

Summer 2023  
Vol. 38, 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 9th

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**Is It Time to Renew Your Membership?**

# President's Report

Volunteerism! Just a word that takes in a whole lot of different venues and meanings. I recently gave a presentation at a local senior center on birds (oh-yes, bluebirds were a focus!) and I noticed in the foyer a plaque that listed people who volunteered at the center. The establishment was honoring people who gave over 100 hours of volunteer service.



At BRAW, we talk about our volunteers all the time for that is our essential backbone to support the Eastern Bluebird. But two things are lacking in comparison to the people on the before mentioned plaque. One, we are a not-for-profit institution so we do not have an expensive plaque that honors all our volunteer monitors and volunteer Board members, and two, only 100 hours? That doesn't even come close to what you and I give to help save and promote Wisconsin cavity nester species. It's not fair to use the same word-volunteers! I suppose the plaque is to encourage volunteers to help at the senior center, but we don't need that for we willingly volunteer for a cause of saving a species. I can't express enough how honored BRAW is to have such dedicated people, who do not need recognition to continue their personal drive and self gratification to support bluebirds.

If I can quote a famous movie, we are a mutual admiration society! A heart filled "Thank You" to all of us, from all of us, is sufficient to dedicated people. Now, how do we convince the next generation?

Most of you know about the programs we initiated this spring. See Spring Issue of WB for details. Of these programs, we set a goal of 223 boxes to be shipped, delivered or picked up, and these boxes were provided free by the Carol McDaniel Legacy Fund. (223 was taken from 2023 less the zero). All recipients agreed to provide the GPS location of the box placements or location that we could determine the GPS or the approximate location of the box's placement. (GPS stands for Global Positioning System). This fund was established to provide boxes with this GPS requirement and I can determine the location if I'm giving some clue as to the location.

As of April 30, 2023, these programs ended except for the Cemetery Installations or "Nest in Peace" program. It is gratifying to announce that we exceeded our goal and

at this writing, we have distributed 243 boxes. A special thanks goes to Mary Sobol and Gene Kroupa (volunteer Board members) and Val Van Winkle who volunteers as our membership chairperson. The volunteer effort by these people is extraordinary for not only do they take a huge amount of time to mail out boxes, etc., but they monitor nesting trails too!

This shows clearly that BRAW works for its members. If you have any comments or concerns, our website now offers a means for members to provide feedback.

The Conservation Reserve Program operated through the Farm Service Agency now permits bluebird nesting boxes on these designated lands. Nesting boxes are no longer considered an unacceptable structure. If someone challenges that notion, refer them to the Wisconsin Farm Service Agency for clarification. This only took two years and help from the National organization (NABS - North American Bluebird Society) as well as the Farm Service Agency in Washington D.C. Keep in mind that many farmers in particular have already been indoctrinated against allowing nesting boxes on CRP land. Re-education may be necessary.

The CRP program asks that we avoid placing our boxes where it will interfere with mowing and that we use 3/4" electrical conduit as the pole to mount the box.

Our Treasurer, Joanie Haugen, has pointed out that we have received a number of donations in support of acquiring and placing nesting boxes. These donations have provided a great support for shipping costs and procuring boxes. Thanks to all of you who have given a little more than a membership fee for this purpose. It really helps our causes and goals.

A note of passing: Myron Byers passed away last year and we just recently learned of it. He was an important supporter of Adams County as a County Coordinator and he helped with neighboring Wood County as well. It is disconcerting for me when you find a county coordinator or any committed trail monitor passing without us knowing about it. If you know of anyone who should be memorialized, please advise me. Also, we need a county coordinator for both of those counties. To serve as a county adviser will make our efforts stronger. Think about helping to support nesting trail monitors.

Best wishes for a productive bluebird nesting season.  
Steve

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## In Memoriam: Patricia Heiden

By Patrick Ready

Patricia M. Heiden, 79, of Dousman, WI passed away on Thursday, March 30, 2023.

I was saddened to hear this news. Patricia was the secretary for BRAW for many years. I'm not sure but I believe it was 15 or 16 years. She resigned in 2016.



When I joined the board in 2002 she was secretary. I watched as she took meeting minutes using shorthand! You don't see that used too much anymore. Even at our state conventions she kept minutes using shorthand in a notebook. I don't think she was the "computer type!"

Her husband John accompanied her to all the BRAW board meetings and sat and listened to our discussions.

The two of them monitored several trails where they lived, each week driving many miles to check all the boxes. I recall a couple had to give up their cemetery trail and Patricia said she and John would do it. That was the attitude she had. Give 110%!

She graduated from Waukesha High School. Pat worked as a Legal Secretary in Waukesha for the majority of her working career and retired after more than 30 years. She was also very passionate about birds and was licensed by the Wisconsin DNR as a Bander. Pat and John spent quite a bit of time walking the fields observing birds and banding baby birds. She will be missed!

Save the Date!

# 2023 BRAW Convention

## September 9, Horicon Marsh Visitor Center

### Morning Feature Program

The Story of Horicon Marsh  
by Elizabeth Herzmann, DNR

The story of Horicon Marsh is one of creation, destruction, and revival. Created by the glaciers yet scarred by humans, this important wetland has been restored by conservationists who had the foresight to think about the future of this wetland. Despite the degradation, Horicon Marsh was listed as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance in 1990 and is one of the best of the best wetlands in the world. Though significantly changed, it is a true testament to the resiliency of nature when allowed to be preserved.

Liz Herzmann has worked for the DNR as a wildlife educator at Horicon Marsh for more than 11 years.



