



Bluebird Notes



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ncbluebird.com

NCBS hosts NABS
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NCBS Logo with Carolina Blue by Dempsey Essick

December 2004 through February 2005

Volume 20 Number 1

North Carolina Bluebird Society Mission Statement

Our goal is to support activities that foster the resurgence of bluebirds and other cavity nesting birds in our home areas.

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Nature Artist and Writer



The following is the official bio from the website, www.juliezickefoose.com.

"Julie Zickefoose is a widely published natural history writer and artist. Educated at Harvard University in biology and art, she worked for six years as a field biologist for The Nature Conservancy before turning to a freelance art career. Her observations on the natural history and behavior of birds stem from more than three decades of experience in the field. She has presented illustrated lectures for nature organizations and festivals across the country, and exhibited her paintings at universities, museums, galleries, and in juried shows. Illustration



credits include *The New Yorker*, *Smithsonian*, *Spider*, *Cricket*, and *Ladybug*. She has written and illustrated articles for *Country Journal*, and *Bird Watcher's Digest* has published more than 30 of Julie's articles and 17 of her cover paintings since 1986. Julie is a regular commentator on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, bringing a taste of rural life to the news program." However, this just scratches the surface

of her presence and presentation. She has agreed to speak at 1 pm on Saturday, May 21 at NABS 2005.

Her talk is titled "Hummingbird Summer." Again from the website:

"In a single July windstorm, two ruby-throated hummingbird nests blew down and were brought into the offices of *Bird Watcher's Digest*. Who you gonna call? Julie Zickefoose spent the rest of the summer as mother to four young hummingbirds, a life-changing experience. Not to be outdone, seven baby chimney swifts came to roost with Julie and her family in the summer of 2004. Wonderful photography captures

the development and behavior of two of our least-understood birds."

Julie has spoken at several NABS meetings. She is a delight to hear and to meet. Julie and her husband, Bill Thompson, III, Editor of *Bird Watcher's Digest*, have a new book, *Identify Yourself: A Guide to the 50 Most Common Birding Challenges*, which will be published by Houghton Mifflin in April, 2005. Copies should be available at the meeting.

NABS 2005 will be the NCBS 2005 Annual Meeting.

Bluebird Notes

Issue 19 Vol. 3

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Notes to The Editor



Newest FBI Member (Foxfire Bluebird Investigators)

Pictured here is Brandee Bryant on a summer visit to Foxfire Village. Brandee accompanied other Bryants on a check of Bluebird houses on both The Bryant Trail (6 houses) and the West Course of Foxfire Golf Course (13 houses).

Paul Bryant, the senior member of the clan, was so pleased at the 100% rate of occupancy and thirty-one fledglings that he has purchased three more houses to add to "his trail"!

Brandee was thrilled with the discovery of this mother sitting on her nest. It was a FIRST for her (and perhaps for the bluebird)!



Submitted by Claire Bryant, the monitor of the Bryant Trail.

A Picture from Bob Rothrock, Monitor at Bryan Park

A typical box on
Bryan Park Golf Course —

- ◆ No Snakes
- ◆ No Raccoons
- ◆ Very Scenic.





Bluebird Tales



Photos by Ed Erkes

A Note from Linda Nunemaker

Dear Helen,

Your article on the bluebird houses at Foxfire has prompted my small garden club here in Mill Creek Golf Course development, Mebane, NC, to take on assisting with an existing trail of bluebird houses already located on the golf course. These houses were lovingly placed several years ago by a neighbor here in our community who works for the golf course. This man has built many bluebird houses for our small community and the city of Mebane.

However, all of his houses are mounted on trees around our golf course, I don't think he has been able to monitor them weekly and he reported to me that he finds snakes in several of the boxes. I have tried to get golf course management interested and involved, to the extent of mounting the houses on separate poles or posts, but the final word on this is that the houses will have to stay on trees. We can relocate the boxes to other trees as deemed necessary, so we will face them southeast if possible, check distances between boxes, evict the unwanted sparrows and use the disposable cardboard berry boxes during nesting season. It now becomes necessary to attempt to prevent snake predation in these boxes. My own idea is to make a "skirt" of black plastic netting to circle the tree trunks both below and above the boxes. I am wondering if you have any other ideas or suggestions about this? Obviously, this will not prevent squirrels getting to the boxes, but I believe only one or two of the 23 bluebird boxes have shown squirrel damage. We will be working with this gentleman who built and installed the boxes, and we are all hopeful that together we can deter intruders of all kinds and help to increase the bluebird population with careful attention to location and monitoring. Thanks for any helpful suggestions you may have. I really enjoy the NCBS newsletter and have recently made several copies of the latest one to share with the aforementioned golf course people. I will also be showing the "Bluebirds, Inside the Nestbox" video to my garden club members.

