

Fall 2023
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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 2023

See Page 3



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Inside this issue:

President's Report - 2 • BRAW Convention - 3 • Call for Data - 4 • County Coordinator News - 5
Konrath's Cemetery Success - 7 • The Power of Bluebirds - 8 • Albino Bluebird - 9
Bluebirding Tips - 10 • BRAW Photo Contest - 10 • Successful Modified Noel Guard - 11
Ready Receives Award - 12 • NABS Box Plan - 13 • An Unusual Cavity Nester - 16

Is It Time to Renew Your Membership?

President's Report

Welcome to another issue of the Wisconsin Bluebird! We are in our 38th year!

Pat Ready has served as a vital member of the BRAW Board for almost 20 years and as President as well. Pat is our newsletter editor and has been at this job 19 years! He has been an active birder, monitors several bluebird trails, maintains and monitors American Kestrel sites, and has worked diligently with supporting Osprey nesting sites, as well as Purple Martin nesting locations. He willingly gives talks all over the state on bluebirds and other bird topics. I cannot count the number of presentations he has given at the Madison Landscape and; Garden Expo over the years. I could go on and on with what he has done for birds and bird conservation in our state!

The Wisconsin Society for Ornithology has recognized Pat for all off these endeavors by presenting him with the 2023 Noel Cutright Conservation Award. This prestigious award recognizes his work on behalf of endangered, threatened species, for managing and protecting bird habitat, and educating the public about conservation issues. Well-deserved for a person too often not recognized for all of his contributions to promoting birds. Congratulations!

BRAW has been publishing ideas to help the population of Eastern Bluebirds in Wisconsin since 1986. We have a wealth of information from past years that deserves to be reprinted. One of your BRAW board members, Gail Smith, has volunteered to review past issues of *Wisconsin Bluebird* for this purpose. Look for these gems in upcoming issues.

We offer the listing of our county coordinators on our website for the purpose of supporting and helping our membership. Using the list to send information and opinions to our county coordinators and other members without permission of the BRAW Board of Directors is discouraged. Unless first published in our newsletter, *Wisconsin Bluebird*, in our packet, or on our website (BRAW.org), the information has not been vetted. Important to Know! We do not give out our membership list to anyone other than BRAW's BOD in order to protect your privacy.

Let's not forget the yearly convention at the Horicon Marsh Education and Visitor Center set for September 9th. More information about the program is provided in this newsletter. As requested by our membership, we are allot-



ting more time for the meeting and informal discussions among members. Bring items for the silent auction and be prepared for an enjoyable time. Also, sign up as soon as you can so we have a good idea of who is attending!

I want to personally thank all of our monitors who have participated with the research on skylight boxes over the past two years, and their effect upon House Sparrow box usurpation. This study is conducted by students at Ripon College under the leadership of Dr. Memuna Khan. The results of the second year of the study will be published in a future *Wisconsin Bluebird* issue. A preliminary report is scheduled for our statewide convention in September. BRAW provided financial support via the Carol McDaniel Legacy Fund and members' dues.

As our current nesting season is concluding, please do not postpone sending in your results. We see nesting results coming in at the end of July, but I want to remind monitors that, although uncommon, I have had active nests started in August with fledging taking place well into September. On July 26th I observed two new bluebird nesting starts on my trail! The reporting form included in this issue can be mailed to our data collector Steve Fallon, 974 Halcyon Days Ct., Oregon WI 53575, or use our easy submission form on our website (BRAW.org), or email directly to Steve Fallon at stevefall50@gmail.com or to wisconsinbluebirds@gmail.com. How is that for options! Thanks for your hard work!

Speaking of nesting boxes, if you have received and have not sent me your Carol McDaniel Legacy Fund nesting box location(s), please do so soon. Either GPS or a landmark location is acceptable.

Reminder for some: It is a good idea to clean out your nesting boxes and clear away any high growth around these boxes to prevent mice from gaining entrance during the winter season. Determine if any boxes should be moved for whatever reasons as it is a good idea to do so in the fall. If you wish to expand your trail(s), now is a good time to do so. We'll have predator guards, hole plates and boxes at the convention or contact me otherwise.

Waiting for the nesting results of 2023! Hopefully it is an improvement from recent years. Thank you for what you do to support BRAW, but more importantly, the bluebirds!

Steve,
President

BRAW Convention SILENT AUCTION

Are you creative with sewing, painting, woodworking, photography or other crafts? Use your imagination for the silent auction. It doesn't need to be bluebird related.

Help support BRAW with your donation or plan to buy an item and support BRAW bluebird trail development.



Register for the BRAW Convention, September 9, 2023

The Annual Convention will be held on September 9 at Horicon Marsh Education and Visitor Center, Horicon..

Conference fees:

\$10.00: Registration without lunch per person

\$20.00: Includes lunch & registration per person

Lunch: Choice of ham & cheese or turkey & cheese on whole wheat or white bread (indicate preference); potato salad, dessert bar – cost \$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 5. Please include name/address of each person registering.

Mail check payment to:

BRAW

9773 Vermont Church Rd.,
Black Earth, WI 53515

Register online!

