



"Raising our Bluebirds for Future Generations!"

Bluebird News



Volume 30 Issue 4

Fall, 2020

A Passion for Bluebirds in Pine County, by Doug Jensen

ASKOV – At 90, Al Jensen may be the oldest active Lifetime Member of the Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota. For 45 years, he built and continues to monitor bluebird houses. He's quietly made a difference dedicating a lot of time and effort to help resurrect once failing bluebird populations in northern Pine County and well beyond.

Building bluebird houses is a good project for woodworkers with a conservation ethic, but most wouldn't tackle constructing as many houses as Al has. He constructed over 500 houses and distributed them from Pine County to southern Minnesota and northern Iowa, most of them before retiring from Continental Grain in 1992. For houses he monitored, he estimates well over 1,000 bluebirds fledged with another 3,000 tree swallows, and tens of dozens of chickadees fledged from paired houses.

"For me, I found it very rewarding to help bring back bluebirds over the years. I saw how they immediately responded by nesting in the houses that I built. I told friends and family about how it was working. They wanted houses, so I'd give some, often times posting them myself," said Al.

He gave most houses away for free to bluebird enthusiasts. He built and monitored houses at Askov City and Railroad Parks, and at Banning State Park. He monitored

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sleeves from discarded used aluminum print sheets from the Askov American Newspaper.

Al's passion for bluebirds began in 1940 when he started checking farmers' cedar fence posts for nests. Flash forward to 1970 when he, with his family, moved back to Askov, when he learned the beloved bluebirds had seriously declined. Like elsewhere, those old cedar fence posts had rotted away, replaced with steel posts and forests that had not matured enough to form knotholes to accommodate bluebird nests.

Al went to work constructing his own style of bluebird houses. Then, in 1975, he recalls attending a meeting of early bluebird leaders at a church in Minneapolis, where he met Dick and Vi Peterson, Steve Gilbertson, Dorene Scriven and others. He learned of the new improved house design and started building Peterson bluebird houses.

On weekends over many years, Al could be seen cutting plywood in the dead of winter in preparation for spring "posting." Inside his metal storage shed, a small workbench was stacked with accumulating cut pieces ready for construction. One of his favorite memories is one day when he had an unexpected visitor. One bright winter day, my dad was cutting wood armed with his circular saw. I



Al with his granddaughter
Marissa Jensen, 2019

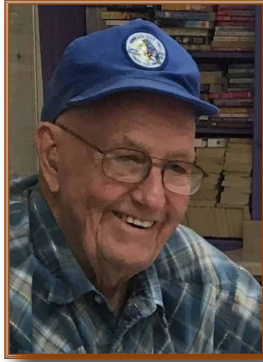
many posted along I35 from Forest Lake to Pine City during his Friday weekend work commute from Shakopee. He also sold some at cost for \$11, including a steel post and aluminum sleeve to deter climbing predators. He cut the

Continued on page 2

A Passion for Bluebirds in Pine County, continued

saw a large dark colored animal bounding across the field through very deep snow directly toward Al. I quickly alerted my dad, who shut off the saw and looked up. It was a large timber wolf! As quick as this happened, the timber wolf now 50 yards away, bounded in another direction. Did the whine of saw cutting plywood attract the wolf? We will never know.

Al used to attend many of the annual meetings before he and his wife, Ardis, turned into Winter Texans. Every year since inception, Al has filed reports to the Bluebird



Al in his BBRP hat.

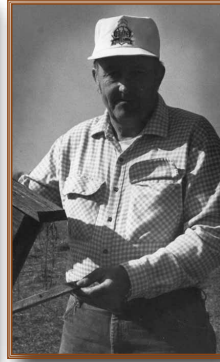


Photo from the Askov American newspaper 1987.

Recovery Program. Last summer around his home, he proudly tended to 14 pairs of houses that fledged 13 bluebirds (low number due to less habitat). He's not one

to take much credit but he's made a big difference through BBRP contributing to community/citizen science efforts long before it became cool! Al's efforts have been a labor of love. He acknowledges that any success would not have happened without support by the BBRP.

Thanks, Al for your support! We hope that Al's story is an inspiration for others to join the Program.

