

THE FRIENDS OF THE BLUEBIRDS

NEWSLETTER

Number 5

April, 1998

RESULTS FOR 1997: Many thanks to all who turned in results for last year. Details on nestbox occupants were received for 65 lines (2586 boxes) and another 645 boxes on 24 lines were reported as cleaned and maintained. There were 491 mountain, 289 eastern, 142 unidentified and 4 mixed bluebird nestings for a total of 846 bluebird nestings. In addition, there were 1207 tree swallow, 168 wren, and 35 house sparrow nestings. Deermice, red squirrels and flying squirrels were also found.

As shown in Table 1, last year was disastrous for bluebirds, with the mountain bluebirds being most affected. The most probable cause was a 3-day snow storm starting April 5. Very cold temperatures accompanied the snow; for 5 days the temperature did not get above -4.6C and reached a low of -18.3C (Data from Agriculture Canada Research Station, Brandon). With snow covering much of the food supply, the birds would soon deplete their reserves just keeping warm. Survivors would have to rebuild reserves for the breeding season. On most lines, instead of two clearly defined nesting peaks, the birds initiated egg laying at different times of the season and many did not re-nest. A few birds began laying early (George Abernathy, Glenboro, found a nest with three new eggs on April 20th and Betty Shankland found nests where egg laying had begun by April 26th (mountains) and April 27th (easterns)), but most bluebirds did not begin laying until the middle of May. Some delayed laying until late May, placing them in direct competition with tree swallows. Tree swallow and wren numbers remained stable.

We all hope that our nice spring weather continues and that the bluebirds have a chance to recover. Getting the maximum number of boxes into service will help. **KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK ALL OF YOU!!**

BOXES: A very big **THANK YOU** to Jerry Wollman and the Newdale Colony for their donation of scrap lumber. This is the second year that they have helped in this way. Thanks also to Jack Webb who has converted this wood into 94 boxes so far, with more to come.

We deeply appreciate the donation of 250 nestboxes from the Portage Naturalists and our thanks to Russ Mead for arranging everything. A group of the naturalists collected lumber from Winnipeg, got box plans and assisted a Portage high school group to construct the boxes. An additional 250 boxes went to Dr. Hugh Hornbeck at Swan River where they will be looked after by the Scouts and a school environmental club. Our thanks to all involved.

MONITORS NEEDED: There are a few lines (especially in the Oak Lake area) that need monitors or, if you know some good habitat, we can provide boxes for a new line. If you know of anyone that you think might be interested, take them out on your line and introduce them to bluebirds! Boxes and extra lids are available from Barbara Robinson.

MONITORING:

- ♦ **Box Numbers:** If your numbers have worn off, check with Ann Smith to see if she has a record of what they should be or to request new numbers.
- ♦ **Unusual Nest Occupants:** If you have trouble identifying an unusual nest occupant, please contact Barb Robinson or Jean Horton). It would be nice to know the identity of our occasional nest occupants.
- ♦ **WARNING:** Remember to check the size of the hole in your boxes (it should be 1-9/16"/40mm).

TABLE 1. Nestings reported for the years 1981-1997. A nesting is defined as a nest in which at least one egg has been laid.

	NUMBER OF NESTINGS																
	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
BLUEBIRDS																	
Mountain	727	662	*494	506	580	580	762	894	995	747	719	712	771	901	820	755	491
Eastern	43	72	87	54	100	168	258	276	354	207	191	164	167	337	265	403	289
Unidentified	12	7	18	6	7	24	83	66	51	97	49	73	84	220	170	182	142
X-nesting	1	1	1	0	3	2	1	2	2	6	2	3	0	5	4	2	4
Total	783	742	600	566	690	774	1104	1238	1402	1057	961	952	1022	1463	1259	1342	846
OTHERS																	
Tree Swallow	680	661	872	1194	1100	1068	994	1094	994	726	691	841	923	1164	1100	1215	1207
House wren	54	62	84	74	79	59	57	46	85	91	122	94	192	211	184	154	168
House sparrow	178	119	127	87	35	28	32	38	46	43	28	21	49	26	34	20	35
Total Boxes			2020	2123	1838	1899	2045	2382	2039	1678	1548	1843	2202	2691	2471	2641	2586
Monitored Lines										44	34	36	58	68	61	68	65

*106 additional nests were found with frozen eggs

The North American Bluebird Society (NABS) has undergone a major reorganization. New Executive Officers are John Ivanko and Lisa Krivitz and their new address is: NABS, Box 74, Darlington, WI 53530-0074
E-mail: <nabluebird@aol.com>; Phone: 608-329-7056
Web Site: <http://www.cobleskill.edu/nabs/state>

CONFERENCES: How would you like to spend the weekend with a bunch of bird enthusiasts? There are two major birders' conventions in the vicinity this summer.

