



"Bringing back Bluebirds for Future Generations"

# Bluebird News



Volume 28 Issue 4

Fall 2018

## "Remembering Doreen Hayes Scriven"

We reported in the last issue that Doreen Scriven, one of the founders of the Bluebird Recovery Program, passed away. Unfortunately, this newsletter will be coming out after her memorial service on November 10th at the Unitarian Society of Minneapolis. Here is her obituary sent by her children:

Dorene died peacefully at home with her three children at her bedside just before dawn on June 25th, 2018 following months of gradual decline from congestive heart failure and ischemia. Dorene was always an upbeat and energetic multi-talented wife, mother of three, grandmother to five, and devoted friend to many across the country and the planet. She was a woman often ahead of her time with regard to causes like women's rights, job equality, free choice, racial equality, land preservation, conservation and even recycling in the late 1960s. She espoused world views rather than isolationist, focused ideology, and was a consummate and skilled naturalist and advocate for wildlife. She supported, led and worked tirelessly with others on local and national wildlife rehabilitation efforts, including the Bluebird recovery effort which she helped lead for decades. During her twenties Dorene trained to become a pilot. In addition to her passionate interest in biology and nature, she was an accomplished woodworker and handywoman. She designed and built much of her cabin with her own hands and, early in married life, built furniture for her home. She taught her children to be independent and, regardless of gender, skilled in many of these areas, whilst working various volunteer and paid jobs. She volunteered in

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school PTA, on neighborhood initiatives, then as an assistant in the school library. This was followed by employment as the Unitarian Universalist administrative assistant and then as a copy editor. For many years she held a leadership position in the Minneapolis Audubon Chapter. In 1989 she published *Bluebirds in the Upper Midwest: A Guide to Successful Trail Management* followed by several editions of *Bluebird Trails: A Guide to Success*.

Throughout her life Dorene was the tireless supporter of her intensely career-focused husband and his graduate students, hosting people from around the world in her home. She became close friends with many of them and continued to travel and stay in touch with friends all over the world. She is survived by her three children Ellen, Terry

Ann and Mark and their spouses, as well as five grandchildren and two great grandchildren, with a third on her way at the time of her death. Dorene is preceded in death by her loving husband, Skip, who fell in love with her during their days attending grammar school in Hillsborough, California. He won the prize of her hand in marriage while at University of California, Berkeley, even as they competed for the same academic scholarship. Skip, an accomplished University Professor, loved her deeply and depended on Dorene for most everything practical. She looked forward to traveling the world with him and sharing times with friends and family. Dorene championed many causes and had a major impact on those who knew her.

You can share memories here:  
<https://maxhealthme9.wixsite.com/dorenescriven>

Donations in her honor can be made here:

**The Dorene Scriven Bluebird Education Fund** at the Minneapolis Chapter of the National Audubon Society. Checks noting "The Dorene Scriven Education Fund" can be sent to P.O. Box 3801, Minneapolis, MN 55403. Online donations can be made at:  
<http://audubonchapterofminneapolis.org/donate>.

**The L.E. & D.H. Scriven Research Fellowship Fund:**

<https://www.cems.umn.edu/alumni/giving/grad/>, the University of Minnesota Scholarship fund already established in honor of Dorene and Skip.

## "The House Wren Debate Revisited – Part 1"

Althea Sherman (1853 – 1943) had an intimate and complex relationship with the House wren. She studied the House wren for nearly thirty years, observing and recording all aspects of the bird, including feeding, courtship, breeding, nest life and the wren's relationship with its own and other species of birds.

Miss Sherman's journals indicate that her association with the House wren began peacefully enough. She maintained several bird boxes in her yard and plugged the entrance holes of unused boxes with corncobs to keep House sparrows out. Ever-watchful, Miss Sherman was aware when the House wren first visited her dooryard and observed as a male wren poked, pushed and dashed at the corncob, trying to gain entry. In her journal, Miss Sherman wrote, "...If the House Wren has not been here before, how did it know a hole was there?" She then set about making or adapting, (with smaller entrance holes) six houses for the wrens.

