



Summer 2014

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The Bluebird Flyer

Newsletter of the Michigan Bluebird Society

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Preventing Window Strikes by Bluebirds & Other Species

The following information is from the web site www.sialis.org and, with permission from the author, Bet Zimmerman Smith, is presented here for educational purposes.

Bluebird landlords (and bird lovers in general) are reminded to ensure the safety of birds coming to their backyard feeders and bird-baths. One of the easiest ways to protect birds from striking windows as they come for food and water is to carefully consider where feeders and birdbaths are placed. Either put them close to a window (one to three feet away) so that birds aren't moving fast enough to get hurt if they do strike the window or place them 25 to 30 feet away from the window. In addition, consider removing houseplants which hang inside the windows where strikes occur.

It is also a good idea to dull or eliminate the reflection on the window's exterior by hanging material on the outside of the window. Draping thin netting with 1/2" mesh and tacking it to the window frame seems to be very effective, and the mesh will still allow a good view when looking out of the window from inside. Instead of netting, you can also suspend an old window or storm door screen in front of the window.

Rather than hanging material or screens, apply a material to the window such as CollidEscape, a window film with small perforations which not only prevents bird strikes but also conserves energy within the home by reducing the infiltration of UV rays and infrared radiation.



(For additional information on CollidEscape, go to www.collidescape.org.)

Products such as those used on the windows of greenhouses can be applied to the window to make the glass appear opaque or frosted. You can also cloud the window with Brasso, fake snow, Epsom salts mixed with beer, or a light smearing of toothpaste applied with a damp sponge to leave an opaque or frosty surface on the glass. Test the application on a small section of the window to make sure the mixture isn't abrasive to your window, and read the instructions carefully to verify the product can be used on, and easily removed from, glass.

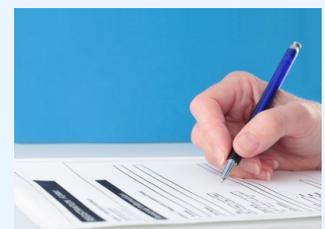
Striping the window may deter the birds. One-inch vertical cloth strips can be applied four inches apart OR one-inch horizontal strips applied two inches apart. Strips of tape no more than 10 inches apart may also work. Vertical stripes appear to be more effective than horizontal stripes.

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We Need Your Nesting Data!

Now that nesting season is starting to wind down, it's time to get ready to submit your **End-of-Season Nesting Summary Report**, a copy of which can be found inside this newsletter. The MBS needs this data to identify nesting trends across the state and areas of possible improvement. The report is very easy to complete. Simply fill in the requested information, tri-fold on the dotted lines, seal with tape, affix a stamp, and drop it into the mail. We also have a link on the home page of the MBS web site where you can download and print more copies. In our winter Flyer, we'll print a summary report of the nesting season.



From the President's Perch

By Kurt Hagemeister



I hope everyone has been having a great summer. The weather in the southern part of the state has generally been very good over the last two months. Of course, this only partly makes up for the horrendous winter we all had!

From the modest number of reports I've received, the nesting season in most areas started late. However, once the weather warmed up in

May, both bluebirds and tree swallows seemed to make up for lost time. There appears to be evidence that house wrens are more prevalent this season compared to past years. As always, it's very important to be careful where you place your bluebird boxes on your property. Try to avoid locations near dense cover and undergrowth.

As you plan the rest of your summer, make sure to put the **MBS Fall Festival** on your calendar. This year we'll be holding it on September 7th at the Dahlem Center in Jackson (see page 8 for details). If you haven't been to one of our fall meetings in the past, I encourage you to attend. Compared to our Spring Bluebird Festival, this event is very informal but still offers a great chance to swap your nesting-season stories with other bluebirders. Dahlem has free parking and, as a member of the MBS, admission and lunch are free. Come out and enjoy the late summer gardens of Dahlem and some bluebird camaraderie!

On June 27th, Don Smith in Tecumseh sadly informed me that long-time co-founding MBS member Allen Bower of Britton had passed away. For those of you who have been MBS members for a while and have been to our events, you most likely had the opportunity to meet Allen. He was truly a giant in the area of native cavity-nesting bird conservation – both in Michigan and nationally. Since 1988, Allen worked tirelessly building and monitoring nest boxes for both bluebirds and flickers and educating others, including many children, about bird conservation.

