



*"Bringing back Bluebirds for Future Generations!"*

# Bluebird News



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## 2024 Bluebird EXPO Recap by Nancy Engel, EXPO Chair

The 2024 Bluebird Expo was held on April 20th in Redwood Falls. Something a little different from the past few Expos was that we held all the events in one large space. That way, all the exhibitors and volunteers could see the presentations. If you attended, please let us know what you thought of this type of format for future Expos.

One other change this year is that we aimed to be a "Near Zero Free" waste event. Along with all of the dinner and drinkware, we were able to capture 5 bags of organics that I then brought to my local collection site. In real terms, that's 5 bags of garbage and food waste that did not go to the landfill but will instead become compost! You'll definitely see organics collections at future Expos.

Our emcee for the day was David Schmidt who introduced all our speakers and was the Tech/AV guru for the event. Our first guest speakers were Grant and Dawn Breitkrentz. They gave a fascinating presentation about the regenerative farming techniques they use at their cattle farm in Redwood Falls. After a short break Wally Swanson introduced the 2024 Bluebird of the year, Don Glassing, who fledged



Dawn & Grant Breitkrentz, Stoney Creek Farms

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Todd Burlet, Starry Skies North

from insects to birds to humans. After a delicious lunch provided by Baune's Catering and our annual membership meeting, Keith Radel entertained us with a presentation about his tips and suggestions to improve our number of fledged birds.

Our last speaker of the day was Brenda Kotasek from Henderson Feathers who discussed how their group maintains a lovely hummingbird garden and their efforts to educate people about the Ruby Throated Hummingbird. Henderson Feathers hosts a terrific outdoor event held the third Saturday

of August called the Hummingbird Hurrah Festival in Henderson, MN. Fellow board member, Brianna Frisch, and I attended this festival last August and I wholeheartedly recommend that you check it out. You can watch hummingbirds get banded, see interesting speakers and visit educational tables throughout the park where the free event is held. BBRP will be there again this August so make sure to stop by our table to say hello if you go.

In addition to our guest speakers at the Expo, we were treated to several different educational tables. Kelsey Moe, a DNR State Parks Naturalist chatted with guests about the parks and how folks can volunteer at them. Minnesota Naturalists were on hand to talk about all the volunteer work that they do. They also provided us with volunteers to help make our Expo a success. And, we had representatives from the Dragonfly

## 2024 Bluebird EXPO Recap Continued...

Association, Nest Watch and Meadowlark Outdoor Prairie spend their day with us talking about their groups. And I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that my son visited with several guests to talk about one of his passions, wildflowers.

Cindy Sabinske did a phenomenal job taking over the Silent Auction this year. I was very impressed with how well organized the auction was and how quickly auction items were distributed to bidders. Thank you as well to everyone who donated items to our silent auction. We had an eclectic collection of items that was fun to peruse and bid on.

Our attendance overall was about in line with last year's. We hope that we can improve attendance numbers next year since it's so beneficial to come together to chat with other bluebirders throughout

the state. A personal goal of mine as the 2025 Expo Chair, is to see some younger guests join us so we can keep growing for the future. If you have some thoughts or are aware of some connections that would help make this happen, please let us know.

I'd like to thank all the volunteers, Board members and County Coordinators who helped with the Expo! We couldn't do this event without your assistance so I hope you know how much we appreciate you. A special shout out to David Schmidt who mentored me throughout the months leading up to the 20th. His help was invaluable to me as I tackled my first Expo. I'm sure I'll rely on him again for next year's as well. And a huge thank you to the staff at the Redwood Falls Area Community Center.

They provided excellent customer service to us along with maintaining a clean venue.

We're already thinking about next year's Expo and continuing the tradition of holding it in different locations. Tentatively, we plan on holding it in the southeastern part of the state. As soon as we get the date and location finalized, you'll be the first to know!

Finally, thank you to everyone who attended this year's Expo. I hope you all had time to visit with friends, old and new, and found the day to be fun and informative. I didn't have the time to chat with all of you, but I'll make a point of doing that next year. Here's wishing you a successful bluebirding season and a wonderful summer!



*Barb Miller & Brenda Kotasek, Henderson Hummingbird Hurrah*



*Kelsey Moe, Minnesota State Parks Table*



*Presentation Setup*



*Keith Radel with bluebird house samples*



*Silent Auction Setup*



*Mary Kalinowski & Pam Sundsmoe, Silent Auction/Apparel Sale Helpers*

## Sights of the Unusual in Bluebirding! by Keith Radel

In 2023, longtime MN bluebirder, Keith Radel, saw his first leucistic bluebird. Only rarely does one glimpse an albino, white, bluebird or a LEUCISTIC bluebird. Leucistic is one with diluted plumage color, whitish overall with faint pattern. The normal pattern is visible, but all its plumage is paler than normal.

