



"Raising our Bluebirds for Future Generations!"

Bluebird News



Volume 30 Issue 3

Summer 2020

Feedback from our BBRP Public Lands Nestbox Program

Nerstrand Big Woods State Park received 8 new nestboxes from BBRP. Here is what their naturalist had to say.

"Nerstrand Big Woods State Park is a great place to visit when you are looking to see birds. Home to numerous species of warblers, flycatchers, woodpeckers, and thrushes, it is easy to spend a whole day with binoculars glued to your face.

Earlier this summer I noticed a flash of blue near the park's entrance sign. Much to my delight, I quickly realized that it was an eastern bluebird. I watched him for several minutes, as he would land in an oak, swoop down to the ground, and then return to the nearby nest box.

Nest boxes like these compliment the many natural nest sites that the state park protects. This year nearly 100 young hatched in the park's fourteen nest boxes. It is encouraging to hear this, because this creates an opportunity for our visitors to see more of these beautiful birds. When they do, I hope they find as much joy in the experience as I do."

Andy Wendt, Interpretive Naturalist, Nerstrand Big Woods State Park

BBRP Board Updates

Unfortunately, we did not have an Expo this year but your BBRP board has continued to meet and plan for the future. We had a Zoom board meeting in June and met in person in August. We were masked and social distancing at the picnic shelter at Oddfellows Park in Northfield and it was good to visit in person and work on BBRP issues.

It has been several years since the BBRP Board had a chairperson. After the departure of a chairperson several years ago the board members have led meetings on a rotating basis. This was all during difficult times dealing with IT issues, banking issues, and the task of setting up our own 501(c)(3). Before the June 10th meeting David Schmidt volunteered to take a leading role on the board and was unanimously elected chairperson at that Zoom board meeting. The Chairperson position is a two-year term with a possible one-time renewal of two more years. David has been a real asset to the organization, spearheading the task of updating our website and dealing with other IT issues and has demonstrated his leadership skills already as a board member for the last two years. He is a volunteer at the Minnesota Zoo and a certified Minnesota Master Naturalist and has coordinated the monitoring of several bluebird trails in Northern Dakota County with a crew of volunteers for a number of years.

The board has been working on updating contact information on membership, especially for our many lifetime members, sending out postcard to them. Have you checked out

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our new online membership system featured in the Spring newsletter? We are also closely monitoring the Covid-19 situation as we deal with the difficulty in planning for the coming year. As Mary Bailey pointed out, the Southeastern Fall Picnic, usually held in Chatfield, was cancelled. The South Central Picnic, usually held in Faribault, needs a new coordinator if we are to continue that in the future.

Finally, we encourage all of you who monitor bluebird trails to file your Trail Report with BBRP either by entering your nesting reports online at our website or mailing in a paper report. This is important to know how our bluebirds are doing in Minnesota. We hope you are all staying healthy and hope you have a great autumn.

Vanilla Gnat Deterrent, by David Schmidt

Gnats were reported as a major problem for many when BBRP began receiving 2019 trail reports last fall. Some offered their solution of spraying the nest and chicks with vanilla, which acts as a good mask to the CO₂ given off by them and adults. Those who used the vanilla reported good success with chick survival, however there was no definitive guideline as to how often to spray. Some said once chicks hatched they sprayed on their regular weekly nest visits. Others wanted to insure no harm would come to the chicks so they resprayed every other day. One thing was, for certain, it was effective as no chicks were lost when spray was applied.

This sounds like a great solution, however not everyone can monitor their trail every week; some monitor every 10 days or even every other week. We know reduced frequency of monitoring can be a problem for chick survival during gnat season. Carrol Johnson, BBRP's statewide coordinator, falls into the category of not always able to get to his trail every week, so he came up with an idea for a more long term masking solution. He had used a car air freshener in his truck and realized over time it lasted all summer long, so he thought why wouldn't something like that work in a bluebird nest box. The problem was how to hang a 'tree' shaped car air freshener in a nest box.