### Afternoon Feature Program

Share a Raptor Experience with  
Hoo's Woods

During this one-hour education program participants will meet several education raptors species. Folks will learn about their natural history, breeding, habitat and behaviors. These raptors are some of the most beautiful and fascinating birds in the world. Hoo's Woods program will leave you spellbound, anxious to learn more about these fascinating birds and others. Hoo's Woods is a non-profit organization established in 1998, dedicated to the rehabilitation and education of raptors.



*Plan on an afternoon of family  
fun and learning.*

9:00 – 2:30 PM

Horicon Marsh Visitor Center

N7725 Hwy 28

Horicon, WI 53032

- Officer Reports
- BRAW Awards
- Silent Auction!
- Catered Lunch

## Register for the BRAW Convention

The BRAW Annual Convention will be held on Saturday, September 9 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 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](mailto:gbbird22@gmail.com)

Once again the anticipation of summer and the excitement of seeing bluebirds is upon us. Just as the warmer weather we seek has been slow to come, so do the bluebirds seem late in appearing and in lower numbers at first glance.

I just saw my first bluebird near my home on April 26, the same day my friend and Brown County Coordinator Steve Mayer, was helping me erect my first Purple Martin house. Others around the state seem to be having a little better results in reporting finding bluebirds and early nests with eggs, as of this report on April 30.

We are constantly seeking motivated, energetic people willing to spread the gospel of bluebird conservation to serve as County Coordinators. Thanks to the efforts of several other BRAW officers, two members have been persuaded to become new coordinators.

We welcome Steve Vidmar in Waukesha County and Michelle Mellencamp in Milwaukee County, as our latest leaders. However, I was less successful in attempting to land a coordinator for Calumet County, which has long been without one. Despite my best efforts, this county remains among those important counties that are not yet represented by a coordinator and have very few, if any, members reporting bluebird numbers each year.

Perhaps You could be a County Coordinator and share your stories like the following:

## Marinette County, Barbie Allen

Since I'm a Snowbird for most of winter in coastal Florida, I have to put my bluebird passion on hold. As I heard the icy storm forecasts that went through Texas and other southern states, I worried that our migrated bluebirds from Wisconsin to these areas may have taken a big hit as they did several years ago when Wisconsin's fledged bluebird totals were nearly cut in half. We'll have to wait and see and hopefully they found enough food to survive. Last year I had a big problem with raccoons even

though I was using the Noel guards. I plan to install the new guards that Dave Lucey wrote about in the past several issues of "Wisconsin Bluebird". Hopefully they will be more successful. If anyone knows who put up the many taller bluebird houses in Marinette County between Lakewood and Middle Inlet, please let me know by text at 920-737-2633 as I am very interested in finding out if they are being monitored for BRAW.

## Milwaukee County, Michelle Mellencamp

FYI: Milwaukee County monitoring today. First EB eggs for us this year. Adult bluebirds nearby. Look what we found!



I'm happy to assist as County Coordinator for Milwaukee. We'll see where this goes! Just found 3 EB nests & 1 CH nest this week when monitoring Lake Park & Schlitz Audubon Nature Center.

I'm thankful for BRAW's support. The additional boxes that Steve Sample provided will be put to good use. So grateful for the beautiful nesting boxes that the Carol Mc Daniel's fund supports. They will definitely help with the bluebird restoration efforts.

After I buy some poles & attach the hardware on these great nesting boxes, I'll be putting in 5 - 6 of them at a cemetery this week.

Looking forward to a productive Bluebird year!

## Rock County, Rod Courtier

I was hoping for a better spring than what we have had the last 2 years, but I don't think that is going to happen. On 4/18/2023 I checked a house and there was a dead Tree Swallow. Between the lack of bugs and the cold, birds are having a hard time. Hopefully it will warm up soon.

Last summer I put Noel guards on

two houses and watched Bluebirds trying to get in for a half hour. They could not figure it out, so I picked up a small stick that would fit in the 1/2" hole in the guard and let it stick out the end for a perch. Right away one landed on the perch and went in the house at once.

I have seen very few Bluebirds so far, hope they are on the way.

I have a lot of my bird houses on a classmates' and friends' farm, nearby in the county. Regrettably, they were in a horrific traffic accident recently. Sadly, Howard was killed, and Diane had many injuries, but is recovering. I want to thank them and express my appreciation for the 20 years they provided me the opportunity of Bluebirding on their property, and to Diane and the family for letting me continue in the years ahead.

## Iowa County, Dale Moody

Doris and I were out making repairs and checking boxes on April 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> in Iowa and Lafayette counties. Some nest activity but no eggs yet. I checked a house yesterday April 19<sup>th</sup> in Iowa Co and found 5 eggs. It is starting! We had about 100 more fledglings in 2022 vs 2021. Let's hope the recovery continues!

## Waupaca County, Craig & Sheila Beyer

As I write this it is April 20, 2023, we have had some 80-degree days that really jump-started bird movements. We have seen a lot of bluebirds around houses and even have a few full nests made! 25 new houses are built and we started a couple new trails on some awesome land. Sheila and I are about almost daily doing what we love to do, helping the Bluebirds! This year we are experimenting with 1/2" raised floors, using 1/8" hardware cloth to keep the nests dry and bug free. The mail carrier just delivered a huge box of live mealworms and the sun is shining, looks like it's going to be a banner year for the bluebirds here in Waupaca County.

We would also like to take this time to thank BRAW for awarding us 2022 Bluebirders of the Year. We don't seek accolades but it is nice to be appreciated. Thank you!

