

BLUEBIRD PRESERVATION IN SOUTHWESTERN MANITOBA 1960-1980

Norah Lane

Bluebird preservation in this part of Canada started with the nature study group, The Brandon Junior Birders, founded in 1958 by John and Norah Lane, Brandon, Manitoba, Canada. In 1959 John Lane had a special vision in mind--a project wherein his club could aid in restoring the fast declining population of the Eastern and Mountain Bluebirds. He had not seen a nesting pair of bluebirds for 30 years and none of the boys had ever seen a bluebird. John explained that the scarcity of bluebirds was due to a lack of nesting cavities. His challenge to the boys was simple: Build and set out nest boxes so that we can BRING BACK THE BLUEBIRDS.

How eagerly those lads responded. In 1960 they set out their first boxes. By 1962 they saw their first bluebirds as four nest boxes were occupied by Eastern Bluebirds and fifteen boxes by Mountain Bluebirds. The year 1963 saw a total of 749 nesting boxes erected with numbers and locations recorded; 34 of the boxes were occupied by Eastern Bluebirds while 36 contained Mountain Bluebirds.

This success stimulated greater efforts. Each year new members were added to the club so that by 1974 the membership through the years had totaled over 200 boys.

Dedicated helpers built most of the nest boxes allowing the Juniors and their leader more time for field work. When the lines became extended, volunteers from outlying areas assisted in maintaining and monitoring the boxes.

Banding bluebirds had begun in 1970. In order to learn their migratory habits John Lane had obtained a banding permit from the Canadian Wildlife Service through the B.J.Hales Museum of Natural History, Brandon, University. Between 1970 and 1974 inclusive he banded a total of 12,462 bluebirds (mostly juveniles). These included 10,433 Mountain, 1975 Eastern, and 54 hybrids.

Annual reports giving highlights and population counts have been published each year in the **Blue Jay**, a publication of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society. This fall, 1980, the twentieth annual report will be compiled.

Since the death of John Lane in 1975 a growing number of volunteer helpers, The Friends of the Bluebirds, willingly look after the nestlines in the vicinity of their homes. This group, which includes eight Junior Birders, numbered 90 members in 1979.

Since the start of the project in 1959 a total of 5051 nest boxes have been set out, but many of this total

are not now in place due to the effects of time, weather, and interference. A number of nestlines are not being checked due to a lack of personnel.

A multi-faceted study of our nestlines has been initiated by Dr. Richard C. Rounds, Brandon University, and is being done by Hugh Munro, B.S., Brandon University. A note by Dr. Rounds in this issue of **Sierra** offers further explanation.

Spring and fall meetings of The Friends of the Bluebirds are held at the home of the co-ordinator, Mrs.

Norah Lane, where all records are kept along with the topographical maps on which bluebird trails are marked. An exchange of experiences and discussion of relative merits of boxes and placement continues through the afternoon.

Following our next meeting in September 1980, an up-to-date report will be compiled. So far, verbal reports indicate an increase in bluebirds over last year. ■

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Bluebird Research on Canadian Prairies

A major research effort concerning both Mountain and Eastern Bluebirds began this year in southern Manitoba. Using the nest box system and extensive data files initiated by the late Dr. John Lane, the multifaceted program will continue for several years. Volunteer monitoring by the Friends of the Bluebirds organization is an integral part of the project and is coordinated by Mrs. Norah Lane.

The first stage includes ecological and physical classification of 2000 box sites, along the lines of that recommended by the North American Bluebird Society, but modified to fit local conditions. All data is being computerized and will be correlated to use data from 1980 and as many past years as records allow. The major emphasis is on habitat selection. The results will form an M.S. thesis by Hugh L.

Munro through the University of Manitoba. His supervisor, and the director of other research efforts, is Dr. Richard C. Rounds of Brandon University.

Future projects will include behavioral studies, clutch and brood sizes and success, hybridization, and possibly food studies. One paper on fertility in albinistic eggs for Mountain Bluebirds has already been submitted for publication, and a review of cross-breeding is in progress. It is hoped that future theses and a renewal of banding can begin in 1981. Readers of **Sierra** will be informed of efforts and results of studies in the future.

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