Best wishes,
Linda Nunemaker

Dear Linda,

I am glad that the article about the bluebird houses at Foxfire met a receptive audience. I always fear that when I write about something personal that someone will think that I am doing a "me, me, me" thing. Of course, it is more of what I know about and am delighted when someone else writes about their experiences which I then include in the newsletter. The golf courses have a problem with poles because they, in turn, cause a problem in mowing. Chuck Bliss has his nest boxes on trees at the Asheboro Country Club and they do well. A consideration for trees is to use the smallest ones possible so they are more like poles and put the boxes on ones that have the least amount of overhang. The bluebirds look at the overhang as potential hiding places for swooping predators.

Snake baffles for poles are easy to come by in that the people who use stovepipe ones swear by them. Bill Abbey is the exception to that in that he feels if a snake wants to come up, it will. I have installed two netting snake baffles in two places where snakes have been active. The only problem is that if the snake gets caught in one, it will die unless released. Some would say, "What problem?"

I have the directions for making one of these and they could go around a tree. I do not have your land address so if you will send it to me, I'll copy it off for you. It is in a book called the Bluebird Monitor's Guide pg. 116-117. (ISBN 0-06-273743-0) (Cynthia Berger, Keith Kridler, Jack Griggs)

The other choice is to move the boxes that are in the snake territory to other locations.

Jack Finch (Homes for Bluebirds in Baily, NC) sells metal protectors to keep the squirrels from enlarging the holes. Check his son's web site for more information (www.danfinch.com).

Please write again and let me know how you make out. If it okay, this may end up in the newsletter. Thanks.

Sincerely,
Helen

Heated Bird Bath & Roosting Box

By Fred Benson, Cary, NC
fbenson@ipass.net

If you need a "do it yourself" project, consider this homemade heated birdbath. The unheated birdbath is available from Wal-Mart, K-mart, Target, etc. for about \$10. The parts to make the heater are available from Lowes, Home Depot, Ace Hardware, etc. for about \$15.00. The heating element is a medium base 60 watt candelabra style bulb.



Unfrozen water can be as hard for birds to find in winter as food. Birds need water not only to drink, but also to keep their feathers clean and fluffy to provide the insulation to keep warm in cold weather. A dependable supply of fresh water will even attract birds to your yard that would not ordinarily come to your feeders. A shallow, easy-to-clean, heated bird bath is the best kind. A heated bird bath will provide unfrozen water in the winter & can be used all year long. Clean your bird bath often and keep it filled with fresh water.

The cost of a purchased birdbath heater by itself is around \$40 plus tax. A homemade heated birdbath is \$25. I will furnish the plans including bill of material via e-mail to anyone interested. This type of birdbath heater makes a great project for clubs, scout troops, etc.

Both purchased and homemade heated birdbath are "on" regardless of the temperature. To have them on only when it is cold enough to freeze, a thermostat of some sort is needed.

A Thermo Cube is such a unique and patented electrical device. It plugs into a standard electrical outlet which turns the power on and off automatically, according to the outside temperature. Each unit has two receptacles for use with more than one electrical device.

The Thermo Cube—Cost about \$30.

"It saves energy and equipment by running only when necessary according to the outside temperature."

Product Description:

- - Turns On at 35° F (2° C) and Turns Off at 45° F (7° C)
- - UL Listed
- - Works Automatically to Ambient Temperature
- - 1 Year Limited Manufacturers Warranty

Maximum rating: 1800 Watts/ 15 Amps /120 Volts

Editor Note: Easy Heat Freeze Free with power indicator light—Cost about \$10

This is found in the plumbing department of Lowes Home Improvement. It turns on and off at 38° F.

To the right is a design that I hope will work for a nice bluebird winter roosting box. It has an inner roosting chamber that is insulated with foam insulation. It opens from the front and the inner roost chamber cover comes off for inspection and cleaning. The floor space should accommodate up to 12 birds. I'm going to field test it in my yard this winter.



Fred Benson, Cary, NC

Asheville Has Great Attractions

The **Biltmore Estate** is often the reason that people from all over the world visit Asheville, North Carolina. This year, of course, the reason is the North American Bluebird Society's annual meeting. However, there are many other attractions if you come for an extra day or if you want to squeeze in some extra sightseeing. Most places in Asheville are within fifteen minutes of the SunSpree, the headquarters for NABS 2005.

The **Thomas Wolfe Memorial** reopened last June after a 2.4 million dollar restoration brought on by a still-unsolved July 1998 arson-set fire. Built in the 1880s, it has been restored to its 1916 condition. This 29-room house was used as a boarding house and "Wolfe's mother Julia rented its small bedrooms to travelers in the first part of the 20th century. The house was memorialized as 'Dixieland' in Wolfe's 1929 novel, Look Homeward Angel."

Thomas Wolfe lived in this boarding house (flop house) from 1906 to 1916. He "did not know what room he would sleep in every night until he looked to see what rooms were occupied and which ones were empty."

The Thomas Wolfe Memorial is a 15 minute drive from the NABS 2005 meeting place. Contact number is (828)253-8304.