His nest box of choice is the Gilbertson PVC which has a small pilot hole on the underside of the roof making it very conducive for a small screw. With that he thought it would be a perfect spot to attach the scented tree. So, he was off to the car parts store to purchase several scented trees. Wouldn't you know, they even had them in vanilla scent. Perfect!



However, a small problem existed as the tree was a little longer than the space on the underside of the roof. So a little tree trimming was in order; not the kind we do for Christmas, rather it needed to be shortened a bit. Remove the string, cut off the top and screw it into the hole, which works fine with the older style wooden roof boxes.



One more hurdle had to be cleared with the latest version of the Gilbertson PVC box. The new ones now have a PVC board as the roof, which lasts much longer than wood, but also is much denser and harder to insert a screw. The solution was to install a molly bolt in the hole, screw through the scented tree and into the molly, problem solved.



As a trial Carrol had several friends try his new gnat deterrent solution in different areas of southeastern Minnesota with very positive results. Not one chick lost!

Actual results from Fern Vesledahl of Nerstrand, MN using Carrol's 'tree' deterrent for the 2020 season said, "I had installed the vanilla tree at 8 different sites on the trail around my area. I was

Vanilla Gnat Deterrent, Cont.

surprised by how long the vanilla fragrance lasted. It lasted through 2 nestings and still I could smell the aroma. During the trial time I did not spray any additional vanilla on the nestlings. All chicks remained safe from the gnats and successfully fledged. I feel this helped deter the gnats and kept the chicks safe between the time of weekly checking." She adds, "I'll definitely use this next year!! I ordered my vanilla trees off the internet. It will be a good thing to do on a cold winter day, to get ready for another nesting season."

Carrol's other test person was Houston county coordinator, Mike Jeresek. This what he had to say: "1. I had to trim the trees a bit to have them fit inside the bottom of the roof inside the box.

2. Secure the tree with a 1/2" sheet rock screw to the bottom of the inside of the roof.

3. No need to add any additional spray to the tree.

My results -- the four boxes where I used only the scented trees to prevent gnats were all successful in fledging bluebirds with zero gnat problems this season. In S.E. Minnesota gnats are generally bad from late May thru mid-July. I will be putting the scented trees in boxes starting in mid-May next year."



1" square piece
of Scented Tree

Jim Humeniuk, Beltrami county coordinator has a similar but different solution for Peterson nest boxes. As there is no easy access to the underside of the roof he had to come up with a little different installation method for the scented 'tree'. Here's what he had to say about his process, "I have found that if you take a vanilla car freshener and cut in to 1" squares. Using a plastic pin mount in the bird house, it has same effect as spraying with vanilla. . . there has been no negative affect to the birds. The pin keeps the birds away from

making contact. All of my boxes have been Peterson type and I mount in upper back." See his photo above.

If you have a good idea like these and want to talk it over with Carrol or have questions about the scented tree application described here you can call him at 507-649-0126 or email him at mnbluebirder@hotmail.com.

Thank You for Donations to BBRP

Barb Gracia, Inver Grove Heights MN

In memory of Bob Walz:

Joe & Cindy Walz, Roseville MN

Marylalice Stepaniak, Faribault MN

Jean Romo, North Branch MN

Cindy Mattson, Forest Lake MN

Bill and Margie Dahlof, Buffalo MN

Janet Thompson, Cedar MN

Clair & Kathy Lillis, Hugo MN

Sue & Tom Leaf, Center City MN

Nicholas Sausen, Minneapolis MN

Sandra Stevens, Bloomington MN

Suzanne LaPalm, Oakdale MN

Donald & June Rott, Roseville MN

Chisago-Isanti DFL

In memory of Kevin Oldridge

Rick and Brenda Meuser, St. Louis MO



Photo by Doris Glander

County Coordinator Corner

Dear Bluebirders,

September, 2020

I hope your bluebird summer went well and that you encountered few challenges. With the season waning, I am heartened by the bluebirds that fly around my yard and the “baby talk” songs of the young ones as they prepare for their journey south.

