

# THE FRIENDS OF THE BLUEBIRDS NEWSLETTER

Number 2

April, 1995

## RESULTS FROM 1994.

**CONGRATULATIONS EVERYONE!** We had the best year ever in 1994. More reports were turned in, more boxes were monitored and there were more nestings of bluebirds than for any year since we began in 1976. Since we are still getting more bluebirds when we increase the number of boxes, it would appear that we have not yet saturated the area. The availability of a place to nest still seems to be a limiting factor for the bluebird population.

Reports were received on 2691 boxes located on 68 lines. An additional 784 boxes (34 lines) were reported as being maintained. There were 901 nestings of Mountain bluebirds, 337 of Eastern bluebirds, 220 of unidentified bluebirds, and 5 cross nestings (or hybrid nestings) for a total of 1463 nestings of bluebirds. Tree Swallows (1164 nestings) and Wrens (211 nestings) also increased. Less common inhabitants in the boxes included: Rough-winged swallow (2); Kingbird (2), Chickadee (1); Chipping Sparrow (1); Starling (2); Flying Squirrel (4); Red Squirrel (1) and numerous deermice.

Table 1. gives the totals for the last fourteen 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:

**Boxes:** Our supply of boxes is getting low. If anyone has any scrap lumber suitable for boxes that they could donate, it would be most appreciated. We could also use the services of some carpenters to build boxes.

**Newsletter:** We would like to incorporate a section in our next newsletter consisting of notes on interesting happenings on your nestlines, questions and answers, etc. If you have any suggestions please contact Ann Smith (727-5102).

**Monitors:** Our request last year for new monitors to take over existing lines met with a very good response. THANK YOU. There are a few more lines available this year. These are located near **Hartney, Wawanesa and Carberry**. 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).

## NOTES:

**CONGRATULATIONS to Rory Ardiel.** Rory has a nestline south of Brandon and this year he did his Science Fair project on bluebirds. He won a red ribbon at Meadows school and a Bronze Medallion in his category at the Western Manitoba Science Fair. He has been invited to present his project at the Environmental Science Fair at Riding Mountain Park in June.

The North American Bluebird Society (NABS) held its 18th Annual Meeting at Jackson, Michigan in March, 1995. John and Hazel Skuce attended from our group.

In addition to bluebird boxes **Richard and Carol Clark** have 12 duck nest boxes near the Treesbank Ferry. Last year the boxes housed six wood duck and four merganser nests.

**Boxes and extra lids** are available from Mamie McCowan, 1415-8th Street, Brandon Tel: 728-3249.

**TABLE 1.** Nestings reported for the years 1981-1994. 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													
	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
<b>BLUEBIRDS</b>														
Mountain	727	662	*494	506	580	580	762	894	995	747	719	712	771	901
Eastern	43	72	87	54	100	168	258	276	354	207	191	164	167	337
Unidentified	12	7	18	6	7	24	83	66	51	97	49	73	84	220
X-nesting	1	1	1	0	3	2	1	2	2	6	2	3	0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>783</b>	<b>742</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>566</b>	<b>690</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>1104</b>	<b>1238</b>	<b>1402</b>	<b>1057</b>	<b>961</b>	<b>952</b>	<b>1022</b>	<b>1463</b>
<b>OTHERS</b>														
Tree Swallows	680	661	872	1194	1100	1068	994	1094	994	726	691	841	923	1164
House Wren	54	62	84	74	79	59	57	46	85	91	122	94	192	211
House Sparrow	178	119	127	87	35	28	32	38	46	43	28	21	49	26
<b>Total Boxes</b>			<b>2020</b>	<b>2123</b>	<b>1838</b>	<b>1899</b>	<b>2045</b>	<b>2382</b>	<b>2039</b>	<b>1678</b>	<b>1548</b>	<b>1843</b>	<b>2202</b>	<b>2691</b>
<b>Monitors Reporting</b>										<b>44</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>68</b>

\* 106 additional nests were found with frozen eggs

**THE PRAIRIE NEST BOX MONITORING PROGRAM**, begun in 1990, is a long-term research and educational program focusing on agriculture and the environment. Part of the research component consists of a monitoring program in which local volunteers collect data from nest boxes located in the agricultural areas of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. These data, when combined with information on local pesticide use, are analyzed statistically for effects of pesticides and other factors on reproduction. The Program, coordinated by Louise Horstman and Ted Code, was initially funded by the Canadian Wildlife Service with assistance from the Toxicology Program of the World Wildlife Fund. Since then, other organizations have contributed to the program's funding including the Ellis Bird Farm Inc., Norcen Energy Resources Ltd. and the Federation of Alberta Naturalists.

