



"Bringing back Bluebirds for Future Generations!"

Bluebird News



An Affiliate of NABS

Volume 35 Issue 2

Spring 2025

2025 Bluebird EXPO Recap by Nancy Engel, EXPO Chair



Expo Silent Auction Table

Thanks to everyone who attended the 2025 Expo in Red Wing. I hope that you found the experience to be a good one. We heard from four interesting speakers who talked about bird watching, conservation efforts at the MN Zoo, how to deal with wrens and sparrows and the latest happenings at the National Eagle Center.

From some of the feedback I received, it sounds like many of our attendees also had some engaging and wide-ranging conversations with the exhibitors. It's always fun to learn about different groups who are committed to preservation efforts throughout the area. If you know of such a group that would be a good fit for future Expos, please let me know. And, if you have any speakers that you would like to see give presentations, I'd love to hear about them.

The Expo could not have happened without the help of some terrific volunteers. A special thank you to Cindy Sabinske who organized the Silent Auction.

PAGE 1

Expo 2025

PAGE 2

Red-Headed Woodpecker

BlueBird Extravaganza

20th Annual SE MN Bluebirders' Picnic

PAGE 3-4

Expo Presentation Overview -

*Local Conservation Projects at the
Minnesota Zoo*

PAGE 5

*Giving Bluebirds a place to call home
"Chatfield's Townie" Bluebirds Return*

PAGE 6

Pine County Spring Reports

Tidbits

PAGE 7

County Coordinators

PAGE 8

Upcoming Events

That's a big job and she did it very well. Thank you as well to Brianna Kruse and her sister Andrea for working at the busy sales tables. And thanks to everyone who assisted with registration check in, lunch, the silent auction and the BBRP tables. Another special thank you to David Schmidt and Karah Bausch Olson for making the presentations run smoothly. Finally, I want to thank the staff at the Red Wing High School. They were wonderful to work with and provided all the support we needed to make the event a success.

If you'd like to help plan and/or work at the next Expo, please reach out to me. There are lots of ways to get involved and I would welcome the assistance. Just email me at nancyengel16@gmail.com to get more information about how you can be a part of this fun event.

I wish you well until I see you again at our next Expo. We'll have details about that coming soon.



Three of the speakers from the 2025 Bluebird Expo:
Amy Simso Dean- Birdwatching 101, Scott Mehus- Eagle Center, Karah Bausch Olson- Sparrows & Wrens

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery Project

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery Project recently went through the same process BBRP went through a few years ago. The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) was formed in December 2006 as a Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis. It has now become a stand-alone organization separate from Audubon.

Red-heads are also cavity nesters with a very specific habitat preference. They like open woods with large trees. This habitat is called a savannah. Due largely to land management practices, Red-headed Woodpecker populations have declined dramatically since 1967, up to 95% in Minnesota.

They had an information table at our Expo.
Membership is \$20 a year.

For further information check out their website:

<https://redheadwoodpeckerrecovery.org>

Their mailing address is:
Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery
P.O. Box 32172
Minneapolis MN 55432-0172



Photo by Joshua J. Cotten

Bluebird Extravaganza



*Join us at Fluegel's in Rosemount to
celebrate bluebirds!*

September 13, 2025 | 9:00am–12:00pm

- *Fix your broken nest boxes * Chat with experts
- *New & rehabbed nest boxes for sale *Bring the kids
- *Play games to learn about bluebirds

20th Annual SE MN Bluebirders' Picnic

**Saturday, September 20, 2025, marks the date for the 20th
Annual SE MN Bluebirders' Picnic.**

As in the past, it will be at the home of Bill & Mary Bailey, Olmsted and Fillmore County Coordinator, 9400 150th Avenue, SE, Chatfield, MN. Bill & Mary will furnish the main dish, tableware, seating, and beverages. Attendees are welcome to bring a dish to share. (Bluebirders are known to be good cooks!) Bill will lead an optional hike after lunch, and the picnic will be "rain or shine" because the Baileys have a sizable covered porch.