(Source—The Herald-Sun, Durham, NC, 6/13/04
Contributed by Edith Blaylock.)

Another National Historic Site is the **Carl Sandburg Home**. "Nature played an important part in the Sandburgs' daily life. Their interest in birds can be seen throughout the house and farm. Visitors may delight in glimpsing birds arriving at the bird-feeders outside the dining room window. Binoculars are on the dining room table waiting for someone to identify a rare bird. Bluebirds are commonly seen flitting in and out of the nesting boxes, part of the Bluebird Trail originally established by Margaret Sandburg."

One hundred species of birds are on the bird list for this 263.5 acre National Historic Site. The Carl Sandburg Home is in Flat Rock, NC, near Hendersonville and approximately 25 miles from Asheville.

(Source— Birds of Carl Sandburg Home)

The **Grove Arcade (downtown)** is described as "a lavishly ornamented Gothic structure dominating an entire city block." It was completed in 1929 and was renovated in 2002 "as a public market showcasing shops and services that feature our distinctive mountain heritage."

This official description does not do justice to the feeling you get as you enter this beautiful building. The light is brought in through the high windows as you wander down the central hall and are enticed by the art and food shops. It has that feeling of an earlier time.

The Grove Arcade is one of the sponsors of NABS 2005 and about fifteen minutes from the hotel. They have invited all participants to a wine tasting on Thursday night at 7 pm. More information will be available at the conference.

(Source— Asheville Visitor Guide (828) 258-6101)

The **North Carolina Arboretum** is part of one of the Biltmore Tours. It is also 15 to 20 minutes from the hotel and accessed from the Blue Ridge Parkway. The Arboretum covers 426 acres in the Pisgah National Forest. "The arboretum features a visitor education center, bicycle and hiking trails, and five theme gardens reflecting southern Appalachian heritage. Tropical plants, bonsai and rare and endangered species are cultivated in a state-of-the-art greenhouse, which is open to visitors."

Phone (828) 665-2492. (Source— AAA Tour Book, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina.)

Folk Art Center is a part of the second Biltmore Tour. It is operated by the Southern Highland Craft Guild and opened in 1980 as a cooperative effort between the Guild, the National Park Service and the Appalachian Regional Commission. It is accessed from the Blue Ridge Parkway.

This center preserves and celebrates the "craft work in the southern Appalachian region through demonstration, special events and changing exhibits of past and present Southern Highlands crafts. A Blue Ridge Parkway information desk is in the center."

Phone—(828)298-7928. (Source— AAA Tour Book, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina.)

(Continued on page 14)

North Carolina Bluebird Society

- () 1 YEAR MEMBERSHIP \$10.00
 () 3 YEARS MEMBERSHIP \$25.00

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 Fayetteville, NC 28311

Mission Statement

Our goal is to support activities that foster the resurgence of bluebirds and other cavity nesting birds in our home areas.

Please help the bluebirds by volunteering to help with:

- ____ Newsletters
 ____ Meetings
 ____ Box Building
 ____ Publicity
 ____ Membership
 ____ Nominations
 ____ County Coordinator program
 ____ On Board of Directors

Contributions to the Newsletter

Please contribute to "Bluebird Notes". Sharing Bluebird information and stories make this an unique publication.

Please submit to: Helen Munro, Co-editor 22 Bobolink Rd. Jackson Springs, NC 27281

Phone - (910) 673-6936 Fax - (910) 673-7345 e-mail - hsmunro@ac.net

For Slide Programs, Videos and Education Material, Please Contact:

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Southern Pines, NC 28387

(910) 692-2328

hmjr@pinehurst.net

**Register by February 15, 2005 to be entered in a drawing for a
 Dempsey Essick Print—"King of the Field".**

Need a Registration Form? Access www.ncbluebird.com

Or call Helen Munro—910-673-6936

Count Down to NABS 2005 Four Months

**Special thanks from the North Carolina Bluebird Society to these NABS 2005 sponsors
 that came in after the last newsletter was printed.**

New Bluebird Cab Company

Sara Lee Foundation

Wild Bird Centers

11th ACVVC

Kay & David Hindsley

Mealworm Information.

**Grubco Grubco.com
 1-800-222-3563**

**Nature's Way
 1-800-318-2611**

Bluebird Wall Hanging Raffle Featured at NABS 2005

Susan Petrie of Foxfire Village accepted the challenge of making a Bluebird Wall Hanging to be raffled off in May at NABS 2005. She thought for a while, bought the "Bluebird Book" by Donald and Lillian Stokes, and then let her imagination take over. As she sorted through her "stash" of quilting fabric and shopped for more colors, she even added some paint to alter these colors so that they were true to nature.

Seven months later she had created the wall hanging that won first prize in the Wall Appliqué Small category at the annual *Quilting in the Pines* event presented by the Sandhills Quilters Guild. This year the event was held in the Pinehurst Fair Barn. This recently renovated building showed off the quilts as they were hung with enough space for viewing and appreciating.