The male wren attracted a mate and they raised the first family of wrens in the Sherman dooryard. Miss Sherman greatly enjoyed the perky song and the lively character of the species. She found them to be comically pompous and self-righteous, especially the males. In one journal entry she said, "Young hatched. Papa coming in for a great deal of scolding, apparently too clumsy to assist in feeding of young, although he had been permitted to feed Mama-Wren before the hatching. Sheepishly and somewhat nettled, he keeps guard over the box, possibly for want of better employment." She later wrote of

the mother, "A flock of 6 baby Wrens with a ruffled mother, scolding and busy, made the yard prohibitive. Anything in sight displeased her ladyship, who undoubtedly swelled up with the importance of presiding over so large a family. She scolded at anything or everything, even a passing automobile and the blowing of a distant factory whistle. Busy, but very happy, she led her flock about from bush to tree, never resting a minute until after putting them to bed, when she usually spent a little time feeding alone."

It was not long until all the houses and still other cavities were filled with wrens. In the third season since their arrival Miss Sherman tallied in her journal that ten pairs of wrens were nesting on her property (and more yet in surrounding areas). Even with the conservative projections of five nestlings per pair, she estimated fifty wrens could be raised in her dooryard that season, and this did not include the likelihood of more than one brood. This did, however, allow much opportunity for study.

Regarding, behavior, she noted that the male wren bonds with the house more than with his mate. One male was recorded to outlive a succession of five mates in one season, maintaining the same house throughout. She wrote of the wide range of proclivities, such as polygamy, and skills of the wrens as parents. The males, she wrote, were often more talk than action. She recorded the practice of the female wren gathering her fledglings each evening at dusk and leading them to a roosting place where she would tuck them in and

leave them for the night. This occurred in an abandoned cat-bird nest, a robin platform, a hanging basket and so on.

Miss Sherman was the first to report of females fighting to the death over mate and house. These battles would be lengthy, with great chasing, stalking, scolding, fanning of wings, and then determined and deadly attacks. They would clinch together and roll and plunge their beaks into each other until one or the other was driven off or killed. During these confrontations one or more males would sit atop their houses and sing.

The first indication of Miss Sherman's distress is noted early in the fourth season with the entry, "The character of the Wren, the fact that I have seen it destroy Phoebe's nest, also that it was the only species around to do the evil deed make me confident that it was the Wren that threw two Phoebe eggs out of its nest under the porch". From that point on, Miss Sherman recorded all instances of despoiled nests, eggs and young, and the particular species she determined responsible. Regarding wrens, her observations led her to conclude that it was the male, and most likely the unmated males, that were so destructive to other species; the females reserving their destructive tendencies for each other. She recorded violations by several other species also, including the Blue jay, House sparrow, Bronzed grackle, Catbird, Cowbird, and European starling.

As a scientist dedicated to facts and truth, Miss Sherman conducted research using skins, including the head and bill, and House sparrow eggs, to deter-

## "The House Wren Debate Revisited – Part 1" *Continued*

mine the precise size and shape of holes made by forcing the various beaks against the eggs. From this research she could ascertain whether wrens (which never produced holes larger than 3 mm) or other birds were the culprits. As time went on, she indeed found the wren accountable for the vast majority of the destruction.

The dilemma was growing for Miss Sherman, who still found endearing qualities in the wren, as the following journal entry shows: "This afternoon I found four young wrens. They certainly are attractive and amusing little imps, with long dark down and open pale yellow mouths. They would be a joy if one could forget the evil of their grown up days. On July 21 I found the shell of the Blackbilled Cuckoo's egg that had the small holes in it. The holes and the long narrow slits seem to prove

that a Wren was the frightful devil that thrust its sharp bayonet into the egg."

