

THE FRIENDS OF THE BLUEBIRDS

NEWSLETTER

Number 8

April, 2001

RESULTS FOR 2000. Many thanks to all who turned in your results. Although we monitored about the same number of boxes as in 1999, the number of nestings of bluebirds (both mountain and eastern) was nearly 200 lower. This decrease is at least partly due to a snowstorm that hit lines south and west of Brandon on May 12th. At the time, a few early nests contained newly hatched chicks but most had completed clutches in various stages of incubation and many of these nests were lost. Although there was some adult mortality, many birds re-nested (see p.2). However, loss of this first nest delayed the season for the bluebirds and reduced the number attempting another nesting after their first successful brood fledged. Details on box occupants were received for 2561 boxes on 67 lines (Table 1). There were 466 mountain, 349 eastern, 212 unidentified and 4 cross-nesting bluebird nesting attempts - a total of 1031 bluebird nestings. In addition, 1243 tree swallow, 103 wren, and 51 house sparrow nestings were reported. The numbers of the last three species were similar to those in 1999. A Kingbird, a chickadee, a chipmunk, deer mice, red squirrels and flying squirrels also found homes in our boxes. We hope that the weather will cooperate and that the bluebirds will have a successful season this year and regain their previous population levels.

VOLUNTEERS: Thanks to all our volunteers. You're doing a great job BUT we can always use more. If you know of some good bluebird habitat, we can provide boxes for a new line. Take a friend out and introduce him/her to bluebirds!

A VERY SPECIAL THANK YOU to Jerry Wollman and the Newdale Hutterite Colony who have donated yet another truckload of scrap lumber. They have supplied us with lumber for boxes for the last several years.

ANOTHER SPECIAL THANK YOU to Jack Webb who has converted this lumber into hundreds of boxes.

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 obtain new ones.

⇒ **Boxes and extra lids** are available from Barbara Robinson. There is no charge for the boxes but we do ask that you submit annual reports to let us know what is using them.

⇒ **Mapping:** Over the next couple of years we are planning to use Global Positioning System (GPS) to produce an accurate map of our boxes. In order to tie the GPS location to a box we need the box numbers to be clearly visible. If you could take care of the numbers, we will gradually enter the locations.

⇒ **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:** Please watch for banded birds. Jim Spear, Ray Pettinger, John Ross and Ray Blackmon have been banding for several years now.

⇒ **Data entry to the NABS-TBT Database:** If you would like to contribute your results to the NABS North America wide database, as well as to the Friends of the Bluebirds, the process is fairly simple. First, you must join NABS (US\$19.00) as you use your membership number as the password to enter the online database. (There are lots of other benefits to a membership including a subscription to *Bluebird*.) There is a one time entry of information about each box, then each time you visit your line, you enter information on what you found in your boxes. You can see your results come up on the screen and appear on the charts and maps on the site. For more information check out the NABS website www.nabluebirdsociety.org or contact Ann Smith.

TABLE 1. Nestings reported for the years 1984-2000. A nesting is defined as a nest in which at least one egg has been laid.

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
BLUEBIRDS																	
Mountain	506	580	580	762	894	995	747	719	712	771	901	820	755	491	716	563	466
Eastern	54	100	168	258	276	354	207	191	164	167	337	265	403	289	527	439	349
Unidentified	6	7	24	83	66	51	97	49	73	84	220	170	182	142	218	221	212
X-nesting	0	3	2	1	2	2	6	2	3	0	5	4	2	4	10	5	4
Total	566	690	774	1104	1238	1402	1057	961	952	1022	1463	1259	1342	846	1471	1228	1031
OTHERS																	
Tree Swallow	1194	1100	1068	994	1094	994	726	691	841	923	1164	1100	1215	1207	1240	1214	1243
House wren	74	79	59	57	46	85	91	122	94	192	211	184	154	168	138	92	103
House sparrow	87	35	28	32	38	46	43	28	21	49	26	34	20	35	62	42	51
Total Boxes	2123	1838	1899	2045	2382	2039	1678	1548	1843	2202	2691	2471	2641	2586	2650	2554	2561
Monitored Lines							44	34	36	58	68	61	68	65	67	59	67

