



"Raising our Bluebirds for Future Generations!"

Bluebird News



Volume 31 Issue 2

Spring, 2021

Nest Boxes on Public Lands Program

As they did in 2019, the BBRP board authorized funding again in 2020 to award up to 100 nest boxes to qualifying applicants. Applications were accepted until February 1st of 2021, with awards being made and boxes distributed in March.

For the 2020-21 application period nine applications were received, eight of which met the program qualifications and all 100 nest boxes were granted. This year four golf courses, two city parks, one of which is monitored by school students, a nature center and a State trail on a former Soo Line rail bed were the recipients. They're in counties from Houston in southeastern Minnesota, up to Chisago just north of the metro, with Ramsey, Hennepin, Rice,

POINTS OF INTEREST

Page 1

Nest Boxes on Public Lands

Page 2

Peterson Nest Box Modifications

Page 3 & 4

Gnat Deterrent Solutions

Page 4

Wadena Coordinator's Report

Page 5

Bluebird Polygamy

Page 6

Tidbits

Page 7

County Coordinators

BBRP Board Members

Page 8

Upcoming Events

Dakota and Anoka rounding out the distribution. These 8 organizations have been maintaining bluebird trails for an average of 13 years; they have an average of 22 nest boxes currently installed and 1 to 4 volunteers doing weekly trail monitoring. They've all stated their aging trails are in need of nest box replacement. The BBRP grants will be put to very good use.

BBRP is ready to receive applications for the 2021 granting period which closes on February 1, 2022. 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.



Peterson Bluebird Nest Box Modification

A number of blue birders using the Peterson nest box have observed the occurrence of wasps building nests in the cavity under the floor behind the bottom of the door, as well as under the roof inside the box.

Several individuals and websites recommend applying a coating of bar soap or Vaseline to these surfaces to deter wasps from building in those spaces. It works quite well to use the recommended application on the inside underside of the roof, with reports stating the Vaseline is much more effective and usually doesn't require a reapplication during the summer. However, trying to apply either soap or Vaseline in the cavity under the floor is problematic at best without removing the box each spring to get into the small space.

A creative Bluebird Recovery Program member decided to conduct an experiment with his Peterson boxes as he was tired of dealing with wasps and trying to coat the underside of the box. His solution was to eliminate the under box cavity. He decided to remove the portion of box and 2 x 4 it is built on at the base of the door, as shown in the photos below.



However, this also eliminates the screws or nails the door hinges on, so a solution was necessary to remedy that problem.



The solution was to install a small metal hinge to the bottom of the door and underside of the floor. The door opens and closes a little easier, the wasps no longer have a cavity in which they can build their nests, and the box is now about a pound lighter, making it easier to mount using Gilbertson's conduit-rebar mounting system.



After two years of experimentation this seems to be a very effective way to deter wasps from Peterson nest boxes.

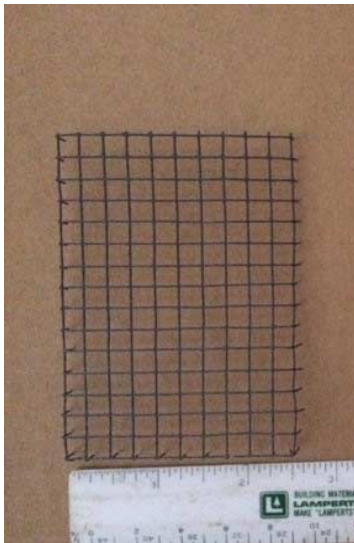
Comments or questions please send an email to David at info@bbrp.org.

“Scented Tree” Gnat Deterrent Solution For Wooden Nest Boxes

This is a follow-on to the gnat deterrent article found in the summer newsletter which featured the Gilbertson PVC nest box. (An alternative to spraying the nest and box with vanilla each time you monitor your boxes.) Trying to implement the under the roof ‘scented tree’ solution developed for the Gilbertson PVC nest boxes is not nearly as easy in wooden boxes. Primarily because access to the underside of the roof is very difficult unless you are building a new box.

As the long lasting effect of installing the ‘scented tree’ in the PVC box was proven very effective in 2020 trials, we began to think of a simple way to install them in wooden boxes like the Peterson and Gilwood as well. We know some bluebirders install fine wire mesh on the inside of the door just below the hole or opening to aid the chicks in getting out when fledging, so we considered that as a starting point.

By cutting a simple rectangle, about 2 ½” by 3 ¾” out of ¼” square wire mesh and bending the edges at 90 degrees to the mesh we’ve created a little pocket, as shown here. (We recommend using vinyl coated mesh or spraying non-coated mesh with vinyl to eliminate any rough edges.)



Each type of wooden nest box has a little wider or narrower door than the other so the width of the mesh pocket needs to be cut for the type of box you wish to install it in. Once it is cut, two small screws are all that is needed to attach it to the inside of the door, as shown here.



