

Winter 2023  
Vol. 38, No. 4



# Wisconsin Bluebird

Newsletter of the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, Inc.

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

## BRAW Wins National Awards

See Page 4

**BRAW Photo  
Contest  
First Place**



© Jonathan Knopp

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

# President's Report

First of all, the fledgling numbers for the 2023 season of bluebirds and cavity nesters shows some improvement compared to recent past years. See report in this issue.

There is a great deal more of good news to report! The North American Bluebird Society (NABS) is our nationwide parent organization and they have awarded BRAW a record setting three awards for 2023:



- 1) Bluebird Conservation Award for 2023,
- 2) Bluebird Research Award for 2023, and
- 3) NABS Presidential Award for 2023.

BRAW has not been cited in the past by NABS so this is special. Furthermore, we are the first NABS affiliate to win three awards at the same time. This is quite an honor!

This is important - our volunteering county coordinators, trail monitors and Board members are the "kingpins" in winning this set of awards. We owe a great deal of thanks to you! Furthermore, thank you for what you have done over the years and continue to work to help keep a stable population of cavity nesters, and particularly Eastern Bluebirds, in Wisconsin. You may read more about these awards in this issue.

I also want to send out a special "thank you" to the Lafayette County Bluebird Society Trust managed by the Southern Wisconsin Community Foundation which has made a special one-time grant to BRAW. The grant will help us support bird conservation via buying and distributing more nest boxes. Plus, it will also fund the purchase of digital equipment for recording convention sessions and bluebird presentations.

Our convention in September proved to be a success based upon our evaluations. The Board of Directors were overwhelmed with the record-breaking number of attendees and though we are all pleased with this happening, it did lead to some issues. One in particular - I promise that the Question and Answer session will be better organized and publicized at our next gathering. This short-sightedness was my fault and I apologize to all who were disappointed. If we continue to have record-breaking attendance like this last conference, I will be asking for volunteers to help out.

One last thing- our BRAW Board of Directors has brought up that we may not be doing enough for our county coordinators. We do provide some assistance when they give presentations, but we are developing other ways to support their efforts. If you are located in a county that does not have a coordinator, please consider becoming a coordinator. You are not going to be overwhelmed and you can mold the position to fit what you are comfortable in doing.

Thanks for your support of bluebirds!

Steve  
President

## Fall 2023 New Members

Benjamin F. Goss Bird Club, Hartland  
John Larkin, Dalton  
Andy Siefkes Family, Cedarburg  
Ann Marie & Eric Godfrey, Ripon  
Mark Resch, Ripon  
Don Heimerman, Random Lake  
Lori Sheehan, Verona  
Laura Cominetti, Cross Plains  
Dan Henderson, Holmen  
Carol Wilson, Madison  
Jeff Sallstrom, Madison  
Hunter Hughes, Mazomanie  
Jenny Bailey, Mazomanie  
Sarah Crittenden, Cross Plains  
Michelle Harris, Mazomanie  
Bob Thompson, TN  
Judy & Paul Kolosso, Slinger  
Dale & Ruth Wojciechowski, Sobieski  
Tom & Mary Nelesen, West Bend  
Rick Sturtz, Neillsville  
Amy Studnicka, Somerset  
Horicon Marsh Education & Visitor Center  
Shirley Grassman, Arbor Vitae

## 2023 Winter Donations

David Roberts, \$15 nest box  
Sharon Woelfel, \$500  
Jim Neider, \$5  
Elaine Swanson, \$10  
Kathleen Hawkins, \$100 nest box & \$150 research  
Eric Wickstrom, \$25  
Karen Kinzinger, \$15 nest box  
Natural Resources Foundation of WI (Cram Fund) \$2000  
James Mand, \$25  
Darlene Jakusz, \$15 nest box  
Judy & Paul Kolosso, \$25  
Karen Haralson, \$20  
Rick Sturtz, Neillsville, \$100  
William Rumpf, \$25  
Richard & Shirley Behrendt, \$25  
Janet & Warren Evans, \$25

In Memory of John Zeinert - Keith Umland \$25

In Honor of the wedding anniversary of  
Jerrilyn & Bruce Brewer - Jane Rada, \$25

# Monitors Report Steady to Improving Bluebird Numbers for 2023

By Steve Fallon, BRAW Data Director

The preliminary statewide reported total for bluebirds fledged in 2023 are shown in the table below.

These values are preliminary, because the data are still being compiled. However, I wanted to give an update of where we stand statewide, and make an appeal to those who have not submitted their data yet, to please do so.

As you can see, we've already surpassed last year's EAB Fledged totals. In general, we've seen a mixed bag in terms of numbers received so far, with many monitors seeing increases and many others have roughly the same as last year. That should amount to a relatively decent increase in our EAB population. However, not all

monitors experienced this increase and statewide, our final numbers may not show as large of an increase as anticipated, as some of our larger trails were unreported this year due to monitor health issues.

Once again this year, I tried to get an idea of the population trends by comparing some monitors' early returns. These data were presented at our convention in September. I took a subset of the early data, approximately 100 submissions, from this year and compared it to those same trail results that were submitted in 2022. The year over year data are captured in the table below.