The North American Bluebird Society (NABS) is holding its 20th Anniversary Meeting in Regina June 25-28th. Following registration which begins at 1:00 pm, Thursday evening features a talk on bird banding by Dr. Stuart Houston. On Friday you have a choice of 4 field trips, then a buffet dinner at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum with tours of the new Life Sciences Gallery. Saturday is dedicated to talks on bluebirds and other cavity nesters. The conference ends with a banquet. For information contact: Ann Smith, or Sandra Ewart, 2818 Sinton Avenue, Regina, SK, S4S 1K3
E-mail: <robert.ewart@sk.sympatico.ca>

The American Birding Association will hold their regional conference in Winnipeg June 10-14 at The International Inn. Friday will feature a workshop on identifying birds by their calls. Robert Taylor will also speak on "Churchill: the Edge of the Arctic". For more information contact: ABA Regional Conference (Winnipeg Session), P.O. Box 6599, Colorado Springs, CO 80934-6599

RESEARCH ANYONE? The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has several projects in which they invite your participation as collectors of information. They are particularly interested in obtaining data from Canada and Mexico. One, Cornell Nest Box Network (CNBN), deals with cavity nesting species. At the moment, they have four research areas: 1) **Calcium requirements** - put calcium (eggshells or oyster shells) by the box and see if the birds use it and how much; 2) **Clutch size** - do birds in northern latitudes lay more eggs than birds farther south? Count the eggs and chicks throughout the nesting cycle (collect data once per week); 3) **Feather study** (swallows) - Do swallows in different regions use different numbers/kinds of feathers to line their nests? - estimate number of feathers and offer feathers (optional); and 4) **Nest box selection study** - pair boxes so that one has an old nest from the previous year and one is empty. This latter study is related to blowfly larvae and the presence of a wasp parasitic on blowfly larvae.

Participation costs \$20.00 (\$15.00 renewal) which provides you with a research kit (instructions, species accounts, data forms, and computer software), access to the CNBN e-mail discussion group, and subscriptions to *Birdscope* (the Lab's quarterly newsletter) and to *Living Bird*. Application forms from: Ann Smith or Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, NY 14850-1999
E-mail: <CNBN@cornell.edu>

KUDOS: Cliff Findlay, a former member of the organizing committee of the Friends of the Bluebirds, was presented with The Manitoba Habitat Stewardship Award for his life-long dedication to conservation. The presentation was made at the Legislature by the Hon. Glen Cummings, Minister of Natural Resources. **Congratulations, Cliff!**

NOTES FROM THE REPORTS:

◆ All 3 of Richard Clark's duck boxes at the Souris and Assiniboine River junction were used by mergansers; two as nests (successful) and the third as a "dump" box for 28 eggs. Three boxes in his yard had wood ducks; one pair ousted a flying squirrel family to take over the box. They also are visited frequently by a pileated woodpecker which has become so tame that it ignores them as they work around the yard.

◆ Despite the generally low numbers last year, two people, Hugh Hornbeck (Swan River) and Lloyd Stankey (Sandy Lake) report their best year ever. Hugh had the most bluebirds ever (20 nestings) and his first successful second nestings. On Line #70 Lloyd had 30 nestings of bluebirds in 35 boxes, with 50% of the easterns and 86% of the mountains re-nesting. Hugh also had some unusual problems. He lost one box to a bear, 4 tree swallow broods to a weasel, and three broods to blowflies. Has anyone else noticed these larvae feeding on young birds? An Ontario survey found that blowflies caused the most nest failures followed by wrens and house sparrows.

◆ Several people reported unusually high mortality of young tree swallows in July. At Camp Hughes, Barbara Robinson found dead nestlings in 11 of 23 nests, and south of Shilo there were dead birds in 10 of 34 nests. Carole & Murray Sangster found dead birds in 5 of 13 nests on the adjacent line. Unfortunately the cause has not been determined. There was aerial spraying in the area, but blowflies, disease, high temperatures, and low food availability are all possibilities.

◆ The Neudorfs visited their line weekly and thus were able to provide detailed information on their tree swallow nests; out of 32 attempts, 28 were successful. Egg laying commenced May 31. Except in two cases where eggs were lost early and re-nesting occurred, all clutches were started by June 9. Incubation took 13 days in all cases (4) that could be precisely determined. Others, although not visiting as often, checked at a critical time so that we have data on clutch initiation for many boxes. The earliest dates were: Betty Shankland (May 28); Dave Stewart & Stankeys (May 29); Sangsters (May 31).

◆ Banding of bluebirds is being carried out by Jim Spear (Russell), Rae Pettinger (Shoal Lake) and John Ross (Grandview). Remember to watch for banded birds and report any that you see to one of the banders or a committee member.

MEMBERS OF THE COORDINATING COMMITTEE:
Ann Smith, Chair, 3011 Park Ave., Bdn, R7B 2K3, 727-5102
Vona Cochrane, Treasurer, 727-2986
Barbara Robinson (Boxes), 1441-8th Street, Brandon 728-4029
David Barnes, 728-6278; Jean Horton, 728-4672
Carole Sangster, 728-7489; Hazel Skuce, 728-3248