Go to braw.org

Feel free to bring your own lunch (BYO) if desired.


Program for BRAW 2023 Annual Convention

8:00-9:00 Registration
9:00-9:30 Welcome: President & Treasurer Report
9:30-9:45 Report on HoSp Skylight Project: Dr. Mamuna Khan
9:45-10:30 *The Story of Horicon Marsh* by Elizabeth Herzmann
10:30-10:45 Early Nesting Results - Steve Fallon
10:45-11:15 - Open Topic Q/ A Panel
11:15-11:45 - Option -Silent Auction Participation & Free Time
11:45-1:00 Lunch! (Pre-paid only or BYO)
1:00-1:15 Silent Auction winners: (Auction to be over at 1 p.m.)
1:15-2:15 *Share a Raptor Experience* with Hoo's Woods by Dianne Moller
2:15 - 3:00 Closing Discussions & clean up

Plan on a great day of family fun and learning.

9:00 AM – 2:30 PM
Horicon Marsh Visitor Center
N7725 Hwy 28
Horicon, WI 53032
(920) 387-7893

★ Horicon Marsh Education and Visitor Center



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



Wisconsin

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 5 to:

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

BRAW Convention Featured Programs

September 9, Horicon Marsh Education and 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 of and education about raptors.

Call for Data! September 30 Deadline

Hi Fellow Bluebirders:

It's getting to be that time of year again. Although there's still some activity, the days are getting shorter and the bird houses are getting emptier. I know that each of you has an idea on how well the bluebirds are faring on your trails, and how your hard work had helped them. But it's the time of year when you'll soon get to see how well the bluebirds are doing across the state. Well... in order to get that information to you, we need you all to share the data you have. It's **Data Request** time! Please use our easy on-line form, or, if you prefer, you can submit by snail mail, by sending the printed form to me at the address, below. The electronic version is quicker, easier and cheaper (no stamps), but as long we get your data, we'll be happy! Please submit your data before **September 30**. Thanks for all you do for the birds!

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

BRAW EZ Summary Form

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

DEADLINE: SEPTEMBER 30

_____ 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

BRAW Summer CC News

Gene Birr, CC Chair

Email: gbbird22@gmail.com

As we approach the early fall and the beauty of September, we can look back at the successes of this summer's bluebird season and forward to our upcoming convention. While some coordinators are reporting disappointing results from their counties, many other monitors have seen great improvement over their 2022 results.

After a slow start to bluebird nesting here in NE WI, my trails have rebounded nicely and I now anticipate that my bluebird fledgling numbers will result in at least a 50% improvement over last year. This is largely due to a great number of second and late nesting bluebirds. I have recorded the latest bluebird nesting in my history of 16 years, with 3 eggs being laid in a new nest from July 19-21. On the other hand, the biggest disappointment of my season was the loss of nearly one-third of my Tree Swallow chicks, approximately 120, due to the wet and cold weather we had in mid-June, when the adult swallows were unable to adequately feed the growing young.

Similar success and disappointment can be found in the following CC reports.

Brown County and Outagamie County, Steve Mayer

As our monitoring season comes to a close I look back at the year as improved Bluebird activity.

Over many years of monitoring my trails in both counties I have reduced my trails and nest boxes due to an overload of House Sparrows and changing habitat. The trails that I monitor now have nest boxes in more suitable habitat. It is so important to move a nest box or make changes based on changing conditions such as tree growth, etc. The roadside trail that is in Outagamie County had no Bluebirds last year after many years of success. I was pleased this year to see the BB activity return to this trail showing me once again that our Bluebirds have a strong will to survive if we provide nest boxes in good habitat.

The landfill property in Brown County gets mowed two times during a season which provides low grass in spring providing good habitat to Bluebirds. This year when second nesting was about to happen the grass was very high and because of the habitat change at one point no Bluebirds were in any of the 10 nest boxes on that site. Then the grass got mowed and to my surprise when I monitored on July 12th two boxes had Bluebird eggs – one with 4 and one with 5. Always great to get good surprises while monitoring boxes to keep it interesting.

This year more than other years I found myself enjoying the other aspects of being out in nature while monitoring. I have observed wild turkeys, Sandhill cranes, deer, and beautiful wild flowers, butterflies, etc. The last time I walked the landfill I turned on my walking app and found that I walked 1.4 miles on a round of monitoring. Nature and Exercise along with Bluebirds! It doesn't get any better than that.



Racine County, Rick Fare

Hi Gene,

Just wanted to share this with you. These chicks hatched on the same day. One was way behind the others in development and ended up fledging 5 days after the others. Have you ever seen such a difference in fledgling time?

This Spring I was able to give 5 Bluebird presentations at the following locations:

1. Wild Birds Unlimited Store in Pleasant Prairie, WI
2. Gateway Technical College in Kenosha, WI
3. Community Library, Salem, WI
4. Pringle Wildlife Area, Bristol, WI
5. Seno Center, Burlington, WI as one of the field trips for the Natural

Resources Foundation of WI.

The last 2 included a walk to check out the boxes on the trails located there.

