



Spring 2016

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The Bluebird Flyer

Newsletter of the Michigan Bluebird Society

Supplemental Mealworm Feeding to Nesting Bluebirds

By Kurt Hagemeister

Although bluebirds are good at finding natural insect food, they can certainly use help in April and May when cold, wet weather conditions last three or more days. This is when bluebirds have trouble finding enough food to feed both their young and themselves, and supplemental feeding of mealworms can literally be the difference between life and death for bluebirds.

This provides bluebird landlords like us an additional opportunity to learn more about feeding bluebirds and to watch them feed. But eating mealworms at a feeder is not something bluebirds know how to do naturally. In fact, they must be “trained” to take food offered in a dish, something they learn quickly and to which they respond enthusiastically.

For those of you new to supplemental feeding, live mealworms are actually darkling beetle larva, not worms, and have tiny legs which enable them to move. You can buy them commercially or raise them yourself. Most pet or bird-feeding supply stores carry them, or you can buy them online at places like www.thenaturesway.com. Typically,



Note that live mealworms are much preferred by bluebirds over dried or roasted ones – especially during the nesting season.

the mealworms come in containers mixed with oat or wheat bran—used for both food and bedding.

Mealworms should be put into shallow metal, plastic, ceramic, or glass dishes. These dishes can then be placed on feeding platforms like wooden trays, plastic domed feeders, or more elaborate “jail-type” feeders with bars on the sides to exclude larger birds. Feeders with roofs will help shelter the mealworms from sun and rain which will help the mealworms last longer.

The first step in training is to make the mealworms very visible so your bluebirds can find them. Birds find food mainly by sight. Initially put the mealworms in an old tuna can in a spot near where the bluebirds



are frequently seen. Affixing the can to the roof of a nest box with a small nail is one idea, or put it on top

of an overturned bucket 20 or 30 feet away from the box or perching spot. Once the birds find the mealworms, make sure to put them out around the same time each day. Early morning is best. If weather conditions are poor, you can put them out two or three times a day, Space out the feedings, however.

Once this feeding routine is established, move the feeder to a more permanent spot in the same area. The feeder can be mounted on a short pole or hung from a crook pole.

Note that enclosed bluebird feeders (like the jail-type) where the birds enter through

DID YOU KNOW that the bluebird is an international symbol of happiness? DID YOU ALSO KNOW that when Vera Lynn famously sang of “bluebirds over the white cliffs of Dover” in her 1940s hit “The White Cliffs of Dover,” she was factually inaccurate? Bluebirds are an American bird and cannot be found in the vicinity of Dover.

Don't Let Your Membership Expire!

Please note that your MBS membership expiration month/year is indicated on the address label on this newsletter. Make sure to send in your renewal payment by that date. Remember, your membership dues support bluebird education and conservation.



Join the bluebird discussion!

www.facebook.com/michiganbluebirdsociety

(Continued on page 4)

From the President's Perch

By Kurt Hagemeister



Another nesting season is here, and bluebirds have started laying eggs in some locations! It looks like it's been a late start to the season due to the cold weather during the first part of April, but fortunately the weather seems to be trending warmer for the birds – and us!

It was wonderful to see so many people, including a number of new members, at the **Spring Bluebird Festival** on March 19th in Hastings. Once again, it was a fantastic event and well received by those in attendance. In holding our meetings and doing programs at locations around the state, I'm always amazed and impressed at the quality of many of the nature centers in Michigan. Collectively, they are a real asset to the residents of our state. And the Pierce Cedar Creek Institute is certainly one of the best. If you're ever in the Battle Creek or Hastings area, I strongly encourage you to drop by for a visit to PCCI. For pictures of the festival, see page 8 or go to our website: www.michiganbluebirds.org/mbs-news.

From recent anecdotal evidence, it appears that House Sparrows are more numerous this spring. It's hard to say why, but a strong possibility is that the relatively mild winter resulted in a much smaller die-off of these avian pests. Of course, this is not a good omen for a highly productive bluebird nesting season. You may need to spend more time this year battling House Sparrow incursions into your nesting boxes. This is extremely critical in helping bluebirds have successful nestings.

If you're new to bluebirding and not very knowledgeable about dealing with sparrows, here are a few basic facts as to why it is critical not to allow sparrows to nest in bluebird boxes – at all. Sparrows are highly invasive, non-native to North America, and can kill adult or young bluebirds as well as destroying their eggs. Sparrows like habitats similar to bluebirds but are more commonly found close to outbuildings or houses. A critical component to discouraging sparrows is the placement of your nest boxes. Place them as far out in the open (away from cover) as you can. If sparrows attempt to nest in a box, remove their nests and eggs – they are not protected by state or federal law as native birds are. If they are persistent, you may need to trap and euthanize them. Sometimes this is the only solution that is effective. See other options and tips on our website: www.michiganbluebirds.org/problem-solving.

