distributed over 137 nest boxes with predator guards to 33 new members.
4. Signed-up new members via special offers at the PBS Garden Expo and county speaking engagements in February and gift memberships noted in the *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter. Special nest box promotions accounted for more new memberships.
5. Increased membership 37% over 2019 figures.
6. Initiated a membership re-connect program that was able to successfully re-up many non-renewals from 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020.
7. Received \$8,750 in donations to support BRAW programs and operations.
8. Appointed liaisons and renewed working relationships with bird groups and the DNR.
9. Increased public awareness of bluebirds and BRAW via articles in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* and weekly newspapers, plus postings on social media.

10. Conducted a photo contest with the three winners receiving awards and future use of their photos in the *Wisconsin Bluebird*.
11. Recognized seven members who have made significant contributions to helping bluebirds, educating the public, and working with persons in establishing or adopting trails. Resulted in some local media publicity for BRAW and them.
12. Received and prepared an annual summary of data for 6,750 nest boxes with over 19,300 bluebirds fledged. Add in other cavity nesters and total number of fledglings is 33,300.
13. Updated and approved changes to the Bylaws, plus conducted quarterly Board of Directors meetings via Zoom.
14. Updated BRAW's strategic and marketing plans.
15. Consolidated nest boxes, exhibit materials and records in a secure central storage location.
16. Joined Amazon SMILE program so that member purchases can benefit BRAW.

Our organization with its more than 750 members statewide looks forward to 2021 and helping all native cavity nesters in Wisconsin.



**Check Out BRAW's
\$15 Holiday Nest Box Offer
for NEW Wisconsin members
at www.braw.org!**

Save on Nest Box Poles

By Steve Lang

Looking to get more poles for your buck? Try one of these three methods.

Method 1

Here's how I'm able to get five 6-foot Bluebird nest box poles out of three 10-foot lengths of metal conduit pipe. First, I cut 4-foot lengths off each; so, I have three 6-footers and three 4-footers. Then I cut one of the 4-footers in half yielding two 2-footers. These 2-footers are attached, using a set screw coupling, to the 4-footers to yield two more 6-footers making a total of five 6-footers. This can be done using $\frac{3}{4}$ " or $\frac{1}{2}$ " pipe.

I do not pound these 6-footers into the ground – they stay 6-feet tall. I hammer a 4-foot green steel post into the ground one-foot deep, set the pole against it and secure them together with two plastic cable ties.

Both the $\frac{1}{2}$ " and $\frac{3}{4}$ " diameter poles fit nicely into the groove of the post. Duct tape can be put around the pole

and post to prevent rotation.

Method 2

Another method is to pound a 4-foot length of $\frac{3}{4}$ " pipe two feet into the ground and put your 6-foot $\frac{1}{2}$ " pole into it – fits nicely and no green fence post is necessary. Add the duct tape. Very simple.

Method 3

If you are working with a 6-foot $\frac{3}{4}$ " pole, use a 2.5-foot 1" pipe for your outside pipe. Very strong but more expensive. A 10-foot length of 1" pipe makes four 2.5-footers.

All three methods work well. When I add to my 70-house trail I use the $\frac{1}{2}$ " poles with the green posts. This set-up makes it easy to relocate houses.

Supplies are available at Menard's, Home Depot, Farm & Fleet, Fleet Farm, ACE Hardware and other stores. Consider investing your savings in a wire Noel predator guard or make your own for each nest box. They are available from BRAW for \$4 each which includes shipping. Plans for making your own are at www.BRAW.org.