I was able to train 4 new monitors to replace ones that no longer could monitor a trail. I also am thankful to have 3 new volunteers that made and repaired boxes.

The 2 trails that I monitor are not doing as well as previous years. I've encountered more dead chicks and adults than normal. Not sure if they starved or were affected by the Canada fires?

Marinette County, Barbie Allen

I am looking into installing new bluebird houses in the state parks and forestry, namely Tommy Thompson State Park, Veterans Memorial Park, Governor Earl Peshtigo Forestry and boat landings on Caldron and High Falls for everyone to enjoy our nesting birds in Marinette County.

Gene Birr joined me at Governor Thompson's State Park to locate possible bluebird house sites. We hope to get these in place before the fall migration of our bluebirds. I was able to locate the people who have bird-houses on County C and F and have included these in my trails. I have added many more houses in Marinette so my bluebird numbers will be better than last year. I was sad to see how many tree swallow chicks I lost with the cold and wet weather we had in mid-June. It was the worst in Oconto County of the five counties I monitor. I am happy to report that in Brown County I have bluebirds in all but 1 of my 7 trails there.

Milwaukee County, Michelle Mellencamp

2023 Mid-year update:

Continuing to purchase more conduit for nesting box installations @ American Legion Cemetery - Nest in Peace Paragon Trust & Maggie Trail area

Existing Milwaukee trails:

Schlitz Audubon Nature Center - Positive results now, after solving a predator issue early in the season.
Lake Park - Refurbished boxes in 2023 & re-established trail. Disappointing results so far.

Looking forward to the convention.

Eau Claire County, Rita Gundry

My first nesting report is very favorable compared to 2022. Other cavity nesters have not been too troublesome this season, helping my totals which have the potential of doubling from last year.

My brother and BRAW member, Larry Liegel, and I have been working/advising our niece and husband setting up a new bluebird trail near their home.

At a family reunion in September, I will be setting up a conservation display for eastern bluebirds, bats, monarch butterflies and mason bees. It will be geared to the younger set with the intention of creating interest as they advance in age.

Waukesha County, Steve Vidmar

Very disappointing year here in Waukesha County. Only one nesting pair of bluebirds on my trail. First nesting attempt, the female laid 5 eggs. Out of the 5 eggs only 2 hatched and those 2 did fledge. That bluebird couple has re-nested and the female has again laid 5 eggs. She has a week to go as of today. I am hoping they all hatch this time. I have had 1 tree swallow nest successfully and all 5 babies fledged. I had 2 pairs of black capped chick-a-dees nest successfully twice. Very unusual that they both nested twice. I got several calls about house wrens and tried wren guards with some success. Not many bluebirds around this year and very few reports of bluebirds nesting.

Oconto County, Gene Birr

In mid-May, I was joined by Brown CC Steve Mayer, as we met with nearly 120 4th grade students from the Pulaski school system at an outside conservation day event, and talked about the importance of bluebirds and the need for nest boxes and people to monitor them. We were greeted with much enthusiasm and interest by very polite students with unlimited questions.

In late July, I accompanied Marinette CC Barbie Allen as we explored state forest lands choosing sites for new bluebird boxes, which I will supply and help put them up in September. Meanwhile I have had a successful bluebird season and hope to fledge

at least 130 bluebirds from my 125 box trail. And although this is a 50% improvement from last year, this is only about half of what I was fledging in a normal year before the tough winter of 2021 which lowered bluebird numbers in Wisconsin about 45%.

Dane County, Patrick Ready

Overall I think bluebirds did pretty well here. Although my trail at Elver Park failed to get any pairs this year again. Harsh winters down south may be the cause. I do get plenty of Tree Swallows there so my boxes do get used. My other trails seem back to normal. Most bluebird pairs had double broods. Chickadees took a hit when House Wrens returned in May. At least 3 boxes with Chickadee nest were taken over by wrens. Not much I can do to stop them. I try to keep the boxes away from brush and trees but wrens take them anyway. In most cases I think the Chickadees find another spot and try again.



Having nest boxes for bluebirds within the city can be a balancing act!

I heard from a couple other monitors that reported typical nesting seasons and successful fledging. House Sparrows continue to be a problem on some trails. Trapping and box moving have solved most issues. Trails in large parks within the city can have large numbers of House Sparrows because of residents living close by.

Looking forward to seeing members at the convention in September.

La Crosse County, Scott Kinny

Hello everyone. I hope you all had a successful season bluebirding. The last couple of years I've been experimenting with using a Noel predator guard on my boxes and I can say that I would endorse and recommend for everyone to use these. Earlier this summer I received an email from a

person that had a nest of baby bluebirds that was invaded by a predator (a cat was suspected) where the parents were now afraid of going in the house even though there were still babies alive inside. I would like to think a predator guard could've prevented, or at least, significantly reduced the likelihood of this happening. If you've ever had a nest raided you know how awful that is. If you haven't, then please do everything you can to keep it that way!

