



"Bringing back Bluebirds for Future Generations!"

# Bluebird News



Volume 34 Issue 3

Summer 2024

## Keeping the Morrison County – Wunder Trail Alive

In the fall of 2017 BBRP was contacted by Larry Wunder from Harlan, IA asking if we could find someone to take over his trails in Morrison County, Minnesota. He and his family had a summer home near Pillager, Minnesota where he had established bluebird trails along Morrison County Road 1. Before we responded to his request we checked 'Trail Reports' for 2017. We found two trails near Pillager, one in Morrison County and one in Cass County. He had a combined total of 162 boxes and had fledged 323 chicks.

Seeing those results and his reports from previous years, we decided to call him to get more information about his trails and the circumstance in which he needed help. He said his health would not allow him to continue coming to Minnesota and monitoring his trails. We asked about the trails in both counties; he said he just needed someone to take over the Morrison County trail.

### PAGE 1-2

*Wunder Trail  
5-Star Hotel*

### PAGE 3

*Lost Creek  
19th Annual Bluebirders Picnic*

### PAGE 4

*Editor's Corner*

### PAGE 5

*Bluebirds and Lawn Care*

### PAGE 6

*Oriole Feeder  
Trail Reporting*

### PAGE 7

*County Coordinators*

### PAGE 8

*Upcoming Events*



*Spring Installation  
Wunder Trail-Mike*

The Nature Conservancy has a large block of land in the area. We contacted their office and found someone willing to take on the trail for 2018. We gave them several of our brochures and offered them assistance throughout the bluebird

nesting season. They tried to monitor it on a frequent basis but couldn't get out as often as they had hoped. When asked if they wanted to try again in 2019, they said 'yes'. Again, they did not do a good job.

Thankfully in March of 2020 we connected with a willing volunteer, Cindy Ley, from Sartell. She monitored the trail in both 2020 and 2021, even giving us recommendations for replacement of some boxes. However, health issues prevented her from continuing for 2022. We did take her nest box recommendations replacing six boxes.

We didn't want to abandon such a productive trail, so the decision was made to host a bluebird monitor class at the Scandia Valley Town Hall in the spring of 2022. The class was well attended, and Carolyn Law from Little Falls stepped up to help. She successfully



*Wunder Trail*



## Wunder Trail Continued...

monitored in 2022 and 2023, again giving us recommendations for replacement and box moves. Sadly, she passed away last fall, so again we were without a volunteer to monitor the trail.

County coordinators Mike Fulford, Morrison County and David Schmidt, Dakota County, linked up following Carolyn's recommendations, replacing and relocating six boxes and adding two new ones. Additionally, they monitored the trail and pledged to each other to try to check a few more times throughout the summer. In late July David returned and geo-located and checked all the boxes. Happily, he found four active bluebird nests and one tree swallow. The remaining were emptied for the winter.

The decision for 2025 is to host another recruiting class in the area, probably Pillager, to hopefully recruit some new volunteers. More improvements will be made to the trail which currently is made up of 45 nest boxes, some paired and some singles. The goal is to get all sites

to be paired which will decrease the number of stops for monitoring, making the task significantly easier.

If anyone reading this article is interested in helping and would like more information, please email us at [info@bbrp.org](mailto:info@bbrp.org). Once we've determined a place and date for the class we'll list it in the Newsletter and post the information on our website as well under 'Upcoming Events'.



*July Monitoring-David*



*Spring Monitoring*



*July Monitoring*

## 5-star Hotels for Mother Nature by Mary Bailey

***“Put down the chain saw and back away from that tree – SLOWLY. You’re not going to cut it down. That’s a 5-Star Hotel for Mother Nature.”***

While this is a fictional statement, it could have taken place. Foresters and other like-minded woodsy people often think of dead and hole-ridden trees as potential firewood. Indeed, they are; however, they serve another valuable purpose: Lodging!

We have many such trees where we live. During the season, our feeder had been visited by the tufted titmouse, yet we could not figure



*5-Star Hotel for Mother Nature, often mistaken for potential firewood*

out where they nested since they were in none of our trails' bluebird nestboxes.

While preparing for last year's Forestry Field Day, which emphasized the wildlife sanctuary aspect of the land, we came upon one of these smaller snags. Upon closer examination, we could see tiny grey feathers near the opening of one of the holes. Question answered! Real estate values just escalated! This kind of habitat adds to the biodiversity of the area and to the enjoyment of those who appreciate the creatures which coexist with us.



## Lost Creek: Update

by Jean Olsen, Pine County Coordinator

Very disappointing bluebird season up here this year. I monitored 71 nest boxes this year: 57 boxes on 8 trails at the St Croix State Park, 7 boxes on the neighboring 49ers Trail and 7 boxes on our property, Lost Creek Trail.