Miss Sherman also recorded the many species consistently ravaged by the House wren. Sadly, the list is long and was not made up only of other cavity-nesting birds, but seemed to include all species. She listed Phoebe, Eastern bluebird, Mourning dove, Black-billed and Yellow-billed cuckoos, Northern flicker, Downy and Hairy woodpeckers, White-breasted nuthatch, Song sparrow, Vesper sparrow, Chipping sparrow, Grasshopper sparrow, Bewick's wren, Tufted titmouse, Black-capped chickadee, Catbird, Brown thrasher, Veery, Cardinal, Robin, Barn swallow, Purple martin, Baltimore oriole, Warbling vireo, Bobolink, Traill's flycatcher, and Common yellowthroat. Even the Short-billed marsh wren (Sedge wren),

whose habitat was completely unlike that of the House wren, was not immune. "The song seems to be dying in the throat of the Short-billed Marsh Wren", wrote Miss Sherman; and the species was harassed until it was driven off.

Reprinted from Wings, the newsletter of the Johnson County, Iowa, Songbird Project, Summer 1993

Watch for Part 2 in our next issue.



## New Members

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| • Kathleen Truhler, White Bear Lake, MN   | • Brenda Hubers, Willmar, MN           |
| • Chalres & Denise Smalley, Chatfield, MN | • Richard Doll, St. Cloud, MN          |
| • Lyndel Steinborn, Belle Plaine, MN      | • Mary Sue Hagerty, Waseca, MN.        |
| • Jessica Wollenburg, Brownsdale, MN      | • Sandra Troendle, St. Charles, MN     |
| • Jennifer Gathje, Owatonna, MN           | • Doug & Betsy Wells, Fergus Falls, MN |
| • Rick & Mary Dahline, Willmar, MN        | • Sherry Munyon, North St. Paul, MN    |
| • Mike Thorson, New London, MN            |  |

## Attention Members

In an effort to clean up our membership records and begin the process of making the quarterly newsletter available via email we are asking you to please send your current email address to membership to [Bbrpmembership@gmail.com](mailto:Bbrpmembership@gmail.com).

Additionally please let us know if you'd like to receive future newsletters via email even if you previously said yes. By agreeing to receive the newsletter via email you will help BBRP reduce printing and mailing expense.

Thank you, BBRP Board.



### ***"16th Annual South Central Bluebirders' Picnic" By Loren & Ardy Murphy***

The South Central MN Bluebird Picnic, held at Riverbend Nature Center in Faribault on September 22nd, was enjoyed by all attending.

State Bank of Faribault again this year donated the hamburger, from Carlander Cattle Company, for the BBQ sandwiches. Faribault HyVee donated \$25 this year to the picnic for essentials needed (paper products, condiments, etc). Fareway of Faribault donated \$25 toward hamburger buns from their bakery. We are thankful for the generosity of these three businesses who contribute each year to our picnic.

The Bluebird guests brought their favorite dish to pass and all was delicious.

Following the meal, there was a discussion of the Birdbirders' year-end results and problems faced this year, questions were tackled and door prizes given out to some lucky people. A wonderful evening for all. Thank You, Loren and Ardy Murphy.



Group picture of those attending the South Central MN Bluebird Picnic on Sept. 22, 2018



#### **100 Patchers present:**

Larry Buhr, Vince Managan, Laura Managan, Loren Murphy, Mary Bailey, Bill Bailey, Ron Guck

A Thank You was received from River Bend Nature Center for the combined contribution of \$101.00 from BBRP and the Bluebirders attending the South Central Annual Picnic on September 22, 2018, held at their facility. It will be used for the educational programs offered during the year.

### ***"Metro Area Bluebirder Fall Gathering" By Jack Hauser***

A group of Bluebirders from the Twin Cities area gathered on October 6th, 2018. After a delicious pot luck breakfast we had our annual meeting. Two items that were emphasized and discussed were the importance of trapping House Sparrows and providing mealworms in cold weather. Both have been changed from being "Optional" to "Required" to protect the bluebird. Fifteen members were present.

**Bluebird Monitors Wanted: Wanted** – Monitors to check a southwest metro Bluebird trail starting spring of 2019. Two golf courses are available: Interlachen Country Club in Edina and Bent Creek Golf Course in Eden Prairie. Golf carts are available (free) if you prefer not to walk. Please call Jack Hauser at 952-831-8132 or email at [jgshauser@gmail.com](mailto:jgshauser@gmail.com) if interested.