Over the last year I've received a few emails from residents of Vernon County. Apparently there is not a county coordinator there so if anyone is interested in that position there is some opportunity for you. Most recently a representative from Friends of Wildcat Mountain reached out to me for help with maintaining and monitoring approximately 35 houses within Wildcat State Park, as well as educating the volunteers of the group. If any BRAW members out there would like to help with this let me know, I can put you in touch with my contact person. I look forward to helping them in the future but it's too far away for me to routinely monitor the trail.

Waupaca County, Craig and Sheila Beyer

Today is July 24th and all is well on the county wide Bluebird Trail. We are doing our best to monitor 140 boxes, give or take a few, but I (Craig) have been dealing with continued health issues.

We had many houses with 2 nests and now have some starting on number 3. Something new this year, we put water filled pans out near houses that don't have available water nearby. I think it really helped them during the drought we are dealing with.

Tree Swallow numbers seem down, but that helps the Bluebirds! The number of birds at our feeders indicate all species had good nesting success this year!

We added hardware cloth mesh flooring to some houses to see if it helped with flies and also to keep the nest dry. The mesh is about 1/2" above the floor. As things have gone this year, we have yet to draw any conclusions on the benefit of hav-

ing the mesh floor. We are going to need another season to see results. The Swallows liked it but we'll have to get it introduced to more houses that the bluebirds will fill.

We still have a good number of bluebirds nesting as of the last week of July, it's always fun trying new stuff!

Door County, Charlotte Lukes

Dear Nest Box Monitors,
John and I did our weekly survey yesterday and found several boxes with new bluebird eggs. Of the 139 bluebird eggs laid so far, only 95 remain viable. The 44 lost were either not fertile or taken by snakes or destroyed by house wrens.

So far 50 bluebird eggs have hatched and 36 fledged. We still have eleven active bluebird nest boxes with 23 eggs and 8 chicks to fledge.

The region where most of our boxes are has received only 2.67 inches of rain in the past 78 days. The dry weather has affected many flowers. They come into bloom but dry up quickly. That might diminish the insect population.

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

Konrath Makes Most of Cemetery Program

By Gene Kroupa

Last spring BRAW offered free nest boxes to qualified members interested in participating in its Nest in Peace cemetery installation program. One of the recipients was Ralph Konrath, age 90, of East Troy.

"I put up two boxes in the Oak Grove Cemetery in Eagle Township not far from the entrance to Old World Wisconsin," said Ralph. "Much to my delight, one of the boxes hosted a bluebird pair that fledged four nestlings. The other box now has another bluebird nest."

At one time Ralph monitored three dozen nest boxes at the Whitnall Park Golf Course, plus another 70 in Adams County. "I got started at age eight when my grandmother introduced me to her bluebird houses. She also had some Purple Martin homes for me to check."

A retired zookeeper and bird house employee at the Milwaukee County Zoo, Ralph welcomed the chance to put bluebird nest boxes in the small rural cemetery not far from his



A bluebird pair successfully used Ralph Konrath's cemetery nest box. (Mary Kirsher)



daughter's East Troy home.

"It's hard to get youngsters interested in anything but technology these days," he noted. "But the cemetery program makes it easier for us old-timers to keep doing what we enjoy."

Fall 2023 New Members

- Bonnie Knoedler, Kenosha
- Isaac Vetter, Mt. Horeb
- Tom Johnson, MO
- Deb Rohde, Madison
- Sarah Fellerer, IL
- Mike Martin, Ft. Atkinson
- Judith Ferkey, Wisconsin Rapids
- Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, North Lake
- Ethan Ripp, MN
- Allen Marty, Belleville
- Anna Maas, Whitewater
- Jenny Pickhard, Spring Green
- Beaver Creek Reserve, Fall Creek
- Jeanne Muellner, IL
- Patti Lee, IL

2023 FALL DONATIONS

Fall 2023 Donations

- Ruby Thomas, \$60
- Jon Frohling, \$20
- Duane Schwab, \$100
- James Heinen, \$25
- Tommy & Ann Mader, \$100 nest boxes
- Dave & Carolyn Mertens, \$100 nest boxes
- Dave & Patti Becker, \$25
- Mike Olejniczak, \$5
- Beth & Greg Clabots, \$25 nest box
- Marilyn Pick, \$25
- Patriot Golf Club, \$25

In Memory of John Zeinert - \$670

- John & Mary Jane Guhl
- Carol Zeinert

- Lori Uitenbroek
- Patsy Zeinert
- Doyle & Joan Hudson
- William & Carol Ann Hillman
- Bradley & Barbra Alt
- Brian & Sara Klawikowski
- Marigen Carpenter
- Allan & Monica Kahl
- Kathy Golem
- Carol Rosenberg

In Memory of Thomas G. Grimes

- Jolie Wood, \$25
- Mary Kay DeBroux & Bethany & Ray Adams, \$100
- Wausau Bird Club, \$100
- Carla & Jeff Moore \$50
- Anonymous Wausau Bird Club member, \$200

The “Power” of Bluebirds

By Patrick Ready, Editor

Joyce Powers was a regular customer at the Madison Wild Birds Unlimited. I gave a seminar on attracting bluebirds, and she came up after and introduced herself. She asked me if I could help set up a trail on her property. She said she lived south of Mount Horeb. We arranged for me to stop on my way to work one day. When I saw her property, I noticed that it was restored native prairie with some woodlands. It was very well-maintained. There was a green lawn area around the house but mostly prairie. The property was located on a couple of intersecting “milk route” roads with pretty much local and farm traffic only.