Happy trails, Craig & Sheila Beyer

### **Eau Claire County, Rita Gundry**

Once again, we're faced with the possibility of lower bluebird numbers arriving this spring, due to damaging storms in the areas they spend the winter. To tempt them to fly my way, I am adding some new nest box locations and changing others that haven't produced well over the last few years. At this time of year, I dream of bluebirds returning and how nice that will be. This sweet poem by poetess, Katharine M. Braun, says it all.

#### **BLUEBIRD HONEYMOON**

Come along with me, my love,  
And we will roam the sky;  
We'll fly across the meadows,  
And soar o'er mountains high.  
We'll drink of streams' pure waters;  
Chase butterflies and bees;  
And when we tire of this, my love'  
We'll rest in shady trees.  
Then we will search in earnest,  
Each nook and cranny wide;  
Where we can raise our family  
Together, side by side.  
There it is, my dearest love  
Well, goodness! Bless my soul!  
Just waiting there for us, dear one.  
Our house upon a pole.  
A kind and careful craftsman  
Has built it, strong and true;  
Do enter in to it, my love,  
And I will follow you.

Hoping for a successful bluebird nesting season for all of us.

### **Oconto County, Gene Birt**

With the fluctuating and unreliable good weather here lately, the bluebirds seem to have taken their sweet time in returning this spring. I have seen just one bluebird lately after finding an early bluebird nest 2 weeks ago on my trail. The Tree Swallows have been back in abundance, first arriving here on April 3.

They haven't claimed the new box in my yard yet intended for the bluebirds, but as many as 5 of them are using the perching rods on my new purple martin house pole regularly. I'm hoping they become attached to the other boxes near my yard before I open and raise my martin house for the first time on May 3.

Even the barn swallows were 8 days late in returning to my brother's farm

nearby this year, compared to their usual arrival on April 20.

I have built an extra 40 nest boxes since my brother and I picked up the pine lumber from the sawmill, which were made from the white pine trees that fell in my yard last summer. 20 of those were intended for a nestbox workshop I had planned for a group in Oconto County, but that has now been delayed to this fall or maybe even next spring.

I gave a bluebird presentation at the Wild Birds Unlimited store in Green Bay on March 15 along with new BRAW member, Steve Hupfer. We signed up 4 new members to BRAW that day. On May 15, I will be appearing at the Pulaski Middle School grounds in Brown County for a day-long outdoor field conservation day for all the 4-th grade students in the Pulaski school system. Alongside a dozen other environmental groups, like the DNR, the Wood Duck Society, and the Brown County Parks department, I'll be sharing the joy of bluebirds and the need for bluebird nest boxes to perhaps a hundred students during the course of the day. Perhaps among that large number, in groups of 10 or 15 during 20 minute intervals, at least one or two will be inspired to build a birdhouse, put up a nest box or start a bluebird trail near their home, and learn to become a monitor in the coming years.

### **Dane Co., Patrick Ready**

In February I gave my Attracting Eastern Bluebird and Other Cavity Nesters program to customers of Wild Birds Unlimited in Madison. About 30 attended.

On May 13 Curt Caslavka and I gave a "walk & talk" at Pope Farm west of Middleton. Curt has monitored a trail there since 2008. About 35 Pope Farm members attended. Nice mix of ages and lots of interest about a bluebird trail. We walked a small section of his trail and talked about box design, predator guards and invasive species vs native species. I think everyone left with a strong dislike for House Sparrows!

Most questions I've been dealing with as county coordinator have to do with House Sparrows. "How do you get rid of them?!" First I tell them not to

feed them! I recommend using a small piece or two of monofilament fish line on feeders to keep House Sparrows off boxes. It really works! Give it a try. I also tell them not to use millet or cracked corn, two seeds House Sparrows love. And of course there's always the Van Ert Trap if they try to occupy your nest box.

I started checking my Trails in Mid-April but didn't see any activity until early May. Now I have seven active bluebird nests and egg laying has begun. One nest has a Chickadee egg dumped in it with 3 bluebird eggs. Have to wait to see how this develops. I have a 5 box trail on a rural property south of Mount Horeb that belongs to a friend I met through Madison Audubon. A good restored prairie with some woods in the middle. When I began checking boxes I emailed her that I would keep her updated on how her "Blue", were doing. She didn't reply back. I know she travels and visits her kids out of town so I was concerned. Then one day a couple weeks ago her daughter saw me making my rounds. She came out and told me her mother passed away after a short battle with cancer. The property will go up for sale. I hope the new owners will keep the nest boxes up and I will offer to monitor them as I have for the past 5 years. I know my friend Joyce would like that.

### **Waukesha County, Steve Vidmar**

Hello, I am the new Waukesha County Coordinator. I have repaired nest boxes from woodpecker damage. House sparrow trapping has been very successful. Not much to report on my trail. I have two nest boxes that have black -capped chickadees with eggs. No nesting bluebirds or tree swallows as of today 4/28/2023. The weather has not been the best for insect reproduction. I typically do not get bluebirds nesting until first or second week in May. Looking forward to a good year. Anyone in Waukesha County need help or have questions - call me. (262-968-5989). Well that's it for now.

**To become a County Coordinator contact Gene Birt: 920-373-2551 or email him: gbbird22@gmail.com**



# Could YOU be a County Coordinator?

By Gene Birr, CC Chair

The strongest link in our association of bluebird-minded individuals is each and every one of you who has chosen to become a member of BRAW and made a commitment to place a nest box for attracting bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting songbirds.

When you make the decision to actively monitor the nest boxes and report your results from a summer's nesting season to our BRAW Data Collector each fall, you have taken another step on the road to the recovery of the Eastern Bluebird, adding to one of the most successful efforts of songbird conservation in modern times. Each account of another bluebird fledgling adds to the accumulated knowledge of having helped to increase bluebird numbers and the practices and efforts that have been taken to bring this about.