Having known Allen since 2001, I can attest to his great dedication to helping bluebirds, flickers, and other native birds. He loved telling others about his many innovations, including his Bower Bluebird Box, flicker nest box system, and bluebird nest box tray design. He would occasionally send me long, informative letters about various things related to bluebirds (he never got much into computers!) and, at our meetings he was always willing to share his vast experience with others.

I will miss Allen dearly, and the MBS is deeply appreciative of all he has done for the group and for cavity-nesting bird conservation over the years (please see the next column for more information on Allen).



www.facebook.com/michiganbluebirdsociety

The Bluebird Community Loses a Great Friend



Allen Bower
1937-2014

Longtime MBS member Allen Bower of Britton died June 27, 2014, after a prolonged illness. Allen was a co-founding member of the MBS and a member of the Ohio Bluebird Society and North American Bluebird Society. He was nationally respected as an innovator in the field of cavity-nesting birds and published numerous magazine, newspaper, and newsletter articles on the subject over the years. In addition, Allen worked tirelessly educating others about bluebirds and other native nesting birds. He especially loved passing on his knowledge to children at schools.

Allen became a bluebird landlord in 1988 after reading an article from NABS about the importance of bluebirds and their declining population. Not being content just to put out any kind of nest box, Allen designed his own "Bower Box" for bluebirds as well as an innovative nest box tray. In addition to his efforts of helping bluebirds, he was a huge advocate of the Northern Flicker. Known to many as the "Flicker Man," Allen was very innovative in his approach to attracting them, including his own development of a house and pole mounting system.

The MBS will forever be grateful to Allen Bower for his help in getting the group started. I remember the

(Continued on page 6)

The Conduit/Rebar Pole Mounting System for Nest Boxes & Bird Feeders

By Kurt Hagemeister

You may be familiar with the 1/2" electrical conduit pole and reinforcing bar (rebar) mounting system developed by Steve Gilbertson for his famous PVC nest box design. It's an ingeniously simple and inexpensive way to mount the Gilbertson PVC nest box, which is a lightweight and extremely effective design. What many people don't know is this pole system can be adapted to mount almost any smaller nest box (bluebird, wren, or chickadee, e.g.) or wooden birdfeeder. In this article, I'm going to explain how this can be done.

First, let's quickly review the electrical conduit and rebar system. It uses a five-foot-long section of half-inch-wide electrical conduit pipe as the main pole. This is readily available at home improvement centers and hardware stores. To save a little money, you can buy it in 10-foot sections and cut it in half with a hack saw. The other major component is a 48" long piece of 1/2" diameter rebar (used mainly in concrete as a strengthening element). The rebar is driven into the ground about 18 to 24 inches in the desired location for the nest box, and the conduit pole is slipped over the top of the rebar. Then, a small coupling is used at the ground level to secure the rebar to the pole so that the latter doesn't rotate (see diagram below).

From there, the nest box is mounted to the top of the pole. In the case of the Gilbertson box, it's very simple. This particular box comes with a counter-sunk hole pre-drilled into the lower backside of the roof with the same diameter as the conduit. Just place the box onto the top of the pole (see picture at right).



Most nest boxes are not designed specifically for mounting with this conduit pole system. Most boxes have a flat back or bottom floor that can be used for a variety of mounting systems. The same applies to bird feeders. So, the rest of this article will explain how you can adapt the electrical conduit pole system for mounting almost any type of nest box or wooden feeder.

Before proceeding further, it's important to consider the weight of what you will be mounting on the pole. The 1/2" electrical conduit pole is best suited for light- to medium-weight nest boxes or light-weight feeders, so most bluebird boxes and smaller bird houses can simply use the 1/2" conduit. For heavier boxes and feeders, you will want to consider using a larger diameter conduit and rebar. The 3/4" diameter electrical conduit and 5/8" diameter rebar should suffice. Just upsize the fittings used, as described below.

Mounting Standard Nest Boxes with Flush Backs

The process for installing the pole/rebar in the ground is the same as described above. The difference will be how the nest box is secured to the top of the pole. Although there are several ways to do this, this article will describe a method that will universally work with all boxes, is simple, and will be secure.