After looking things over I told her that about five bluebird houses would work. I was basically going by 100



yards spacing (or slightly less) and suitable habitat. She wanted more but I told her to begin with five and see how it goes. We could always add more later if needed. I returned to her property on the weekend and used a couple of boxes that she already had and added three of my own.

I was able to put three of the boxes close enough to the house area so she could easily see those three. On the west side of her property along Sutter Road, I added two, where there was restored prairie in a long strip bordering the woods. The village kept the roadsides well mowed so there was plenty of short grass for bluebirds to find food.

For the last five or six years I was the one that monitored those boxes for her. It wasn't too far out of my way from my trail at McCarthy Park near Blue Mounds. Both of these trails had five boxes, and they all were successful producing bluebirds. There was little competition from tree swallows and house sparrows. I think the reason the bluebirds did well in her boxes was due to at least three pair that double



brooded. Whenever I checked those boxes I took photos with my cell phone and I would email them to update her and how things were going. She was often gone so I couldn't give her a first-hand report. Her boxes usually produced 15 to 20 bluebirds in a season. For 2023 season it looks like it will fledge 29 bluebirds. That's an all-time record!

This year when I went to check the boxes I met one of her daughters, Michelle, who wondered what I was doing on the property. I explained that I was checking the bluebird boxes for Joyce. She then told me that Joyce had passed away in spring. Her cancer had returned around the holidays and she had lost the battle. She said it was okay if I wanted to continue checking the boxes. I got her number so I keep her updated. On my next trip over I met another daughter, Andrea. She too appreciated the fact that I continued to check the boxes. I planned to keep her updated as well.

Over the summer, I was amazed that four of the five boxes were being used by bluebirds. This was the best the trail had ever done. I sent a message to the daughters and told them somebody must be smiling down on the bluebirds this year!

From time to time when I stopped, I was able to get some really nice bluebird photos coming to the nest boxes or hanging around the bird feeders that Joyce had in front of her house. The cover photo and the ones here are all from Joyce's trail.

Now the property is up for sale so this may be my last year monitoring the trail. I will try to contact the new owner and tell them about the Power's Trail. More “power” to them!



Joyce loved her bluebirds. She fed mealworms to see them more often.

The Story of an Albino Bluebird

By Mary Roen, River Falls, WI

On June 19, 2023, I was monitoring my Bluebird trail when I came upon a nest with an unusual looking Bluebird. It was more undeveloped than its 3 siblings and the feathers starting to come out were white! Could this be an albino chick in the nest? I snapped a couple of pictures and left quickly. This was day 8.



I went back two days later on June 21, day 10. It was doing well, and had feathered out more. I wondered if the parents were feeding it as much as its normal siblings but it seemed they were. I left a few mealworms on the top of the nest box for them.



I normally check my nest boxes once a week, but I wanted to keep track on how the little albino was doing so I went back in two more days on June 23, day 12. I had seen its red eyes so I knew it was albino. It was doing well, still smaller than its normal colored siblings, but alert and had feathered out more.



I went back on June 25, day 14. It was completely feathered out and looked healthy, but still smaller than the others. With the modified Gilwood nest box built by Joe Adelmann, I was able to take pictures with the door closed so they would not fledge prematurely.



On June 26, day 15, the albino was growing and looking well. It was close to the size of its siblings.



On June 27, day 16, the albino was the only nestling in the box. The others had fledged. It looked alert and healthy.

I expected the albino to be gone when I went back on June 28th and it



was. The nest was empty. It fledged on day number 17, just one day after the rest.



There is a tree line close to the nest box and I thought that would be a likely place for the fledglings to be. I walked closer and the Bluebird parents started scolding me, like they did when I did a nest box check. Luckily, I had my binoculars and camera with me. I checked out the trees for about 15-20 minutes and I saw the albino! It was sitting on a branch quite far up, right by the trunk of the tree. Had it been further back I would never have seen it. It was one in a million chance, and I found it! It just sat there on that branch for about 15 minutes while I was taking pictures. I hated to leave, knowing I would probably never see it again.

Albinos are not common. One source said one in 1764 hatchlings. Both parents have to carry the recessive trait. I have monitored nest boxes for 34 years and fledged over 3800 Bluebirds, and this is the first one I have seen. Albinos usually have a short life span. They are so much more obvious to predators. Without melanin, the feathers wear out faster. Also, albinos are subject to eye problems, so their vision isn't as good as normally colored birds. Despite all this, the little albino survived to fledge and my hope is that it beats the odds and survives to come back next year. I will be watching for it.