Since our organization's founding, this achievement of increasing bluebird numbers has been helped greatly by the accomplishments of a few dedicated individuals who have chosen to do even more than simply putting up and watching a single birdhouse in their own yard. Those who are most passionate about helping educate others to learn all the little things that make a bluebird trail successful have often chosen to take on the role of becoming a County Coordinator. Each coordinator can decide for themselves just how active they want to be in accomplishing this.

Some of our coordinators are content to simply list themselves as a contact person in their county so anyone may call them and ask a question about bluebirds and advise them where to find additional information, resources and materials to get started with a bluebird box or begin a trail. Other individuals elect to speak to groups and give presentations to those interested in learning about bluebirds, or choose to assist others in helping locate ideal bluebird nesting habitat and then help provide boxes for a trail and setting them up. They may decide to build the boxes themselves and acquire the



**Here I am showing off a nest box and explaining the contents of one box to a group at the Oconto Bird City Nature Festival in 2017 while Dick Nickolai (far left) prepares to band a bluebird nestling at Copper Culture State Park.**

lumber and metal poles required for erecting the boxes, or contact others in BRAW or its Board of Directors to help provide these items. Still others go so far as to acquire the materials and shape them into the metal predator guards that are added to the box or pole which are necessary to deter cats, snakes and raccoons from raiding the box of the eggs and young birds. Some address the problems posed by the invasive House Sparrow by providing Van Ert traps and other methods of controlling them.

However active one chooses to be in their pursuit of strategies that improve the public's knowledge of bluebirds and the need to provide more nesting opportunities for them, it is most essential that a coordinator be willing to stay in contact with the person inquiring about bluebirds and connect them to the staff and resources that can be found at BRAW and the North American Bluebird Society (NABS). Each of these groups and its board members has access to boundless information that can be presented to anyone inquiring about bluebirds.

BRAW has a brief quad-fold article that can be offered to those interested in joining BRAW and explaining the very basics of how to attract bluebirds, and the simple things needed to do them and the cost and value of being a member. The coordinator can explain the benefits of membership beginning with the Information Packet that each receives and the *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter that follows with it. They also have ready access to those that can provide nest boxes, poles, Noel predator guards, Van Ert sparrow

traps, hole-reducer plates and any box replacement parts. Even more important, they can assist members in selecting proper bluebird habitat and installing the boxes and poles there and offer assistance to any inquiry.

Once you have chosen to assist others in your county with learning about the practices that will improve the monitoring of the boxes on their trail, it is important that you keep in touch with them to learn of their successes and offer solutions to the problems that arise with their trails. By doing this you can relay their experiences and yours into a report that can be sent to the County Coordinator Chair six weeks before each quarter to be published in the four issues of our *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter so they can be shared with the BRAW membership.

The primary duty of a coordinator is simply to be a resource for anyone inquiring about bluebirds in your county. The opportunities to help others learn about bluebirds and provide the products and information to increase their nesting possibilities is endless, limited only by the time, talent, interest and passion each of us has to contribute to this endeavor. Do you see yourself as someone who can be active for bluebirds in some small way in one of the many counties that does not yet have a coordinator for BRAW? If YOU are one of those who want to be involved in these efforts in your county, please contact any BRAW BOD member or Gene Birr, the County Coordinator Chair at [gbbird22@gmail.com](mailto:gbbird22@gmail.com) or 920-373-2551, at 3698 Morgan Marsh Rd., Oconto Falls, WI 54154-9677.

# Summer Is a Great Time for Putting Up Nest Boxes

By Gene Kroupa

When is a good time to put up nest boxes or start a trail? If asked this question, most veteran bluebirders would answer: "Early spring in time for returning male bluebirds and mates to find them."

I would agree and disagree! Anytime is a great time as long as you can drive the mounting poles into the ground. Let me explain why based on personal experience.

When I started bluebirding and running my own trails, I didn't know how important second nestings are to bluebirds. Unlike some native cavity nesters, blues don't give up if their first attempt doesn't produce a crop of fledglings.

And even when good spring weather and a healthy supply of insects result in a successful effort, blues are still driven to give it all another go. So, when a fellow gardener invited me to check out her 90-acre property, I mentioned it looked like ideal bluebird habitat.

She gave me the go-ahead to put up four nest boxes along an old fence line bordering some CRP ground. That was about the middle of June. Although I had my doubts, I installed and faithfully monitored the boxes.

Much to our delight, two of the boxes were used by bluebirds which fledged two clutches. Now, most years those four boxes host both first and second bluebird nestings. In years when there are delayed first nestings, I can count on finding eggs or fledglings deep into the summer.

Since my trails are located in several directions and various distances from Madison, I often find that the nesting season begins and ends differently at these sites. While checking my boxes again last April, I had to clean out a few nests from successful late nesting attempts.

Although putting up boxes in summer can meet with mixed nesting results depending on location, another great time to install boxes is in the fall. To me it's sort of like splitting and storing a pile of fireplace wood in anticipation of winter.

As most bluebirds head south, newly placed nest boxes will be waiting and ready for their spring return. And I'll feel good knowing that I don't have to rush next spring to install a stack of nest boxes taking up space in the garage



Anytime is a good time to put up a nest box. (Gene Kroupa)

Wisconsin Bluebird

# Data Corrections

Dear Monitors-

As I've mentioned in previous data reports, we would like all of our monitors to be recognized for their effort in helping the birds. You are the reason that bluebirds have recovered in Wisconsin, and the reason BRAW is recognized as a national leader in this effort. We appreciate all you do for the birds. Unfortunately, with the hundreds of reports I receive, errors, oversights and fatigue happen, despite my best efforts. Below is a list of corrections for the year 2022.