In the *Initial Comparison Data Table*, the number of boxes is slightly higher in 2023 (by ~3%), yet the boxes used by EABs is nearly 22% higher than the 2022 value. This led to more eggs laid, more hatchlings and more fledglings. Now we need to be careful about reading too much into any specific numbers generated from a subset of data, as many things can confound it, but this analysis shows us having a

better year statewide than last year.

While some monitors did quite well, others reported a lack of bluebirds early in the season. In general, it seems like those in the western part of the state had some nice increases, but the increases were rather spotty and conclusions based on region require more analysis.

As mentioned earlier, most monitors had increases or similar results to last year. The numbers so far, show that tree swallows which arrive a bit later in the nesting season, were down a bit this year, as might be expected with increased bluebird success. Chickadee and wren numbers seem comparable to last year. In the next newsletter, I'll have the maps ready for regional and yearly comparisons.

Once again, thanks are due to the many hours our monitors put in to help the birds. Your efforts toward setting-up, checking, fixing, cleaning, educating, AND reporting make all this possible!

## Preliminary Data for 2023

Number of boxes	Boxes used by Bluebirds	Bluebird eggs laid	Bluebird eggs hatched	Bluebirds fledged	Tree Swallows fledged	Chickadees fledged	House Wrens fledged	Total Cavity nester fledged
6651	3024	18447	15513	14673	8983	1058	5623	30337

## Initial Comparison Data Table

Sample	Year	Number of boxes:	Boxes used by Bluebirds	Bluebird eggs laid	Bluebird eggs hatched	Bluebirds fledged	Tree Swallows fledged	Chickadees fledged	House Wrens fledged	Total fledged
100	sum 2023	2509	1118	7106	5968	5733	4008	458	2031	12230
100	sum 2022	2442	917	5640	4772	4547	4309	388	1745	10989
	difference	67	201	1466	1196	1186	-301	70	286	1241
	% difference	102.7%	121.9%	126.0%	125.1%	126.1%	93.0%	118.0%	116.4%	111.3%

### Last Chance to Report 2023 DATA

If you still want to get your nest box data included in the final BRAW Report send it in ASAP. Mail it, file online at [braw.org](http://braw.org). or email it to:

Steve Fallon

974 Halcyon Days Ct., Oregon, WI 53575

email: [stevfall50@gmail.com](mailto:stevfall50@gmail.com)



Patrick Ready



# BRAW Wins Trifecta of 2023 Awards from NABS

By Gene Kroupa

BRAW members received a big “thank you” for all they do for bluebirds in the form of three awards from the North American Bluebird Society (NABS).

NABS selected BRAW as one of two affiliates to receive the 2023 Bluebird Conservation Award. Of particular note were the efforts of members in monitoring nearly 7,000 nest boxes, supporting bluebird research, educating groups, informing the public on its website, [www.braw.org](http://www.braw.org), and communicating with members via the *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter.

BRAW also shared the 2023 Bluebird Research Award for sponsoring studies about wren guards. County Coordinator and Ripon College Professor Memuna Khan designed and directed the research. Financial support came from BRAW’s Carol McDaniel Legacy Fund.

A special note of appreciation goes to Director Andy Garcia-Rivera whose technical skills and creative touches made BRAW’s winning applications possible and effective.

Finally, BRAW President Steve Sample and Secretary Gene Kroupa received 2023 Presidential Awards. Given at the discretion of the current NABS president, recipients can be “any individual or group that has been judged to have made a long-term or recent contribution to the art and science of Bluebirding.”

NABS has over 60 affiliates located throughout the US and Canada. BRAW has been an affiliate for 37 years since its organization in 1986.



Memuna Khan



Andy Garcia-Rivera



Steve Sample



Gene Kroupa

## BRAW Photo Contest 2nd and 3rd Place

Second Place was awarded to Mary Blanke  
Elkhart Lake, WI



Third Place goes to Lynn Dodge  
Phillips, WI

BRAW once again thanks *The Camera Company* of Madison for judging the photo contest.



# BRAW CC News

Gene Birr, CC Chair

[gbbird22@gmail.com](mailto:gbbird22@gmail.com)

New phone # 920-461-0108

Now that the summer bluebird season has come and gone and our fall convention proved to be a very well attended and successful event, it is time to turn our attention toward the activities that can keep us busy through the winter while we wait for the return of our beloved bluebirds next spring. The following County Coordinators are reporting on their season's trail results or the troubles their bluebirds experienced this summer. Many are sharing their thoughts on our convention while others are scheduling presentations for spring or their plans for new trails.

Please remember that each of our coordinators is willing and available to help any member or individual or group that may be interested in setting up a trail or learning more about bluebirds and BRAW. Coordinators have the expertise to aid in selecting nest box sites and in most cases can supply the boxes, conduit poles, sparrow traps and other items needed to establish a trail, as well as assisting to put in the poles and boxes to accomplish this.

Anyone should feel free to reach out to any CC or Board Director for assistance. To that end we are publishing the updated list of CCs across the state and each of their individual contact information on the website: [braw.org](http://braw.org). Don't hesitate to contact me if you can't find any assistance available in your own county or region of the state.