An adult female was spotted first by Keith's friend and fellow bluebirder, Mitch, by his nest boxes in his yard just north of Faribault. Mitch got pictures and a movie of her to share with Keith. The bluebird, however, moved about one block west to Keith's lone Glibertson PVC nest box at the entrance to a gravel pit. Her mate was a normal colored bluebird. She built a nest and laid five blue eggs which all hatched on July 4, 2023.

Keith checked the nest weekly, plus a few more times, to see if the chicks were normal in color or leucistic. All were normal and fledged on July 23rd. This whole bluebird family hung out in Mitch's

yard, and he got to see her several times!

This female leucistic bluebird is well documented by other bluebirders. Marilyn Suter of Farmington, a board member of BBRP of MN, took photos. Arlon and Doris Glander, who provide most of those great bluebird photos for the BBRP Newsletters, took pictures of her several times. Pro-Photographer, Skip Steele, photographed her many times as well.

This leucistic female bluebird was cream color with a bit of light blue at the base of her tail. Her chest was light orange. She had the normal dark eye of a bluebird, not the red or pink eye of an albino bird.

In thirty-nine years of bluebirding this is only the second leucistic bluebird Keith has ever seen or heard about in Minnesota! Carrol Johnson, long time MN BBRP State Coordinator, took pictures of the first which was seen just east of Northfield about eight years ago.



*Leucistic bluebird fledgling with its normal colored sibling.*

That one was a chick that had fledged and was with a normal colored bluebird chick. Also unusual to see, Mary Roen of River Falls, WI, had an albino bluebird chick and shared her experience in the 2023 summer issue of the BBRP Newsletter. Keep your eyes open and YOU may be treated to a discovery of the unusual!!



*Top photo and top left photo by Carrol Johnson  
Bottom right four photos by Doris Glander*

## Carrol Johnson Remembered

Carrol Manford Johnson, age 85 of Northfield, passed away with his wife and family by his side, on Wednesday afternoon, January 31, 2024, at Three Links Care Center.

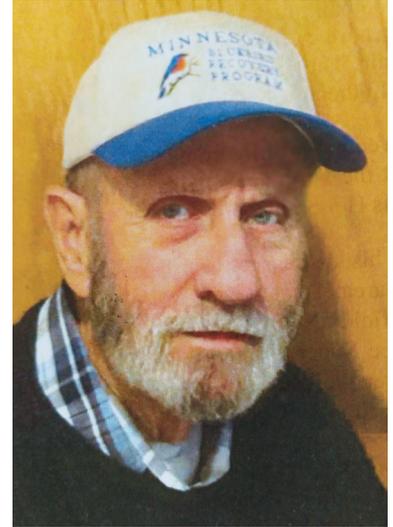
Carrol was born September 21, 1938, in Rushford, Minnesota, to Carnet and Otilia (Jenson) Johnson. He grew up on their century farm and went to Tawney Country School. He graduated from Mabel High School in 1957. He enjoyed football, track, and basketball, and also took part in band and chorus. Carrol met Winifred Sande at the Fillmore County Fair. They were married on November 26, 1960 at Arendahl Lutheran Church, Peterson, Minnesota.

Carrol served in the army from 1962-1965 working as a radar operator at the Farmington Nike Hercules Missile Base. He received his Honorable Discharge on April 29, 1965. Following his discharge Carrol began working as a photographer

for the Northfield News. In 1970, he began working as Maintenance Supervisor and Planner at the 3M Dynacolor plant. He then worked at the 3M Greystone quarry in Wausau, WI. He retired in 1999.

Carrol was a member of Bethel Lutheran Church, where he helped with building maintenance. He was the Minnesota State Coordinator for the Bluebird Recovery Program and was a dedicated volunteer for Habitat for Humanity. He loved hunting deer and turkeys and riding his tractor on his farm.

Survivors include his wife of 63 years, Winnie; his children Kari (Mark) Breckenridge of Northfield, Sarah Johnson of Northfield, and Craig (Karen) Johnson of Lakewood, CO; four grandchildren Justin (Kristen) Breckenridge, Trevor (Hannah) Breckenridge, Corina Johnson and Gretchen Johnson; 3 great-grandchildren Jaxson, Blakely and Tatum; his sister Nancy (Larry)



*In memory of Carrol M. Johnson*

Hoff of Hastings; nieces, nephew and many friends. He was preceded in death by his sister Marilyn and his parents.

Memorials are preferred to Bethel Lutheran Church, Rice County Habitat for Humanity or the donor's choice.

# Memories of Carrol Johnson



### ***From Mary Swenson, Wright County Coordinator***

Carrol almost always made time to talk either on the phone or in person, and talk we would!!! Bluebirds, deer, wild parsnip, ticks and on & on!

