

THE FRIENDS OF THE BLUEBIRDS NEWSLETTER

Number 3

April, 1996

RESULTS FROM 1995.

Reports were received on 2471 monitored boxes from 61 lines and another 652 boxes from 28 lines were reported as cleaned. **Give yourselves a pat on the back for a job well done!** While the monitored box total decreased slightly, the relative number of nestings also decreased from 54 to 51 nests/100 boxes for bluebirds and from 43 to 41 nests/100 boxes for Tree swallows. Hopefully conditions will improve again this coming year.

There was a total of 1259 bluebird nestings (820 Mountain; 265 Eastern; 170 unidentified and 4 X-nesting), 1100 Tree swallow nestings) and 184 wrens nestings.. Less common nestbox occupants were: chickadees (2), rough-winged swallow (1); kingbird (1); flying squirrels (3); Red squirrels (11) and numerous mice. Porcupines liked the boxes too - they ate some of them! Table 1 gives the totals for the last fifteen 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.

BOXES: Our sincere thanks to our box builders, **Raymond Gladden, Len Neufeld, Gordon Attridge and Jack Webb.** Your work keeps our lines going. If anyone has any **scrap lumber** suitable for boxes, it would be much appreciated. **Boxes and extra lids** are available from Mamie McCowan, 1415-8th Street, Brandon Tel: 728-3249.

MAPS: Our map of the nestlines is sadly out of date. Could you find a few minutes when checking boxes to draw us a sketch map showing where your boxes are located? Blank grid forms

are available. We will keep these on file and incorporate them into our overall map.

NOTES & THING TO WATCH FOR

- **Richard Clark** reports 2 wood ducks and 4 merganzers in his 12 duck boxes. Not quite up to his 1994 results but still quite good. The late spring resulted in the wood ducks returning almost a month later than in 1994.

- **Barb Robinson** reported two nests with white eggs. One was a first nesting, the other a second nesting less than a mile from the first. The same female maybe? She also reported that something (someone??) removed the lids from 23 boxes during the first nesting.

- **Banded Birds:** Jim Spear continues to band birds on his line and on that of Rae and Barb Pettinger. If you spot a banded bird please let us know.

- **Unusual Nest Occupants:** If you have trouble identifying an unusual nest occupant, please contact Barb Robinson (728-4029) or Jean Horton (728-4672). It would be nice to know the identity of our occasional nest occupants.

- **Cross-nesting Bluebirds:** If you find a cross-nesting pair of bluebirds, please contact Ann Smith (727-5102).

- **Chickadee Nests:** These nests are made of moss, fine hair, fur and plant down and superficially resemble a mouse nest although they do not usually fill the box as completely. Often the eggs are not visible as the adults cover them when they leave the nest. There have been several close calls with nest and eggs almost ending on the ground. Beware!

- **Feedback:** Any comments, items or suggestions to improve the newsletter would be greatly appreciated.

TABLE 1. Nestings reported for the years 1981-1995. 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 monitored lines is also given.

	NUMBER OF NESTINGS														
	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
BLUEBIRDS															
Mountain	727	662	*494	506	580	580	762	894	995	747	719	712	771	901	820
Eastern	43	72	487	54	100	168	258	276	354	207	191	164	167	337	265
Unidentified	12	7	18	6	7	24	83	66	51	97	49	73	84	220	170
X-nesting	1	1	1	0	3	2	1	2	2	6	2	3	0	5	4
Total	783	742	600	566	690	774	1104	1238	1402	1057	961	952	1022	1463	1259
OTHERS															
Tree Swallow	680	661	872	1194	1100	1068	994	1094	994	726	691	841	923	1164	1100
House Wren	54	62	84	74	79	59	57	46	85	91	122	94	192	211	184
House Sparrow	178	119	127	87	35	28	32	38	46	43	28	21	49	26	34
Total Boxes			2020	2123	1838	1899	2045	2382	2039	1678	1548	1843	2202	2691	2471
Monitored Lines										44	34	36	58	68	61

*106 additional nests were found with frozen eggs

BLUEBIRD VACATIONS ANYONE?

How about incorporating bluebirds into your vacation this year. There are several opportunities. The **North American Bluebird Society (NABS)** is holding its 19th Annual Meeting in Canada this year. It is sponsored by the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society and will be held at the Hamilton Botanical Gardens September 13-15, 1996. Closer to home, the Ellis Bird Farm Ltd. and Mountain Bluebird Trails Society are co-hosting the **Mountain Bluebird Trails Conference July 5-7, 1996 in Lethbridge, AB.** Registration and a social take place Friday evening. Saturday starts with a morning "bird walk" for the really early risers (6 a.m.), followed by a full day of talks and an evening banquet. On Sunday a Western Breakfast and a range of field trips are planned. Hazel and John Skuce are planning to attend both conferences and may be contacted for registration forms and more information. Tel: 728-3248.

