

THE FRIENDS OF THE BLUEBIRDS NEWSLETTER

Number 6

April, 1999

RESULTS FOR 1998: GREAT NEWS!!! You recorded more nestings of bluebirds last year than ever before surpassing the previous high (1994) by a few nestings. Although the Mountain bluebirds have not yet recovered to their earlier numbers (995 in 1989; 901 in 1994), they did increase by 225 nestings and the easterns are at an all time high of 527 nestings. **Thank you all for turning in your results.** Details on nestbox occupants were received for 67 lines (2650 boxes) and another 680 boxes on 26 lines were reported as cleaned and maintained. There were 716 Mountain bluebird, 527 Eastern bluebird, 218 unidentified bluebird and 10 cross bluebird nestings for a **total of 1471 nestings of bluebirds.** In addition, 1240 Tree swallow, 138 House Wren, and 62 House sparrow nestings were reported. There was one nesting each by Great-crested Flycatchers, Chickadees and Starlings. Deermice, red squirrels, flying squirrels and chipmunks were also found.

As you can see from Table 1, the balance between the two bluebird species has changed over the last few years with 185 fewer Mountain bluebird nestings and 190 more Eastern bluebird nestings than in 1994 when the total number of nestings was about the same. Mountain bluebirds, with their early return and initiation of egg laying, are taking a chance each year balancing an early start with reduced competition and the opportunity for two successful nestings against the chance of a late spring storm reducing their survival and productivity for that year. A few Mountain bluebird nests may be lost each year. Although 1998 was a generally successful year, the early May cold snap caused some problems. On one line, in three nests with 17 eggs laid before May 1, only three eggs hatched. It is assumed that the other eggs succumbed to hypothermia. It is to be hoped that our nice spring weather continues and that the bluebirds have another successful season this year. Getting the maximum number of boxes into service will help. **KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK ALL OF YOU!!**

BOXES: Boxes and extra lids are available by calling Barbara Robinson at 728-4029 or Carole Sangster at 728-7489. Our supply, while adequate for this season, is diminishing and any donation of scrap wood or boxes would be much appreciated.

MAPS: Many thanks to all of you who provided maps. If you have not already submitted a map of your line, blank "grids" are available from Ann Smith (727-5102).

VOLUNTEERS: We have a goodly number of volunteers looking after bluebird boxes BUT we can always use more. There are a few lines (especially in the Oak Lake area) that need monitors or, if you know of 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! Alternately, have them get in touch with a member of the organizing committee.

MONITORING:

⇒ **Box checks:** Remember to check the hole size of your boxes (should be 1-9/16"/40mm); if your numbers are 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 (728-4029 or Jean Horton (728-4672). It would be nice to know the identity of our occasional nest occupants.

⇒ **Banded birds:** Watch for banded birds and notify one of the committee if you spot any. We will try to trap the bird to read the number. We are particularly interested in finding any of the offspring of the cross nestings.

⇒ **A new predator:** A pair of very agitated Tree Swallows greeted Ann Smith when she was checking boxes May 31. When the box was opened there sat a chipmunk with egg on his face and in his paws. The nest was not disturbed except for the presence of some bits of broken shell in the bottom. The chipmunk made his escape through the hole with obvious ease.

TABLE 1. Nestings reported for the years 1982-1998. A nesting is defined as a nest in which at least one egg has been laid.

NUMBER OF NESTINGS

	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
BLUEBIRDS																	
Mountain	662	*494	506	580	580	762	894	995	747	719	712	771	901	820	755	491	716
Eastern	72	87	54	100	168	258	276	354	207	191	164	167	337	265	403	289	527
Unidentified	7	18	6	7	24	83	66	51	97	49	73	84	220	170	182	142	218
X-nesting	1	1	0	3	2	1	2	2	6	2	3	0	5	4	2	4	10
Total	742	600	566	690	774	1104	1238	1402	1057	961	952	1022	1463	1259	1342	846	1471
OTHERS																	
Tree Swallow	661	872	1194	1100	1068	994	1094	994	726	691	841	923	1164	1100	1215	1207	1240
House wren	62	84	74	79	59	57	46	85	91	122	94	192	211	184	154	168	138
House sparrow	119	127	87	35	28	32	38	46	43	28	21	49	26	34	20	35	62
Total Boxes		2020	2123	1838	1899	2045	2382	2039	1678	1548	1843	2202	2691	2471	2641	2586	2650
Monitored Lines									44	34	36	58	68	61	68	65	67

*106 additional nests were found with frozen eggs

NABS NOTES: The *Friends of the Bluebirds* is now an official affiliate of the **North American Bluebird Society (NABS)**. *Sialia*, the NABS journal, has received a face lift and a new name. The first edition of *Bluebird* will be on display at the spring meeting together with membership applications. Ray Harris of Alberta is NABS President; 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

CONFERENCES: Two very interesting looking weekend programs are occurring this spring: one in Portage and the other a bit farther afield in Montana.