#### **Front row, from left to right:**

Dave Schmidt, Ivona Domnisoru, Lisa McIntire.

#### **Middle Row:**

Jill Schmidt, Ginny Nemec, Clara Bleak, Heidi Hermes, Jack Hauser.

#### **Back Row:**

Chuck Robison, Angie Begosh, Jim Egge, Larry Ingrid Welty, Tim Hermes, Cristian Domnisoru.

**"Expo Preview" By Jeanie Mortenson, Chair**

Hello to everyone. I hope you have had a great summer and great bluebirding season! In September a year ago I resigned from BBRP with a heavy heart. It was hard to quit. I had chaired the Expo for 12 years and been on the Board since 2005. I had always enjoyed doing this each year, but right then I felt I had to leave. In August of this year I was asked to come back on the Board and chair the Expo for 2019. (Keith Radel said when you do your article for the Newsletter say "I'm back.") I am very happy to be planning the Expo with my side kick Glen Shirley and a new Board member Mike Sandberg.

I had secured the school at Cannon Falls for 2018 before I resigned. It is a great venue for us. I was very happy when I called them to see if they'd be available for 2019. So we will have the Expo on Saturday, April 6th in Cannon Falls. So far we've gotten Jim Gilbert who does the Sunday morning show Nature Notes on WCCO 830 on your dial. He was one of our speakers years ago when we were at Medford School. I had so many calls on him, everyone was so excited that he'd be at our Expo. Keith Radel will be back with so many useful tips for both novices and experienced bluebirders. Our wonderful humorist and friend Al Batt will be with us again. Al makes us laugh so much and is such a joy to listen to. Al had been very ill battling cancer and it is so nice he is doing so well and coming back to our Expo. A new Board member, Dave Schmidt, will also be speaking on Recording your nesting results. Still working on the program and will have more information later on.

It will be so good to see everyone again. Hopefully this will be a good date for all of you. I don't know where this year has gone, it's hard to believe it's November and the holidays are coming very quickly.

Take care, have a great Holiday season and mark April 6th, 2019 on your calendar for the Expo.

**"I have monitored a Bluebird trail for 30 years " By Mary Roen**

I have monitored a Bluebird trail for 30 years and I always seem to find some surprises on my trail.

This year as I was checking nest boxes I found a pair of boxes in which one box had an empty grass nest that appeared to be a Bluebird nest. The box that is paired with it had a Tree Swallow nest with 6 eggs. The next week I checked and the grass nest was still empty, and the Tree Swallow nest had the 6 eggs plus 3 Eastern Bluebird eggs in it! The following week, there were 4 Bluebird eggs and one Tree Swallow egg. The next week was the same. On my next check, the Bluebirds had all hatched and the last Tree Swallow egg was gone. These Bluebirds thrived and fledged. The Bluebird nest in the paired box was never used. I have been trying to figure out what happened here. Usually Bluebirds and Tree Swallows nest in paired boxes with no problems. Did the Bluebird see the Tree Swallow nest with eggs and her nesting instinct took over to lay eggs in that nest also? Did the female Bluebird intend to take over the Tree Swallow nest? Interesting...

Mary Roen • River Falls, WI • mbroen@hotmail.com

**Have you had a change of address?**

If you have moved, changed from a box number to a street address, or have your mail forwarded for several months, please let us know. If you are a snowbird let us know the dates when you leave and return. Under bulk mailing restrictions, the Postal Service does not forward newsletters, but returns them to BBRP with postage due. If the return notice has a new address, BBRP then sends your newsletter to the correct address with the additional required postage.

Please contact Membership Chair, Brianna Frisch, 507-459-4829 or email us at [Bbrpmembership@gmail.com](mailto:Bbrpmembership@gmail.com) if this applies to you. Your help in keeping our costs down is greatly appreciated. Thank you.