1. Joining 4-ft. and 2-ft. sections with a set-screw coupling makes a 6-foot nest box pole. (Nest box on pole.)



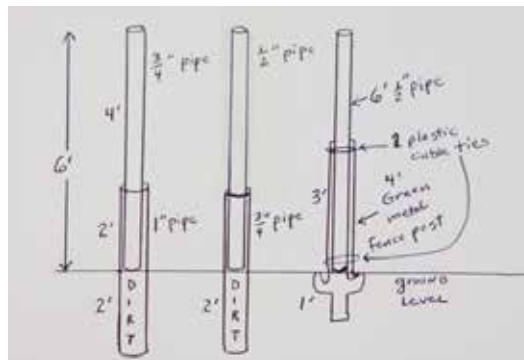
2. A 4-ft. green steel post will provide support for a 6-ft. pole. Tape keeps pole from turning.



3. A smaller diameter pole can be inserted into a 2.5-ft. anchor pipe.



Wisconsin Bluebird



4. Diagram shows the different options for joining and mounting poles.



5. A set-screw coupling is used to join two conduit pipe sections of equal diameter.



A Bluebird Holiday Season Offer

BRAW is offering a high quality cedar nest box with a predator guard as part of a Holiday Gift Membership deal for \$15 for NEW Wisconsin members only which expires December 31st. (PLEASE READ NOTE BELOW BEFORE ORDERING.)

The offer is designed to expand BRAW's membership by supplying NEW members with a starter nest box and the information they need. Current BRAW members cannot receive the nest box gift.

The nest box will be shipped FREE to the NEW Wisconsin member. Holiday Gift Membership recipients will receive the online version of the quarterly Wisconsin Bluebird newsletter. If a mailed hard copy of the newsletter is preferred, the membership fee is \$25 to cover the added printing and postage.

All NEW members will also receive an Information Packet that covers locating, erecting, maintaining and monitoring instructions. A list of County Coordinators offers individual mentoring help.

PLEASE NOTE: CURRENT MEMBERS ARE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR THE OFFER. THEY CANNOT RECEIVE A NEST BOX NOR GIVE IT TO SOMEONE IN THEIR HOUSEHOLD. THEY CANNOT USE THE OFFER TO RENEW THEIR MEMBERSHIP. ONLY IN-STATE RESIDENTS QUALIFY. TO ORDER OR IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT: VALERIE, PHONE 1-847-302-5684, RIPVWS@GMAIL.COM.



Fred Craig NABS-style box & predator guard.



NABS-style box with predator guard put on.

Andy Garcia-Rivera photos

Nest Box Usurpation by Non-Native Birds

By Gene Kroupa

From time to time we will report on studies so you can be up-to-date on current research about our native cavity nesters. In North America, there are about 85 bird species that use cavities for nesting. Not all are native and some pose a particular threat to Eastern Bluebirds.

Funded by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and published February



House Sparrow nests are messy built with rough grasses that fill the nest box with a tunnel to the floor where female lays her eggs.

Wisconsin Bluebird

13, 2020 in *Conservation Science & Practice*, this study analyzed survey responses received from 871 folks across the U.S. and Canada who maintained nest boxes.

Key findings reported by the researchers include:

- Nearly one-third had observed a non-native species usurp a nest box occupied by a native species. Observed incidence ranged from 3% up to 35%.
- Witnessing a nest usurpation is the most important predictor of humans engaging in management activities.

- Management activity was associated with the extent to which respondents believed non-native birds to be a problem at the continental scale.

Conclusion: Management actions can mitigate the threat, and potentially support the survival of native birds.

You can use these findings by:

- Regularly monitoring your nest boxes to observe any pirating by invasive species.
- Employing appropriate control practices to help native cavity nesters compete.



Female House Sparrow and male House Sparrow, non-native cavity nesters known to usurp bluebird boxes. Also called English Sparrows.

- Choosing better nest box locations to lower the likelihood of usurpation.

Source: Bailey R.L., H.A. Faulkner-Grant, V.Y. Martin, T.B. Phillips, and D.N. Bonter. Nest usurpation by non-native birds and the role of people in nest box management. *Conservation Science and Practice* 2020: e185. <https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.185>

NABS style Bluebird Box

Cedar, 7/8" lumber preferred.