Reminder to Map Your Trails, by Loren "Murph" Murphy

Kevin D. Oldridge age 59 of Mankato, MN, who died suddenly this year, had been a dedicated blue birder. I helped Kevin many years ago set up his trail and gave him 24 nest boxes that were taken down off an old 35E trail. He had made a few location changes over the years, but I remembered a few of the locations. I felt responsible for the trail after he died and with no one watching them. I went over to help his son Kevin J. and his young son Marvin, who also remembered a few locations, take



the trail down for now, but we are sure some may have been missed.

The reason for this message is, make a map of your trail locations, making sure someone has it available when your time is up. We never know when that can be.

I have my Bluebird and Wood Duck Trail marked in a county plat book and hope it isn't needed for a long time.

Rest in Peace Kevin, Murph

Expo Survey

With all the Covid uncertainty the Bluebird Recovery Program board would like to ask you for your help in planning a 2021 Expo conference.

On our website is this link <https://bbrp.org/2021-expo-help-us-plan/> which will take you to our secure website where we'd like you to complete a survey questionnaire, the answers to which will help us plan and execute a successful 2021 Expo.

Your entries will be completely anonymous, we will only be capturing the answers to the questions. Please only complete the survey once as we'd like the results to be as accurate as possible. If you already responded to the email sent earlier you need not do anything more.

Thank you for helping us plan and we hope to see you at our 2021 Expo!

The BBRP Board

Public Lands Nest Box Program 2020–21 Applications Still Open

At a fall 2019 BBRP board meeting we reinstated the nest box program for public lands that had been dormant for a few years. The board authorized funding to award up to 100 nest boxes per year to qualifying applicants. Applications are accepted until the end of February each year, with awards being made and boxes distributed each March.

For the 2019-20 application period we received 9 applications, 8 of which met the program qualifications and all 100 nest boxes were granted in 2020. The boxes were given to 5 state parks from central Minnesota to the southeastern corner of the state, one to a south metro city for their park's bluebird trail program, one to a county historical society and one to Camp Ripley in Morrison County. These 8 organizations have been maintaining bluebird trails for an average of 13 years; they had an average of 35 nest boxes and 1 to 10 volunteers doing weekly trail monitoring. They all stated their aging trails were in need of nest box replacement.

We have already begun to receive applications for the 2020-21 granting period which closes on February 28, 2021. The program requirements and an application form can be found on the BBRP website, www.bbrp.org, under the heading 'Public Lands Nest Box Program'. Questions about the program can be sent to info@bbrp.org.

North American Bluebird Society

We encourage members of BBRP to also become members of the North American Bluebird Society (NABS).

NABS was founded in 1978 by Dr. Lawrence Zeleny (1904-1995). As a youth growing up in Minnesota, he became interested in birds, especially bluebirds. Even before entering high school in the late 1910s, Zeleny was building bluebird nesting boxes, utilizing a design put out by the Department of Agriculture. Dr. Zeleny, during his 30-year career as a biochemist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, noticed a decline in the numbers of bluebirds. After his retirement in 1965 he began a decades long crusade to save the bird. He promoted bluebird conservation through hundreds of talks and articles in many periodicals. Larry, with the support of his wife, Olive dedicated much of his life to providing nestboxes and managing bluebird trails in the Maryland/Washington D.C. area.

NABS' core mission is education, conservation and research, to mirror the life of Dr. Zeleny. His book, "The Bluebird: How You Can Help Its Fight for Survival" is a testament to what he called, the "symbol of love, hope and happiness," the bluebird.

From the beginning, the NABS Board of Directors had mandated a place for all native cavity-nesting birds in the scope of NABS' work. The three species of bluebirds (Eastern, Western, and Mountain) may have been the "banner birds," but all native cavity nesters were to be protected and their welfare promoted. The Society's logo is a juvenile bluebird, signifying all three bluebird species, perched near a nest box.

Your annual membership in NABS will help to support bluebird conservation, research and education. The quarterly Bluebird journal is one of the many benefits of membership.

The cost is \$25 for a subscribing single membership, \$40 for a supporting membership, and various levels above that.