**BLUEBIRD RECOVERY PROGRAM MEMBERSHIP ENROLLMENT & RENEWAL**

Enrollment in the Bluebird Recovery Program includes: initial Information Packet containing a full color Trail Guide, Top Ten Tips including colored Nest Guide, Record Keeping booklet, Pole Assembly instruction sheet, yearly Report Form & quarterly Newsletter. There are also annual informational meetings and a yearly Bluebird Expo. Consultation and advice are available by phone, e-mail, correspondence or in the field.

Enrollment contributions are tax deductible.

\_\_\_\_\_ New Member \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal \_\_\_\_\_

Membership periods are:

\_\_\_\_\_ 2 years \$23.00 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 years \$55.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Lifetime \$150.00

\_\_\_\_\_ \* Gift Membership \* - indicate amount & period of gift \_\_\_\_\_



*Brianna back Bluebirds  
for Future Generations!*

Member Name \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ County \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

\* If giving a Gift Membership, please provide your name so that the recipient can be informed of your generosity. \_\_\_\_\_

Send to:

Bluebird Recovery Program, c/o Brianna Frisch  
395 Williams Street • Lewiston, MN 55952



***"Saving Rice County's Bluebirds – Radel Receives Wildlife Enhancement Award"***

Posted on September 5, 2018 from the Rice County Soil and Water Conservation website blog:

If you take a drive down one of Rice County's gravel roads, chances are you'll see a bluebird house and maybe even spy a bluebird perched along a fence line. Today, Minnesota boasts a healthy bluebird population, but this hasn't always been the case. Back in 1979, Rice County's most famous naturalist, Orwin Rustad, recorded zero nesting bluebirds in the county. Last year almost 4,000 bluebirds were fledged, thanks to the efforts of citizen volunteers through the Minnesota Bluebird Recovery Program.

Around one-third of Minnesota's bluebirds are born in Rice County, which leads the state in bluebird recovery. Every week about 100 volunteers crisscross the countryside to ensure healthy nesting habitat for this beautiful bird species. One volunteer among the hundred stands out and was recently honored for his efforts in bluebird conservation. The Rice Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) selected Keith Radel to receive the 2018 Wildlife Enhancement Award for Rice County. Radel accepted the award at the Rice County Best of the Best Awards at the Rice County Fair this past July.

Radel's interest in bird conservation started in his childhood. He recalled, "I remember learning about the extinction of the passenger pigeon in grade school. We had this 'resource' and our ancestors took such poor care of it that it disappeared. That stuck with me and I decided that if I ever got the chance to help a bird in trouble, I was going to do it."

Years later, Radel seized the opportunity to volunteer with the Minnesota Blue Bird Recovery Program. After moving from Marshall in southwestern Minnesota to Faribault in 1982, Radel started working to restore Minnesota's bluebird population. Today, Radel drives around fifty miles per week to check his "bluebird trail," a series of nest boxes along a route of roads. Along his trail, Radel checks and maintains 175 nest boxes each week throughout the mating season, which lasts from April through August. In total, Radel has established around 500 nest boxes, with other volunteers helping to check and maintain them. Across Rice County, about a hundred volunteers, each with their own trail, check and maintain around 2,000 nest boxes in cooperation with Rice County



landowners.

Bluebirds began to decline in the 1920's with the introduction of European House Sparrows and Starlings. Their decline continued through the 1970's due to loss of nesting habitat. Bluebirds prefer to build their nests in the holes carved out by woodpeckers that are usually found in old dead trees. Radel explained, "Nowadays, people look at an old decaying tree as one that needs to be cut down, but there's more wildlife in a dead tree than in one that's alive. The woodpeckers will make a hole for a nest this year and raise their babies. Next year, they will make a new hole. The bluebird, tree swallow, chickadee, nuthatch, and even wood ducks can nest in the woodpecker's old hole. These dead trees are so important in providing habitat for nesting bird species."

Besides leaving dead trees to stand for habitat for nesting birds, nest boxes can provide needed cavity space for the species to nest.