8" wide for top

6" wide for back, front, sides & bottom

All angle cuts are 10 degrees

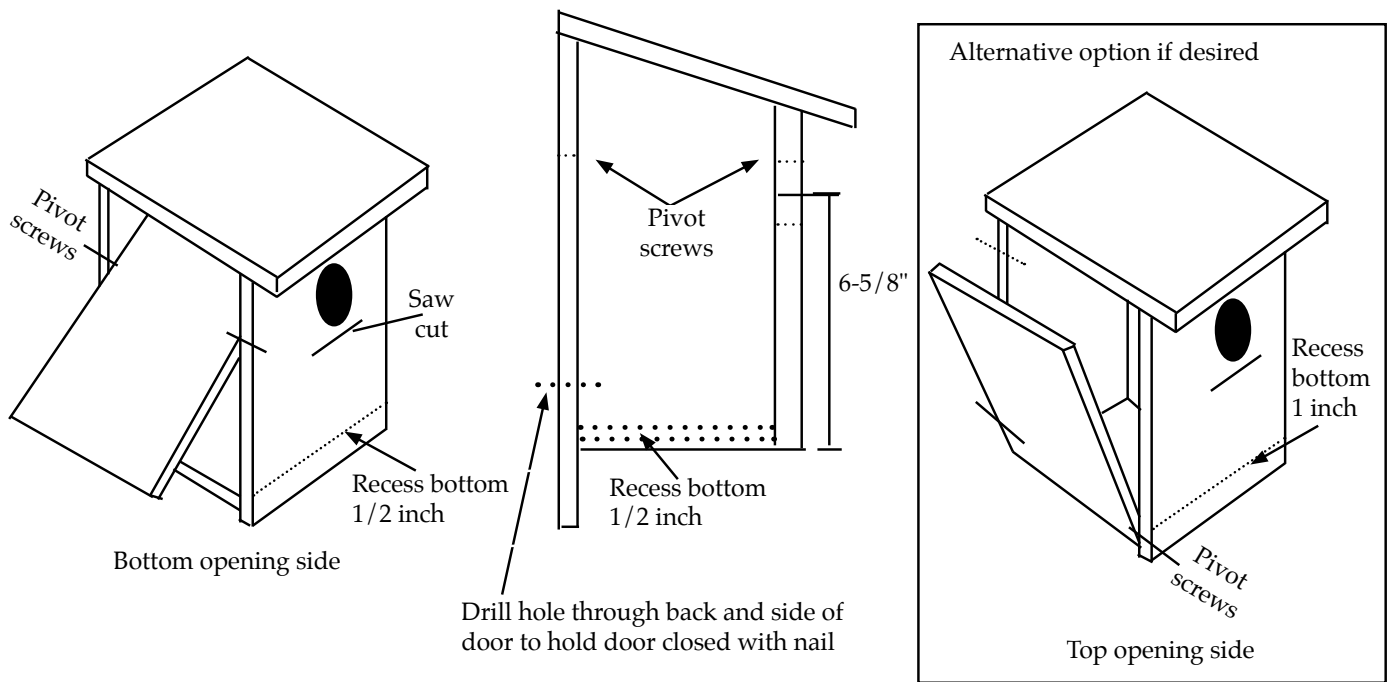
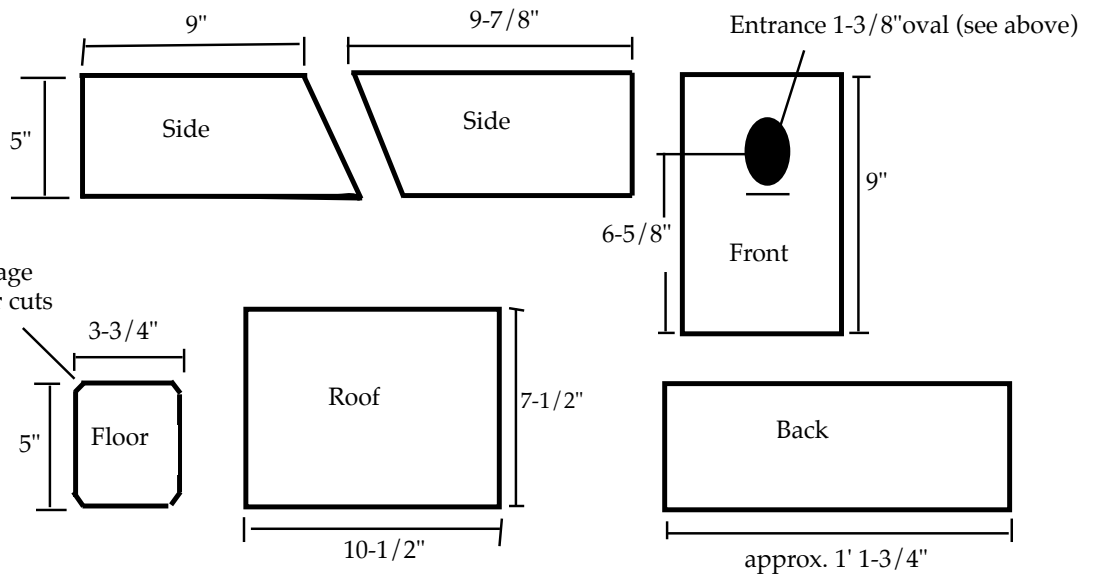
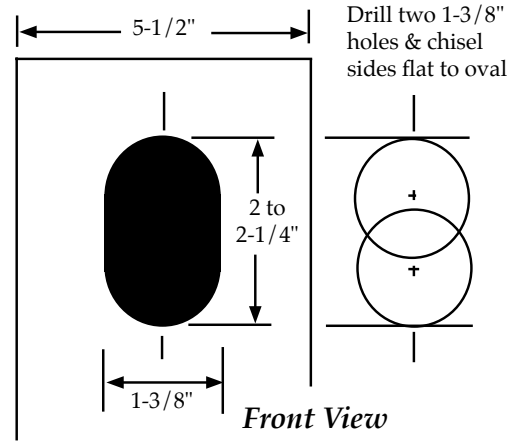
Roof is 7-1/2" wide x 10-1/2" long