One final topic that comes up each year is neglected or abandoned nest boxes. You find these almost everywhere – many on public properties like parks, schoolyards, libraries, etc. These are a hazard to native nesting birds primarily because sparrows breed in them uncontrolled. Also, most of these boxes have no predator protection. I hope none of you have neglected or abandoned boxes on your property, but if you do, by all means either fix them up and monitor them or take them down. If you have influence with individuals responsible for properties where abandoned boxes exist, encourage them to remove the boxes. Or alternatively, find some motivated individuals to repair and monitor the boxes.

Well, I hope everyone has a great spring! And as always, don't hesitate to contact me with your questions and input.

Help Needed

New Events Committee

The Michigan Bluebird Society, as it does from time to time, has authorized the formation of a committee to assist with Spring and Fall Bluebird Festival planning. The Events Committee has been charged with identifying suitable venues to hold our festivals, identifying speakers, identifying and encouraging exhibitors, seeking prize donations, and finding volunteers to staff the events, among other responsibilities. Society Vice President Phil Peterson has agreed to serve as the committee chairperson. The committee will meet periodically (by teleconference when possible) and will make recommendations which will be forwarded to the Board of Directors for their consideration. If you wish to serve on the committee, please contact Phil at (517) 256-4248 or by e-mail at ppeterson@michiganbluebirds.org.

County Coordinators

The Society is in need of members to serve as county coordinators in their local counties. County coordinators serve as local resources on bluebirds for both members and the general public and are a great asset to our group. They also help promote bluebird conservation and the MBS in their local areas. It's a task that doesn't take a lot of time but definitely makes an impact. As of the end of 2015, we only had 28 counties (out of 83) in Michigan with coordinators. If you're at all interested, and your county is not currently represented (check the list on page 7), please contact Kurt Hagemeister at khagemeister@michiganbluebirds.org or at (734) 663-9746. He can give you more information and answer your questions.

Upcoming MBS Programs

Are you looking for something fun and educational to do? Plan on attending one of the following programs where our MBS members are presenters:

May 17, 7:00-9:00 p.m. - "Attracting Bluebirds" by Kurt Hagemeister at Seven Ponds Nature Center, 3854 Crawford Road, Dryden (810) 796-3200.

June 16, 8:00-4:00 - "Woodcraft Display and Crafts" by Gene Wasserman at the National Get Outdoors Day by U.S. Forest Service at Greenfield Village, 20900 Oakwood Boulevard, Dearborn.

2015 MBS Annual Report

By Kurt Hagemeister, President

I am pleased to be able to issue this report summarizing the MBS 2015 calendar year. I delivered a version of the report below at the Spring Bluebird Festival on March 19, 2016.

Overall

2015 was another successful year for the Society – one which saw the group carry out its mission of bluebird conservation and education of its members and the general public. It was a strong year for educational programs as we saw a high demand from various nature-related groups. Representatives of the Society presented at least 35 programs in many areas of the state. We reached many new people with the bluebird message at our successful Spring Bluebird Festival in Muskegon. In addition, the website continued to get increased traffic, and the MBS store saw strong revenue growth. Although membership dropped slightly during the year, end-of-the-year membership efforts brought good results. Finally, the group ended the year in strong, stable financial condition with sufficient assets to keep planned operations going well into 2016.

MBS Board of Directors

The makeup of the board was largely stable throughout the year. Dave Newhouse replaced Gene Wasserman as Director at Large. The group held quarterly board meetings in March, May, August, and November. In addition, the Society held a planning retreat meeting at the Fenner Nature Center in Lansing in January. Since starting to use teleconferencing the previous November, the group has seen higher participation in the meetings which helps ensure a quorum is reached on all votes.

Membership

The Society showed slightly lower membership in 2015, ending the year around 190. As of year-end, there are MBS members in 38 Michigan counties and 12 other states (OH, IN, IL, AK, NY, PA, MD, MN, NE, FL, WI, and CO). In November, John Harville took over as Membership Director and started a renewed effort to recover expired memberships.

Education

MBS continued to be very active in 2015 doing educational programs for groups in different areas of the state. Typical hosting organizations included nature centers, Audubon Societies, schools, garden clubs, and businesses (like birdfeeding specialty stores). Two additional major components of the educational function of the MBS are events and our website (see below).