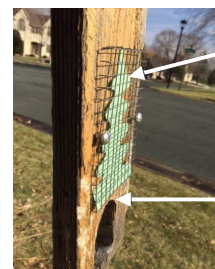
In the following illustration you’ll notice the mesh doesn’t have any turned over wire ends on the near side-top, but they are on the far side-bottom. Make sure the open, non-wire ends, are mounted nearest the opening so when you close the door the scented tree will not fall out.



Here is what it looks like with the ‘scented tree’ inserted.



Here is a side view, so you can see the open, top end of the mesh and the closed bottom. (When the door is open, as in the photo, the mesh pocket is inverted.)



Closed end
of mesh

Open end
of mesh

This makes it easy to replace the ‘scented tree’ once the scent is exhausted. In PVC nest boxes fitted with the ‘scented tree’ the scent lasted all season, so hopefully no need to replace during the summer in the wooden boxes either. As stated in the PVC article they work as a long lasting scent mask for the CO₂ given off by nesting birds which would normally attract gnats if the CO₂ was not masked.

“Scented Tree” Gnat Deterrent Solution For Wooden Nest Boxes” Part 2

This is what a package of “Little Trees” or ‘scented trees’ looks like as previously referenced. They can be purchased in automotive supply stores and gas stations, as they are generally sold as an air freshener for your car. They are also available on the internet.



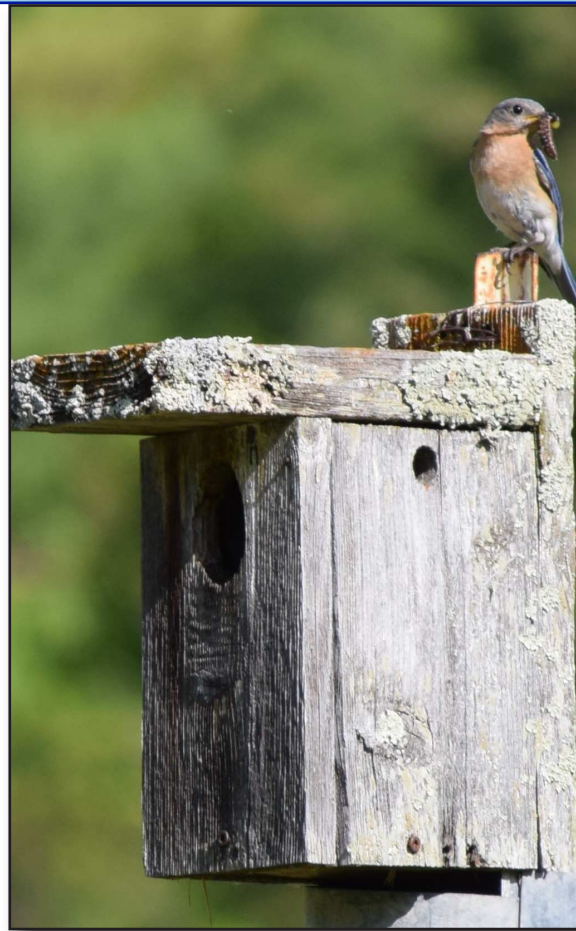
Depending on the size of the wire mesh pocket cut for the door, the ‘scented tree’ may have to be trimmed or cut in half. Cutting in half is a good thing then one will be enough for two nest boxes.

Hope you found this useful. Give it a try. If you have questions or want to report your results please send an email to David at info@bbrp.org.

Bluebird Recovery Project (BRP) – Wadena County Volunteer Coordinator’s Report – 2021

Where the bluebirds are this year is a mystery. I have had a minimum of six paired-houses on a bluebird trail along the Wadena – Ottertail County line since 1987. They are spread across four, two to three acre fields of prairie grasses and wildflowers, surrounded by aspen, oak, pine, and spruce. Our earliest sighting was on March 4, 2000, a winter without snow. The latest April 30, 2019. As I write this report on May 5, I have been visiting the trail frequently, which is easy to do as I live on the property. The wind has been southerly and the temperature mild to warm only a few of these days. Still, the bluebirds should be here.

In 1991, the BRP issued a report on bluebirds that included arrival times for the southern and northern part of



the state. For the Wadena area, the peak was mid-to-late March. This held true from my experience as the average arrival date was March 25, and remained so until the early 2000s, when it began shifting to mid-April. Also, the bluebirds used to arrive here a few days before tree swallows. The last few years, the opposite has been true. This past week-end these swift little fellows have been buzzing over the fields like WWII fighter pilots in a dogfight. One of these days, the bluebirds will suddenly appear in all their brilliance. But it remains a concern that they are so late in arriving.