These additions bring our state totals up to over 14,000 bluebirds fledged! Congratulations on a job well done!

Thanks and regards,  
Steve Fallon  
BRAW Data Coordinator

Name	County	EAB Fledged
Jim Blair	Door	18
Cathy Eckers	Door	6
Charlotte Lukes	Door	74
Glenna Peters	Door	5
Richard Bong State Recreation Area	Kenosha	53
Gerry/Della Clabots	Brown	112
Len Gracyalny	Brown	4
Lynn Crawford	Milwaukee	6
Bruce and Ruth Marion	Sauk	104
Lawrence Liegel	Sauk	103
<b>Total EAB</b>		<b>14,065</b>

## 2023 SUMMER DONATIONS

Tom Pierce, \$100  
Bruce & Jerrilyn Brewer, \$10  
Karen Dostal \$10  
Mike Moran, \$15 research  
Larry Liegel, \$50  
Norbert Pritzl, \$25 nest box  
Brian & Janet Nelson, \$25 research  
Tammy Frey, \$15 nest box  
Cara Knothe \$25  
Ken Jalowitz, \$100  
Gordon Telford, \$80  
Joan Hoy, \$25  
Debra Walters, \$25  
Phyllis Feiner, \$75 nest box/research  
Phillip Rogers, \$5  
Mary Strasser Colclough, \$15 research

Karen Haralson, \$15 nest box  
Gene Birr, \$10  
Ruth Jensen, \$50 nest box  
Duane Schwab, \$100  
Donna Garske, \$20  
Christopher Glass, \$100  
John & Jane Prusinski, \$25  
Allen Rosenthal, \$75 nest box  
Patrick Enright, \$25  
Jane Prindle, \$75  
Caroline Moes, \$10  
Richard Gunderson, \$25  
Martha Gibson, \$40

*In Memory of Pat Heiden*  
Ilene & Paul Kronschnabel, \$30



# Wren Guards Work in Wisconsin Study

By Gene Kroupa and Memuna Khan

There is nothing more disappointing than to view a nest box full of blue eggs one day and then to return the next and find them lying punctured on the ground below. The culprit in most cases is a House Wren (Quinn & Holroyd 1989).

Since House Wrens are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, any mitigation measures must not disturb these birds. So what can be done to prevent such devastation?

One suggestion is to use a wren guard: an attachment that blocks a direct view into the nest box. In 1996, Bob Orthwein successfully used wren guards to protect Black-capped Chickadee nests. But would they work for Eastern Bluebirds?

In 2021 BRAW funded the first of a two-year wren guard research project conducted by Dr. Memuna Khan and her students at Ripon College. Using a nest box trail near the campus, the researchers ran two experiments.

First, they hypothesized that the guards would deter wrens from entering the boxes. Second, they hypothesized that bluebird breeding activity would not be adversely affected by installing a wren guard.

The experimental designs were approved by the Ripon College Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, and no birds nor nests were harmed because of the research. Funding for the studies was provided by the Carol McDaniel Legacy Fund.

To test the effectiveness of wren guards the researchers identified an active wren nest and temporarily installed two nest boxes, each containing a salvaged bluebird nest and two House Sparrow eggs, nearby (Fig. 1).

The control box had no guard, and the experimental box had a guard extending 3.5-3.75 inches from the nest box entrance hole. The guards were made of 3D printed white plastic and shielded view of the nest hole from the front and sides. Birds could still access the nest box by entering from under the guard. After 24 hours the researchers checked to see if the eggs inside the boxes were destroyed.

Student Natalie Davies ran 29 tri-



Fig. 1: A nest box with a wren guard (left) and an unprotected one (right) were temporarily installed 10m from an active wren nest. Each box contained a salvaged bluebird nest and two HOSP eggs. (Zach Rowling)



Ripon College students, Natalie Davies and Zach Rowling helped conduct research to determine the efficacy of wren guards on a Wisconsin nest box trail. (Memuna Khan)

als at active wren nests. Of those 29 trials, wrens interacted with the experimental boxes 16 times. The guards deterred wrens from destroying eggs in seven boxes or about 50%. The guards were nearly 50% effective whether the wrens were incubating eggs or feeding chicks in the nearby active nests.

The researchers observed that as the breeding season progressed, the wrens were less likely to engage with the experimental boxes. In July and August, wrens ignored them in 66% of the trials. Despite Davies' best efforts to maximize sample sizes, the wrens simply did not cooperate. Therefore, the study was con-

tinued for a second year.

In 2022, student Zach Rowling repeated the wren guard study at 33 active wren nest sites with one key change. Trials conducted at the same locations as 2021 presented wrens with brown guards (six nest boxes) instead of white to account for habituation should the birds at these locations be the same ones as the previous year. This was a possibility because studies of marked wrens in Arizona, Ohio and Wyoming observed a 29-37% return rate of adult breeders (Johnson 2020).

As in 2021, wrens were less likely to engage with the experimental boxes later in the breeding season (Fig. 2), thus resulting in 14 tests of the wren guard. Once again, wren guards were 50% effective at repeated locations (3/6) and at new locations (5/8).