Questions, call (507) 867-9118.

Please be mindful of the I-90/US 52 construction when coming south on US 52. All interested in bluebirds or nature in general are welcome.



Expo Presentation Overview – Local Conservation Projects at the Minnesota Zoo



Seth Stapleton, through his position with the Minnesota Zoo's Conservation Department, has participated in a variety of conservation and research projects.

These include freshwater mussels and prairie butterflies here in Minnesota to black rhinos in southern African marine turtles in the eastern Caribbean. At our April Expo he spoke about some of the conservation activities at the zoo.

The Following is from the Minnesota Zoo website:

Restoring Freshwater Mussels

For many of us, mussels are mostly out-of-sight and out-of-mind. But native mussels are important for healthy rivers and lakes. Sadly, freshwater mussels are the most at-risk group of animals in the U.S. In Minnesota, 25 of our 48 remaining native mussel species are listed as endangered, threatened, or of special concern by the Minnesota DNR. The Minnesota Zoo is working with them to help mussel populations by conducting research and rearing mussels for release into the wild.

Native mussel species were once abundant throughout our rivers and lakes, helping to keep these ecosystems healthy and vibrant. Historic overharvesting of mussels for the pearl button industry caused major declines, along with the construction of dams which can alter water flow and quality, and negatively impact mussels. Runoff from chemicals and silt also threatens mussel populations. More recently, mussels have been threatened by the introduction of zebra mussels, an invasive mussel species that is native to eastern Europe. The invasive zebra

mussels colonize the shells of native mussels, intercept food, and take over their habitat – eventually killing them – and degrading aquatic communities important for fish populations.

These tough little filter-feeding animals are critical to a healthy ecosystem. Mussel beds help to filter the water and stabilize riverbeds, much like a freshwater coral reef. This improves water quality and



Native mussels just prior to being released into the Mississippi River.

helps create habitat for fish, turtles, birds, and other aquatic animals. Mussels are also an important food source for animals including otters, muskrats, ducks and gulls.

The Minnesota Zoo is joining the Minnesota DNR's efforts to restore native mussel populations in Minnesota. At several locations across the Zoo campus we're rearing mussel species including the Plain pocketbook, Black sandshell, Mucklets (a state-threatened species), and the Higgins' eye pearly mussel (a federally endangered species). Zoo researchers are developing protocols on rearing mussels and studying how they interact with and impact each other in a controlled setting. In addition, the Zoo partners with the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC) to study control

methods for the invasive zebra mussel.

Freshwater Turtle Conservation

Minnesota, with its 10,000+ lakes and miles of winding river, is a veritable paradise for freshwater turtles and many other wildlife species. There are nine species of freshwater turtles that call Minnesota home, from the more commonly sighted snapping and painted turtles to the relatively elusive softshell turtles. Unfortunately, freshwater turtles today face a variety of threats that are putting their future in Minnesota at risk.

Unfortunately, as a result of habitat loss & degradation, road mortality, nest predation, and poaching, and climate change, turtles today are in trouble. Of the nine species found in Minnesota, Blanding's and wood turtles are particularly vulnerable and are state listed as Threatened. Significant population declines in recent decades necessitate the need for action.

In addition to providing an important connection to nature for kids and adults alike, Minnesota's turtles provide us with many ecosystem services. Turtles are a crucial member of the freshwater community, keeping waterbodies clean and healthy by consuming decaying matter that can spread disease. They also disperse seeds of native plants, cycle nutrients, and create habitat for other pond critters.

The Minnesota Zoo is partnering with other state agencies to better understand the threats facing Minnesota's turtles. Using radio telemetry and GPS transmitters, we are tracking threatened turtles to learn about habitat use and nesting locations. These data will provide information on turtle needs and help to inform effective management strategies. We are also investigating road mortality impacts on turtles by

Expo Presentation Overview – Local Conservation Projects at the Minnesota Zoo

surveying sites around the greater metro and testing the effectiveness of mitigation strategies such as small animal exclusion fencing.