The monochromatic rendition of this wall hanging at the right only hints at its beauty. If you look carefully, you can see the hand quilting that fills the background. The male bluebird is carrying a worm in his beak as he comes in for a landing.

The raffle tickets will be \$2 each or three for \$5. The drawing will be at the Banquet of NABS 2005 on Saturday night, May 21, 2005.

Susan is delighted to create and donate this work of art to NCBS as the raffle item for NABS 2005. However, she will keep her first prize ribbon. That made her day!



Peanut Berry in a *Hurry* Suet

Reprinted by *Bluebird Trails & Tales*/ Winter 2003-2004, Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania

1 Store bought suet cake (any) or lard
 ½ Cup peanut butter
 ¼ Cup peanut hearts or finely chopped peanuts
 (a little less if using chunky peanut butter)
 2 Cups corn meal
 1 Cup unbleached, whole-wheat or corn flour
 ¼ - ½ Cup Zante currants
 Other berries such as dogwood, hawthorn, elderberries,
 etc. can be substituted or also added.
 Melt suet or lard and peanut butter over low heat.
 Add peanuts and currants.

Stir in corn meal and flour mix till desired consistency is achieved.

Use all of the cornmeal/ flour mix to pour into shallow pan. Refrigerate. May be cut into the usual blocks (for most birds) or chopped up into pea sized bits.

For stuffing cones or smearing grapevines you may need a little less cornmeal/flour. Warming cooled suet in the microwave (on warm or low setting) also allows for easy spreading/stuffing. If "too sticky" add more cornmeal/flour mix.

Make your own version of *Bluebird Banquet*... Simply put dry ingredients of this recipe in a square cake pan. Slowly drizzle melted fat and peanut butter, stirring as you pour. Mix/ Drizzle till mix is a "chunky crumble," and serve!

The Debate on Cleaning Nest Boxes

By David Bird excerpted from Backyard Bird News, Early Winter 2000 and reprinted from Bluebird Fly!, the California Bluebird Recovery Program newsletter, Vol. 10 #3, Summer 2004.

Should you or should you not?

Clean out your nest boxes, I mean. This is a perennial debate among bird lovers. Perhaps cavity-nesting birds prefer boxes that contain old nesting material. Or maybe leaving it in for next season will lead the birds to reproductive failure. There are various reasons, however, why birds might prefer either scenario.

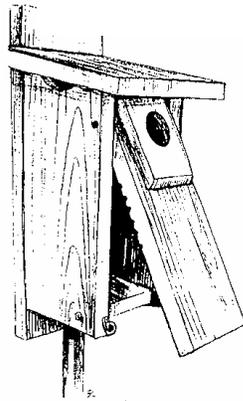
First, reuse of an old nest can save time and energy. Second, birds might be able to avoid selecting an unsuccessful nesting site if they choose one that looks like it was used last year.

On the other hand, old nests, might have been plundered by predators last year, who are just waiting for the new occupants to set up house. Also, if a site has been used, the previous owners might show up leading to nasty competition and perhaps nest destruction and delayed breeding.

The biggest disadvantage though might be the presence of nest-swelling ectoparasites just waiting to infest the incubating adults or their nestlings. These include blood-sucking mites and fleas...

...Eastern bluebirds readily use wooden nest boxes, so Wayne Davis, Paul Kalisz, and Rick Wells of the Univ. of Kentucky in Lexington set up pairs of nest boxes on 50 power poles, one box empty and another containing a bluebird nest that had fledged young the year before. The results were quite clear. Of

41 bluebird pairs using the paired boxes, 38 chose ones with an old nest and only 3 nested in a clean one. In 4 other sets of boxes, a pair of house wrens, white-breasted nuthatches, Carolina chickadees, and tree swallows, respectively, chose boxes that had old nests. A pair of tree swallows used a clean box.



According to serious purple martin landlords like Harry Wright who manages hundreds of martin nests at Purple Martin Junction in Griggsville, Illinois, martins, too, prefer houses containing old nests.

As to why the bluebirds prefer boxes with old nests, Davis and associates offered a couple of explanations. First, bluebirds like deep nests that make it hard for predators to reach in and grab eggs or young. Perhaps the bluebirds like having the old material so that they can rework it and dig a deeper nest cup. Then, again, the researchers found no difference in the depth from the entrance hole to the top of the old nest.

Their second explanation was related to ectoparasites. The larvae of blood-sucking blowflies inhabit

bluebird nests and can be quite harmful to the bluebird young. But the birds have an ally in the parasitic wasps that also inhabit their boxes and kill the blowfly larvae. Although adult blowflies over winter outside the boxes, the parasitic wasps hang out in the boxes. By removing old nests in spring or fall, you are also throwing out the wasps, which ultimately leads to greater blowfly larvae numbers and hence lowered nestling survival. So the eastern bluebirds might prefer boxes with old nests simply because they want parasitic wasps that come with them.