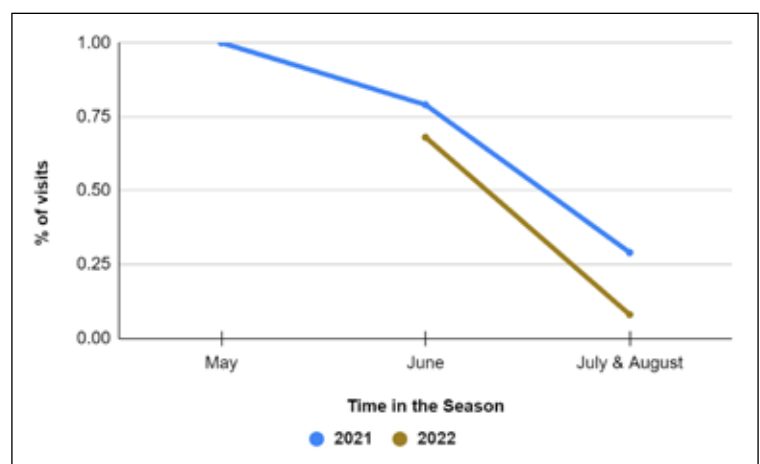


Fig. 2: House Wrens were less likely to visit the experimental nest boxes as the breeding season progressed. (Memuna Khan)



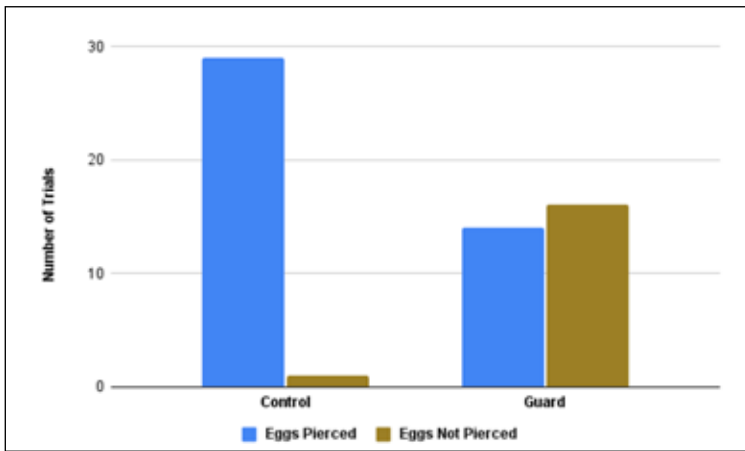


Fig. 3: Data from 30 trials conducted near active wren nests in 2021 and 2022 show wrens destroyed eggs in 97% of boxes without a guard and 47% of boxes with a guard. (Memuna Khan)

Over both years, wrens destroyed eggs inside 97% of the unguarded boxes (Fig. 3). These experiments provide strong evidence that the guard effectively discourages wrens from destroying eggs in nearby nests.

In addition, wrens were consistently less aggressive later in the breeding season. It is widely believed that wren aggression is caused by competition for resources (Belles-Isles and Picman 1986, Kattan 2016, Pribil and Picman 1991, Quinn and Holroyd 1989).

The researchers also tested if wren guards prevented bluebirds from tending their nests. They conducted a second set of experiments by affixing a wren guard to bluebird nest boxes with 30 active nests, either during the egg laying or nestling phase of breeding.

During egg laying the guard was left in place for 24 hours and checked for additional eggs to indicate that the birds were able to enter the nest box. Out of 15 trials, 10 bluebird pairs were able to continue egg laying (67%). During the nestling stage, a researcher observed the pair for an hour or until they successfully entered the box.

Out of 15 trials, 13 pairs (87%) continued feeding their young within 22 minutes after the guard was installed. The guard was removed after one hour. This finding indicates that most bluebirds are capable of maneuvering under a wren guard.

However, 33% of bluebird pairs that encountered a wren guard during egg laying abandoned their nesting attempt. As a result, bluebird monitors should be attentive to the pair's behavior when using wren guards.

These trials further confirm that wren guards work well in discouraging egg destruction when competition for nest boxes is fierce. However, there is a trade-off to consider in the potential interruption of bluebird egg laying caused by the wren guard. The best wren management tactic

might still be proper placement of nest boxes in open areas away from wren habitat.

**Editors Note:**

Dr. Gene Kroupa is a director of the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin.

Dr. Memuna Khan is a biology professor at Ripon College, Ripon, Wisconsin.

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Sialas.org – Source of plans for a wren guard.

Reprinted from *Bluebird*, newsletter for NABS

**BRAW Welcomes**

**These Members**

- Lisa Benitez, McFarland
- Michael Huffman, Bangor
- Timothy Pierce, Mt. Horeb
- Dave Mittlesteadt, Deerfield
- Ellen Steinhauer, Middleton
- Ann Yourell, Sparta
- Janice Yourell, Sparta
- Trevor Bellrichard, Oregon
- Frances Steele, Madison
- RsG Development Dynamics, Verona
- Dave Mittlesteadt, Deerfield
- Dennis Persinger, Kenosha
- Janet Cleary, Prescott
- Jason Akey, River Falls
- Richard Thoenes, Lisbon
- John Feiner, Plain
- Benjamin L Arnold, Mequon
- Phillip Rogers, Clear Lake
- Judith Huf, Whitefish Bay
- David Eager, Mequon
- Michael Sweeney, McFarland
- Francis Rott & Carlyn Dee Rott, Blue River
- Laurel Heil, DePere
- Twila & Bill Meo, Green Bay
- Sari St. Onge, Clintonville
- Steve Hupfer, Green Bay
- Phyllis Walker, Pound
- Joy Rathjen, Marshfield
- Tim Comer, Niagara
- John & Jane Prusinski, Muskego
- Heidi Putnam & Jayden Schmitz, Oregon
- Les Thornburg, Danbury
- Jodi Slager, Fond du Lac
- Carl Truss, Mosinee
- Maddie Lopresti, Shorewood
- Helen Zwickey, Madison
- Jack Garczynski, Greenfield
- Darrell Zietlow, Norwalk
- Ellen Neal, Madison
- Robert Feller, Waunakee
- Krystyna Mazur, Crivitz
- Jodie Haas, Chippewa Falls
- Lou Anne Koerschner, Madison



# Bluebirding Tips: Stay Away from Staples

By Gene Kroupa

There are many bluebird nest boxes in the marketplace. Some are made with thin wood, less than the recommended 3/4-inch thick, and held together with staples (or brads). These are two things to avoid.