When I would go to his and Winnie's home in Northfield he would quiz me on his antique tools hanging in the garage "I bet you don't know what this on is" he'd say. Because I'm an antique dealer he didn't stump me too often.

I will miss his wisdom and wit tremendously!

### ***From David Schmidt, BBRP Board Chair***

He was always interested in new ideas to help bluebirds thrive, he devised solutions to many bluebirding issues. The most significant of which was putting "vanilla trees" car air fresheners in nest boxes to mask the CO2 exhaled by adults and chicks to keep them from being attacked by gnats. He created an elaborate process to attach the air freshener to the underside of the nest box roof. After one season he decided his process was too complicated, instead a large paper clip would easily affix the air freshener to the back of the PVC box, much simpler. He loved to share stories and pictures of recent bluebird interactions, whether from his back yard or his beloved farm in southeastern Minnesota. I'll miss my monthly sit-down chats with him in his living room. He was truly loved by all.

## Memories of Carrol Johnson Continued...

### *Anonymous*

Carrol used to open up his family farm & invite people down to go hiking, explore the “Cabbage rocks” & eat a picnic meal together!

### *Anonymous*

Carrol is/was like the grandpa I never had. He was so passionate about bluebirds he hooked /got me interested. He assisted me setting up my trails. I’m going to miss his phone calls! A call for a simple question usually lasted at least an hour. He was a master of the Midwest long goodbye. ♥

### *From Mary Bailey, Filmore & Olmstead County Coordinator*

Yes, I have a fond memory of Carrol Johnson; and it is a good thing no one took pictures because no one can now see how frozen we were that day. It all started with a site visit by Loren “Murph” Murphy and Keith Radel, then the BBRP State Coordinator. I had been recently widowed and needed help placing bluebird boxes on the rest of my land. As we rode down Olmsted County Road 136 near my home, Murph said, “Mary, you have to get boxes out here. This is really good bluebird territory.”

After obtaining landowner permission, I applied for and received a BBRP grant of twelve boxes for placement on that county road. Carrol delivered the boxes and offered to help me install them. Unfortunately, we chose a windy and bitterly cold day to do it. There we were, wearing every stitch of winter clothing we owned, installing those boxes through deep snow that had arrived in a spring storm. For each box, Carrol pounded in the re-bar and tightened the screw at the bottom after I oriented the box. Chilled to the bone, I said, “Carrol, after all this, when we get to heaven there better be a whole bunch\* of bluebirds waiting to welcome us!” He just gave his usual chuckle as we struggled on.

These twelve boxes have always been and today still are successful just as Murph predicted nearly twenty years ago, but now that day I alluded to has arrived. Carrol, a man remembered for his generosity in giving of himself, has rightly claimed his eternal reward. When I learned of his passing, I remembered that blustery day he helped a widow with her trail; and I felt in my heart that those bluebirds were there to welcome him to heaven. Because of Carrol’s help, the bluebirds return each spring to that county road.

Everyone has more than one “Carrol story,” and they will all tug at your heartstrings. This is my favorite of the many fond memories he left me with.  
Goodbye, dear friend.

\*Yes, I did use that unscientific phrase to describe the flock that would welcome a bluebirder to Heaven. Just an indication of how frozen and dedicated we both were.



### *Anonymous*

Bought many houses from Carrol. He encouraged us to be more ruthless first with sparrows and second with wrens. We bought a couple of his traps! Quite a character—always ready with advice.

### *From Sharon*

I met him for the first time at last year’s Expo. His closing comment to our conversation stuck with me, “Take a young person out there with you.”

## House Wrens: Destructive Interference

by Marilyn Michalski

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The Northern House Wren is often heard before it is seen. After wintering in Southern U.S., it arrives in Pennsylvania in April. The bubbly song of the “Jenny Wren” signals the return of danger to cavity-nesting birds.

The House Wren is a small, energetic bird whose brown feathers are plain in comparison to its larger cousin, the Carolina Wren, which has a white eyebrow stripe and reddish-brown back. The House Wren (HOWR) is the plainest of all wren species. It nests in all kinds of “cavities.”

When a male House Wren locates a potential niche for his nest, he puts sticks in it – twigs about 3 to 7 inches long. He also puts sticks into nestboxes already occupied. His action of filling up many nestboxes prevents other birds from nesting, especially bluebirds and chickadees.



The wren does not hesitate when he finds eggs already laid; he will poke them and toss them onto the ground. We find these pierced eggs lying dead underneath their nestboxes. When we wonder what happened to our bluebird eggs, already laid, we can be pretty sure they were removed by the House Wren. The only other predator of bird eggs – leaving no trace of its work – is a snake.

