



Sustaining Bluebirds For Future Generations

Bluebird News



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The Mother Bluebird's Crucial Role in the Nesting Cycle



A pair of bluebirds. © BBPMN

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2025—The Bluebird Flyer

By Mary Mason, MBS Education
Director

The female bluebird has a lot of responsibilities becoming a mother, and she takes them seriously. Experienced mother bluebirds seem to be very good at what they do, while younger, first-time mama bluebirds have more to learn with their new lessons of becoming a mom.

Male bluebirds usually pick the nest box for nesting, but it is the female bluebird that is the nest builder. She selects and brings in the nesting material, shapes the nest cup, and is responsible for incubating and brooding new nestlings for the first week or so after hatching. It is entertaining and comical to see the male bluebird act silly by bringing in some nesting material and acting like he is helping; however, it seems to often irritate the female bluebird, and she will remove what he brings in or look at him as if to say, "What do you think you are doing?" The bluebirds in spring are fascinating to watch and observe. No wonder we all fall in love with them so quickly.

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The female's job is vital to egg development, and many females seem to really have it down! What we have learned by observation is that most females keep the eggs at a perfect temperature before they have finished laying eggs and true incubation starts. Incubation is when the true "cooking" begins — which leads to embryonic development that helps all the eggs hatch at relatively the same time. Of course, there are sometime exceptions to that rule, but I have found that more often than not, all of my bluebird eggs hatch on the same day.

The mother bluebird develops what is called a "brood patch" — an area on her abdomen that does not have feathers. Some of the feathers fall out and some are pulled out to expose bare skin which acts as a little thermal blanket to help incubation. Her direct skin contact with eggs is much warmer to eggs than her insulating feathers are. The male bluebird does not have a brood patch, but sometimes he will go in and sit with the eggs. Remember, he is excited, too, and Mama may need to go out, stretch her wings, and maybe

grab a snack. But the male bluebird, although helpful, cannot incubate eggs.

Mama bluebird's temperature control of her eggs starts before all the eggs are laid and before sustained incubation begins because the eggs need to be rotated and moved. She has to change the position of her eggs all the time, turning and rotating and even staying with the eggs on cold days or nights before she has

The Mother Bluebird's Crucial Role in the Nesting Cycle continued...

The Nesting Cycle *in photos*



BBPMN member submitted photos

completed laying eggs to try and prevent those already laid from freezing. Once serious incubation starts, the eggs typically hatch in approximately two weeks. Many people worry about their eggs during our unpredictable spring weather that may bring below-freezing temperatures. However, those with nest box cameras often observe the mother bluebird going into the box with her one, two, or three eggs and staying all night to prevent them from freezing — all to try and keep her eggs viable before incubation begins. The next day she may lay yet another egg.

After two weeks of incubating, the eggs hatch, and the nestlings begin their development. Again, the mama bluebird will brood her brand new featherless nestlings to keep them warm for at least a week. Both the mama and proud papa bluebird will feed the babies, and it is the thrill of their lives to hunt and bring food to their family. It is just remarkable to witness their behavior attending to their family!

It is always a notable day when Mom leaves them on their own for their first night without her.

Being a good bluebird landlord requires that you are watching, worrying, hoping and doing your best to make it all as safe and easy as possible for these beautiful birds.

When you have done everything you can to help bluebirds by offering a well-built, durable nest box with a good predator guard on a free-standing pole in a safe and recommended location, the fledge is even more rewarding. If you are lucky, you may also see the parents bring the kids back to your yard and garden with their adorable spotted feathers, learning how to be little bluebirds that can hunt and survive on their own. You may even witness a young bluebird trying to eat all by itself, even though they do love to be fed by the parents.

In closing, remember that as we strive to return to a more healthy ecosystem by planting native, the more sustainable your yard and garden will become, making survival easier for bluebirds and other native birds and wildlife. That sustainability assures less work and more enjoyment for you!



Female Bluebird nesting. © BBPMN

Bluebird Virtual Expo 2026

Join Us!

SATURDAY, APRIL 11, 2026

9AM-NOON

FREE!



University of Colorado
Boulder



Dr. Scott Taylor

Dr. Scott Taylor, evolutionary biologist at the University of Colorado Boulder, and podcast host of “Ok...But Birds” will talk about how birds are faring with climate change.

A representative from Monarch Joint Venture will talk about the importance of planting for birds. The Monarch Joint Venture (MJV) is a national conservation nonprofit that implements science-based conservation actions for monarch butterflies and other pollinators through four main pillars: habitat, science, education, and partnership.



MONARCH
JOINT VENTURE



Monarch on Aster. Photo Monarch Joint Venture

Dr. Hiller and his graduate students from Bemidji State University will present their latest bird research project.

Board members will hold our annual “Bluebird Potpourri” session. Whether you are a beginning bluebirder, wannabe bluebirder or have been monitoring trails for years, bring your questions and concerns. We are here to learn from each other.

How to Register

1. Go to bbpmn.org
2. Click on “2026 Expo”
3. Complete the online form and we’ll send you a Zoom link 1 week prior to the Expo.