## Kewaunee County, Don Pritzl

Had a "bounce back" year on my bluebird trails this summer. I had a total of 50 boxes and fledged 128 bluebirds. This is up from the last two years. I also fledged 102 Tree Swallows and about 50 wrens. It's difficult to monitor a wren's nest in a Peterson box, so the wrens is an estimate (plus or minus 10%).

I had my right knee replaced in April so it was a three person job to monitor the boxes. My wife drove the car, I navigated and my daughter checked the boxes. She would take a picture of

the nest and show it to me to determine what it was. Took a while, but we got it done.

Don't have much sparrow pressure this year at all. Had a lot more wrens than normal and they seemed to nest earlier than usual. Maybe I have to look to move some of the boxes. Also had three chickadee nests real early but they're not very competitive and lost out to the tree swallows. For the last three years I've had a Great Crested Flycatcher use one of my boxes, but this year they failed to fledge.

Would have liked to attend the annual meeting but had a family commitment. Hope it went well.

Had my 82<sup>nd</sup> birthday on 9/11. I hope I can continue to take care of my trails next summer. I always enjoy finding a new nest of blue eggs!



Peggy Kelly Gierhart

Gene, keep up your good work with the county coordinators. Thanks for all your efforts.

## Pierce County, Jim Beix

My wife and I made our weekly BB rounds in Pierce and St. Croix counties. Blue birds fledged in Pierce Co. totaled 192 from 38 boxes, while nearby St. Croix county fledged 28 from 5 boxes. I plan to help a fellow BRAW member move nest boxes from roadside construction this Spring.

## Racine County, Rick Fare

About 15 years ago, Dr. Kent Hall got the Hoy Audubon Society interested in setting up bluebird trails in Kenosha and Racine Cos. Hoy Audubon is a local chapter of the National Audubon Society representing these counties. With his help and expertise we started with 4 trails (60 boxes). We now have expanded to 30 trails (404 boxes). Our monitors report their totals to Hoy. Although Hoy encourages them to report their

totals to BRAW some do not, so our totals are under-represented. I hope to correct this discrepancy in the future. This year we fledged 703 BBs, 781 TSS, 135 HWs, and 62 BCCs for a total of 1681 songbirds fledged.

Recently someone donated his time and efforts to make 54 BB boxes which will be used to replace some of our worn boxes.

A local golf course was sold for housing development. Unfortunately, a trail of 20 boxes had to be removed.

## Marinette County, Barbie Allen

First off, I want to thank all our Marinette monitors who reported their totals this year. I believe that Marinette County will have its best year ever. My total bluebirds fledged in Marinette County went from 27 last year to 125 this year. With help from Gene Birr, 120 new houses were installed in Marinette County with another 25 older houses repaired. Next spring, I plan to install at least another 30-50 houses at the boat landings and other people's houses who want to monitor and enjoy having bluebirds in their yards. Marinette County has turned out to be an excellent place for our bluebirds.

Another exciting first that I had happen on my small trail in **Door County** which is monitored by my daughter is that in one nest box, she had a pair of bluebirds who fledged 16 chicks in four broods. She found 5 eggs in mid-April and these fledged in mid-May. There were 3 new eggs in the nest before the nest could be removed and these fledged on June 20<sup>th</sup>. The following week there was another 4 eggs in the nest box and these fledged in mid-July. Again there were another 4 eggs in the nest in late July and this last brood successfully fledged in August.

**Note:** This is the first time I have ever received a report of someone in Wisconsin verifying that there were 4 successful bluebird broods from the same nest box in one year. Has anyone else ever seen or heard of a similar bluebird achievement?

## Oconto County, Gene Birr

My own trails helped fledge 55% more bluebirds than last year result-

*continued on next page*



(continued from page 5)

ing in 130 bluebirds total.

Along with participating in our Skylight Study, I conducted a separate test of the many skylight boxes of my own bluebird trail. My results were even more profound than our state-wide study results. Although less than 15% of the skylights were used by House Sparrows, no bluebirds at all chose to nest in any of nearly 50 available skylight boxes during my 2 year study. Consequently, I have decided to remove all of my skylight boxes and replace them with standard roof nest boxes, as most of us have used in the past. Several other local monitors have reported that they have already done so, after seeing similar results that the bluebirds have been avoiding them. I still believe the most effective deterrent to sparrows using our nest boxes, is to eliminate them permanently by the use of a Van Ert sparrow trap. Although a skylight may reduce greatly the chance of sparrows using nest boxes, ultimately that just leaves the sparrow free to move on to harass and threaten other songbirds in other boxes and locations.

In October I supplied 40 nest boxes and 35 poles to Barbie Allen in Marinette County and helped place 25 of them on a state park there. In November I helped Cordula Van Den Heuvel repair or remove a dozen nest boxes in Oconto, which included changing a half-dozen skylights back to regular roof boxes. During these months I managed to build 75 new boxes and 25 predator guards. I now have an inventory of nearly a hundred boxes that I have available to assist local monitors next spring.