Bluebirding Tips: Cleanliness Is Preferred

By Gene Kroupa

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

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

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

Research by Mark T. Stanback and Anne D. Dervan of Davidson College confirmed that cleanliness wins out. Bluebird pairs prefer to reuse a cleaned-out box where they have had a first successful nesting attempt, even



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



over an identical unused one at the same site.

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

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

move to the clean unused nest box.

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

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

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.
Subject line: **BRAW Bluebird Contest 2023**

No mail-in photos please.

Tips on Photographing Birds for the BRAW Photo Contest

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



Pat Ready



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



Modified Noel Guards Prove Successful

By Dave Lucey

Two years ago, I wrote about losing bluebird eggs and young at several boxes I had located in Festge County Park near Madison. Despite having Noel guards on the front, raccoons were able to reach into the box and empty the contents.

I have since come up with modifications to the Noel guard that are showing success. Those changes were in the dimensions of the device – it’s 2.5” wide, 3” high and 6” deep, and with the addition of a strip of thin wood stapled to the bottom that is 8” long. The wood strip provides a landing pad for the adults and a more comfortable surface to approach the box opening plus it makes the device more rigid.

I recently observed another benefit of the wood strip. On a hot June day, I saw three chicks in the tunnel of the guard, possibly to escape the heat and to ease themselves into “the great outdoors,” while two other young were still in the box. All had fledged by the next day. The provided photo is grainy because it was taken from a distance with a cell phone.

This summer, I lost only one box of young tree swallows to raccoons. They were successful in wrestling the box down the pole and to the ground, where they proceeded to work on the guard until the front of the Peterson box split in two. On another box, a guard was bent, but it protected the bluebird young inside.

Egg Dump! Part 2

By Pat Ready, Editor

In the last issue I wrote of this bluebird nest that had a Black-capped Chickadee egg dumped in with four bluebird eggs. Some of you thought it might be a Brown-headed Cowbird egg. Based on the size, color and amount of specs I’m sure it was a Chickadee egg. I haven’t had a Cowbird egg in a nest box in over 15 years.

On my next monitoring a week later the egg was pushed off to the side.



The following week it was gone, removed by the adult bluebird. The final result from this nest was four bluebirds fledged. In mid-summer they nested again and she laid five eggs and fledged four by end of July. One dead chick was left in the nest.

A Special “Thank You” In the Northwoods

By Barbie Allen

As the new Marinette County Coordinator for Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW), I made it my mission to find out who had put up so many birdhouses particularly on County C and County F between Silver Cliff and Lakewood in Northern Wisconsin. These houses were very tall but very well constructed and I found out they were very old. I obtained permission to monitor some of these houses and found them to have multiple nests upon nests to the very top of the house.



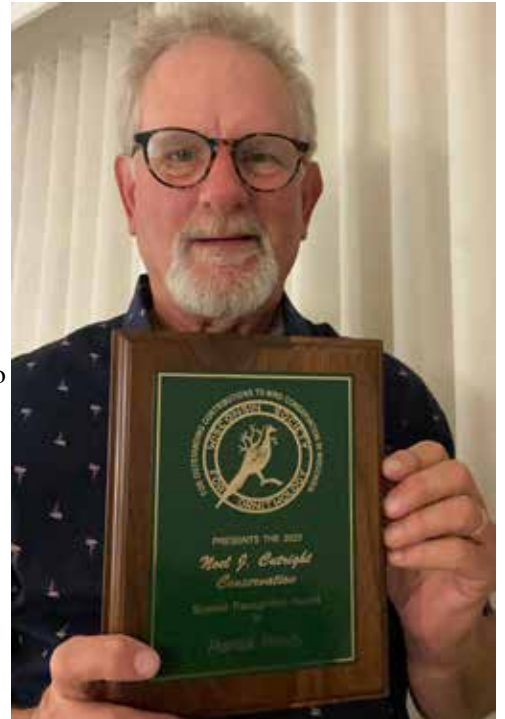
Ready Receives WSO Recognition

By Gene Kroupa

Patrick Ready, BRAW’s past president and current director, was honored by the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology with its 2023 Noel J. Cutright Award.

Named after one of Wisconsin’s premier bird conservationist, the award recognizes individuals who have made contributions in the following ways:

- Worked on behalf of endangered, threatened, and/or common species,
- Promoted the establishment, management and protection of bird habitat, and
- Educated the public on bird conservation issues.



Presented the award at WSO’s annual convention in May, Ready exemplifies all of these characteristics, especially in his work with BRAW on behalf of the Eastern Bluebird. Congratulations!

In Memoriam: Thomas Grimes

By Susan Haug, Wausau Bird Club

On May 23, 2023 Thomas George Grimes lost his short battle with a devastating illness and passed away with his family present. Tom was a member of the Wausau Bird Club for many years. He sent the monthly newsletter for years, worked on many outdoor projects (tree planting and watering and road clean up) to name a few.

For years before they sold their camper he always was in charge of grilling the meat for the annual campout potluck. He always provided the grill and all that goes with it. Tom and Lynn monitored a bluebird trail for many years and reported their findings to BRAW. Many a time at the club’s campout the Grimes would have to leave early to check their bluebird boxes. I could continue with his contributions to club’s community efforts but all of us remember the time we spent with him on projects because of his great sense of humor and wit.