For this method, you'll need a 1/2" EMT conduit strap (3/4" for the larger-diameter pole), two #8 3/4" and two #8 1 5/8" wood screws, and a small section of two-by-two wood – three inches long should be plenty. First, into the center, close to the edge of the long side of the two-by-two wood piece, drill a 3/4" diameter hole about 3/4" deep. This edge will be up against the back of the nest box, and it will enable the pole to be almost flush up against it. Next, using the



1/2" conduit strap

two 1 5/8" screws, attach the wood piece to the back of the nest box, several inches from the top and along the vertical centerline. Now you can mount the house to the top of the conduit pole. Last, secure the pole firmly to the back of the house by installing the conduit strap about six to eight inches below the mounting piece with the two 3/4" screws (refer to picture at right).



(Continued on page 4)

1/2" Conduit/Rebar Pole Mounting System

Designed by Steve Gilbertson, Aitkin, MN

This system has become the standard for mounting light to medium weight nestboxes. It uses readily available, affordable materials and is easy to install. When the conduit is polished with steel wool, coated with a quality paste wax and buffed smooth, the system is extremely resistant to climbing predators.

Tools
Large Hammer
Phillips head screwdriver
Work gloves
Safety glasses

Conduit
5 foot section 1/2" conduit (electrical metallic tubing, or EMT). Usually sold in 10 foot lengths. Most retailers will cut these to length for you.

1/2" Conduit Coupler

Longer screw for conduit coupler
The bottom coupler screw is tightened against the rebar to prevent the conduit from rotating. Because the screws supplied with the coupler are too short to reach the smaller diameter rebar, the bottom screw must be replaced with a slightly longer screw.

Rebar
4 or 5 foot section 1/2" rebar. Use 4 foot for normal soils, 5 foot for loose or sandy soils.

Safety Precautions
Insure that no underground utilities are present where you plan to install this system. You could be injured if the metal rebar comes into contact with electrical cables, and you may be liable for any damages. Don't guess – know!

Wear gloves and eye protection

Step by Step

1

Use hammer to drive rebar into ground. Leave approximately 24" above ground.

2

Attach 1/2" EMT coupler to end of conduit. Tighten upper screw against conduit. Install longer screw in bottom but do not tighten.

3

Slip conduit/coupler assembly over rebar. Tighten bottom screw against rebar.

Plan by Fred Stille, Sr. - April 2012

The Conduit/Rebar Pole Mounting System for Nest Boxes & Bird Feeders

(Continued from page 3)

Mounting Bird Feeder to Tops of Poles

(Note: This method can also be used to mount a nest box to the top of a pole by securing the pole to the underside of the nest box floor.)



galvanized floor flange



1/2" pole adapter

For this method, you need one 1/2" galvanized floor flange, one 1/2" EMT pole adapter with a threaded end (see pictures at left), and several #8 3/4" wood screws (for 3/4" conduit, simply upgrade the size of these fittings to 3/4"). Start by turning the wooden bird feeder upside down and finding the center of the bottom. (The center is the intersection of two lines drawn diagonally from opposite corners.) Attach the floor flange in the center with the wood screws. Next, take the pole adapter and remove the collar ring – you don't need it. Then screw the adapter into the flange as far as it will go and tighten it with a wrench so it won't come off. Finally, take the entire feeder/mounting flange and set it on the top of the pole.

Tighten the screw on the adapter so it is tight to the pole. You're done!



Costs

Approximate costs are:

- 48" rebar—\$3.00
- 5-foot conduit—\$1.25
- conduit straps—\$0.20
- EMT pole adapters—\$0.40
- floor flanges—\$3.00

(You can probably save money if you shop around and if you purchase larger quantities of the materials.)



A Word about Predator Protection

Please protect your nest box or feeder by putting a predator guard on the pole (alternatively, you can apply car wax to the pole, making it harder for critters to climb). However, there is no substitute for a good metal baffle guard to keep rodents, snakes, and raccoons from climbing the pole. Visit the MBS web site under Problem Solving (michiganbluebirds.org/problem-solving) for a downloadable plan

to build a metal predator guard using home-center materials for \$11 or less. (**NOTE:** If using the larger-diameter conduit, you will need to adjust the fitting sizes and hole diameters, since the website design is based on the 1/2" conduit.)