Website

The website continues to be a tremendous bluebirding resource for the public and membership. Major initiatives

completed in 2015 included upgrading the software operating platform to Joomla 2.0, revamping the main menu, and making the site mobile-friendly for all devices. The MBS store page also continues to be a significant source of funds for the group (after membership dues). Merchandise sales continue to increase, not just to members, but also to out-of-state and non-member consumers. **NOTE:** *the MBS puts all proceeds from sales of merchandise (selling price less our direct costs) back into bluebird conservation. No officer or board member receives any compensation from the group or any other benefits.*

Nest Box Monitoring & Data Collection

The group's county coordinators were a major asset to local members last year, helping to solve nesting challenges, monitor trails, educate others on improving bluebird habitat, and spread the word about the MBS. At year-end, 28 counties had coordinators in place. There was a healthy 14% increase in the number of trail season summary reports submitted. However, the total number of nest boxes for which reports were sent in decreased by 9.6%. Despite the brutal winter and cold, early spring, the average number of bluebirds fledged per box decreased only slightly to 1.4 from 1.6.

Events

The MBS held two major meetings in 2015. The Spring Bluebird Festival was held in Muskegon in March and attracted more than 85 people. This was a small decrease from the previous year's meeting in Traverse City. The Fall Meeting was held at the Dahlem Center in Jackson in September and attracted another good attendance of 35. In addition, the group set up booths at several other large events including the Birds, Blooms, and Butterflies Festival in Jackson in August.

Financial

From a cash-flow point of view, the group's revenues exceeded expenses by \$1,045 in 2015, despite expenses being \$2,145 higher than in 2014. Several higher expense items included website upgrades and the newsletter. In revenue, the two biggest increases were membership dues and donations. A good part of this was due to the fund-raising drive at the end of the year – the group's first in many years. Note that the revenue surplus was carried over to 2016 to be put toward the group's educational activities.

Any questions on this report can be sent to Kurt Hagemeister at khagemeister@michiganbluebirds.org.

Who Would Have Thought??

By Ken Fox

Editor's Note: We at the Michigan Bluebird Society are always amazed at the ingenuity and creativity of our members. Recently Ken Fox of Dowagiac contacted us with a fascinating way he recycled an old plastic pitcher with a lid. Here is his story:

A few years ago my in-laws had a chickadee nest in a tea kettle they had hanging in their yard. I decided to try my hand at attracting these friendly, little birds by reconfiguring an old 2-quart pitcher. Success!

I think the opening on the underside attracts these agile little beauties and seems to discourage wrens!



The picture on the left (below) shows the pitcher with a lid. I enlarged the pour spout by heating the plastic and stretching the opening, then drilled two holes and put nails in to hold the lid on. It hangs on a small tree branch. I've since tilted it almost horizontally and the chickadees have to hang onto the underside and flutter in. After a couple days, they fly right in!



Wrens have not figured this one out!

The picture on the right shows the lid removed with the

beautiful nest and eggs inside.

I did drill two small drain holes and put a cup of cedar shavings in; however, it seems the chickadees had to "excavate" the nest. They spent a couple of days hauling the shavings out. A few years ago I saw a pair hauling shavings out of a box. I thought that was a lot of work and would take them forever because there were 3" of shavings in there! To help them out, I walked over and while they scolded me, opened the box and scooped most of the shavings out - they left and never returned!!

Supplemental Mealworm Feeding

(Continued from page 1)

holes in the ends or bars on the side require more effort for the birds. Going inside a feeder to get food is not natural for them. Again, training is required. Keep the top of the feeder open until the bluebirds are feeding from the dish. If the side panels can be removed, leave them out until the bluebirds are going in to get the mealworms. Then try putting them back in place.

Finally, never put the mealworms directly inside the nest box for the young birds. The young birds need to be fed by the parents, and the mealworms are likely to just end up burrowing down into the nesting material.

For more information about feeding bluebirds, go to the MBS website page: www.michiganbluebirds.org/feeding-bluebirds.

Clarification

In the Winter *Flyer* Keith Kridler's front-page article suggested planting currants to help feed birds during winter. That is fine in Texas where Keith lives and there is no occurrence of Eastern White Pines, but DO NOT plant currants in Michigan. All species of currants are alternate hosts for white pine blister rust, a devastating disease to Eastern White Pines, Michigan's state tree. Black currants in particular are still illegal to plant in many Michigan counties. For further information contact the Michigan DNR.

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

Now is the perfect time to help by joining the 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, John Harville, at (269) 473-2667.
- 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, made 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, and Happy Spring! It's me, Papa Blue. Mama Blue and I are back from Missouri where we spent the winter. It took us many days to get back, but we are glad to be home.

This has been a very unusual spring for us and already has presented us with some challenges. First off, the cold and snow are making it hard for us to concentrate on courtship and having a brood of babies. It has us working hard to stay warm and to find enough berries until the weather warms and there are some insects around for us to eat. Mama keeps saying to be patient, but I can hear my little bluebird tummy rumble from hunger.