I encourage you now to submit your reports to BBRP. That can be done electronically at the BBRP website at bbrp.org. If you encounter any problems with that process, you can get help from David Schmidt by emailing him at schmidt_dw@yahoo.com. He is very good at responding to those who need help. You can also print a paper copy of the report and send it in via the USPS.

At the end of the season, you don't need to do anything special to your boxes other than cleaning out any nesting material. We leave most of our boxes up over the winter to provide roosting space for the birds on migration. Several will gather in one box to keep warm as they travel south and when they return again in the spring. The exception is the county road boxes which get hit with the snow from the plow. We remove the cylinders after migration is over and replace them in the spring when the bluebirds are back. These boxes are on private property, and our neighbors are very good at letting us know when we have returning bluebirds.

This last bit of information you have probably anticipated. We will not be holding our annual SE MN Bluebirders' Picnic this year in compliance with the health guidelines in place at this time. Bill & I will miss seeing you and sharing our “tales from the trail.” [Those of you who have earned your 100 bars or a Keeping Bluebirds Safe badge should contact your county coordinator and we will arrange to get them to you.] We hope that the future will be brighter in our ability to get together; but in the meantime, feel free to call me or email me with concerns or if you simply want to chat about our little blue friends.

Mary C. Bailey, County Coordinator Olmsted and Fillmore Counties BBRP

S.E. Mn. Report

August 24

As of this writing 2020 has been a good year in this part of the state. I still have one box that has yet to fledge her 3rd batch from her box. I had three boxes that had triple nesting in them, and most of my 35 boxes had two nestings. I removed several boxes that I had in town. I just grew tired of trapping sparrows. I did replace a few of them with chickadee boxes.

Most of the bluebirders I talked to this summer from the Rushford area have been having good results too.

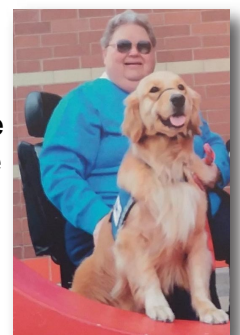
I hope the rest of the state has been experiencing a similar situation. 2020 could be a good year for the bluebirds and the bluebirders

I know my bluebird trail helped me get through this tough summer with the Covid.

During these tough times any ray of sunshine we can get helps.

Mike Jeresek, Fillmore and Houston County Coordinator BBRP

This is a follow-up to a memorial statement for Maxine Sheldon in the last newsletter. I noted her passing with her devotion to her “little boys” and that her pair of nestboxes had at that time five bluebird eggs in one of them. Sadly, that nest was preyed upon by wrens; however, her pair of bluebirds persisted and nested an additional two times, for, in essence, a triple nesting. Maxine's site yielded nine baby bluebirds to grace SE Minnesota. She is pictured here with her service dog Chai who could also be considered a bluebird since she would come bounding out to greet me as I checked the boxes each week. Chai also accompanied Maxine when she attended an Expo and the annual SE MN Bluebirders' Picnics here in Chatfield. Maxine was devoted to bluebirds and the environment despite her infirmity, and she will be missed in our neighborhood - Mary C. Bailey,



In Memoriam

During this difficult year we have lost several dedicated bluebirders. The loss of Maxine Sheldon was noted in the Spring newsletter with a followup in this edition. Kevin Oldridge of Mankato passed away in June of a heart attack and Bob Walz of North Branch, a BBRP County coordinator for Chisago County, died in July as a result of a severe head injury from a fall. We offer our sincere condolences to their family and friends. Here are a few comments from their obituaries:

Maxine Helen SHELDON, 1947-2020

She peacefully slipped away Sunday April 19, 2020, at home after a lengthy & debilitating illness with family, friends & beloved service dog, Chai (Helping Paws) at her side. She and her husband James raised their 3 children on their hobby farm in Marine-on-St. Croix, finally enjoying retirement at their picturesque home in rural Chatfield. After her retirement from nursing her love for infants continued as she used her knitting skills to create lovely baby blankets for newborns. Maxine was strong & devoted, yet loving, gentle & ever so kind to all she encountered. She excelled at anything she put her mind to & lived an extraordinarily remarkable life, having an immeasurable impact on countless lives -- both human & animal.