In addition, the Zoo manages a growing turtle headstarting program. Turtles in the wild are threatened by predators and natural and human-caused disturbances, and they are especially at-risk during their first year of life. Wildlife biologists are rearing hatchling wood turtles at the Zoo during their most vulnerable life stage. At approximately one year of age, the young turtles are released back into the wild to help boost local populations.

Pollinator Conservation Initiative

The Minnesota Zoo's Pollinator Conservation Initiative aims to secure a future for our state's most imperiled pollinator species. In collaboration with many agencies and groups, we are working to save endangered prairie butterflies such as the Dakota skipper and Poweshiek skipperling through rearing and breeding programs. In addition, Zoo biologists are conducting research on Minnesota's State Bee- the endangered rusty patched bumble bee. Why are pollinators in trouble?

Did you know that the orange and brown Poweshiek skipperling, formerly one of Minnesota's most common prairie butterflies, is now nearly extinct in the wild? Fewer than 500 likely remain in the world. Another prairie butterfly, the Dakota skipper, has also dropped to very low numbers and has vanished from most sites. Both are now listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, and are among 15 butterflies that are "Endangered," "Threatened," or of "Special Concern" by Minnesota.

Unfortunately, many other pollinator species also face uncertain futures. Globally, pollinator

populations are shrinking and the reasons appear to be complex. Habitat loss, pesticide use, climate change and disease appear to be overlapping factors threatening many pollinator species around the world. In Minnesota, we have experienced the near total disappearance of native prairie which historically supported an abundance of wildlife, including many pollinators. Today, less than 1% of the historical prairie remains in the state. Many animals and plants that need prairie have declined or vanished, including the Dakota skipper and Poweshiek skipperling.

We can't live without them!

Pollinators like native bees, beetles, moths and butterflies, and birds and bats, are crucial players in functioning and healthy ecosystems. They help plants reproduce, keeping our world vibrant and beautiful- and delicious! It is estimated that one out of every three bites of food humans consume depend on pollinators. Some of our favorites, like cocoa beans, are entirely dependent on services provided by pollinators. A world without pollinators would be a world without chocolate.

The Pollinator Conservation Initiative at the Minnesota Zoo has created the world's first rearing and breeding programs for Dakota skipper and Poweshiek skipperling to help save them from extinction. Zoo biologists study wild populations of prairie butterflies to assess their status and the threats they face. By rearing these butterflies during their sensitive caterpillar stages and eventually releasing them back to the prairies they have vanished from, this program is doing vital work for some of the most endangered butterfly species in the world.

In addition, Zoo researchers are studying other Minnesota pollinators, including the endangered rusty patched bumble bee. Through

regular surveys on Zoo grounds and development of research protocols, the Pollinator Conservation Initiative is helping the scientific community better understand the reasons for this species' decline and ways we might take action to protect it. Pollinators also help stabilize natural ecosystems which clean our air, filter our water, and boost our soils. They act as an important food source for many other species of wildlife. And pollinators have long held significance in many cultures. The world we recognize and cherish today is largely dependent on the health of pollinators.

Bison

The Minnesota Zoo has collaborated with the Parks and Trails Division of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to create the Minnesota Bison Conservation Herd and conserve the American plains bison throughout the state. A joint herd of American plains bison that has tested largely free of cattle genes is being managed cooperatively at Blue Mounds State Park, Minneopa State Park, Oxbow Park & Zollman Zoo, Spring Lake Park Reserve and at the Minnesota Zoo. Minnesota Zoo staff coordinate the genetic testing and pedigree tracking of the bison and work with our partners to ensure the health and long-term viability of the herd.

What can you do to help?