Radel and others working in the Bluebird Recovery Program have learned much through the years to develop a successful nest box program. Checking the boxes weekly has been the key to the success of fledging healthy baby bluebirds. Each week, volunteers remove house sparrows, mice, or wasps if they are found nesting in the box. They also count the eggs/fledglings and remove any babies that have passed away. To prevent harmful gnats from killing the baby bluebirds, volunteers mist the babies with a vanilla spray. Finally, the volunteers clean out the nest boxes in between broods to prevent parasites from infecting the nest.

Thanks to the efforts of Radel and other volunteers across Rice County and Minnesota, the bluebird population has rebounded to a healthy level and can be enjoyed by future generations. To view bluebirds in Rice County, Radel recommends traveling along Rice County Road 22. Along this road, you can see around 20 nest boxes, seventy percent of which fledged bluebirds this year.

The Rice SWCD congratulates Keith Radel for winning this year's Wildlife Enhancement Award! Thank you for your dedication and efforts to preserve this beautiful bird species in Rice County. Congratulations!



## Need help or have suggestions? Call your County Coordinator!

If you are an active bluebirder, and would like to donate some of your time to help others help the bluebirds, the BBRP is looking for more county coordinators. If interested, contact Carrol Johnson, State Coordinator, at 507-664-9433 or [mnbbluebirder@hotmail.com](mailto:mnbbluebirder@hotmail.com) for more information.

<b>AITKIN</b> Steve Gilbertson Aitkin 218-927-1953	<b>CROW WING</b> Mary Kalinowski Baxter 218-829-5297	Bob Hursh Edina 952-334-5084	<b>LAKE</b> Beth Urban Ely 218-365-5047	<b>PENNINGTON</b> Dave & Diane Peterson Thief River Falls 218-681-7614	<b>STEARNS</b> Vacant
<b>ANOKA</b> Jeanne Wilkinson Anoka 763-229-9972	<b>DAKOTA</b> David Schmidt Inver Grove Heights 651-457-9195	Pete Meyer Mound 952-472-7449	<b>LE SUEUR</b> Bruce Smisek Montgomery 507-364-8966	<b>POPE</b> Bruce & Barb Mulvaney Glenwood 320-278-3763	<b>SWIFT</b> Bill Hoberg Benson 320-843-3988
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*From Al Batt: The second half of October brought five eastern bluebirds to my yard. I christened them the bluebirds of happiness, kindness, forgiveness, hopefulness and wellness.*

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*"Bringing back Bluebirds for Future Generations!"*

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Photo by Doris Glander

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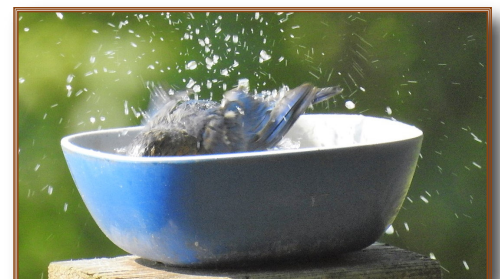
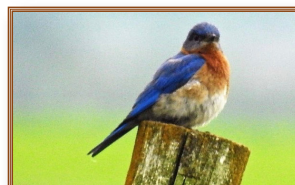
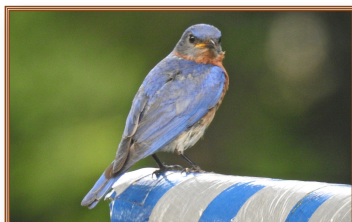
***Upcoming Events***

**Dec. 31, 2018 – Saturday**  
**Trail reports deadline extended to Dec. 31st.**

**Jan. 19th, 2019 - Saturday - 9:30 a.m.**  
**Bluebird Coffee,**  
**Hy-Vee Restaurant Back Room**  
**Faribault, MN**

**April 6, 2019 – Saturday**  
**Bluebird EXPO**  
**Cannon Falls**

*Our Mission:  
"To encourage, inspire, educate and  
assist individuals and organizations to  
become actively involved in the  
restoration and preservation efforts to  
sustain a healthy and expanding  
population of bluebirds and other  
native cavity nesters."*



*Photos by Doris Glander*

***Thank you to everyone who wrote articles, provided photographs or helped with the mailing of this publication of the Bluebird News.***