Wadena County Coordinator
Paul Sailer

Photo by Paul Sailer

Photos by Doris Glander



Bluebird Polygamy... “Hot Times” in Florida

By Jeanne Wilkinson, Anoka County Bluebird Recovery Coordinator

For the last 12 years I've been monitoring a bluebird trail in the City of Anoka started by the late Vern Emmons, an avid blue birder. Needless to say, I've enjoyed the weekly inspections, data gathering and reporting of results each fall. Since my husband and I spend 5-6 months each winter in central Florida, I thought it would be fun to create a bluebird trail there. I purchased 4 Gilbertson PVC nest boxes and enlisted neighbors to host a box in their backyards overlooking a golf course. Soon after arriving in November, we had bluebirds checking-out our boxes.

By early March, much to our surprise, we had two females and one male building a nest in our box. By March 11th I counted 5 cold eggs. However, four days later I found nine warm eggs. Soon, I observed both females looking out the hole... apparently both incubating their clutch of nine eggs at the same time. In the meantime, the male bluebird was busy dive bombing any squirrel that dared get within 20 feet of the nest box. On March 29th we were delighted to find nine hungry bluebird babies. When I checked them a week later, I found eight babies neatly lined up in a circle with the ninth one in the middle. The next two weeks all three parents were observed busily feeding the youngsters and removing waste sacks. Chirping from the nest was heard as they became more demanding. Up to three heads with mouths open were seen greeting the parents as they took turns dropping off bugs every few minutes. On April 12th all nine babies fledged... one month after eggs were laid. I'm happy to report that all four nest boxes on our Florida trail were successful, however, only our box had a threesome and nine kids!

We returned to Minnesota soon after our bluebird adventure. I recruited a neighbor to continue monitoring the trail. She reported the threesome is back starting a new nest... “Hot Times” in Florida!



Tidbits

Donations -Thank You!

Alan Hale, Rochester MN in memory of Dr. Po Scholz

Sue & Todd Middleton, Northfield MN

Tom & Lisa Boevers, Faribault MN

Laurie Winzig, Faribault MN

Mike & Stacy Shuda, Faribault MN

Jerry & Dianne Barta, Medford MN

Richard Powell, Owatonna MN

Tate Running, Northfield MN

Rick Fagen, White Bear Lake MN

Brian Anderson, Faribault MN

Wendy Andberg, Ham Lake MN

Leslie Pilgrim, Mendota Heights MN

Jim Walker, New Brighton MN

Denise Olson, Dennison MN

Like many organizations this last year, we had to meet virtually for our Spring Expo. We had 79 in attendance in addition to our board members. 35 were current BBRP members. 6 were Master Naturalists (3 of those are also BBRP members). That means there were about 40 people who were not members, good outreach to teach more people about bluebirds and what we can do to help them nest successfully.

In the May 5th StarTribune Birding section Jim Williams wrote about the bluebird die-off down south. "Snow, ice and cold weather killed bluebirds and other early migrants in a wide swath from Oklahoma to the East Coast. Reports from the newspapers throughout that area say Eastern Bluebirds and other early spring migrants froze, or died from lack of food and water." I know that bluebird groups on Facebook posted some sad pictures of birds that died of exposure.

Joe Adelman and his wife JoAnn make and sell the nest boxes we've have at the BBRP Expo in the past. You can contact the Adelmans directly. They live in the Owatonna area and their email address is josephadelmann@msn.com or you can call them at 612-598-1374 or 507-213-0199. They'll be happy to supply you with whatever your bluebird nest box needs may be.

Correction

Bill and Mary Bailey live in Olmsted County and have always reported as such. On Page 2 of the Winter 2021 Edition, 100 Club Members article they were mistakenly listed as being in Fillmore County. Our apologies for this error.

Bluebird Recovery Program of MN

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 mnbluebirder@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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Photo by Doris Glander

Upcoming Events

May 20-22, 2021 - Detroit Lakes Festival of Birds
23rd Annual Festival of Birds

May 31 – Memorial Day

June 5, Saturday, 2 – 9 PM - Rhubarb Festival, Lanesboro
Celebrate Minnesota's sweet-tart favorite

June 21 – First day of Summer

Sept 30 – 5:30 p.m. An Evening Celebrating the Missis-
sippi River: Our Healing River.

Online or in person at Nicollet Island Pavilion,
Minneapolis – Friends of the Mississippi River

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."

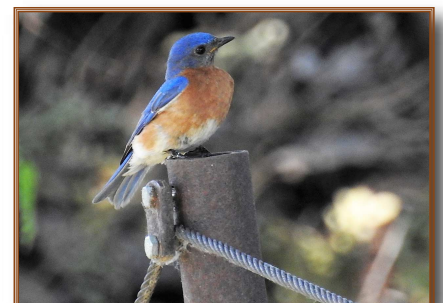


Photo by Doris Glander

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