.... The bottom line to all this? The only effective way to completely eliminate parasites from nest boxes is to clean out the nests and thoroughly clean the box interior with a light bleach-water solution just prior to nesting season. Deciding which chemicals are safe for the birds and the environment raises a whole new issue.

I recommend that you do not bother cleaning out your nest boxes each fall or spring except under two circumstances. If the nesting material is badly soiled, then chuck it out. If it feels damp, consider the possibility that your nest box is not rain proof and it should be repaired or replaced. In the case of eastern bluebirds, clean out the box only if the old material has accumulated to the point where the nesting cavity has become too shallow and thus vulnerable to predators.

Singing by male Eastern Bluebirds More than meets the ear

Bluebird, Journal of the North American Bluebird Society
Summer 2003, Vol. 25, No. 3
Continued from Bluebird Notes, Vol. 19, No.4

One explanation for such large song repertoires is female preference. Some recent studies of other songbirds indicate that males with larger song repertoires may all be larger, better quality males. If so, males singing lots of different type of songs might be advertising their quality to females. This would make sense when a male is seeking a mate.

For male bluebirds, it might also make sense even after they have a mate. This is because female bluebirds are known to copulate with males other than their mates. As a result, a male bluebird singing lots different song types, even late in the breeding season, could be advertising his quality to neighboring females.

Male bluebirds in our study sang at the highest rates and highest volumes when unpaired, averaging 400 to 500 songs per hour (Figure 2). After pairing, singing rates and volumes declined (Figure 2).

Similarly, other studies have revealed that male bluebirds may utter up to 20 songs per minute (or up to 1,200 songs per hour!) before pairing, with rates dropping considerably after pairing. Similar declines in singing rates after pairing have been reported in many other species of birds, including Common Yellow throats, Euro-

pean Starlings, Tufted Titmice, White-throated Sparrows, and House Wrens.

This drop in singing rates after pairing provides evidence that one function of singing by male bluebirds is to attract mates. For unpaired males, combining high singing rates with high volume increases the likelihood that nearby females will hear and, perhaps, be attracted to their territory.

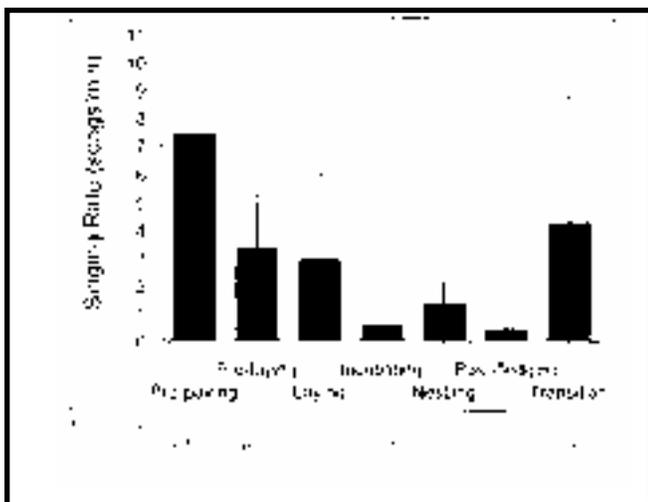
Although singing rates declined after pairing, male bluebirds continued to sing during pre-laying, laying and transitional stages, and most of this singing was low volume. This use of low-volume songs suggests that at least some of this singing was directed at mates.

During these stages, female bluebirds are either preparing to nest (or re-nest) or are actually producing a clutch (and would be fertile). Male House Wrens are also known to sing low-volume songs during the late pre-laying and early laying period. Low-volume singing by males could stimulate egg laying by females, and may also be used to advertise a male's willingness to copulate with a mate.

Using low volume songs at this time may be beneficial because it would make it more difficult for an intruding male, intent on copulating with the female, to pinpoint the location of the singing male and his mate.

Extra-pair behavior has been reported in Eastern Bluebirds and, in some populations, may account for as many as one-third of nestlings.. So if male bluebirds must sing to stimulate females or to solicit copulation, the use of low volume songs may be a strategy to reduce the likelihood of extra-pair copulations.

Singing rates during the incubation, nestling, and post-fledging stages were much lower than during other nesting stages, and most singing was low volume. During these stages, male bluebirds are foraging and bringing food to the



(Continued on page 15)

Control Sparrows with the "K" Box By Terry Glanzman

Reprinted from the *Bluebird Monitor*, Summer 2004, Newsletter of the Ohio Bluebird Society

Unfortunately good bluebird habitat is often good habitat for house sparrows, especially in those areas around cattle farms. I have used several strategies over the years in an attempt to control sparrow use of bluebird nest boxes, but have had limited success.