The **North American Bluebird Society (NABS)** is holding its **Annual Meeting** in Great Falls, Montana June 17-20th. There is a tour through Missouri River Canyon on Thursday. Friday's program starts with breakfast and continues with talks, videos, slide presentations and discussions and ends with a banquet in the evening. Another field trip to the Mountain Bluebird Trail is scheduled for Saturday and the conference ends with a birdwalk and a visit to the Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center on Sunday morning. All events and all meals except Thursday and Saturday dinner are included in the registration fee US\$110.00 (US\$99.00 before June 1). Post-conference tours (Yellowstone and the Rocky Mountain front) are also available. For more information contact Jean Horton or email: BluBrdBob@Prodigy.Net

The Glesby Centre in Portage la Prairie is headquarters for the **Delta Marsh Bird Festival**, May 13-16, 1999. The program starts on Thursday night with several presentations by local ornithologists; Friday night Dr. Michael Bradstreet, Director, Bird Studies Canada/ Long Point Bird Observatory, will be quest speaker at the banquet; Saturday the speaker is Dr. George Archibald, Founder of The International Crane Foundation. During the day there are photography workshops and 16 different sites to visit. These include a demonstration of banding, a visit to a sharp-tail lek, birding by canoe, etc. Registration is \$35. For information contact Jean Horton.

A NEW FIELD GUIDE: *Pelicans to Polar Bears. Watching Wildlife in Manitoba* by Catherine Senecal is due out this month. Drawing on the expertise of wildlife and birding specialists (Jean Horton was on the Advisory Committee), it presents accurate, detailed information on 100 sites in the province. With dozens of coloured maps and hundreds of photos, this book is a bargain at \$9.95. The publishers plan a book launching at Candlewood in May.

RESEARCH ANYONE? The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is still interested in attracting "citizen scientists" and has several projects in which they invite your participation. It costs US\$20.00 (\$15.00 renewal/NABS members) and provides you with a research kit, access to the CNBN e-mail discussion group, and subscriptions to *Birdscope* and to *Living Bird*. Applications: Ann Smith or Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, NY 14850-1999
E-mail: <CNBN@cornell.edu>

NOTES FROM THE REPORTS:

◆ **Ray and Barbara Pettinger** found an unusual box occupant at St. Lazare. Their **Great crested flycatcher** was a first for our lines. In the corner of the box, the pair built a nest consisting of an outside of bark strips and an inside of hair and feathers. Beginning July 10, they laid 4 brown speckled eggs and successfully fledged 4 young. The recommended hole size for a great crested flycatcher nest box is 1 3/4" but it may be reduced to 1 9/16" if starlings are a problem. Their preferred habitat is mature deciduous forest edge.

◆ **Lloyd Powell** reports two nestings (both in the same box) with white eggs.

◆ **Richard Clark's** 12 duck boxes had 5 wood ducks and 4 hooded mergansers. However, 2 kestrels kept the small birds away from his bluebird boxes and only one Tree swallow nesting was recorded.

◆ **Bob and Isabelle Smith** renovated an old line along the RR tracks west of Carberry. They had 39 nestings of bluebirds in 26 boxes and all were successful except two.

◆ On April 26 **Virginia Shemeliuk** found a headless garter snake on each of two adjacent boxes. Any suggestions as to what might have done this? Virginia also had three cases of two successful tree swallow nests in the same box.

◆ **John Ross** of Grandview reported six cross-nestings. In all cases they were second nestings. All except one was of an Eastern female and a Mountain male. Two of the males had been previously paired with Mountain females. John bands both adults and young so all the offspring have been banded. Please keep an eye out for banded birds. It would be very interesting to know if the offspring of these crosses are fertile. Other cross-nestings were found by **Cy & Kae Moir**, **Lloyd Stankey** (2) and **John Murray**.

◆ **Dave Randall** reports the best year ever on his line near the Criddle homestead. He had 94 nestings of bluebirds in 54 boxes, 3 House wrens and not a single Tree swallow.

◆ **Hazel and John Skuce** noted that in 1983 there was only one nesting of an Eastern bluebird on their line along Hwy #5 near Spruce Woods. Last year (15 years later) they had more Easterns than Mountains. In 1983 there were only 87 nestings of Easterns in all our boxes.

◆ Four nestings of flying squirrels were reported. **Lloyd Powell** had three and **Barbara Robinson** had one. They appear to nest in late April and early May and by early June the squirrels are gone and the bluebirds or tree swallows have taken over. Red squirrels were also present in a number of boxes (12). **Charlie and Joan Kingdon**, with more nerve than most, counted nine babies in a nest on their line while **George Greenlay** found three babies in the one he checked.

◆ **Hugh Hornbeck** (and several others) reported heavy mortality in young Tree swallows presumably due to the very wet weather in June - July. Nests were soggy, not just damp.

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