Memorials may be made in her name & in honor of Chai to: Helping Paws, PO Box 634, Hopkins, MN, 55343.

Kevin D. Oldridge, 1961-2020

Kevin was a kind soul who would help anyone in need. He had a unique way of teaching others. His hobbies and passions included being the first customer at the gym each morning for his workout, gardening, keeping his lawn well-manicured, building an array of projects out of wood, relaxing in his La-Z-Boy recliner with Kitty between his legs, family dinners on Sundays, and being surrounded by all of his loved ones; especially his grandchildren. Kevin enjoyed being a member of the Bluebird Recovery Program of MN. There are many bluebird houses scattered throughout Southern MN. If you find one, please care for it. He was a man of many talents. The family requests that donations in Kevin's memory be directed to LifeSource, 2225 West River Road North, Minneapolis, MN 55411 or for his love of nature to the Bluebird Recovery Program of MN.

Robert "Bob" George Walz, 1946-2020

From the beginning, Bob pursued vocations where his deep commitment to social justice and dedication to his community were front and center. He worked as a county social services director, then for St. Paul Area Council of Churches, and then Guardian Angels Catholic Church. Bob embraced retirement with the same enthusiasm he had shown in his career. Now there would be even more time for all the things he loved and the list was long. He became a Master Gardener, a Master Naturalist, and Coordinator of the Bluebird Recovery Project in Chisago County. He was a Rotarian, a Birder, an Ambassador for the Alaska Wilderness League, active in many environmental causes, a champion of social justice, and active in politics. He was a life-long learner and spent many hours reading and teaching others about birds, plants, butterflies, pollinators, and so much more. He enjoyed ballroom dancing and campfires in his beautiful backyard overlooking the Sunrise River, sipping a glass of wine by the pond with his wife Jeanne, and traveling the world, especially Latin America where he could practice the Spanish he was so dedicated to learning. Memorials preferred to the Alaska Wilderness League, alaskawild.org, and the Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota or any environmental group or social justice cause of the donor's choice.

Photos by
Doris Glander

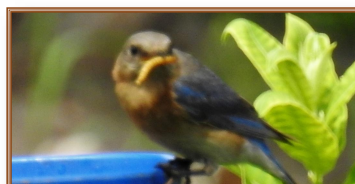




Photo by Doris Glander



Bluebird Recovery Program of MN

New and Renewing Membership Form

Bluebird Recovery Program Membership Enrollment in the Bluebird 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 and quarterly Newsletter. There are also annual 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

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ County _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Please indicate how you'd like to receive the BBRP quarterly Newsletter ____ via email or ____ via USPS

If giving a membership as a gift please enter your name below so the recipient can be aware of your generosity.

Please mail form and payment to:

**BBRP c/o Brianna Frisch,
11018 Taylor Hill Road
Minnieska, MN 55910**



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 for more information.

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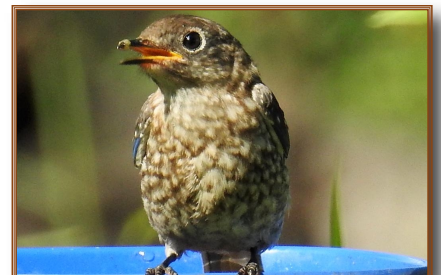
Upcoming Events

December 31, 2020

Trail reports for 2020 nesting season due



Photos by Doris Glander



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."

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