Sides 9-7/8" long x 5" wide

Floor is 5" x 3-3/4"

Back & front 5-1/2" wide

Recommended Oval Hole Plan



Winter is a good time to build some nest boxes for trail expansion, gifts or replacement of old boxes. Other box plans are on our website: braw.org.

Membership Renewal Information

By Valerie Van Winkle, Membership Services

If the address label of your *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter reads Winter 2020 next to your name, then your membership expires this month and you need to renew immediately. If you are an online member, you won't see this clue so please consider marking the expiration date on your calendar when you sign up. We don't want you to miss a single newsletter!

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

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

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

BRAW, Inc. Membership and Wisconsin Bluebird Subscription

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

- \$10 Gift Annual Membership (Online subscription)
- \$15 Student/Teacher Annual Membership (Online subscription)
- \$20 Online Annual Membership
- \$40 Extended Online Annual Membership for 2 years
- \$60 Extended Online Annual Membership for 3 years
- \$25 Individual or Family Annual Membership (Printed copy mailed)

- \$75 Extended Individual or Family Annual Membership for 3 years (Printed copy mailed)
- \$100 Corporate Annual Membership
- \$300 Life Membership

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Email Address: _____

Telephone: () _____

County of residence: _____

Donation (optional)

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

Check appropriate boxes:

- This is a renewal
- This is a new membership
- This is a GIFT membership

Enclosed please find my check \$ _____

Mail this membership request to:

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

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

**A BRAW
membership makes
a great Anytime gift!**
\$10 includes Online Newsletter
Give the gift of Bluebirds!

BRAW ELECTED & APPOINTED OFFICERS

President Patrick Ready, 815 Sky Ridge DR., Madison, WI 53719 • 608/239-0791 • birdsready@gmail.com (term to 12/22)