Sometime ago I read about a bluebird nest box that a fellow named Wayne Davis was experimenting with in Kentucky to reduce sparrow usage. Wayne was experiencing problems with sparrows using the boxes he placed around a horse farm. In his article, Wayne reported that this particular box did not seem to be very attractive to sparrows. Although Wayne did not name his box, I call it the "K" (Kentucky) box in his honor. There are several features to this box that I think make it more unattractive to sparrows—it is a shallower box and has an oblong opening at the top that lets in more light. In theory this style of opening discourages sparrows from their traditional domed nests. From Wayne's original design, I further modified it by leaving no ventilation slit at the top and by slanting the roof back slightly.

In order to scientifically determine whether or not this

box had the desired effect, I conducted the following study. For four years in a row, (1999 thru 2002), I substituted the K Box in places where I had had sparrow nests in both of the previous two years. In other words, the K Boxes went into areas where I had had 100 percent sparrow occupancy (a nest with at least one egg laid) for two years running.

Overall those areas went from averaging 100 percent sparrow nests with eggs to only 14 percent. In some boxes sparrows built nests but did not lay eggs. In at least two cases, bluebirds fledged young out of abandoned sparrow nests. I had such good success with the K Box that in 2003 I began placing the box in sparrow habitat too.

Because the K Box is shallower than most other types of bluebird nest boxes, these nests had increased predation. To address this problem, beginning in 2002 I started placing some of the K Boxes on five foot high, 1/2" diameter electrical conduit slid over rebar sunk into the ground. This pole is too slender for raccoons to climb. In 2003, all of my K Boxes were placed on these narrower poles.

If you have sparrow problems, I suggest you give the "K" Box a try!

Wayne Davis is planning to attend NABS 2005 for a question and answer session.

The "K" Box

Make the roof to overhang about 1 1/2" with a slight backward pitch, front to back.

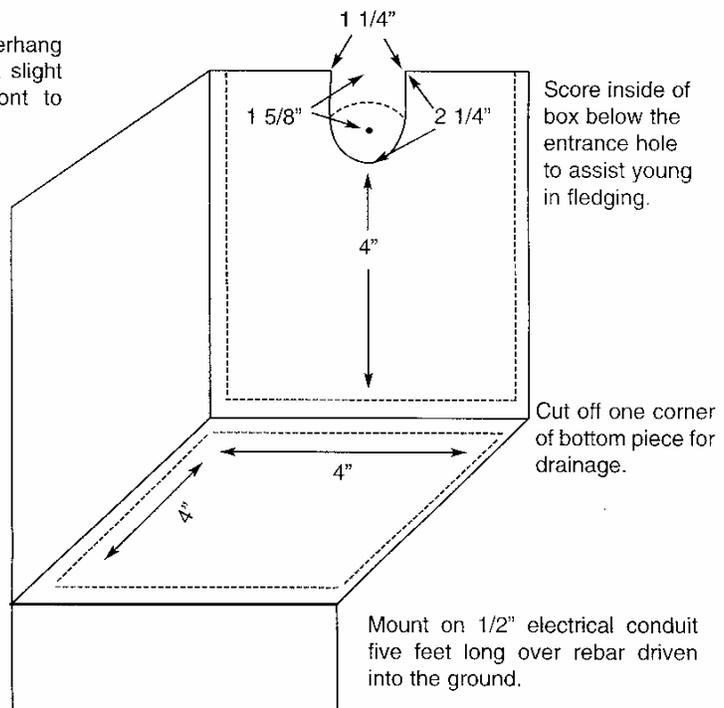
Below is a diagram of Steve Gilbertson's Conduit/Rebar Nest Box Post from the Wisconsin Bluebird Vol. 18 No. 1

Not to scale

Use two conduit pipe clamps to secure the nest box to the post about 5 feet above ground on this five-foot length of 1/2 inch electrical conduit pipe

Conduit coupler with 2 locking bolts

A 5-foot length of 1/2 inch rebar driven about 2 feet into the ground.



You've Got Mail!!



I do not have the computer system that declares, "You've got mail!" but I retrieve my email most every morning at about 5:30 am. One of the delights of this early morning activity is email from Fred Benson with bird pictures from his back yard.. Many of these pictures are of bluebirds (see left and below) as well as gold finches, a Coopers Hawk, Carolina Chickadee, Downey Woodpecker, towhee and even a Barred Owl. It is a wonderful way to start my day!

Bluebirds Across Nebraska developed a calendar for 2004, but after checking out the cost of producing a calendar using these and other bluebird pictures, it was decided that this was too expensive. The response to the article asking for bluebird pictures was great and we are now in the process of doing note cards. If everything goes well, twelve note cards will be sold for \$10 - twelve cards instead of twelve months; bluebirds from all four seasons.

The picture below is from Debbie Winchester and the one below and to the right is from Ed Erkes. One of Ed's picture has been used in the past on the front page of this newsletter and a simpler one to this one is still on the second and third pages.

Page 13 of this newsletter is proposing that our newsletter be offered on-line so that you can en-



joy the colored pictures like the ones on this page. Our Web-mistress, Liz Schmid, has figured out how I can transfer the whole newsletter to her and she can put it on line. She will need email addresses for passwords to limit the access to on-line subscribers. Perhaps in February, we can put this newsletter on the website for all of you to see and enjoy the difference color makes.