I've had sporadic predation by bears the last couple of years but this year has been horrific. It seems the bears have come to recognize the nest boxes as an easy meal, bending the conduit poles over, knocking the house off and eating eggs and chicks. One trail at the Park has 18 boxes spaced out through a large meadow area and from early to late June, a bear was hitting the boxes every week, taking both bluebird and swallow eggs and chicks. A total of 122 bluebird eggs and chicks were lost, along with the needed replacement of dozens of conduit poles. Even the rebar poles are bent on some of them, but they are easily bent back straight without breaking.

Once other natural food sources became available, the bear predation ended and with a great sigh of relief I crossed my fingers for a productive remainder of the season. It was not to be. Some boxes weren't used again for the rest of summer. I can only hope the bluebirds found natural nesting cavities to use.

Late July a problem arose that I hadn't encountered yet in the 6 years I've been monitoring these boxes. I started finding abandoned nests, some with eggs, some with dead chicks in them. A couple had dead and live chicks in them.

After watching these nests for a half hour each on the ones with live chicks, and seeing no parent coming to feed them, I ended up taking 5 live chicks one week and 5 more the next week to the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in St Paul.

My other determination that the nests were abandoned was that they were very dirty with the chicks' feces, indicating no parent was keeping the nest clean as they normally do. Of the rehabbed chicks, all were showing signs of dehydration. Along with the abandoned nests, I noticed there were no longer adult bluebirds in the area, neither seeing them nor hearing them as I usually did, numerous times before their disappearance.

There is still one active nest on a trail at the Park as of this writing (Aug 9th). Of 3 eggs, only 1 hatched, and I am monitoring that one most every day. A female has been seen at that nest box and the chick appears relatively healthy.

As I've only been monitoring nest boxes for 6 years now, I'm very curious if others have noticed this abandonment problem also.

Except for a couple of weeks of hot weather, it's been a relatively cool summer up here, with nighttime lows down into the 50s at times.

Comments, questions and suggestions are welcomed, on both the bear issue and the abandonment issue. Jeanne Olsen [lostcreekbrds@gmail.com](mailto:lostcreekbrds@gmail.com)

## 19th Annual SE MN Bluebirders' Picnic

**Anyone interested in nature** is invited to gather at the home of Bill & Mary Bailey for the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual SE MN Bluebirders' Picnic on Saturday, September 21 at noon. There will be a potluck lunch with the main dish, tableware, seating and beverages provided by Bill & Mary. There is a covered porch, in view of one of the Bailey's ponds where we can enjoy each others' company and share stories of the past bluebird season. There will be an optional hike led by Bill which will pass around wetlands and go through a timber stand management area.

**The Bailey Wildlife Sanctuary** is located at 9400 150<sup>th</sup> Avenue, SE, Chatfield, MN. There will be bluebird signs to indicate turns.

Call (507) 867-9118 for questions.



*Bluebirders gather on the Bailey porch for a previous annual picnic.*

## Editor's Corner by Virginia Windschitl



A.



C.



B.



D.



E.

I went to the Dakota County Fair on Friday and saw a beautiful felted wreath in the Handicraft Dept.

It shows a pair of mountain bluebirds on a wreath of flowers with a butterfly and a ladybug. It won a blue and a purple Champion ribbon. I took a photo of the tag and searched online to find the maker, Deborah Anderson in Savage MN. I was able to contact her and get some background information.

She sent me several photos of a pair of bluebirds in her yard. She wrote "For the first I had bluebirds nest in my backyard. It was so fun watching them. They still come back to feed. When I bought my home I wanted to make the backyard bird friendly. Each year I get new birds visiting. I've been a volunteer at the Raptor Center for 13 years. Whenever I'm on a trip I'm always on the lookout for birds and tours. I just love birds. My nieces call me the bird lady."

She had a photo of mountain bluebirds that she used as her inspiration included with her fair entry. "I knew I wanted to have them as my focal point in my wreath. The flowers are from my garden."

She also sent a photo of a Christmas tree completely decorated with felted birds!

- A. *Male Bluebird*  
Photo by Deborah Anderson
- B. *Female Bluebird*  
Photo by Deborah Anderson
- C. *Bluebird Wreath*
- D. *Bluebird Wreath up-close*
- E. *Christmas Tree with felt birds*  
Photo by Deborah Anderson

Virginia Windschitl



## Bluebirds and Lawn Care

Bluebirds and lawn care? How do the subjects of bluebirds and lawn care go together? To begin, most people have read by now about the advantages of using native plants in their landscapes to sustain many forms of wildlife, including bluebirds. You have probably also read many recommendations to get rid of your lawn and go native. The reality is that those calls fall too often on deaf ears. Most people who have cultivated nice lawns over the years are not about to abandon the practice. To be sure, this reporter, also a native plant aficionado, appreciates a nice lawn as well. Nothing sets off a perennial garden better than a great lawn. But I have reduced my lawn coverage, and that is what I will be suggesting to you here.

While we see bluebirds feeding in manicured lawns all the time, gardens of any size, especially those containing native plants, will be far more productive in terms of food sources for bluebirds.