Besides being an active member of the local birding community Tom was also a valuable volunteer in the Wausau community. For many years he was a Boy Scout leader and shared stories of the adventures he had while camping with his troop. The Grimes also welcomed many Hmong families to the area with their assistance wherever needed. Recently he drove an ebike with his passengers being local nursing home, assisted living residents and others. He was always giving back. He always found something good in hard work and made it fun.

The Wausau Bird Club will deeply miss Tom as well as so many in the Wausau Community.

BRAW thanks the Grimes family for the donations received at Tom’s request.



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

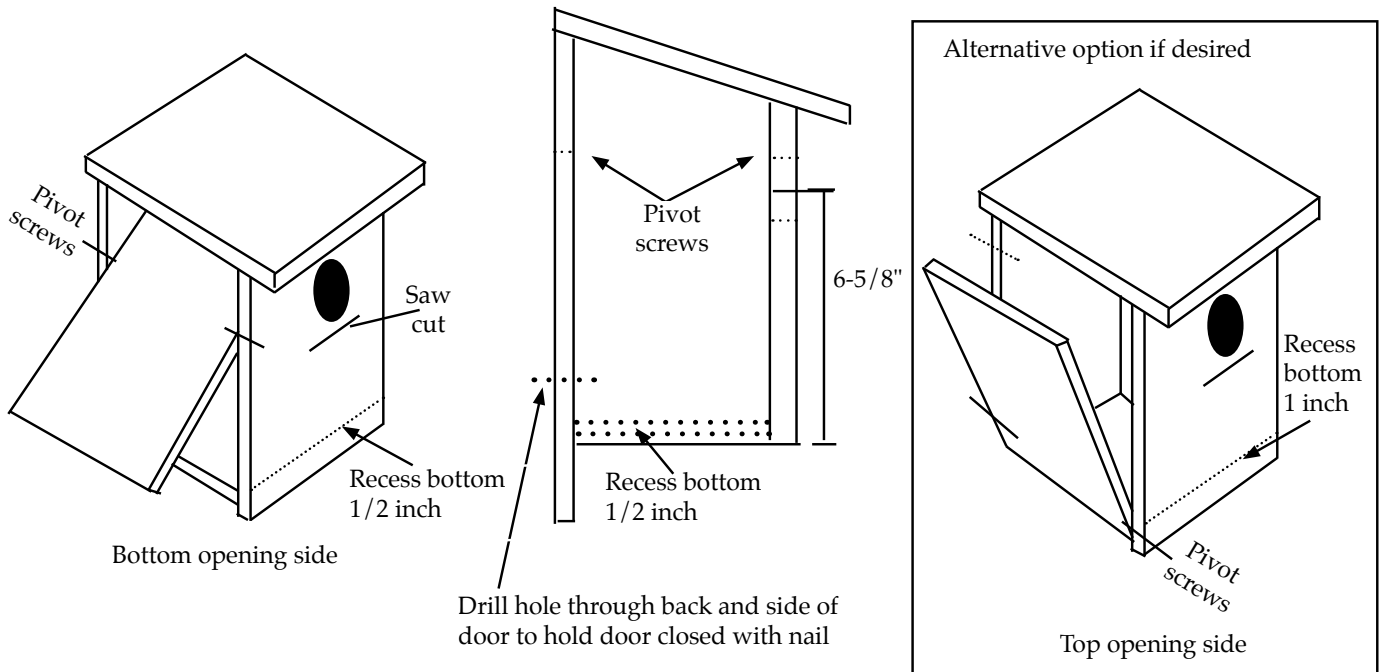
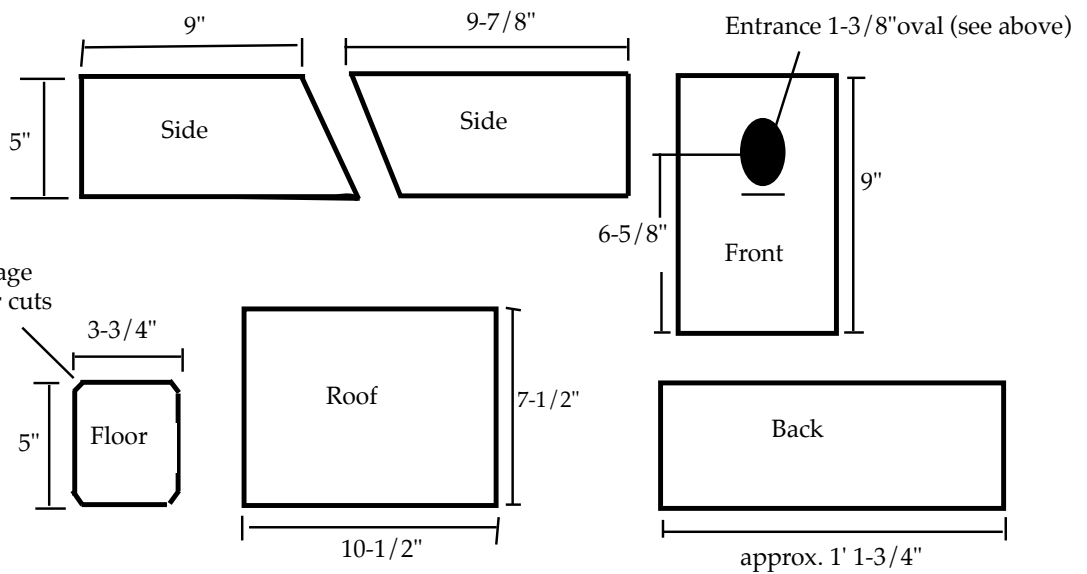
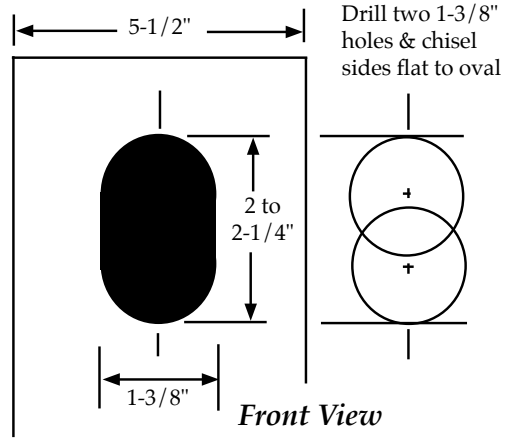
Roof is 7-1/2" wide x 10-1/2" long