Vice President Steve Sample, 422 Shepard Ter., Madison, WI 53705 • 708/606-8070 • ssample@gmail.com (term to 12/22)

Secretary Gene Kroupa, 1010 Tumalo Trail, Madison, WI 53711 • 608/238-3571 • gkroupa@tds.net (term to 12/22)

Treasurer Dan Schroeder, N4028 Morgan Drive, Waupaca, WI 54981 • 920-475-8525 • brdanjoe@gmail.com (term to 12/22)

Director Steve Fallon, • 974 Halcyon Days Ct., Oregon, WI 53575 • steve-fall50@gmail.com (term to 12/21)

Director Dave Lucey, Cross Plains, WI • 53528 • dklucey@chorus.net (term to 12/22)

Director Kris Perlberg, 208 Johnson Street, Stoughton, WI 53589 • (608)698-9318 • kperlberg@gmail.com (term to 12/20)

Director Mary Sobol, 5205 Broadhead St., McFarland WI 53558 • 608-838-6962 (H) 608-338-8529 (cell) msobolontime@gmail.com (term to 12/20)

Director Mike Crawford, 817 5th St. Waunakee, WI 535397 608-213-1806 • mike@marieandmike.com (term to 2021)

APPOINTED OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS:

Data Collection Officer: Steve Fallon (see above)

Public Relations, Steve Sample, (see above)

County Coordinator Chair: Gene Birr, 722 E. Frontage Rd., Little Suamico, WI 54141 • gbbird22@gmail.com • (920) 826-7552

Funding: Dan Schroeder (see above)

WI Bluebird Editor: Patrick Ready (see above)

Membership: Valerie Van Winkle, PO Box 628492, Middleton, WI 53562 • ripvws@gmail.com

Promotions: Gene Kroupa (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: Andy Garcia Rivera, agarciarivera@gmail.com

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

Pass WB Along!

By Gene Kroupa

So, what do you do with the *Wisconsin Bluebird* after you've finished reading it? File and forget it if printed copy? Save or maybe erase it if the digital version?

Please do the bluebirds and BRAW a huge favor: pass (WB) on or forward to at least three more family or friends. Why? Because:

1. There's lots of good information about getting started and helping bluebirds,
2. Stories about bluebirders' experiences engage readers in a joyful manner,
3. Shared fledging data boost awareness of the key role humans play, and
4. New readers might become BRAW members and join you in the restoration effort.

Studies have shown that folks who read a free newsletter are more likely to become a paid subscriber or an organization member if they already aren't one. Let's give them a chance to think about doing so.

If you want to hold on to your printed copy, BRAW has a limited supply we can send if you contact Pat Ready, editor, 608.239.0791 or at birdsready@gmail.com. We also plan to post back issues that you can access online at www.braw.org. Please pass along the *Wisconsin Bluebird*.



Wisconsin Bluebird • Volume 35, Number 4 • Winter 2020
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 **Valerie Van Winkle**, PO Box 628492, Middleton, WI 53562, Email: ripvws@gmail.com
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. Membership and Subscriptions renewals should be sent to: **Valerie Van Winkle, PO Box 628492, Middleton, WI 53562**

Issues are dated Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. Deadlines for submissions to the editor are due the 15th of January, April, July, and October.

Except for material with a copyright notice, permission to reproduce material printed in *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter is granted providing credit is given to *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter as the publisher and to the author(s) or photographer(s) whose bylines and photo credits appear with the story or photographs.

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

Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin

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



NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
MADISON, WI
PERMIT #2783



BRAW 2020 Awards

See page 8

Check the address label. If it says "Winter 2020", then you need to RENEW membership now.



2nd Place BRAW Photo Contest

Steve Lang
Madison, WI



3rd Place BRAW Photo Contest

Mary Kohls-Blanke
Elkhart Lake, WI

Thanks to the Camera Company of Madison for judging the BRAW Photo Contest.