Check out the Minnesota Zoo website to find suggestions on how you can help each of these species: <https://mnzoo.org/mnzoo-conservation/>

Giving bluebirds a place to call home– by Debra Neutkens (Reprinted from Apr 2, 2025, White Bear Press)

Hoping to attract more bluebirds to the area, White Bear Lake resident George Brown spends spring days putting up special boxes in efforts to boost the population.

Brown is the Ramsey and north Washington County Coordinator for the Bluebird Recovery Program (BBRP) and has been monitoring bluebird boxes for 25 years.

“I like birds,” Brown replied when asked why he volunteers. “My mother loved birds, too, so I probably picked it up from her.” Although he never saw a bluebird growing up, the songbird is found in every county in the state. In fact, Minnesota has one of the most successful bluebird recovery projects in the country, according to the BBRP.

Every week, from the beginning of April to the middle of September, Brown visits the boxes, noting if there is a nest, or eggs, or baby bluebirds inside. He also records how many babies fledge (leave the nest). If there is nesting material from squatters, it is removed. Data is then reported to the recovery program, which posts monitoring results on its website.

Brown originally maintained a “bluebird trail” that stretched from Stacy to North Branch along I-35. When it became clear the trail was too dangerous to monitor near the freeway, boxes were relocated to the Dellwood Hills Golf Course. Eventually he added a trail of boxes at Oneka Ridge Golf Course in Hugo (monitored by someone else) and last year, installed 22 bluebird boxes at the White Bear Yacht Club golf course. The birds like open spaces and often return to the same box year after year.

Populations declined significantly from the 1930s to the 1960s due to habitat loss and competition from other cavity-nesting birds, especially starlings and house sparrows, but bluebirds have made a comeback. Normally 70 to 80 birds fledge from his boxes in a summer, noted Brown, and he’s optimistic 2025 will have similar numbers. “We saw bluebirds at both golf courses, so they’re here,” he said.

Statewide, numbers have been stable the last few years. In 2024, the state had 4,307 nest sites. Volunteers reported 14,477 eggs, 12,439 hatchlings and 11,592

fledged. In 2023, 11,636 bluebirds fledged. When southern Minnesota birders started the project in 1979, only 22 bluebirds were counted.

The Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota has coordinators in 33 counties to help with issues and share their bluebird knowledge. Go to bbrp.org for contact information, upcoming events, how to attract bluebirds and more. There are also plans online for nest boxes, including the Gilbertson PVC box, Brown’s favorite. “Someone could make a few bucks making the boxes,” he added.

For his dedication to the project and successful fledging results, Brown was named Bluebirder of the Year in 2010. He is also a past commander of VFW Post 1782 and is active at the district level.

The BBRP coordinator wants people to know he is looking for a successor, and is happy to mentor his replacement. He’s also willing to help homeowners place boxes in their yards. “I enjoy it and I’m happy to do it,” Brown said. “I’m not looking for accolades, I just like to see bluebirds.”

CHATFIELD’S “TOWNIE” BLUEBIRDS RETURN– By Mary C. Bailey

Chatfield, MN, has been unique in that it has often been blessed with bluebirds nesting in the heart of town. Again, they are in the backyard of Rev. Deb Collum, pastor of the Chatfield United Methodist Church. I suppose we could attribute this to divine intervention, but that doesn’t explain the bluebirds’ presence at more secular sites in the city of Chatfield. Loren “Murph” Murphy, the Bluebird’s Friend said many years ago that the southeast had some of the best bluebird habitat in the state. This is just another example of his wisdom.



The returning “Townie Bluebird” nest at the home of Rev. Deb Collum, pastor of the Chatfield United Methodist Church

PINE COUNTY SPRING REPORT– By Jean Olsen, Pine County Coordinator

Received on May 13th:

Much better spring here in Pine County than last year for the nesting bluebirds. Warmer and drier weather, though looking forward to forecasted rain for later this week.

STATS ON MY 3 TRAILS THIS YEAR:

- St. Croix State Park - 59 nest boxes.
- 49ers property - 2 nest boxes.
- Lost Creek property - 8 boxes.