Narrower width wood tends to warp or crack, especially the roof, and pull away from the side pieces when stapled. Trying to tighten the roof down while still in place with wood screws frequently results in split pieces and gaps.

Your best bet is to first remove the warped roof, flip it over and refasten it with wood screws. If the roof isn't usable, then you will have to replace it. For nest boxes with staples that aren't yet pulling apart, add screws for reinforcement.

In addition to supplying better insulation, the 3/4-inch thick walls provide more margin for error when using screws. Since dried out or knotty wood is tough, pre-drill holes slightly smaller than the width of the screws for easier setting.

I use #6 flathead 1 1/2-inch long wood screws that are less likely to split walls, particularly when I've also pre-drilled them. Drywall screws are thicker and tend to split narrow wood sides. Apply wood putty, paintable exterior caulk or Bondo to close any cracks.

If a house is not salvageable, another solution would be to buy some 3/4-inch plain pine boards and build a new house using the measurements from the old house. Repair or replace – either way the bluebirds are the winners when you stay away from staples.



Thin wood roofs that are stapled on can warp and pull up from sides. (Gene Kroupa)

Remove warped roof, flip and re-attach with wood screws. (Gene Kroupa)



**Looking for more information about Eastern Bluebirds & setting up trails? Go to the BRAW website: [braw.org](http://braw.org)**

## Egg Dump!

By Pat Ready, Editor

Over 25 years of monitoring nest boxes on several different trails and I discovered a first! A Black-capped Chickadee laid an egg in a bluebird nest. I've checked the box twice now on my weekly routine on my bike ride. The hen appears to be accepting the egg and rotating it with her own.

My assumption is the chickadee hen had a nest ready to go nearby but it was taken over by a Tree Swallow or Wren and she had an egg ready to lay in her nest. With no place of her own she flew over and dumped it in my active bluebird box.

I have experienced egg dumps before. A House Wren dumped an egg in a Tree Swallow nest at Lake Kegonsa State Park about 20 years ago. I watched that nest and saw the hen swallow raise it with her own 6 chicks. All fledged that box around the same time.

I will keep following the progress of this nest and report what happened in the Fall issue of the WB. Stayed tuned!





## Tips on Photographing Birds for the 2023 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.



**Give  
us  
your  
best  
shot!**

**SHOW US YOUR BLUEBIRDS!**  
**Enter our member photo contest.**



### Show Us Your Bluebirds!

Enter the BRAW 2023 Photo Contest for a Chance to Win a \$50 Amazon Gift Card and MORE!

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

#### RULES:

Open to BRAW Members only.

Original photography please.

Up to 3 submissions (photos) per person.

Photos do not need to be from the current year.

Photos will be judged on composition, image quality and subject matter. Judges will not be affiliated with BRAW.

#### FIRST PLACE

A \$50 Amazon Gift Card.

Your photo on the cover of the *Wisconsin Bluebird* Newsletter - Winter Issue.

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

#### SECOND PLACE

A \$25 Amazon Gift Card.

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

#### THIRD PLACE

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

**Submission deadline is September 30.**

Please email your photographs (JPEG file) with **your name, location and any other information** that you think others will find interesting to: Patrick Ready at [birdsready@gmail.com](mailto:birdsready@gmail.com). Subject line: **BRAW Bluebird Contest 2023**

**No mail-in photos please.**

# WB's Content Over the Years – Part 2

By Mary Sobol

After all the years of data collection and analysis, the recommendations for nest box style, location and spacing were incorporated into BRAW's impressive *Information Packet* in a section called "Best Management Practices."

I view the *Information Packet* as a key document in the history of BRAW, because it is the culmination of extensive data collection and analysis. When Paul helped me set up my bluebird trail 10 years ago, I had no idea about the effort that went into choosing the design of the boxes and how and where to locate them. I now have a much greater appreciation after my review of the *WB* newsletter.

The data summaries and analysis were the most interesting parts of the newsletters for me. Population charts and historical graphs were an important part of the *WB* newsletters. Members could see clearly how their actions (putting up and monitoring nest boxes) factor into bluebird population numbers.

The last time a graph of historical data was published was the Spring 2019 newsletter. The graph was titled "Trends in Bluebird Production – 1994-2018." At a glance one could see trends in bluebirds fledged compared with tree swallows. The graph also contained data on number of boxes monitored over those 24 years. I think there is value in presenting our annual nest box summaries in a historical context.

Over the years photos got better. The letters to the editors kept coming. BRAW members love to share stories and photos of bluebirds in their yard or on their trail, whether humorous or heart-breaking. Important connections are made when people send letters and photos to the newsletter. I hope the connections can continue as BRAW becomes more digital.

Our members are enthusiastic about all cavity nesters and the newsletters were full of information about chickadees, wrens, woodpeckers, purple martins, and tree swallows. A few of many outstanding topics that stood out in my review include:

- discovery of a natural tree cavity used by nesting chimney swifts in Taylor County reported in a 2004 newsletter by County Coordinator Ken Damro,
- the frustrations of dealing with woodpeckers destroying bluebird boxes (numerous articles),
- first mention of and warnings about Lyme's disease in the early 1990's newsletters,
- an article about Lawrence Zeleny, the founder of NABS by Sue Cashman in 2016, and
- "The Weeds of the Sky," an article by Ray Pinter about the house sparrow in a 2017 newsletter,

County Coordinators' updates, member bios (and obits), and descriptions of the annual meeting make for great reading over the years and continue to have their place in the newsletter. Offering those features in the newsletters shows the continuity of BRAW's traditions.