Helen S. Munro, Co-Editor





Bluebirds, Inside the Nest Box

Recorded by the Cornell Birdhouse Network

Summer 1999

Produced by the North Carolina Bluebird Society

Available for \$13.85 including shipping and handling.

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Video tapes and DVDs are now available on the ncbird.com website.

Wouldn't it be fun to have a newsletter with pictures in color?

They say that “one picture is worth a thousand words,” and there are so many times when the right picture would replace the inadequate descriptions of a place, person, thing or event. However, our newsletter is limited to pictures that give you the general idea of what they are.

These pictures start out in color and while I print out the proof copies of the different pages, the beautiful color pictures tantalize me for they are closer to the true rendition of the place, person, thing or event than the monochromatic reproduction that appear in the newsletter. These monochromatic pictures are a compromise between the color and what will print satisfactorily. I can't even say “what will print well.”

Technology is rising to the occasion and is presenting us an alternative to the newsletter that you now receive. Our Web Mistress, Liz Schmid says, “We have the means to put the newsletter on-line.”

In the future, those with printers that print in color would get to see the color photos and the newsletter at least a week ahead of the ones who would receive the newsletter by mail.

We would continue to mail out newsletters because not everyone has the technology at their house and

all of us have a mail box. However, members would be given a choice of “mailed” or “on-line” newsletters.

The dues would remain at \$10 per year or three years for \$25, but there would be a choice of which type of newsletter you would receive. Currently, the cost of printing and mailing the newsletter is approximately \$700 each quarter for the 450 members.

People who choose the “on-line” version would be emailed a password that would allow them to access the newsletter from the website and, perhaps, also be given an incentive (a pen, pin, magnet or notecard) for choosing that mode.

The newsletter would continue to be printed with monochromatic pictures and mailed. Printing in color is prohibitively expensive. This on-line choice would become an option and allow for pictures in color.

*Helen S. Munro
Co-Editor*

Perhaps you have a preferences about this. Please feel free to express your opinion. Contact me at hsmunro@ac.net or 22 Bobolink Rd., Jackson Springs, NC 27281 or 910-673-6936.

Nest Boxes Protected by Tinsel Wands

By Don Bragg, editor

Wisconsin Bluebird, Summer 2004 (Vol. 19, No. 2)

For the fourth year, two nest boxes at the Ladysmith Riverside Cemetery with a past history of house sparrow predation are being protected with wands of party tinsel fluttering in the breeze.

In 2001, wands of silver tinsel purchased at party supply stores, were duct taped to the box post after egg laying began. The sparrows avoided the nest box immediately and no sparrow predation losses occurred to either nest box in 2001, 2002, and 2003.

Why does the tinsel “sparrow spook” work? We really don't know, but we theorize that the house sparrow's strong instinct for survival causes it to be wary of anything that moves that it does not understand. Bluebirds and tree swallows, on the other hand, will accept the presence of the fluttering tinsel.



The picture that accompanied this article did not scan well. This is “made from aluminum foil” tinsel fastened to a nest box and patterned after the picture of Rose Bragg and a “wand duct taped to the box post.”

Asheville Has Great Attractions (continued from page 5)

(Continued from page 5)

The Great Smoky National Park is the most visited National Park in the United States. It straddles the North Carolina Tennessee border and the southern entrance at Cherokee is about an hour's drive west of Asheville. However, it is day trip in that you will want to spend some time exploring the vistas from some of the 238 miles of paved road.

Cades Cove on the Tennessee side of the park has an 11-mile loop with log cabins, barns and wild life sightings. Black bears can stop traffic as people scramble for close up views. Mountain peaks and valley are magnificent. Admission is free. Call (865) 436-1200. (Source— AAA Tour Book, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina.)

Black Mountain is less than 20 miles east of Asheville. The Asheville Visitor Guide says, "Black Mountain, charming town and such friendly people. Town definitely earns its names as the 'front porch of the mountains.' Neat old hardware store, 1890s train depot and many shopping opportunities!" (Source— Asheville Visitor Guide (828) 258-6101)

Grandfather Mountain is a little over an hour's drive from Asheville up the Blue Ridge Parkway from Milepost 380 to Milepost 305. Contact number 800 468-7325 for admission fee information. "The irregular crest and distinctive peaks of Grandfather Mountain can be recognized from many miles away. The mountain's craggy peaks resemble the profile of an old man, making it one of the North Carolina's most widely recognized landmarks. Its mile-high swinging bridge, nature museum, and native wildlife habitats make Grandfather one of the state's most popular tourist destinations as well. But it is the incredible biodiversity of its pristine backcountry that has earned Grandfather Mountain worldwide acclaim as a United Nations Biosphere Reserve." Tweetsie Railroad is in the same area. (Source—The Nature Conservancy Grandfather Mountain brochure)