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

In the middle of fall clean up on October 3, I was surprised by loud bird chatter and looked up just in time to see a flock of 15 or so bluebirds land in the small maple tree in our yard.

I was mesmerized and decided to give them my full attention. Finding no edibles on the maple tree, they swooped to the nearby blue-berried juniper and started sampling. The leaders of the pack soon flitted to a neighboring white pine and rested momentarily. Spying a bittersweet

vine amass with berries a few feet away, they changed locations and eagerly attacked the fruit. They completed their task and made a final run for it in the volunteer pokeberries that popped up in our grape arbor. They bid me adieu when they were done feasting on these purple jewels.

This was my first experience witnessing bluebird migration—a lovely way to end the season.

I came close to doubling the number of bluebirds fledged this year, compared to the 2022 season.

### **Dane County, Patrick Ready**



In late summer I got a message from a Girl Scout leader saying they were doing nest boxes and studying bluebirds and where they live. They picked the NABS



**Ellen Neal and Peggy Kelly Gierhart will monitor the new trail at Yahara Hills Golf Course in south-east Madison.**

box design. Sometime in fall they will spend a Saturday building them and then find a county park to have a trail. They will also monitor the boxes. I told her to make sure they use screws and not nails. Can't imagine kids trying to pound nails with hammers! Safety first.

One day in October I was doing some birding at the Yahara Hills Golf Course in Madison. I noticed some really old nest boxes in some of the long grass areas. They were boxes built by the late Gary Gaard, former BRAW board member and an old friend who passed away more than 10 years ago. I knew Gary had trails on some golf courses but I thought they were on the west side. I made a few inquiries with park folks and found out no one was monitoring them. Peggy got the okay to remove old and

put up new. Ellen and Peggy helped get the trail set up in November and they will monitor it starting in April next year. I heard bluebirds there so I have high hopes for the trail.

I have three bluebird programs set up for next year already. One in January and two in March. If we don't go to Florida in February I'll do my Bluebird/Cavity Nester program for the Garden Expo in Madison.

### **Calumet County, Coordinator Vacant**

In August BRAW was contacted by Todd Verboomen, the asset management officer for EnTech Solutions, who expressed interested in establishing a bluebird trail and attracting a purple martin colony on their grounds at the Lakeside Vision Center, along the east shore of Lake Winnebago near Stockbridge in Calumet County. His request was forwarded to Steve Mayer in Outagamie County, since Calumet has no coordinator and he reached out to Gene Birr for assistance. Lakeside Vision Center is an educational facility showing the possibilities of using clean energy with solar panels and other technologies in creating a completely off-the-grid residential development in a rural setting. We met with Todd in September and explained how a bluebird trail could fit in very well among the prairie gardens and vineyards that are being developed within the berms and fenced boundaries of this otherwise open site. We referred Todd to Dick Nickolai of the WPMA, who came out there weeks later to evaluate the site for its suitability to attract martins. In early October Steve and I returned to place 10 poles and nest boxes on the newly seeded berms within the chain-link fenced boundary of the property and within viewing from their main buildings. We will return next spring to help teach Todd the basics of monitoring the nest boxes for bluebirds. Later we will add additional boxes after more of the property is seeded, planted with native prairie gardens and pathways are placed throughout the gardens and vineyard. We will keep you updated on the progress of this project as it grows, which could lead to reaching more folks interested in monitoring bluebirds in Calumet County.

**Door County, Charlotte Lukes**

Thank you to all of you who sent me your final BRAW report numbers. I am enclosing the county totals. They were a bit better than last year.

Interested in being a County Coordinator? Get more info from: **Gene Birr, CC Chair**  
[gbbird22@gmail.com](mailto:gbbird22@gmail.com)  
 Phone # 920-461-0108



Name	# bxs	EB use	Eggs	EB hat	EB-FL	TS-FL	HW-FL	BCC-FL
Nick Anderson	10	7	59	58	58	9	13	0
Marj Andrae	8	3	17	17	17	13	0	0
Sarah Freyman	2	1	4	4	4	0	0	0
Marilyn Hansotia	10	3	15	15	15	0	13	8
Mark & Michaela Holey	6	2	9	8	8	6	6	0
Brenda Keys Char & John Lukes/Maring	17	7	43	43	43	53	20	0
Wendy Lukes	22	18	151	81	59	13	0	0
Madden	19	4	20	20	20	21	54	0
Mike & Barb	7	4	15	6	6	0	26	0
Ed Miller	18	5	29	26	26	6	67	0
Caroline Moes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Newport Park (Jim Blair/others)	18	8	43	30	16	0	28	6
Signe & Ken Onsrud	70	38	270	244	232	26	6	14
Glenna Peters	5	2	10	10	10	0	0	0
Sherry Seubert	2	1	9	7	7	6	0	0
Ben Teich	62	15	70	59	50	95	58	6
Carl & Darcy Wallace	15		25	23	17	11	9	0
Renee White	2	1	9	8	8	0	3	0
Eric Wickstrom	19	9	67	63	63	32	12	6
	<b>312</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>865</b>	<b>722</b>	<b>659</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>40</b>



*2023 SEASON*

*The Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin  
 Extends its appreciation for providing habitat  
 To support the conservation of Wisconsin's  
 Eastern Bluebirds to*

\_\_\_\_\_

*Trail Monitor*

\_\_\_\_\_

*Steve Sample, BRAW President*

Do you know of a trail that needs to be recognized? BRAW can send them this certificate! Contact Steve Sample at: 422 Shepard Ter., Madison, WI 53705 or [ssample@gmail.com](mailto:ssample@gmail.com).