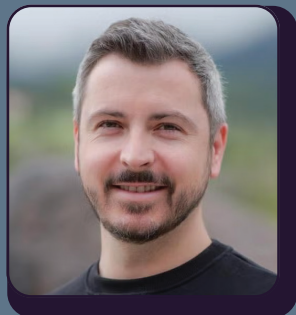


BEMIDJI
STATE UNIVERSITY



Dr. Hiller. Photo Bemidji State University

Introducing our Featured Expo Speakers



Dr. Scott Taylor

Evolutionary Biologist &
Bird Enthusiast



Dr. Brian Hiller

Professor of Biology-Wildlife
Specialist

Dr. Scott Taylor is an evolutionary biologist, and bird enthusiast who has spent his career trying to answer questions about how species evolve and what happens when they collide. He is an associate professor at the University of Colorado, where he teaches topics such as hybridization, speciation, evolutionary ecology, and population genomics within different species of birds. Taylor serves as a member of their Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and serves as Director of the Mountain Research Station. His research explores hybrid zones, speciation, and how climate change is shaking up the lives and love lives of birds across North America.

Taylor was raised in southern Ontario. He received his undergraduate degree in wildlife biology at the University of Guelph, later pursuing a graduate degree at Queen's University.

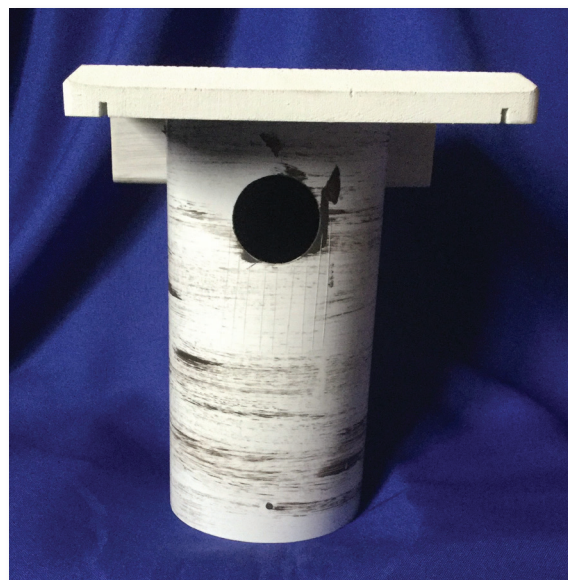
He completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. His work has taken him from the cloud forests of South America to the high alpine tundra, but he's just as captivated by the chickadees outside your window.

Dr. Brian Hiller is Professor of Biology-Wildlife Specialist in the Biology department at Bemidji State University. Being a curious person by nature, Dr. Hiller's research interests include a wide variety of wildlife-related topics. His graduate work was focused on the presence in, concentrations of, and potential impacts of contaminants on American woodcock (*Scolopax minor*). He is still very interested in the various impacts of contaminants on a wide variety of wildlife groups, especially migratory birds, and his research interests have expanded since coming to Bemidji State. Some additional areas of interest include furbearer management, urban-suburban deer management, population monitoring methods, non-game bird management, native prairie management, and invasive plant management.

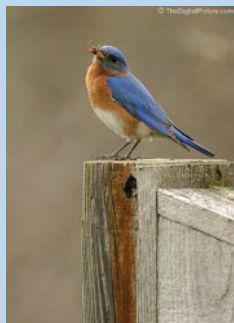
Public Lands Nest Box Program

BBPMN's 2025-26 Public Lands Nest Box Program which grants nest boxes to qualifying communities, parks and organizations concluded on February 1 with a review of this year's applicants. Four organization submitted requests and were granted a total of seventeen Gilbertson - PVC boxes.

If your community, or a state, county or regional park or other public lands organization near you is in need of bluebird nest boxes have them check the BBPMN website at: Public Lands Nest Box Program - Bluebird Program of Minnesota to submit an application for the 2026 - 27 granting period which ends on February 1, 2027.



Maplewood Bluebird Trail Monitoring Class



MAPLEWOOD BLUEBIRD TRAIL MONITORING CLASS



Each spring thousands of beautiful little bluebirds return to Minnesota from Kansas and Missouri looking for nest sites to raise their young. That's where we come in by providing them nest boxes and weekly monitoring to insure their safety from the time the first egg is laid until the little ones fledge.

BECOME A MAPLEWOOD BLUEBIRD TRAIL VOLUNTEER MONITOR

Bluebird nest boxes in Maplewood Park trails are just waiting for volunteers to monitor and maintain. From April to August bluebirds and their competitors will be nesting in these boxes. To keep bluebirds safe and record their nesting progress the boxes need to be monitored on a weekly basis.

COME JOIN OUR MONITORING CLASS:

- Just want to learn about Bluebirds, this class is for you no commitment beyond learning.
- We'll learn how to check the nest boxes, determine who is using the box by nest type.
- Cover the things we as volunteers need to do to keep bluebirds safe during the nesting period.
- We'll talk about competitor bird species and predators – other birds, mammals and insects.
- We'll identify where the nest box trails are in Maplewood parks.
- How we record what we find each week and reporting it to BBPMN at season end.