Several members of the Friends of the Bluebirds have been involved in the collection of data in the past and the coordinators have asked that their heartiest thanks be passed on to the Friends who have contributed nest records. As Manitoba continues to have a relatively high use of pesticides in the vicinity of nest boxes, the coordinators are particularly interested in obtaining Manitoba data not only from areas where spraying may occur but also from areas where there is no spraying. The latter are used as controls to monitor the effect of weather, food availability, etc. The coordinators provide booklets that ask for detailed information on nest box activities and the surrounding habitat for 10 active nest boxes on a weekly or 10-day basis. There is a small contribution (about \$25) towards your gas. Booklets for the 1995 nesting season have just been mailed to those who sent in reports last year.

If you are interested in participating or in more information contact: Louise Horstman or Ted Code, Pecan Resources Inc., Prairie Nest Box Monitoring Program, Box 3333, Morinville, Alberta, T8R 1S2 Phone/Fax: (403) 939-5858 E-mail: [pecan@freenet.edmonton.ab.ca](mailto:pecan@freenet.edmonton.ab.ca)

#### **THINGS TO WATCH FOR**

**Banded Birds:** Jim Spear at Russell is continuing to band bluebirds on his own line and on that of Rae & Barb Pettinger. 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.

**Unusual Nest Occupants:** If you have trouble identifying a box occupant, and would like some help, please contact Barb Robinson (728-4029) or Jean Horton (728-4672).

#### **HANTAVIRUS**

You may have heard via the media of a hantavirus which is carried by mice and can be transmitted to humans. Although the virus is still very rare and there is no need to panic, it would be sensible to take precautions.

Hantavirus infection is a rare but serious illness. Typical symptoms are flu-like and include fever, headache, nausea, vomiting, muscle aches and shortness of breath that develop up to six weeks after exposure to the virus. Up to 60% of persons may die from lung failure associated with this infection. Although this is not thought to be a new virus, it was first described in humans in the southern US in 1993. The first Canadian case was found in B.C. in June 1994.

The virus spreads to people when they breathe air contaminated by infected mouse saliva, urine and feces or when the virus enters the body through a break in the skin or via contaminated food. It is uncertain how long the virus remains viable outside of the mouse. In our case the most likely route of infection would be by breathing infected dust when cleaning the nest boxes.

There are two approaches to the mouse problem. One is to exclude the mice by closing the boxes early in the fall. This requires that you be able to get out to open them before the birds arrive in March. If mice are already in your box, you can deal with them using a few precautions.

The virus is readily killed by a solution of a household bleach such as Javex. It should be diluted one part bleach to nine parts water and the solution should be used within 3-4 days of making the dilution. This is not a case of more is better; a 10% solution is more effective than a stronger one. If you find a mouse nest: --stand downwind, tap the box to scare out any resident mice, then wet down the nest material with the bleach solution and remove the contents wearing rubber gloves. The bleach solution serves two purposes--it kills the virus and it settles the dust. A HEPA 8710 mask will provide extra protection. These masks are available at meetings or from Ann Smith for \$1.00 or from the Safety Centre, 905 McTavish Ave. E., Brandon. Although the masks are termed disposable, they can be used for several years as long as they are handled properly. After handling any mouse-contaminated materials, wash your hands and face before eating, drinking or smoking.

Natural Resources has sampled mice from near Alexander, Neepawa and Killarney and all came up negative. However, one of a bunch of mice from Manitoba sent to Ottawa by Federal Government employees did test positive.

**FEEDBACK.** Any comments, ideas or suggestions for improving the newsletter would be greatly appreciated.