You now have a simple and inexpensive way to pole-mount most of your nest boxes and bird feeders. Here's a final tip: If you don't like the silver galvanized look, the hardware can easily be painted with black rust-proofing paint such as Rustoleum. Black tends to blend into the yard much better than lighter colors.

Kurt Hagemester is a long-time bluebird landlord, former birdfeeding store owner, and founding member and current President of the Michigan Bluebird Society.

We'd Like to Hear from YOU!

Do you have a bluebird anecdote or short story you'd like to share with other MBS members? A question you'd like answered? If so, please send it to us for possible publication in an upcoming Flyer.

Our address is: newsletter@michiganbluebirds.org

Please Join Us in Our Efforts to Help Michigan's Eastern Bluebirds to Thrive.

Now is the perfect time to help by joining MBS or renewing your membership.

Here are some easy ways to join MBS:

- Fill out this form and mail it with your check.
- Phone our membership chairman, Lynette Myers (517) 206-7066.
- Join Online by going to www.michiganbluebirds.org/join-mbs

Please indicate your preferred membership:

- One year individual or family \$15.00
- Three year membership \$40.00
- Corporate membership \$125.00

Lifetime membership \$300.00 (includes free MBS logo shirt)

- I will make a donation of \$_____
- I have time to volunteer.

Name _____ Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

E-mail _____

Mail your check payable to Michigan Bluebird Society, with this completed form to: Michigan Bluebird Society, P.O. Box 2028, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-2028

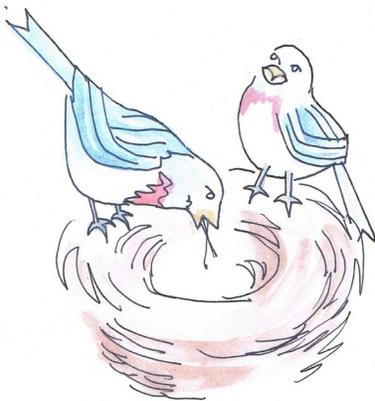
A Fantastic Bluebird Story

By Papa Blue

Hello! It's me, Papa Blue. Whew, what a challenging year this has been so far! Mama Blue and I found a lovely nest box early this spring, and Mama laid five lovely blue eggs. She worked very hard incubating them, and I worked hard helping to feed her while she kept those little eggs warm. A few days before the eggs were to hatch, we had our nest box raided by a House Sparrow. Mama was able to get safely away, and fortunately Old Man Peterson saw the whole thing. He came running out to chase the sparrow away but not before it pierced two of our eggs with its strong beak. I carried the two damaged eggs far from the nest so they wouldn't attract predators.

Old Man Peterson has been helping us by trapping those annoying House Sparrows. With the House Sparrows gone, Mama concentrated on incubating the eggs, and they hatched a few days later.

Once the eggs hatched, we were busy feeding the hatchlings. Our three nestlings fledged on Memorial Day, and all three are doing well.



Artwork by Elaine Morton

Our family keeps growing! Mama laid three more blue eggs, and all three successfully hatched. We were busy feeding the hatchlings until they fledged in mid-July.

It was a challenging two weeks after that, as two of our babies did not survive. One was eaten by a cat and the other just disappeared. Our remaining son, Al, hangs around a lot. Make no mistake, we named him after a great friend to bluebirds, Al Bower, who recently passed away.

We see Al frequently, and we often feed together. Our other kids stop by occasionally; and one of our sons, Spike and his mate, Mattie, have been seen in the neighborhood.

Enjoy your summer, stay safe, and say "hi" when you see us.

Papa



Bluebird



Q. It seems whenever we have bluebird nests during the summer, the birds don't lay as many eggs. Why is this?

A. During the early parts of the breeding season, bluebird clutches typically number four to seven eggs, but many people notice smaller clutches in the June/July period – often three and sometimes only two eggs. There are a number of possible reasons for this. One may be declining hormone levels in the female as the season gets later. Another could be the availability of food. The birds know whether food is relatively plentiful or not and may adjust their egg-laying accordingly. As summer wears on, favored supplies of bluebird food may diminish, which the birds instinctively know. Also, it's believed the age and experience level of the female may dictate how many eggs are laid.