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



Membership Renewal Information

By Valerie Van Winkle, Membership Services

If the address label of your *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter reads Fall 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 November and will be mailed in December. Memberships received after November 15 may not be processed in time to receive the Winter newsletter. Consider an extended or one-time \$300 Life Membership.

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

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

BRAW, Inc. Membership and Wisconsin Bluebird Subscription

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

- \$10 Gift Annual Membership (Online subscription)
- \$15 Student/Teacher Annual Membership (Online subscription)
- \$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

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

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip Code: _____

*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

Enclosed please find my check \$ _____

Mail this membership request to:

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

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

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

BRAW ELECTED & APPOINTED OFFICERS

President Steve Sample, 422 Shepard Ter., Madison, WI 53705 • 708/606-8070 • ssample@gmail.com (term to 12/23)

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

Secretary Gene Kroupa, gkroupa@tds.net (term to 12/23)

Treasurer Joanie Haugen, 9773 Vermont Church Rd., Black Earth, WI 53515 • jlhcb@gmail.com (term to 12/24)

Director Steve Fallon, 974 Halcyon Days Ct., Oregon, WI 53575 • stevfall50@gmail.com (term to 12/23)

Director Dave Lucey, Cross Plains, WI • dklucey@chorus.net (term to 12/24)

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

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

Director Patrick Ready, (Past President) 815 Sky Ridge Dr., Madison, WI 53719 • 608/239-0791 • birdsready@gmail.com (term to 12/24)

Directors Fred & Mary Craig, 3308 Nathan Lane, Holmen WI 54636 • 608/783-2225 • 266marycraig@gmail.com (term to 12/23)

Website : Director Andy Garcia-Rivera, 10 Darien Circle, Madison, WI 53717 • agarciarivera@gmail.com (term to 12/24)

Director Gail Smith, Middleton, WI 53562 • gsmithbird@gmail.com (term to 12/24)

APPOINTED OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS:

Data Collection Officer: Steve Fallon (see above)

County Coordinator Chair: Gene Birr, 3698 Morgan Marsh Rd Oconto Falls, WI 54154 • 920-373-2551 • gbbird22@gmail.com

Funding: Joanie Haugen (see above)

WI Bluebird Editor: Patrick Ready (see above)

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

Public Relations: Gene Kroupa (see above)

Student and Youth Outreach Committee:

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

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

Shop the BRAW Online Store

Check out the new BRAW Online Store! T-shirts, sweatshirts, hats, and lots more all with the BRAW logo on them. Items can be ordered online at <https://stores.inksoft.com/brawstore/shop/products/all?page=1>



madison
AUDUBON



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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

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



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BRAW Convention!

See page 3

Check the address label. If it says "Fall 2023", then you need to RENEW membership now.

An Unusual Cavity Nester

By Patrick Ready, Editor

We all know that the only "thrush" species that nest in a cavity like a nest box or tree hole is the Eastern Bluebird. All other thrushes build nest similar to American Robins, in trees or low bushes and shrubs.

Well there is one warbler in the eastern half of the US that is also a cavity nester and it's the Prothonotary Warbler. They prefer swamp-like habitat and can be found in the southern part of the state. They are usually seen in Spring migration along streams, ponds and rivers. Typically seen from April until July, then they migrate south for the winter.

The past four or five years a pair has nested in Madison at the Lakeshore Nature Preserve near the UW campus! The males are loud singers on territory and are usually heard before being seen. I was able to get a few photos of them before they headed south.



Wisconsin Bluebird

Slightly smaller than a bluebird they often use a PVC box with a 1-1/4" opening.

Both male & female feed the young and remove fecal sacs.