# BRAW Honors 2023 Awards Recipients

By Gene Kroupa

As another year comes to a close, BRAW pauses to recognize the contributions of those who have made special efforts on behalf of bluebirds, the environment and the organization.

"I'm always amazed at the dedication exhibited by these individuals to the restoration of the Eastern Bluebird and protection of our environment," said President Steve Sample.

## Sue Cashman

*Carol McDaniel Bluebird Award*



Sue Cashman, of Darlington, received the **2023 Carol McDaniel Bluebird Award**.

According to BRAW President Steve Sample, "the purpose of the award is to recognize persons who have demonstrated a strong dedication to the restoration of the Eastern Bluebird."

The retired teacher recalled that when growing up "my mother loved birds. There also were other folks who shared

their interest in birds, especially from a science view."

Cashman is known for her efforts to help bluebirds through the Lafayette County Bluebird Society and the Bluebird Nest Nature Center store in Darlington. Carol McDaniel and Cashman shared both a friendship and an interest in bluebirds.

"Carol would visit some of my classes to teach about the Eastern Bluebird," explained Cashman. Upon her passing, the McDaniel family donated a sum to BRAW which was used to create the Carol McDaniel Legacy Fund.

"It is fitting that Sue Cashman is the first recipient of this award to honor Carol McDaniel, who was not only a past president of BRAW, but also of the North American Bluebird Society," added Sample.

Cashman suggested that folks can carry on McDaniel's legacy "by seeking support from elected officials for legislation that helps birds."

Nominations of current BRAW members for this award are open through August 1, 2024. Check our website [www.braw.org](http://www.braw.org) for details and an application form.

## Fred & Mary Craig

*Lifetime Achievement Award*

**Fred and Mary Craig, of Holmen, received the 2023 Lifetime Achievement Award.** Fred was also honored with Board of Directors Emeritus status.

*Wisconsin Bluebird*



They were recognized for their work in designing better bluebird houses, conducting field research to improve box management, doing public education and monitoring trails.

In announcing the award, President Steve Sample noted that their effort was "a together project from day one."

There was a time when the couple checked more than 100 boxes outside of Holmen, as far north as Merrick and Perrot State Parks, and then south of La Crosse in Timber Coulee country. It would take two days to monitor the boxes.

"In a typical year, bluebirds using our boxes would produce over 700 fledglings," said Fred. "They would also annually average another 60 or so Black-capped Chickadees, Tree Swallows and other cavity nester fledglings," added Mary.

Both were a familiar sight on the Brice Prairie Conservation Area. "We enjoyed meeting new BPCA members and introducing them to bluebird monitoring," said Mary. "It is heartwarming to get a smile from property owners when they see their first nest full of eggs."

As for the future, both agreed that: "We need to encourage more families to get outdoors and connect with the bluebird population. It definitely is a rewarding hobby."

## Paul Noeldner

*Educator of the Year Award*



Paul Noeldner, of Maple Bluff, received the **2023 Educator of the Year Award**.

According to BRAW President Steve Sample, "Noeldner has led bird education efforts through Madison FUN Friends of Urban Nature workshops and Bird Buddies programs to establish bluebird box trails.

Interest in birds started at a young

age. Noeldner said "as a young farm kid I used my little binoculars to identify different species of birds. Later on as a student at UW-Madison, I learned about doing field research and the power of data in understanding our environment."



Now, Noeldner shares his expertise by helping put on “Learn to Make a Bluebird Box” workshops. “Our Madison FUN partner groups and Bird Buddies team are key to educating the public,” he explained.

According to Noeldner, “The Madison Parks Department, Badgerland Bird Alliance, Friends of Cherokee Marsh, Wild Warner, BRAW and Friends of UW Lakeshore Nature Preserve help support bluebird trails and educational outings.”

Noeldner feels that humankind can help birds by “connecting with environmental and conservation groups to support ethical actions on birds’ behalf.”

In accepting his award, Noeldner noted that “he was especially grateful for help from wife Barbara and monitors, plus BRAW members Pat Ready and Stephen Lang.”

### Dan Small

*Communicator of the Year Award*

Dan Small, of Westby, received the **2023 Communicator of the Year Award**. The long-time host of *Outdoor*



*Wisconsin* on Milwaukee PBS and PBS Wisconsin, and contributing editor for the *Wisconsin Outdoor News*, was cited for being an “important and significant environmental spokesperson for Wisconsin.”

According to BRAW president Steve Sample, Small has “worked to educate the public about the state’s many plant, insect

and animal species, including the Eastern Bluebird.”