But lawns are toxic and are resource hogs too, aren't they? Yes, they certainly can be, and often are, but this long-time extension master gardener can teach you how to have a showroom lawn while applying far less toxicity, fertilizers, water, etc. The first and most important rule is to raise your mower deck to 3 inches or higher—consistently. The top growth supports the root growth, not the other way around as most people think. Scalp your lawn, and it jettisons roots it no longer needs. Nothing else you do, no amount of money thrown at your lawn, can improve it if you are mowing too short.

Mowing high helps in other ways too, because more root growth develops a denser lawn, leaving less room for crabgrass and weed seeds to germinate, while the taller turf leaves will help to shade the unwanted weeds out as well. I use NO pre-emergents, weed control, or pesticides on my lawn because they are not needed. Of note, this applies to cool season grasses only, mainly Kentucky Blue Grass. MBS has members in numerous other states

- more southern states - that may only grow warm season grasses, and this will not apply to those members.

Remember that bluebirds are highly susceptible to toxicity, whether it comes from lawn care chemicals themselves or the insects they eat that are tainted by chemicals. If you find an expired bluebird in your nest box during the growing season, strongly suspect pesticides.

Another major issue that has come to my attention, since it happened to me, is pesticide drift from a neighbor's yard that I'm quite sure caused the death of an incubating female on the nest in my backyard nest box. With the advent of mosquito-borne diseases like West Nile, Zika, and others, mosquito control companies have popped up everywhere and heavily play on those disease fears when promoting their services. I've seen this done, and it is awful, folks! They fog every inch of turfgrass – turfgrass that our bluebirds very likely will have fed from - as well as fogging every tree and shrub on the property. While this exerts mosquito control only temporarily at best, it creates havoc for everything else alive on the property. When I approached the applicator in his space suit, he told me the insecticide used was Fendona CS. This is an insecticide that is listed for 189 other insects besides mosquitos, including bees, beetles, and other pollinators. Common sense tells us there WILL be collateral damage, and lots of it. Yet when contacted, these companies will tell you the treatments are completely safe. HUH? Safe for whom or what? Certainly not for our pets and children, along with wildlife. On top of that, Extension Educators, usually all over environmental issues, stay silent for unexplained reasons. Otherwise, someone has to blow the whistle on the devastation.

If you may be thinking of doing this, PLEASE DO NOT!



## Oriole Feeder from Recycled Parts by Mary Bailey



*\*Please excuse the glare. The only way to photograph this feeder was through a window.*

Bluebirders are often interested in recycling, and we have a project that will delight all the species of orioles that visit you. It is made from a lid of a five-gallon plastic bucket, chains, and a ring you might put keys on.

As you can see in the picture\* the lid has a rim around it, but that is not a necessary component of the feeder. Initially we believed that the orioles would perch on the rim, but instead they often hang from the chains to eat the jelly you so generously serve them.

You will need a plastic lid from a five-gallon bucket, three 10 – 12 inch lengths of chain either metal or plastic, and one metal ring about 1 – 1.5 inches in diameter.

Drill three holes for small bolts, spaced equidistant around the edge of the lid. With a small bolt, affix a link at one end of each chain through each of the holes in the lid and gather them together at the other ends with the ring. This makes a neat hanging apparatus and the entire feeder is easily cleaned with a hose and a small brush.

We have found this to be a popular feeder for all the orioles that visit us, and Bill made ours from parts found in our barn – just waiting for a purpose!

If you have questions, we can be reached at the phone number in the list of county coordinators.

## Time to Report Your 2024 Results

### Trail Reports Are Important!

Both individual and trail reports are vital to our organization. When the data is gathered and analyzed, it allows us to know the health of our bluebird population. It tells us where we have been successful and where we need to do more work. We need to know your statistics whether you have one nest box or a whole trail, whether you fledged hundreds of chicks, or none at all. Please take the time to completely and accurately fill in your trail report form(s). Complete a separate form for each trail you are reporting on.

***Reports are due by December 31, 2024***

**To report your results go to our website: <http://bbrp.org/> Click on 2024 Trail Reporting Forms.**

You can either fill out the online report form or download a printable version to mail in.

Mail Report form to: Wally Swanson, 128 South Buchanan, Waterville, MN 56096.

Questions call Wally @ 507-362-8760.

Email: [dendroica55@gmail.com](mailto:dendroica55@gmail.com)



## 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, email us at [info@bbrrp.org](mailto:info@bbrrp.org) for more information.

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*"Bringing back Bluebirds for Future Generations!"*



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Saturday, September 21, 2024**

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

Bill & Mary Bailey Home

**February 20, 2025 - February 23, 2025**

**Port Aransas Whooping Crane Festival**

Port Aransas Civic Center, Port Aransas, TX

**March 1, 2025 - March 31, 2025**

**Nebraska Crane Migration**

Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center, Wood River, NE

**March 7, 2025 - March 9, 2025**

**International Festival of Owls**

Houston High School Houston, MN

**May 15, 2025 - May 17, 2025**

**28th Annual Detroit Lakes Festival of Birds**

### *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 Ardy Murphy*

*Thank you to everyone who wrote articles or provided photographs for this publication of the Bluebird News.*