Last week's box check:

SCSP - 24 bluebird eggs in 7 boxes. The majority of the other boxes had nest building activity in them.

49ers - 9 bluebird eggs, with 6 eggs in one box and 3 bluebird eggs in the other one.

Lost Creek - 14 bluebird eggs; 6 in one box and 4 each in 2 other boxes.

No sign of bear activity on the boxes yet this year, with fingers crossed that there isn't a repeat of last year - where 109 eggs and chicks were lost to bear

predation.

On Sat 5/10, I attended the Pine County World Bird Day event and manned a table representing BBRP. Attendance by the public was double that of last year (where I also had a table at representing BBRP), with 82 people attending; most were families with children. Most everyone stopped by my table; with the adults interested in info I provided and the children fascinated by egg display and pictures of the age progression of chicks from birth to fledging.

The sponsor of this event, Shayna Vendela, (Farm Bureau Wildlife Biologist, PheasantsForever, QuailForever) hopes to make this an annual event; and I hope she does.

Four people I talked to have bluebird boxes on their property and expressed an interest in joining BBRP and reporting their yearly totals of bluebirds fledged this year. Each was given a brochure for further information on doing this.

*Best wishes for everyone and their
bluebird counts this year.*

TIDBITS

"After numerous requests for connections to builders of bluebird nest boxes, BBRP has created a website page containing all the information needed to contact the three builders who should be able to provide you with new nest boxes.

<https://bbrp.org/where-to-purchase-new-nest-boxes/>

Questions, please contact us at info@bbrp.org

Your BB News editor has only 4 pairs of boxes. Sadly I lost one nest of five baby blues in the recent cold and rain. Two other nests have babies doing well and another has tree swallow eggs.

2024 Bluebirder of the Year

announced at the Expo is Fern Vesledahl.



Bill & Mary Bailey speaking at a recent gathering at Chester Woods County Park

On April 24, 2025, over 25 people gathered at Chester Woods Olmsted County Park for a buffet lunch and presentation by Bill and Mary Bailey. Attendees were primarily the park's bluebird trail monitors, but others interested in bluebirds and nature attended.



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 for more information.

AITKIN

Steve Gilbertson
Aitkin
218-927-1953

ANOKA

Richard Sherva
Anoka
763-360-5075
rmsherva@gmail.com

Jeanne Wilkinson
Anoka

763-229-9972
jgwillk@comcast.net

BELTRAMI

Brian Hiller
Bemidji
218-755-2212
brian.hiller@bemidji.state.edu

BENTON

Bob & Sandy Rajkowski
Rice
320-393-2909

BLUE EARTH

Jonathan Willow
Mankato
612-760-9212
jwillow@pheasantsforever.org

CARLTON

Steve Gilbertson
Aitkin
218-927-1953

CARVER

Mary O'Neil
Chanhassen
612-599-8399
marebare914@aol.com

CROW WING

Mary Kalinoski
Baxter
218-829-5297

marydee@brainerd.net

DAKOTA

David Schmidt
Inver Grove Heights
651-457-9195
schmidt_dw@yahoo.com
Marlys Shirley
Farmington
952-469-3510
gshirley@frontiernet.net