You can join online at:

<http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/membership/>

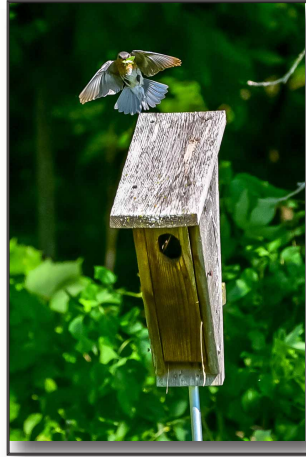
New Members

Jonathan Trudell	John Ferm	Edward Bohrer
Renay Leone	Tom Cody	Polly and Lee Scotland
Virginia Kearney	Jason Klegg	Michael Medford
Frank and Susan Weaver	Cindy Ley	
Jordan DeRudder	Heather Paulson	

We have not listed new members for quite a few issues and with our new system we can only list new members from the last quarter. Sorry if any new members were missed during the transition to our new system. We will be better moving forward.

Teri & Steve Brown Photographs

Teri and Steve Brown are BBRP members and support the bluebird efforts in Wabasha county, as they live in rural Lake City. Teri is the one who cares for their houses, monitoring them every other day or so, and Steve is the photographer. They've been successful attracting and eventually fledging many birds and find this to be a very rewarding summer activity. Getting close enough to photograph them is another story but Steve says he keeps trying new approaches and here are some of his photos.



Key Factors to Selecting a Bluebird Nestbox Location

Three things needed to attract bluebirds: Habitat, Habitat, Habitat

- "The area or type of environment where they normally live"
- "The place where they are most likely to be found"

Ref: www.sialis.org , by Bet Zimmerman

"All about Eastern Bluebirds - Preferred Nesting Habitat"

WHAT NESTING BLUEBIRDS NEED:

FOOD

INSECTS: A bluebird's primary food source is insects/protein. These insects are found *on the ground* and include grasshoppers, crickets, beetles, spiders, caterpillars, earthworms, snails, katydids and more. A bluebird's diet also includes fruit and berries. Nestlings are usually fed insects and that is primary. (Fields of sumac double as perching spots and sources of fruit)

HIGH PERCH: Bluebirds need to perch in order to find their food. They are naturally attracted to anything that helps them perch and look for food: power-lines, trees, poles, roof-tops, fences, etc.

SHORT GROUND COVER: They need to see their prey, but tall grass hinders their hunt for food. Orchards, mowed meadows, large lawns, gravel roads/driveways, cemeteries, sparse ground cover, and power-line clearings are favorite areas for food sources. (Avoid areas treated with chemicals, like Christmas tree farms)

SHELTER

CAVITY: Bluebirds are secondary cavity nesters. They need a *ready* cavity to build their nests. Natural cavities in trees are

historically the normal source, but survival rates are low and availability is scarce. Nestboxes fill the needs and are safer.

NEAR FOOD SOURCES: Bluebirds live near their food sources. The short ground cover and nearby perches are important factors.

PROTECTION: A good shelter protects the bluebirds from weather, predators and competitors.

WEATHER: Select and maintain nestboxes to be draft free from the cold and keep nests dry when it rains (or snows). Shaded boxes or light colors help with hot and sunny weather.

PREDATORS: (climbing or flying) Mounting nestboxes on smooth conduit or using predator guards is critical. Avoid areas where house sparrows are a threat. Inspect often for signs of trouble.

COMPETITORS: Nestbox entries are sized to exclude larger birds like starlings. Avoid house wren habitat by locating far from brushy areas and check for signs of their stick nests. Tree swallows and chickadees may compete but adding another nestbox is a simple alternative that permits compatible species to nest. Bluebirds are territorial and compete for food during the nesting season. Spacing is typically greater than two acres per nesting pair.

Summary

1. Is there a plentiful source of food with perching locations and short sparse ground cover, so they are able to see prey?
2. Provide safe and secure shelter available within view from a 'safe' tree so the male can keep an eye on the homestead.
3. Make a commitment to check the nestboxes and watch for problems so you can react early and quickly.
4. Avoid habitat with predators and competitors.
5. Ask for help and share your experiences—enjoy your blues!

BBRP Awards

We usually present awards at our annual Expo. With the cancellation of this year's Expo and other issues, we recently got caught up in getting plaques made and distributed to our most recent winners. "Bluebirder of the Year 2018" went to Gary and Barbara Drentlaw of Northfield. "Bluebirder of the Year 2019" went to Brianna Frisch of Minnieska. This is awarded to the person with the greatest percentage of fledglings per location that nesting season. The Dick Peterson Award is not necessarily awarded every year. It is given to someone who has done outstanding work helping bluebirds and BBRP. It was awarded this last year to Marilyn Suter. Besides monitoring trails on 3 different golf courses, she has worked at many of our Expos at the sales booth, and as a board member she spearheaded BBRP's efforts to become an independent 501 (c) (3) and is currently our treasurer.