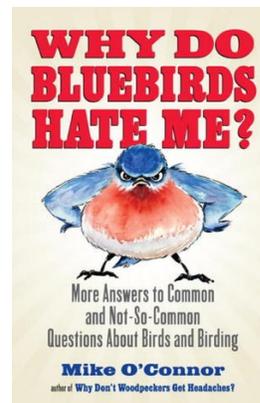
Q. I'm worried about my bluebirds during days when the weather is extremely hot. Is there anything I can do to help the birds?

A. Yes. First, make sure you have one or two birdbaths available nearby and keep them filled with fresh water. Second, you can attach what's called a "heat shield" to the top of the roof, giving an extra layer of insulation from solar rays. It can be made of different materials, but 3/8" plywood attached with small screws works well. Make sure that the shield overlaps the sides by at least an inch and overlaps the front by three inches to provide more shade. Either paint it white on top or cover it in aluminum foil. Third, consider using a nesting box like the X-Box with a double-thick roof. See the MBS web site for the design of this box.

Book Review

Why Do Bluebirds Hate Me?

by Mike O'Connor



In this collection of humorous questions and answers, you'll find everything you've always wanted to ask about birds. Mike O'Connor knows bird watchers as well as he knows birds. He knows that if you're interested in attracting birds, then you've also had all sorts of questions about their sometimes peculiar and puzzling behaviors. Questions range from *Should I clean my bird houses?* and *How much does it cost to run a heated birdbath?* to *Why are vultures eating my screen door?* He also

explains why bluebirds just don't like some people. Mike owns the Bird Watcher's General Store on Cape Cod and is a regular feature to Ray Brown's *Talkin' Birds* radio show.

The Bluebird Community Loses a Great Friend

(Continued from page 2)

first organizational meeting held in September of 2001 at the Potter Park Zoo, where a dozen or so of us bluebird lovers met to talk about setting up a society in Michigan. At the time, I thought I knew quite a bit about bluebirds, having “read a lot” and having sold nest boxes for almost 10 years at my store. As soon as I heard Allen talk about bluebirds, I realized I still had a lot to learn and that I needed to listen to this man.

Over the next five or so years, Allen attended many of our meetings and provided much valuable input to the group. During this time he also was a great asset to the group at the Jackson Bluebird Festival, which is when we got a lot of traction in getting the group going. As time progressed, however, he attended fewer meetings due to health problems and his desire to remain at home to monitor his nest boxes.

Over the years, Allen received many awards in recognition of his bird conservation efforts. In 2003, he was awarded a prestigious service award from the North American Bluebird Society for his long-time efforts helping bluebirds. Then, in 2013, Allen and his wife Nina received from the Ohio Bluebird Society the coveted Blue Feather Award which is given in “recognition of that individual’s extraordinary accomplishments in all areas of Bluebird conservation and management.”

Allen is survived by his wife Nina, sons Todd and Scott, daughter Andrea Mason, brother Carl, sister Arlene Martlock, and five grandchildren. The Michigan Bluebird Society extends its deepest sympathies to the Bower family.

Kurt Hagemeister



The expiration date of your MBS membership is printed on the envelope of your MBS quarterly Flyer. See the form on page 4 for membership renewal information.

Save Paper & Receive *The Flyer* by Email

Help the MBS save money, paper, and resources.

If you would like to only receive this newsletter electronically, send us an email at newsletter@michiganbluebirds.org. Provide us with a working email address where we can send you a link to download a PDF file of *The Flyer* each month. To do this, you must have the Adobe Acrobat Reader program installed on your computer. The program is free and can be downloaded at www.get.adobe.com/reader.

Thank You!

The MBS is grateful to the following people who have recently joined, renewed, or donated money.

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

Martin Johnson - Westland
Janet Sprague - Sunfield
Joanne Moryc - Saline
John Krueger - Davison
Duane Peterson - Toledo, OH
Carl Ball - Dowagiac
Catherine Bussema - Holland
Barbara James-Beaver - Lowell, IN
Robert Wittenberg - Byron Center
Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy - Bay City
Libby Mundy - Roscommon

WELCOME BACK, RENEWING MEMBERS!