The **Ellis Bird Farm Ltd.** has opened a **Tea Room and Gift Shop** in the old Ellis homestead at Lacombe, AB. They are also developing display gardens to show the kind of plantings that can attract birds and wildlife to a Prairie homestead. Tearoom hours vary with the season; check by calling Tel: 403-346-2211.

TALE OF A JEEP COWGIRL:- by Barb Robinson

"Nightmare of Cows!" I thought as I approached the gate. I was on my way out of the pasture after a box cleaning session. There, lying on the ground, or standing around ruminating, were a hundred cows! The rancher would probably have got out of his truck and started shouting and flailing his arms around, but not me. I approached very, very slowly hoping that by rounding them up as it were, they would disperse. Imagine my horror when one huge beast lumbered up from a prone position and turned out to be a monstrous bull. Well, I took the bull by the horns, or rather, grasped the steering wheel firmly and ever so gently went this way and that until the majority were a safe distance away. Getting out of the truck, and still keeping a wary eye on the cattle, I took down the gate, drove through and put it up again. I hope this little scenario isn't repeated too often. Believe me, bluebirding isn't for the faint hearted!

BANDING TRAINING: The **Delta Marsh Observatory** is looking for volunteers to help band songbirds during May, August & September. They are particularly seeking people who can commit to a longer period (a week to a month) but all are welcome. Volunteers are required to attend a bander workshop and apprentice before they are allowed to handle birds. The "Bander Training Workshop" will be held 27-28 April at the Delta Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Station. Cost is \$120/weekend and includes course materials, room and board. For information call 204-239-1900 (day) or 204-239-4287 (eve).

The Delta Marsh Bird Observatory is a non-profit organization initiated to fill a major information gap for songbird population trends in Manitoba. The Board of Directors has representatives from CWS, Manitoba Natural Resources and the U of Manitoba. Last spring they banded 3164 birds, comprising 75 different species. If you would like to find out more about Manitoba birds this would be a great opportunity. Visitors are welcome.

PREDATORS OF A DIFFERENT KIND

When we think of nestbox predators, we tend to think of vertebrates: raccoons, cats, snakes, hawks, house sparrows, etc. However, invertebrates can also create problems as predators, external or internal parasites, or competitors for boxes. They may kill the birds outright or weaken the young birds to the point where they become susceptible to other stresses such as cold, disease or food shortage. Our reports mention ants, carrion beetles, no-seeums, blowflies, lice, fleas, mites, wasps and bees as possible problems. In most cases we have little information on the severity of the problem or exactly who is the culprit. Perhaps it is time to look at these animals in relation to our nestboxes. In order to determine just what **invertebrates** are in the boxes, may I suggest that you bring in anything you find for identification. Ziplock bags or old pill vials serve as excellent containers and are light and easy to carry in the field. Just drop them in the freezer until you can deliver them.

BLOWFLIES: Dr. Terry Galloway (U of Manitoba) works on the external parasites of birds. At his experimental nestbox site, there was no problem with blowflies for the first two years but last year they made their appearance in some numbers. They are in Manitoba. Adult blowflies lay eggs in the nest; pale gray larvae hatch from these and suck blood from the nestlings, especially at night. During the day the larvae may be hidden in the nest material or may remain attached to the young often at the base of the claws or under the wings. These larvae pupate in the nest boxes, then adults emerge and leave the box to overwinter elsewhere leaving the pupal cases behind as evidence of their presence. These cases are black rectangles about 3/8" long. In some parts of the US the problem is so severe that nest line operators recommend replacing the nest material completely with dry grass when the young are about 7-9 days old. Spraying the box does no good as the adults are gone and anything that would kill the larvae would harm the young birds.

MANITOBA'S NOCTURNAL OWL SURVEY-Jean Horton

In early April 1991 the first extensive survey of the owls or southeastern Manitoba began. The objectives were to determine: relative and species abundance and distribution, species specific habitat preferences, population fluctuations and to provide an organized opportunity for volunteers to contribute to understanding owl ecology. In 1995 new routes and volunteers were recruited in southwestern Manitoba. In the surveys in southwestern Manitoba the Northern Saw-whet Owl and the Eastern Screech Owl are emphasized. These nocturnal surveys are conducted in late March or early April starting about half an hour after sunset. Volunteers receive general information, instructions, data sheets and a tape with owl calls. At each stop a specific method is followed in which volunteers listen for owls, record owls heard and this is followed by playing owl taped calls at specified times. If you would like to know more about what owl species breed in your area this nocturnal owl survey may be just for you. If you would be interested in conducting an owl survey in southwestern Manitoba contact Ken De Smet in Melita at 522-3719 or 522-8733.