Likewise the tradition of sharing monitors' data and sponsoring scientific research with Ripon College continues on to today. And, Fred Craig has improved nest boxes by incorporating ventilation options.

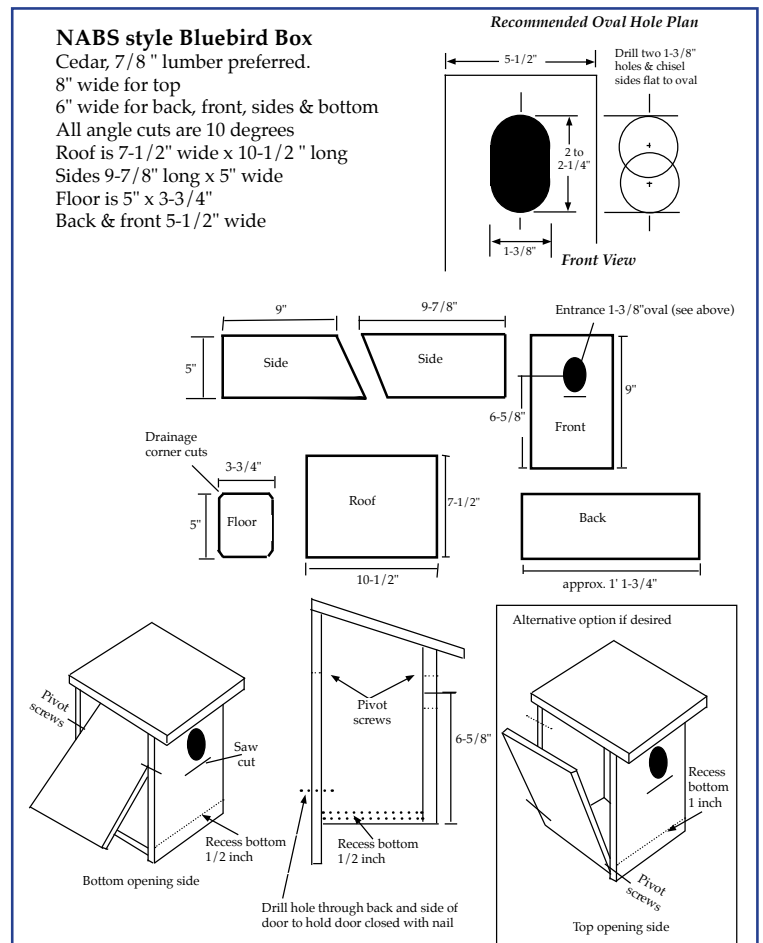
Dave Lucey is working on the impact of skylight nest box design in discouraging



Mary with her French Rabbit Hounds.

house sparrows research. Dr. Gene Kroupa is overseeing the second year of testing the effectiveness of wren guards. Both research efforts are managed by Dr. Memuna Khan and her students at Ripon College.

And thanks to BRAW's monitors, Steve Fallon is reporting annual nesting data for members' use. All of the research results and monitoring data summaries continue to be key articles in *WB*. I look forward to reading all about it.







# Membership Renewal Information

## By Valerie Van Winkle, Membership Services

If the address label of your *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter reads Summer 2023 next to your name, then your membership expires this month and you need to renew immediately. If you are an online member, you won't see this clue so please consider marking the expiration date on your calendar when you sign up. We don't want you to miss a single newsletter!

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

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

You can also renew your membership at [www.braw.org](http://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)
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- \$100 Corporate Annual Membership
- \$300 Life Membership

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Give the gift of Bluebirds!

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\*Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: (     ) \_\_\_\_\_

County of residence: \_\_\_\_\_

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

### Donation (optional)

\$15 for nest box construction/post & predator guard

\$100 for nest box trail

\$\_\_\_\_\_ for bluebird research

In addition to my membership 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

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Mail this membership request to:

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Valerie Van Winkle  
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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](mailto:ripvws@gmail.com).



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**Vice-president Brad Zinda**, 6737 Pinelake Dr. #213, Madison WI 53719 • [brad.zinda@gmail.com](mailto:brad.zinda@gmail.com) (term to 12/23)

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**Director Mary Sobol**, 5205 Broadhead St., McFarland WI 53558 • [msobolontime@gmail.com](mailto:msobolontime@gmail.com) (term to 12/24)

**Director Mike Crawford**, 817 5th St. Waunakee, WI 53539 608-213-1806 • [mike@marieandmike.com](mailto:mike@marieandmike.com) (term to 12/23)

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**Funding: Joanie Haugen** (see above)

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**Lowell Peterson**, 1860 45th St. Somerset, WI 54025 • (715) 247-3243

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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 2023", then you need to RENEW membership now.

## Future Bluebirders?

By Dave Lucey

These photos are from a recent Cub Scout activity that I did locally with a group of boys and girls. Using precisely machined components fabricated by Fred Craig, the scouts assembled 20 bluebird houses to be used as a fundraiser, rather than selling high-priced popcorn.

Each quality cedar box will come with a predator guard, state of the art ventilation system, and a half-page instruction sheet covering information relating to those features, and the need for weekly monitoring.

The scouts and their parents received a lesson on bluebirds, egg ID, and the adverse behavior of house sparrows toward bluebirds. The closeup is of my son and grandson, which is how I became aware of the group's interest.