Chimney Rock Park has a 26-story elevator that takes you to the top of Chimney Rock in 30 seconds. Here you are treated to the 75 mile view from the top. "Chimney Rock Park was the backdrop to many

scenes in 'The Last of the Mohicans,' but like many a movie star, it looks even better in person. 1,000 acres of rambunctious beauty— amazing wildlife, a 404-foot waterfall, and trails in abundance including two for families with children." (Source-Asheville Visitor Guide (828) 258-6101) Contact number is 800-277-9611

Last spring Chimney Rock opened a new half mile hiking trail called the Great Woodland Adventure. This features twelve woodland creatures. These creatures are larger than life size and were created by local artists. "There are hands-on-touch tables and guessing games that will help the children explore how animals live."

(Source-The Sunday Courier, Forest City, NC, 4/25/04. Submitted by Christine Ammons.)

Simon Thomson of Birding Ventures will meet interested people at Chimney Rock at 9 am on Sunday May 22. There will be a sign up at the NABS 2005 registration desk.

The Cradle of Forestry is part of the North Carolina Mountain Tour. However, if you are staying an extra day, the Cradle of Forestry and its Forest Discovery Center is an hour south of Asheville. "On the wings of a national conservation movement, forestry in America was born and nurtured at the site of the Cradle of Forestry in America. As the first private landowner to hire a trained forester, George W. Vanderbilt of Biltmore Estate fame launched the idea of forestry in 1891. Vanderbilt's 125,000 acres, including the place now known as the Cradle of Forestry, became the proving ground for the scientific approach to forest management. The land became the outdoor classroom for the Biltmore Forest School, the first forestry school in American. The forest Discovery Center at the Cradle of Forestry tells the birth of forestry story through an 18-minute movie." Contact (828)877-3130.

(Source-Cradle of Forestry brochure.)

Many more attractions—Whitewater Rafting (30 minutes); Pisgah Center for Wildlife Education (45 minutes), etc. Try www.exploreasheville.com for more information..

Singing by male Eastern Bluebirds (concluded)

(Continued from page 9)

nest (for their mate and young) or to fledged young. As a result, these birds have less time to sing. Similarly low singing rates by males engaged in feeding nestlings have been reported in several other species, including Northern Cardinals, Common Yellowthroats, and Tufted Titmice.

One possible function of singing male bluebirds during the incubation and nestling stages may be to coordinate feeding activities at the nest. Males sometimes sang near nest boxes before approaching to feed mates. Singing might prepare a mate or nestlings for the male's visit and reduce the time that a male needs to spend at the nest. Male House Wrens also sing when approaching their nest, perhaps to signal the female that the male is about to come to the nest cavity with food. Such behavior would probably facilitate the rapid transfer of food.

Male bluebirds in our study sometimes sang before approaching the nest box during the nestling stage. This singing also may serve to facilitate the transfer of food. However, this did not always appear to be the case. On several occasions, males flew to within 32 feet (1.0 meters) of a nest box, uttered several songs, flew to the box entrance without delivering prey, then flew away from the box and uttered more songs before finally delivering the food to the nestlings.

This behavior suggests that another possible function of singing during the nestling period is to teach nestlings to associate singing with food. After the young fledge, families sometime travel long distances from the nest while foraging. Fledglings familiar with the songs of their parents might be better able to stay in contact.

Our observations indicate that singing by male bluebirds also plays a role in establishing and maintaining territories. Male bluebirds often sang during interactions with other males, and male bluebirds also responded to the playback of songs in their

territories by singing. However, male bluebirds do not rely entirely on song during encounters with other males. Aggressive interactions between male bluebirds sometimes involve the use of "chuck" or staccato calls or even attacks.

In addition to the possible functions already noted, singing by Eastern Bluebirds also seems to communicate distress. We found that male (and female) bluebirds sometimes sang when we approached and checked nest boxes. Other investigators also have reported predator or alarm songs in the presence of nest predators. Singing in this context may help warn a mate or nestlings that a potential predator is nearby or, as with the flight songs of male Common Yellowthroats, may serve to distract potential predators.

In summary, male Eastern Bluebirds have surprisingly large number of songs in their repertoires, and a primary function of these complex repertoires is to attract and stimulate mates. However, male bluebirds also sing during interactions with other male bluebirds, suggesting an aggressive or territorial function. Male bluebirds may also use song to facilitate the transfer of food to incubating or brooding females, nestlings, and fledglings. Singing may also serve to warn a mate, nestlings, or fledglings about the presence of a potential predator or to distract those predators. Clearly, singing by male Eastern Bluebirds, as with males in other species of songbirds, serves multiple functions.

Acknowledgements

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(Gary Ritchison and Bret O. Huntsman can be reached at the Department of Biological Sciences, Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, KY 40475.)

An extensive bibliography can be found in the original article in Bluebird, Journal of the North American Bluebird Society, Summer 2003, Vol. 25, No. 3

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