In reflecting on his contributions, Small noted:

“Throughout my 50-year career, I have encouraged viewers, listeners and readers to learn about the interconnections between birds and other wildlife, and their dependence on a healthy, diverse environment. We need to consider our role as participants in the natural world and as its stewards.”

Small’s interest in birds began on family camping trips. “Those experiences helped me understand the complexity of our natural world and led me to a career communicating about its wonders and the many activities that can bring us closer to wild things.”

To help birds now and in the future, Small suggests “becoming more aware of the impacts our actions have on nature and preserving natural travel routes used by migrating birds to provide food and safe resting areas.”

Upon receiving his award, Small said: “This award is a great honor for me. I will continue to raise awareness about the importance of bluebirds and other grassland species.”

### Dale & Doris Moody

*Bluebirders of the Year Award*



Dale and Doris Moody, of De Forest, received the **2023 Bluebirders of the Year Award**. They were cited for their efforts in helping restore the Eastern Bluebird population of Wisconsin by working with individuals and groups.

Together they monitor 89 nest

boxes on trails in Iowa and Lafayette counties. Since 2001 bluebird pairs using those boxes have produced nearly 6,000 fledglings.

During their travels to other countries, they’ve observed that “nowhere else is there so much focus on bird migration, habitat and protection as in the U.S.”

As far as how humankind can help birds, the Moody’s agreed that: “We need to protect habitat, conduct research into bird viruses, and educate people about the importance of birds in nature’s cycle of life.”

### Ralph Konrath

*Lifetime Achievement Award*

Ralph Konrath, of East Troy, received the **2023 Lifetime Achievement Award**. Konrath, age 90, was cited for tirelessly promoting bluebird awareness over the years. This year he put up and monitored a pair of successful nest boxes in the Oak Grove Cemetery near the entrance to Old World Wisconsin in Eagle Township.



The retired Big Cat House and Bird Building employee of the Milwaukee County Zoo at one time monitored three dozen nest boxes at the Whitnall Park Golf Course, plus another 70 in Adams County.

Konrath’s interest in birds started eight decades ago. “My grandmother taught me how to monitor blue-

bird houses,” said Konrath. “She also showed me how to discourage invasive species like house sparrows and starlings.”

Growing up on a farm eventually led Konrath to become

*continued on next page*

involved with taking care of animals and birds as a profession. In retirement, he focused on pigeon racing. His main concern now is “that people take care of the environment for all plants and wildlife.”

### Curt Caslavka

*Facilitator of the Year Award*

Curt Caslavka, of Middleton, received the **2023 Facilitator of the Year Award**. He was recognized for his work in increasing prairie habitat for birds. Additionally, President Steve Sample pointed to Caslavka’s efforts at Pope Farm Conservancy and Goose Pond Sanctuary to educate the public about the environment and birds.

Growing up in a rural community with nearby natural areas to explore, Caslavka had an interest in wildlife early in his life that later led to seeking a degree in Biological Sciences. While on the academic staff of the UW-Madison, he helped create the Biocore Prairie at the Lake Shore Nature Preserve.

“Preserving existing wildlife sanctuaries and creating new habitat are the keys to helping birds retain their population numbers,” observes Caslavka.

One thing he believes humankind can do now and in the future is “volunteer time and provide financial support to organizations that protect habitat and the environment for birds.”



## Do Skylight Boxes Work?

For years, bluebirders have discussed the use and effectiveness of skylights in boxes as a non-lethal way to discourage occupancy by House Sparrows. In order to arrive at a scientific answer to this question, the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, with funding from the Ray Cram Bluebird Fund, embarked on a two-year research project with the help of BRAW member volunteers and Ripon College. We had 30 volunteers who participated with 170 boxes spanning 19 counties across the state of Wisconsin. Volunteers reported their monitoring data weekly to Ripon College.



In Year 1, paired nest boxes, one with a skylight roof and the other with an opaque roof, were installed at 85 locations with a history of House Sparrow problems. All of the boxes were identical, in order to demonstrate that the roof-type was driving a bird’s preference and not other factors, like the age of the box. Previous investigations had simply replaced the box, so it was unclear if birds were responding to the roof-type or age.

Our results definitively showed that all species prefer the opaque roof box over the skylight roof box. In Year 2, we tested if all species would continue to avoid the skylight box when it was the only option by either removing the opaque roof box or making it unavailable. We hypothesized that House Sparrows would be less likely to use skylight boxes than native species. As in the first year, a box was scored as occupied if a pair built a nest and laid at least one egg. There are a number of conclusions that can be reached by studying the data.

Skylight boxes were used by native species (66%) more frequently than expected compared to House Sparrows (6%). Tree Swallows were the most common nest box occupant and nested in 39 (63%) of the skylight boxes. Bluebirds used 10 (12%), House Wrens 7 (8%) and House Sparrows only occupied 5 boxes across the entire study. However, the occupancy rates in Year 2 of the study were much lower (73%) than when birds could use nest boxes with an opaque roof (94%). These results suggest that the birds sought alternative nesting sites rather than use a skylight box. Indeed, House Sparrows nested at 42% of the 85 locations when opaque-roofed boxes were available in 2022 and their occupancy dropped to 6% in 2023!

