

THE FRIENDS OF THE BLUEBIRDS NEWSLETTER

Number 1

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RESULTS FROM 1993.

Reports were received from 58 monitors reporting on 2202 nest boxes. Another 26 people reported that they maintained an additional 903 boxes. **THANK YOU ALL FOR A GREAT JOB -- THE BLUEBIRDS THANK YOU TOO!!!** I'm sure we didn't hear from everyone who looked after boxes. Please let us know how many boxes you are looking after even if you don't keep any records on the occupants in the boxes.

Table 1. gives the totals for the last ten years. Those for bluebirds are probably low as not all lines were monitored at the right time to get both the first and second nesting.

HELP WANTED!!!

There are several nest lines that have been checked for many years and now require new monitors. These are located near **Hartney, Virden, Oak Lake, Souris, Wawanesa and Glenboro.** If you know of anyone who might be interested in looking

after these lines, please have them get in contact with Ann Smith (727-5102) or Mamie McCowan (728-3249).

IN THE MOOD FOR A TRIP ???

The **North American Bluebird Society (NABS)** is holding its 17th Annual Meeting at Boise, Idaho on June 9-12, 1994. The program begins Thursday evening and includes a day long field trip to a Bluebird trail to see both Mountain and Western Bluebirds, talks and presentations on a variety of topics, the annual meeting and a banquet. On Sunday for those able to stay, a field trip is planned to the World Centre for Birds of Prey and/or the MK Nature Centre. The meetings are open to anyone interested in bluebirds (you don't need to be a member of NABS). Hazel Skuce is on the Board of Directors of NABS and she and John are planning to attend. Those interested should contact Hazel (728-3248) for further information and registration forms.

TABLE 1. Nestings reported for the years 1984-1993. A nesting is defined as a nest in which at least one egg has been laid, whether or not the nest was successful. The total number of boxes for which reports were received and the number of monitors is also given.

	NUMBER OF NESTINGS									
	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Mountain Bluebird	506	580	580	762	894	995	747	719	712	771
Eastern Bluebird	54	100	168	258	276	354	207	191	164	167
Unidentified Bluebird	6	7	24	83	66	51	97	49	73	84
X-nesting Bluebird	0	3	2	1	2	2	6	2	3	0
Total Bluebirds	566	690	774	1104	1238	1402	1057	961	952	1022
Tree Swallows	1194	1100	1068	994	1094	994	726	691	841	923
House Wren	74	79	59	57	46	85	91	122	94	192
House Sparrow	87	35	28	32	38	46	43	28	21	49
Total Boxes	2123	1838	1899	2045	2382	2039	1678	1548	1843	2202
Monitors Reporting							44	34	36	58

THINGS TO WATCH FOR:

Banded Birds: Jim Spear at Russell is continuing the banding work begun by his father, and has now banded over 1200 bluebirds. Four female bluebirds, first banded as young of the year in 1989, have returned every year to the same area (one to the same box). If you spot a banded bird, please let us know.

Cross-nesting Birds: In this area the ranges of the mountain and eastern bluebirds overlap. Occasionally, we find a male mountain bluebird paired with a female eastern bluebird and vice-versa. We are interested in determining the incidence of these cross-nestings and in banding the young hybrids. Please call Ann Smith (727-5102) if you find a cross-nesting pair on your line.

BEST TIMES TO CHECK BOXES

The essential check for the bluebirds is the one in the spring to make sure that the lids are on and to evict any mice that have taken up residence over the winter. Cleaning the boxes each fall is also necessary. This allows any parasites a chance to be frozen out over the winter. If you are pressed for time and can only monitor your boxes a couple of times during the nesting period, you can still get a great deal of information if you time your visits carefully. An examination of the records of a few lines which were monitored frequently was made to determine the timing of the nesting cycles. Nesting for bluebirds was quite synchronous. If you make your first check between **May 24 and June 4**, you should find the bluebirds busy with their first brood and the tree swallows just beginning to nest. A second visit during the **first two weeks of July** should catch 80-90% of the second nesting. You will miss those cases where the first nest failed and the birds began their second nesting immediately and you will probably miss a few very late second nestings. Bluebirds sometimes nest in a box after the young tree swallows have fledged from it. This time table applies to most years, but not all. In 1983 for instance, a large number of eggs were frozen during a late snow storm and the birds immediately re-nested throwing the whole time sequence out for the rest of the year.

WHODUNIT??

Have you ever wondered what happened when eggs disappeared or the nest was destroyed or young birds were found dead in the nest? Here are some pointers to help you narrow down the possibilities. The following is adapted from Bluebirds in the Upper Midwest by Dorene H. Scriven published by the Bluebird Recovery Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis, Minneapolis, Minn. 1990.

CLUES & PERPETRATORS

Nest:

- Clue: Little sticks in box, often on top of the nest: *Wren*
- Clue: Feathers (often white) on top of bluebird nest: *Tree Swallow*
- Clue: Debris, weeds, coarse grass often high over the hole: *House Sparrow*
- Clue: Shredded bark, leaves, etc. filling box, hole may be enlarged: *Red Squirrel*
- Clue: Shredded Milkweed, seeds: *Mice*
- Clue: Small nest of moss and fur: *Chickadee*

Eggs:

- Clue: Eggs suddenly disappear, nest undisturbed: *Wren, House Sparrow, Snake*
- Clue: Eggs disappear, nest partly pulled out: *Raccoon, Cat*
- Clue: Eggs shattered on ground or in nest: *House Sparrow, Wren, Red Squirrel*
- Clue: Eggs with tiny holes pecked in them: *Wren*

Nestlings:

- Clue: Nestlings gone, nest intact, parents still around: *Cat, Snake, House Sparrow*
- Clue: Nestlings gone, nest partly pulled out, feathers around: *Raccoon, Cat*
- Clue: Nestlings dead outside box, perhaps one per day: *House Sparrow*
- Clue: Nestlings dead in box, bodies unmarked, stomach full, parents around: *Pesticides*
- Clue: Young nestlings dead in wet nest: *Hypothermia*
- Clue: Nestlings dead in nest, emaciated: *Predator got both parents*
- Clue: Nestlings dead in nest, large red welts over bodies, black pupae or gray maggots under nest: *Blowfly larvae*
- Clue: Female dead in box, head feathers and/or eyes pecked out: *House Sparrow*