Dr. Elizabeth Stone – Ann Arbor
Jill Rife – Homer, AK
Jeanne Peterson – Homer, AK
Ann Gaultney – Haslett
Liz Hagemeister – Ann Arbor
John Trapp – Buchanan
Randy & Lynette Myers – Michigan Center
Phil Knapp - Williamsburg
Noal Brown - Dexter
Margaret Higgins – Pleasant Lake
Tom & Karina Davis – Springfield, OH
John & Gail Kober – Wayland
Peggy Tully – Muskegon
Ron Higgins – Caledonia
Delores Hildebrand – Berrien Springs
Beth & Molly Straebel – Traverse City
Carla Caretto - Metamora



“It’s been years since she sang my praises.”

Original Artwork by Jonny Hawkins, Sherwood, MI

About The Michigan Bluebird Society

Our Mission: To improve the nesting success of the Eastern Bluebird and other native cavity-nesting birds in the state of Michigan through education of our members and the general public, as well as promoting active nest box management and habitat improvement.



The Bluebird Flyer is a publication for the members of the Michigan Bluebird Society. It is published four times a year: Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall. Contributions including articles and photos are very welcome and can be mailed to: **The Michigan Bluebird Society, P.O. Box 2028, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-2028**, or via email to newsletter@michiganbluebirds.org. Articles must be related to bluebirds or other cavity-nesting birds. The MBS retains the right to refuse article submissions. Non-profit, nature-related groups are encouraged to submit press releases of events and every effort will be made to find space in The Bluebird Flyer. Advertising is NOT accepted at this time. No reproductions of any material in this newsletter are permitted without permission from the MBS.

The Michigan Bluebird Society (MBS) was founded in 2001 and organized in 2004 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in the state of Michigan. The MBS is an affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society.

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Plan to Attend Our Fall Festival

Sunday, September 7, 2014

Dahlem Center
7117 S. Jackson Road
Jackson, MI



Don't miss this annual fun and informative event held at the beautiful Dahlem Center in Jackson. The meeting is free for MBS members and will include lunch. (For non-members there is a \$5 fee to cover the cost of food.) This year we have scheduled a very enjoyable afternoon for you:

- 11:00—12:00 Coffee; meet and greet other bluebirders
- 12:00—1:00 Lunch; visit our merchandise table
- 1:00—1:30 **Program: Roosting Boxes** by MBS Vice President Phil Peterson
- 1:30—1:45 Break
- 1:45—2:30 **Program: Potential Agricultural & Conservation Implications of an American Kestrel Nest Box System in Michigan Fruit Orchards** by Megan Shave (see information below)
- 2:30 Adjourn (You are welcome to take a fall nature walk on the beautiful trails at Dahlem.)



Are you looking for another nest box, a sparrow trap, or MBS shirt? All that and more will be available for purchase at the Fall Festival. Now would be a perfect time to start to get ready for spring — and save on shipping costs as well!

We'll also have several informational tables set up. Come and see what new things you can learn about bluebirding!

Megan Shave is a zoology student and researcher at Michigan State University whose research was described in the Winter 2013-2014 issue of *Bluebird*, published by the North American Bluebird Society. Ms. Shave's research has focused on the effects of orchard nest boxes on American Kestrel populations and the diet of these Kestrels in the fruit-growing region of northwest Michigan.

RSVP: To help us plan for food and seating for this popular event, the MBS requests interested attendees contact Lynette Myers at (517) 206-7066 or membership@michiganbluebirds.org. Leave your name, phone number, and number of people attending. We hope to see you on September 7th!

Preventing Window Strikes by Bluebirds and Other Species

(Continued from page 1)

Here are some additional choices:

- * Tape newspaper, cardboard, or wrapping paper to the outside of the window.
- * Spray a light coating of vegetable oil onto the window and apply clear plastic food wrap.
- * Plant shade trees outside of the window to cut down on glare.
- * Consider installing awnings.
- * Place commercial decals/window clings to the window, preferably two inches to four inches apart. They are more

effective if applied to the outside of the window but if applied to the inside will last longer, remain cleaner, and are easier to apply. They can be purchased at some hardware stores or at Wild Birds Unlimited.

* Put up something that moves, such as feathers strung on fish line, old CDs or aluminum pie pans attached to fish line, or strips of mylar (cut from an old balloon).

With one or more of these preventive measures in place, the bluebird landlord can enjoy watching his or her bluebirds while protecting them from window strikes.

(For additional information, visit www.sialis.org.)