Volunteers reported very different experiences during the study. Skylight boxes appeared effective at some locations and not others. Our results demonstrate that skylight boxes are an additional tool that nest box landlords might find useful. House Sparrows are resilient and tenacious nest box competitors. Those with skylight boxes have options - to continue to use them if you feel they worked for your location, or paint or somehow cover the skylight and make it into an opaque box. As for House Sparrows, changing the location of the box to more open areas may help. A time-tested solution is the use of a Van Ert trap. It’s not convenient, but often if the pesky House Sparrow is removed from the site, a bluebird may move in soon afterwards.

*Co-written by Dr. Memuna Khan, Sydney Clark and David Lucey*



# Bluebirding Tips: Dealing with Pests & Pirates

By Gene Kroupa

Bluebird pests and nest pirates come in all shapes and forms: birds, critters and insects to name some. Controlling and preventing these threats are keys to getting more production out of our nest boxes.

Winter is a great time to plan and gear up for minimizing the impact of pests. By looking back at the just-ended season, we have some guideposts for what needs to be done.

Ants and wasps were my personal bugaboos. I foolishly planted a nest box pole near an ant hill. These nasty invaders were drawn in legions to the egg waste inside the box. Carefully treating the pole and exterior bottom of the box with Permethrin spray put an end to their treks. Never apply to the inside of the box, and cover nest-



Permethrin is a reliable external line of defense against ants. (Gene Kroupa)



Nestlings are vulnerable to a host of pests and critters. (Gene Kroupa)

lings when spraying outside surfaces.

Some bluebirders place ground cinnamon under the nest, on the bottom of the box and around the base of the mounting pole to keep ants away. Others install a small, round indoor ant trap under the nest to control ants. Usually, they can remove it in a week or so. Diatomaceous Earth is another good remedy for ants.

Wasps loved one of my skylight nest boxes because of easy access to the protected cavity. But bluebirds shied away, possibly because of them. Rubbing bar soap or Vaseline inside on the roof corners would have blunted wasps' attempts to hang a honey-combed nest.

Blackflies attracted by CO<sub>2</sub> given off by a hen and nestlings can be thwarted by using vanilla-scented Christmas trees typically hung inside vehicles to get rid of foul odors in the air. Staple one to the top inside back of the box.

Blowflies like to lay their eggs in nests. The resulting larvae suck blood

from nestlings during the night, and then burrow back down in the day to escape the adults. Replacing infested nests with clean grassy material and putting the nestlings back is one solution. Some folks have used hardware cloth risers to trap and remove the larvae beneath the nest.

Starlings can take over a box if the entrance hole is larger than the recommended 1.5-inch diameter. Likewise, persistent woodpeckers can widen the opening unless a metal protector plate is installed to blunt their attack.

Troublesome house sparrows can be eliminated with the use of a Van Ert trap. Wren guards can discourage the pesky pirates, but do not provide foolproof protection. Almost daily monitoring of the bluebird's egg laying regime is required to know when to install the guard. Moving the nest box to a new location is a solution for both problems.

The Dave Lucey Improved Predator Guard with landing ramp will keep the long arm of bandit raccoons away from eggs and nestlings. Likewise, not installing nest boxes on tree trunks, wooden posts, fences and other climbable structures will usually secure a nest box from squirrels.

Slippery mounting poles can make life safer for bluebird nestlings from a range of critters. Vaseline and Vick's Vapor Rub are water resistant. Both do work well against squirrels and raccoons. Reapply periodically as warranted.

No preventive tactic nor remedy works all the time. But a little planning and due diligence can help negate the impact of pests and nest pirates on your trail in 2024.





# A Great Education Success Story

By Dorothy Messner

Samantha Behnke, a senior at Winnebago Lutheran Academy in Fond du Lac recently participated in and completed a summer bluebird project which she since used toward credit in our current Wildlife Conservation class. Bluebird houses were provided by BRAW through the Carol McDaniel Legacy Fund. The project was mentored by myself. I've been an avid bluebirder and BRAW member for many years. I'm also Sammy's grandmother.



On Earth Day April 22nd, encouraged by the BRAW "Nest in Peace" incentive, Sammy and I erected 3 nesting boxes at historic Rienzi Cemetery located a mile or so outside of the city at the base of

the Fond du Lac ledge. We felt that this site had ideal bluebird habitat, grassland with large open oaks surrounded by farmland with hopefully little House Sparrow competition. Our goal for the project was to attract one pair of nesting bluebirds to hopefully raise one brood of chicks. Often in nature things don't go as hoped or planned, but this undertaking at



Rienzi produced results far beyond our expectations! Here are the results from Sammy's monitored notes:

- Box #1 June 14th fledged 5 bluebirds
- Box #1 August 5th fledged 3 bluebirds
- Box #2 June 25th fledged 6 tree swallows
- Box #2 August 3rd fledged 5 bluebirds
- Box 3 August 5th fledged five wrens

No signs of House Sparrow activity in any of the three boxes!