We offer our congratulations and thanks to all three winners!

P.S. We are still trying to track down a few early award winners. The "Bluebirder of the Year" Award was started in 2003 and was won by Carrol Johnson, but we are not sure who won the award in 2004, 2005, or 2006.

Editor's Notes

2020 Fledging Numbers

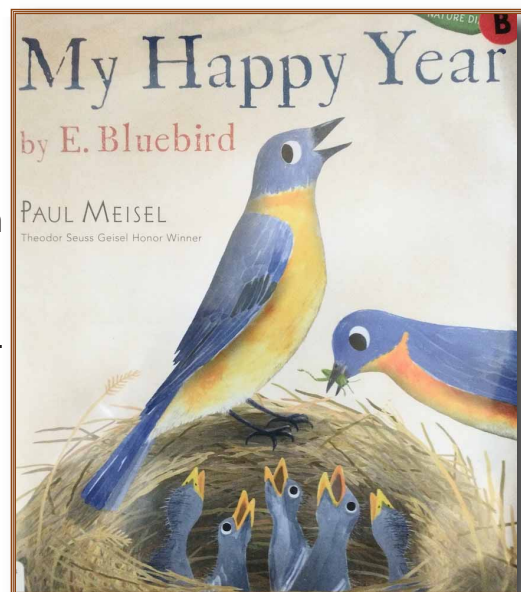
At the last board meeting Wally Swanson gave us the fledging totals received so far: 10,209 total, of which 9,446 were from Minnesota. Some usual reporting sites with substantial numbers had not yet submitted reports. Final totals will be listed in the Winter newsletter. Last year's total for Minnesota was 9603.

Children's Book on Bluebirds

Ran across a book that would be a great present for a young reader. My Happy year, by E. Bluebird (A nature diary), by Paul Meisel. Holiday House, c2019

"An Eastern Bluebird narrates a chipper account of her first year, from blind and helpless hatchling to fearful fledgling to full-grown adult . . . with a brief, friendly journal-style text accompanied by equally uncluttered and appealing digitally enhanced paintings in sumptuous colors. Both text and art provide a close-up look at the bird's growth, behaviors (including seasonal migration), diet, threats, and habitat. The illustrated front and back endpapers are filled with more detailed information about the species, a migration/habitat map, a glossary, information on how to build a bluebird house, and suggested web-sites."

—The Horn Book
Grade level: Preschool – 3



Error in Summer Newsletter

On the bottom of Page 4 of the printed newsletter some copy was cut off at the bottom of the page. The text was there on the emailed newsletter but was missing from the printed version that was mailed out. My apologies for this error. It was the follow-up on Maxine Sheldon's nest boxes. The last line should have read "Maxine was devoted to bluebirds and the environment despite her infirmity, and she will be missed in our neighborhood."

BBRP on Facebook

If you are on Facebook, check out our Facebook Page!

S.E. Minnesota Bluebird Notes

This is a great time of the year to make improvements on your bluebird trail.

Move or remove boxes that failed to produce fledglings for you this past year.

One of my goals for my 35 site trail is to have every site produce at least one brood during the bluebird season.

A personal note: 33 of my 35 sites accomplished this goal in 2020.

Look for new areas to install boxes for the 2021 season. I have already found a couple of potential spots to expand in. A goal for every bluebirder should be to improve their trail each year.

Good Luck to everyone in 2021.

Mike Jeresek, Fillmore and Houston County Coordinator

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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Photo by Doris Glander

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Photo by Doris Glander

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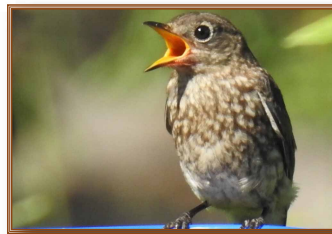
Dec. 21

This first day of astronomical winter, the winter solstice, we receive only 25 percent of the solar intensity we had on June 21.

Dec. 25

Merry Christmas!

Photo by
Doris
Glander



Dec. 31

Final deadline for Nest Reports for 2020 season.

Jan. 1, 2021

Wishing you a happy year and a great nesting season!

*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.