FILMORE

Mary Bailey
Chatfield
507-867-9118
marycbluebird@gmail.com

Mike Jeresek

Rushford
507-864-2573
san@acegroup.cc

FREEBORN

Karen Sundal
Albert Lea
507-433-2701
karen.sundal@yahoo.com

GOODHUE

Steve Dietz
Frontenac
952-994-4118
stevedietz.mn@gmail.com

HENNEPIN

John Hauser
Bloomington
952-831-8132
jgshauser@gmail.com

Bob Hursh

Edina
952-334-5084
bobhursh@hotmail.com

Pete Meyer

Mound
952-472-7449
pjdmeyer@gmail.com

HOUSTON

Mike Jeresek
Rushford
507-864-2573
san@acegroup.cc

HUBBARD

Ron Jensen
Park Rapids
218-732-4205
jenspr@unitelc.com

ITASCA

Rick Blake
Grand Rapids
218-327-3303
rwblake@outlook.com

KANABEC

Steve Gilbertson
Aitkin
218-927-1953

LAKE

Beth Urban
Ely
218-365-5047

LE SUEUR

Bruce Smisek
Montgomery
507-364-8966
montgomerysodco@gmail.com

LYON

Paul Rasmussen
Russell
507-823-4731

Cynthia Sabinske
Ghent

507-829-7965
cynthia.sabinske@gmail.com

MORRISON

Mike & Kelly Fulford
Little Falls
612-581-6400
mike@oliverspoint.com

OLMSTED

Mary Bailey
Chatfield
507-867-9118
marycbluebird@gmail.com

PINE

Jeanne Olsen
Hinckley
320-384-6163
lostcreekbrds@gmail.com

RAMSEY

George Brown
White Bear Lake
651-245-2435
g.r-b.jr@comcast.net

RICE

Mike & Stacy Shuda
Faribault
608-323-7511
michaeljshuda@gmail.com

Keith Radel

Faribault
507-210-0961

SCOTT

Jon Allen
Savage
612-490-8700
jonedwardallen@gmail.com

SHERBURNE

Jan Wallin
Zimmerman
763-442-4390
janwallin37@gmail.com

ST. LOUIS (North)

Beth Urban
Ely
218-365-5047

WABASHA

Carol & Dale Nibbe
Lake City
651-345-2410

ccnlc@hotmail.com

WADENA

Paul Sailer
Wadena
218-631-4401
lodenbks@gmail.com

WASECA

Wally Swanson
Waterville
507-362-8760
dendroica55@gmail.com

WASHINGTON

David Morgan
Stillwater
651-430-2427
Leadrsheep@aol.com

WASHINGTON (North)

George Brown
White Bear Lake
651-245-2435
g.r-b.jr@comcast.net

WASHINGTON (South)

David Schmidt
Inver Grove Heights
651-457-9195
schmidt_dw@yahoo.com

WINONA

Brianna Frisch
Minnieska
507-459-4829
bri_kruse@hotmail.com

WRIGHT

Mary A. Swenson
Monticello
763-516-1074
maranswen@aol.com

BBRP Board Members contact at info@bbrrp.org

Nancy Engel - Expo Chairperson

Rosemount
763-843-6581

Brianna Frisch - Membership

Minnieska
507-459-4829

David Schmidt - Board Chairperson

Inver Grove Heights
651-457-9195

Marilyn Suter - Board Member at Large

Farmington
C-651-900-4335
H-651-460-4236

Karah Bausch Olson - Secretary

Minneapolis
612-819-0944

Wally Swanson - Treasurer

Waterville
507-380-4106

Virginia Windschitl - Newsletter

Farmington
C-612-402-8042
H-651-463-8056
edbbnews@outlook.com

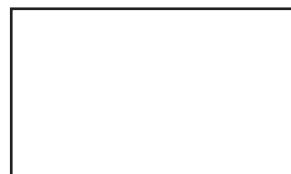
Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota



5294 W 235th St.
Farmington, MN 55024

Volume 35 Issue 2
Spring 2025

"Bringing back Bluebirds for Future Generations!"



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Bluebird News is published quarterly by the
Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota

www.bbrp.org

BBRP is a 501 (C)(3) Organization

Membership qualifies as a tax-deductible donation.

Editor BB News: Virginia Windschittl,

edbbnews@outlook.com

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, September 13, 2025

Bluebird Extravaganza, Rosemount | 9:00 am–12:00 pm

Saturday, September 20, 2025

12th Annual SE Minn. Bluebirders' Picnic, Chatfield

Saturday, September 27 - 29th Annual Wildlife Festival

**Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, Oak Savanna Learning Center
Zimmerman**

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."

Visit our Web-site at
www.bbrp.org



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