When a female House Wren selects one of these “stick nests,” she lines it with soft grasses and then lays 5 to 7 small pinkish-brown eggs. After two weeks of incubation, the eggs hatch and the adults feed the young, which fledge in about 15 days. A pair of wrens can repeat this process two more times a summer – producing up to 20 new House Wrens each nesting season. This prolific reproduction rate has resulted in overpopulation. House Wrens are abundant, and their take-over of nestboxes has become common. If their population rise continues, we may experience lower rates of Bluebird and Chickadee fledging.

The House Wren’s needle-tipped beak is a weapon. Without hesitation, wrens puncture the eggs of any bird using a nestbox. Once a wren pierces the membrane, the egg dies. We often find punctured eggs below nestboxes – a disturbing sight. The wren is especially deadly

to chickadees, who nest only once a year.

Some of us are experimenting with panels that block the view of the entrance hole on nestboxes. These “wren guards” or covered entry holes are 50% effective. Currently, “Bluebirders” are searching for ways to prevent wrens from taking over nestboxes. New innovations and successful deterrents to wren predation are needed.

### **CURRENT RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Relocate nesting boxes away from homes, patios, and shrubbery. Why? Wrens like clutter.
2. Install nestboxes out in the open – away from buildings and greenery. Use “open fields” with a tree about 20 to 30 feet away for the bluebirds to perch on while guarding their box.
3. Remove sticks and twigs from all dummy nests. (those without a nesting cup or wren eggs)
4. Experiment with “Wren Guards” on nestboxes -- check websites for ideas.
5. If wrens manage to lay eggs in a nestbox, REMOVE their nestbox immediately after their nestlings fledge. Other birds will be harmed if a nestbox is used more than once by wrens.
6. No one who admires bluebirds/ chickadees should supply a nestbox for House Wrens.

## 2023–2024 Public Lands Next Box Program Highlights

For five consecutive years the Bluebird Recovery Program has awarded nest boxes to public land organizations throughout the State. This spring 50 boxes were awarded to eight organizations:

- Sustainable Stillwater (8)
- Gateway Browns Creek Association (2)
- City of Mahtomedi (2)
- Fort Snelling State Park (4)
- Frontenac State Park (10)
- Afton State Park (10)
- City of Burnsville (6)
- River Oaks Golf Course (8)

## Editor's Corner



Friday night BBRP board members, volunteers who helped with setup, and our featured speakers had dinner at Duffy's Riverside Saloon in North Redwood Falls. The person who had come the farthest was Tom Comfort, from Michigan. He is the Michigan Bluebird Society's Antrim, Charlevoix and Kalkaska county coordinator and a board member for the North American Bluebird Society and helped Keith Radel answer questions on Saturday.



My husband and I spent Sunday morning exploring Ramsey Park. At 256 acres, it is the largest municipal park in Minnesota with miles of hiking trails, a zoo with animal feeding, scenic waterfalls, picnic areas, playgrounds & a campground. It is located along the Redwood River in the City of Redwood Falls, MN.

Virginia Windschitl

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## Tidbits



*"Ringing back Bluebirds for Future Generations!"*

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

Contact information can be found on our website at [BBRP.org](http://BBRP.org) or you can email [info@bbrp.org](mailto:info@bbrp.org)



The 19th Annual SE MN Bluebirders' Picnic will be held at noon on **Saturday, September 21, 2024** at the home of Bill & Mary Bailey. This will include a potluck lunch and optional hike which was added last year and was well received.



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<https://www.facebook.com/BluebirdRecoveryProgram>

**Question: I have seen the parents taking something small and white out of the nestbox. What are they doing? Answer: The parents are removing fecal sacs.**

A fecal sac is a clean, tough mucous/gelatinous membrane/film containing the excrement of nestling birds. Nestlings usually excrete one sac after each feeding, especially as they get older. Usually both parents help with this task. They may take out 60-70 bundles a day! For hatchlings and very young nestlings (e.g., up to 4-5 days old), the parents may eat the sacs, as the baby's digestive tracts are not very efficient and the sacs may still contain nutrition. Otherwise, they drop them outside of the box, usually several meters away. (From SIALIS website)



Photo by Doris Glander

## Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Monday, June 3, 2024**

**Inver Glen Library, Inver Grove Heights | 1-2:30 pm**

Join BBRP Dakota County Coordinator  
David Schmidt for all things bluebird!

**Saturday, June 22, 2024**

**Gammelgarden Museum's Midsommardagen**

Come visit the BBRP Information Table!

**Saturday, August 17, 2024**

**Henderson Hummingbird Hurrah | 9:00 am - 4:00 pm**

Come visit the BBRP Information Table!

**Saturday, September 21, 2024**

**19th Annual SE MN Bluebirders' Picnic | 12:00 pm**

**Bill & Mary Bailey Home**

### *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 or provided photographs for this publication of the Bluebird News.*