BLUEBIRDING 101 – TRAIL MONITORING IN MAPLEWOOD NATURE AREAS

WHEN: March 19, 2026, 7 – 8:30pm

WHERE: Maplewood Nature Center, 2659 E 7th St, Maplewood, MN 55119

RSVP: send an email to bluebirdsafe@gmail.com – your name & contact information is all we need

QUESTIONS: email questions to bluebirdsafe@gmail.com

INSTRUCTOR: David Schmidt - Dakota Co. Coordinators - Bluebird Program of MN

This class is presented in cooperation with the following nature-based organizations:



**Bluebird Program
of Minnesota**

Sustaining Bluebirds For Future Generations

20th Annual SE MN Bluebirders' Picnic

Tidbits

At noon on September 21, 2025, over 30 people gathered at the home of Bill and Mary Bailey, Olmsted and Fillmore County Coordinator, for the 20th Annual SE MN Bluebirders' Picnic. There was a potluck lunch, with Bill and Mary providing the main dish, the tableware, the seating and the beverages. It was exciting to mark 20 years of gathering and recalling the growth of the bluebird impact in the southeast part of the state. A fair number of first-timers attended.

After the lunch and drawing for door prizes, Bill did a demonstration of a sparrow trap capable of catching multiple birds. Several attendees took plans for the trap. They also got to see a prototype of a new bluebird box style made by Quint Lohse, a long-time Chatfield bluebirder. Bill and Tim Gossman, another long-time Chatfield bluebirder, then led a hike to an area set aside for apple and pear trees they had grafted in the spring.

It was warmly gratifying to look back at 20 years of growth and evolution in helping bluebirds here in the southeastern part of the state. Seeing the veterans chatting with the youngsters and first timers was both exciting and heartwarming. Mary had a hopeful vision when moving here from Indiana over 24 years ago. The dream continues...



Bill Bailey demonstrates traps and boxes, answering questions from the group.



Bill Bailey showing the grafting of apple and pear trees to root stock.

Interesting article posted online recently "To Support Nesting Eastern Bluebirds, Plant Native"

(February 18, 2026) written by Dr. Ashley Kennedy, Affiliated Faculty, Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology, University of Delaware

<https://nestwatch.org/blog/to-support-nesting-eastern-bluebirds-plant-native/>

Horicon Marsh Bird Club invites birders of all skill levels to the Annual Horicon Marsh Bird Festival. This weekend-long event provides family-friendly activities and educational experiences designed to showcase Horicon Marsh's role as an important habitat for birds and wildlife. The festival will include birding, bus tours, Whooping Crane tours, smaller more intimate guided tours, and so much more! The Horicon Marsh vast wetland is both a Wisconsin State Wildlife Area and a National Wildlife Refuge. Over the years, a total of 300+ species of birds have been sighted on this marsh.

The Horicon Marsh Bird Festival will focus on introducing visitors to many of these birds at the peak of the spring migration. Registration will be open after February 1st, 2026 on the Horicon Marsh Bird Club's webpage.

The 29th annual Festival of Birds in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, will be held May 14-16, 2026.

Look for online registration starting in March.

Humorist Al Batt will be presenting up laughs on Friday, May 15.

Photographer and author Peter Cavanagh's presentation Saturday, May 16 will be based on his book "How Birds Fly."

Mice Nests

If you cleaned the box at the end of nesting season, and mice used it over the winter, clean the box out again before bluebird nesting season starts. Because of various diseases use precautions. Before removing a mouse nest, use a spray bottle to thoroughly soak the nest and box (to control dust) with a 10% bleach solution (water if no bleach is available). After 15-20 minutes, while standing upwind/wearing a mask, use gloves or a plastic bag to remove the nest, and then sweep and scrape out the box. Wash your hands afterwards. Leave the box open for a day to air it out.

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 BBMN is looking for more county coordinators. If interested, email us at info@bbpmn.org for more information.

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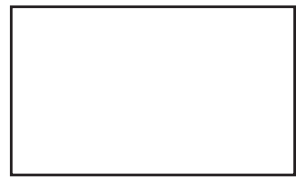
Bluebird Program of Minnesota



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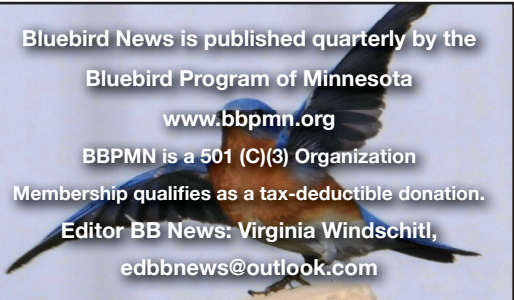


Photo by Joanie Schults

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, April 11, 2026
Bluebird Expo

May 8-10, 2026
Horicon Marsh Bird Festival
Marsh Haven Nature Center, WI

May 14-16, 2026
Festival of the Birds
Detroit Lakes, MN

March 19, 2026
Maplewood Bluebirding Class
Maplewood Nature Center,
2659 E 7th St, Maplewood, MN

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.