Before this project Sammy was already familiar with bluebirds. They have nested in her backyard

for many years. She already understood the basics of monitoring and House Sparrow control. This project reinforced those values and helped to encourage her towards a lifelong hobby of active participation in bluebird conservation and restoration. Hopefully the project also inspired her teacher and fellow students toward a greater appreciation of and interest in bluebirds.

Thank you to BRAW for providing the bluebird houses and to the "Nest in Peace" program for providing an incentive to place houses in cemeteries. Thank you to Lundeen Rice of Rienzi for her assistance and patience in regards to approval of box placement. The program participant and the mentor, a granddaughter and her grandmother are rewarded with special memories of time spent together fulfilling an enjoyable project. This undertaking provided an excellent outcome for all involved most importantly for the bluebirds and their 13 new fledglings! Thanks to all who helped make this a great success story.

Sammy's mother Angie also loved the bluebirds. She was called to her heavenly home in January 2016 after battling cancer. Her earthly remains rest in peace at Rienzi Cemetery.



## Mouse In the House?

By Steve Lang

At the end of the nesting season some trail monitors clean out their boxes and then prop the doors open to prevent mice from moving in for the winter. My wife and I like to keep our doors shut all year long. We think the boxes have a longer life span if they don't get filled with snow and rain. The closed boxes also give birds like Chickadees and Downy Woodpeckers a place for shelter. They also give early bluebirds a place to shelter and consider using for their site come spring. Of our 86 boxes last year we only had 3 with nesting mice that we had to empty.



# 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. (See Photo1)



Photo 1

I found out that the man who installed the tall birdhouses had died many years ago but I found out his son still lived in the area. I called John Perpich, Jr. who ironically lives on Bluebird Road in Silver Cliff. I found

out that his father, John Perpich Sr. was the man I had to thank for bringing bluebirds to Northern Wisconsin. John Senior was born in Upper Michigan in Annville in 1918.

He died in July 1990. He retired in 1979 and thought about relocating to Tucson, Arizona but instead moved to his son's small home in Silver Cliff where they added on to the house numerous times. He began to garden and started a hobby of building and installing bluebird houses in the neighborhood wherever anyone would allow him to install them. He also started selling some of his birdhouses making and installing more than 300 of them. Surprisingly, some of these houses are still in existence today. Many are on tall wooden posts and the houses are tall. They have been fitted with hinges, metal around the opening holes and have survived

the elements of Northern Wisconsin's cold, snowy winters and the winds and sun. (See Photo2)

I have started monitoring many of John's old houses. Last year one of the wooden posts fell over so I replaced it with a metal pole. Last fall was the first time these houses were cleaned out and I found several that bluebird did choose to occupy this spring but they really had their work cut out for them as they had to fill the box with so many pine needles to get to the top of the nestbox. (See Photo 3)

I will work with Gene Birr to make the interior of these taller houses a little shorter to make it easier for the occupying birds, as these houses have withstood the test of time and I would like to see how long they can survive. Thank you so much John Perpich, Sr. for all your hard work to get bluebirds in the North Woods of Wisconsin. Continuing John Perpich's efforts today is Gene (Geno) Avery who owns property on County F in Marinette County where I spotted so many bird houses. He has continued to repair and install new bird houses. His efforts have brought many bluebirds to the Silver Cliff area. He presently has 26 bluebird houses installed on his property. He checks the houses in spring and fall but no one has been doing weekly checks and no numbers have been reported to BRAW in the past. With Geno's permission, I started monitoring the houses on a weekly basis. Geno calls the birds using his



Photo 2



Photo 3

houses "renters" and he is a great landlord who charges no rent. Geno has replaced many of the taller deteriorating houses with the shorter style that the bluebirds prefer. The houses are on taller wooden poles to prevent critter invasion such as raccoons. There are brand new houses installed and some bear the Packer "Green and Gold". (See Photo4)



Photo 4

The new houses were built by Brian Marcela, Geno's first cousin from Two Rivers. Geno currently has almost all houses "rented" except for three of the older houses that will be replaced in the future. Thank you Geno and the entire Avery family for your hard work to help bluebirds in the North Woods!



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

# Membership Renewal Information

## By Valerie Van Winkle, Membership Services

If the address label of your *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter reads Winter 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 February and will be mailed in March.

Memberships received after February 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](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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\*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

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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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## Do Your Holiday Shopping at 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>



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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 "Winter 2023", then you need to RENEW membership now.

## BRAW 2023 Convention Highlights



Over 100 attended!

The 2023 Convention was held at The Horicon Marsh Education and Visitor Center in September. A record number were in attendance. President Sample opened the morning with a welcome message. Liz Herzmann gave a history of the marsh that was very informative. Memuna Khan and her student Syd Clark gave results of the Skylight Box study. In the afternoon Dianne Moller from Hoo's Woods delighted us with live raptors and facts about each species.



Silent Auction did very well.

The Silent Auction had many items and sales were very good. Thanks to those who donated and everyone that bought items.



Memuna Khan from Ripon College.

Wisconsin Bluebird



Elizabeth Herzmann on history of Horican Marsh.



Dianne Moller of Hoo's Woods.



Syd Clark gave skylight study results.