*106 additional nests were found with frozen eggs

NOTES FROM THE LINE REPORTS

- ◆ **Jack Bryer** sent in his report in a different form this year. He tried out the **North American Bluebird Society – Transcontinental Bluebird Trail (NABS- TBT)** on-line reporting of his nest box occupants and turned in his results as the “Summary Report” from that program. It includes date of first nesting activity and of first eggs seen, as well as the usual total number of eggs and chicks.
- ◆ **Ray Pettinger** is continuing to band bluebirds and this year added 178 Mountain bluebirds and 31 Eastern bluebirds to his total of banded birds.
- ◆ For the first time, **Jim Spear**, who monitors a line north of Russell, captured a bluebird that had been banded by someone else. He later found that the bird had been banded two years earlier by **Ray Blackmon** in the Ochre River area.
- ◆ **Lloyd Powell** was host to 3 families of flying squirrels and one of chipmunks. He also had a Kingbird use one of his nest boxes. On April 3, Lloyd found a new nest with four bluebird eggs. As might be expected, the eggs froze and were abandoned.
- ◆ **Don Proven**, whose boxes are near Carberry, found a chickadee nest from which 8 young chickadees fledged.
- ◆ **Pat Bjarnason** had a bonus on her line. She found a wild turkey nesting only 4-5 feet from one of her boxes. As the turkey did not flush and she hesitated to disturb her, Pat did not get a count of the eggs.
- ◆ **Barbara Robinson** reported a major problem on her line at South Shilo. Seven boxes had eggs that were abandoned and at least three had blue feathers on the ground beneath them. Both tree swallow and bluebird eggs were involved. The boxes were located beneath a hydro line and have since been removed. Barbara blames at least two Kestrels that she saw sitting on the line for the damage and thinks that the adult bluebirds and tree swallows were killed and the eggs then failed to hatch.
- ◆ **Dwight Carkener**, who has a line near the Assiniboine River between Oak Lake and Virden, had another type of problem. His boxes are mounted on ½ inch pipe. Two of his poles were bent completely over by a black bear checking out the boxes.

EFFECT OF A LOCAL SNOWSTORM. On May 12, a heavy wet snowfall occurred in the area northwest of Souris, MB. A total of 169 nestboxes on 4 different lines were checked within the next 1-5 days. There had been 42 bluebird nests initiated before the storm (11 mountain, 18 Eastern, 12 unidentified and one cross-nesting). Of these only 7 Mountain bluebird nestings survived intact. One mountain bluebird pair renested and 3 abandoned the nest. The eastern bluebirds seemed to suffer more. Three adult females were found dead on their nests and 2 nests had dead young. Only one eastern bluebird egg hatched but the chick did not survive. None of the eggs in the unidentified bluebird nests hatched either. The birds either renested (9

eastern, 5 unidentified) or abandoned the nests with tree swallows eventually taking over most of them. Fortunately, the storm seems to have been fairly localized. Two lines NW of Oak Lake were also checked within a week of the storm. One line, about 23 km away, lost only 6 out of 22 nests; another, 32 km away did not appear to be affected. The usefulness of frequent checking as a means of interpreting what has happened on a bluebird line is illustrated here. With the exception of a higher incidence of tree swallow nests built over bluebird eggs (not usually visible till the boxes are cleaned) and a higher proportion of tree swallows to bluebirds, there was no evidence of the effect of the storm to be found when the boxes were checked two weeks later.

NABS 2001: A Bluebird Odyssey This year's North American Bluebird Society (NABS) convention is being organized by the Ohio Bluebird Society and will be held **June 21-24 in Columbus, Ohio**. The program includes workshops for affiliates (one on newsletters), field trips, displays, papers on bluebird related topics, guest speakers and a banquet. For more information contact Ann Smith (728-5102); Doug LeVasseur at emdlev@clover.net or visit the NABS website at www.nabluebirdsociety.org If you feel NABS 2001 is being held too far away for you to make this trip, make your plans now for next year when the conference will be in Penticton, BC.

DELTA MARSH BIRDING FESTIVAL-MAY 11-13, 2001

This sounds like a great weekend of birding. Highlights include: lectures, daily guided birding tours at Delta Marsh, self guiding tours, banquet, barbeque, and a trade fair with birding organizations, artists, businesses, etc. To register or for more information call: Tel: (204) 857-8637 or check the Website at: www.dmbio.org/festival

BIRDS ON THE INTERNET: Gwyn Richards and Bill Gallaway are developing a web site for the BJ Hales museum at Brandon University. It has a lot of links to a variety of birding web sites including one to an online Bird Guide which has pictures and a brief account of the biology of all North American birds. Even if you know your birds, this site is worth a visit for the pictures alone. The address is <http://flinflon.brandonu.ca/bjhales> The Ellis Bird Farm site, www.ellisbirdfarm.ab.ca has some great pictures of mountain bluebird nestlings to use in aging the birds.

FEEDBACK: Any comments, suggestions or items for inclusion in the newsletter would be much appreciated.

COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

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