When we got back from Missouri we returned to Old Man Peterson's and found a nice nest box. However, it already had an occupant, a Downy Woodpecker. I scared him out of the box by accident one morning and he hasn't returned, so we will make that nest box our home. The woodpecker must have been here for a while because it looks like he pecked at the entrance hole and tried to make it larger. He also pecked at the inside of the door leaving small wood chips inside the box. I guess he was just doing his job looking for insects and grubs.

We had a very exciting morning yesterday when Mama Blue saw a cat cross the yard at Old Man Peterson's. It was hunting and found a vole, but it sure made us nervous. Old Man Peterson chased it off, and Mama Blue overheard him talking about trying to find the owner to convince him to keep the cat indoors or put a bell on its collar so it wouldn't be such a threat.

Lastly, there have been many House Sparrows in the area. I keep chasing them off when they fly by our nest box and some chase me right back. That can be a little scary, but so far we have our nest box. I see Old Man Peterson with some contraption in the yard. Every time I see him with that contraption, it has some House Sparrows in it and then we see a few less sparrows.

One cheery bit of news to report. Mr. and Mrs. Chickadee are our new neighbors. They are small but very hard working birds. It looks like the Downy Woodpecker tried to make the entrance hole to Mr. and Mrs. Chickadee's nest box bigger, too, but the opening of their nest box is so small I don't think any other bird can get in.

Well, that's all for now. Enjoy Spring and say hi when you see us.

Papa Blue



Artwork by Elaine Morton



Bluebird



Q. Sometimes when I monitor there are one or more eggs that don't hatch. Why is this?

A. Bluebirds sometimes lay eggs that are not fertile, so they will never hatch. It may be one egg or the entire clutch. In the latter case, the birds may build a new nest on top of the infertile eggs. If all other eggs hatched four or so days earlier, you will know the remaining eggs are infertile. These unhatched eggs should be removed from the nest box and discarded a good distance away. If this is not done, there is a chance the eggs will break, and the rotten smell will attract insects or predators. This is just one of the reasons why it is important to monitor ALL nest boxes.

Q. I have a new nest box and am wondering if I should stain it to help it last longer.

A. Staining boxes will certainly help the wood last longer. If you do so, it's best to use a non-toxic water-based stain on the exterior of the box. Never stain the interior of the box. Typically the part of the box that fails first is the roof which is most exposed to rain and sun. If you only stain one part, make sure it's the roof. Two coats would be even better for the roof. After staining, make sure the box dries thoroughly and the stain smell dissipates somewhat. Waiting several weeks before putting the box out is a good idea, too.

Important Member Information

Members: If you do not have your e-mail address on file with MBS, please consider doing so. We are increasingly communicating with our membership via e-mail. Contact the membership director, John Harville, at membership@michiganbluebirds.org.

You can help us save money, paper, and resources. Send us an e-mail at newsletter@michiganbluebirds.org, and we will send you only an electronic version of *The Flyer*. You will need to provide a working e-mail address where we can send you a link to download a PDF file of *The Flyer* each quarter. 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.

Omission in Winter Flyer

In our Winter *Bluebird Flyer* we inadvertently forgot to credit Brian Powers and Dan Cunningham for their wonderful drone photo of the Pierce Cedar Creek Institute. The Society apologizes for this omission.

THANK YOU!

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

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

Dan Belson - Hastings
Susan Canty - Lansing
James Crimmins (Lifetime) - Chicago, IL
James & Deborah Cusack - Gobles
Lori & Rick Dettloff - Rockford
Adena Friend - Howell
Kelly Heyner - Metamora
Agnes Karas - Hastings
Janet McLaughlin-Williams - East Lansing
Julie & Leo Menestrina - Bellair
Patricia Miller - Williamston
Mike & Donna Parr - Kalamazoo
Pierce Cedar Creek Institute - Hastings
Mary Poerner - Oscoda
Lisa B. Reed - Kalamazoo
William Robson - Whitmore Lake
Carolyn Rourke - Otsego
Catherine Strout - Bloomfield Hills
Frank Turley - Kensington, MD
Paul Uzarski - Grand Rapids
Dr. David & Joan Wendling - Kalamazoo
Peggy Whidden - Berrien Springs

WELCOME BACK, RENEWING MEMBERS!

Peter Alberda - Zeeland
Karen Bender - New Boston
Rose Birchall - Fowlerville
Dave & Betty Boes - Fruitport
Sandra Bowker - Kalamazoo
Ronald Brink - Ida
Elliot Brunetz - Rockford
Tom & Karina Davis - Springfield, Ohio
Mark DeHaan - Rockford
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Cindee & Larry DuBey - Lake City
Peggy Falk - Rockford
Joe & Janet Forneris - Dwight, IL
Anita Friend - Muskegon
Marjorie Gilde - Marne
Jim & Joyce Grace - Jackson

Carl Griffith - Bellaire
Kurt Hagemeister - Ann Arbor
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Joan Otter - New Boston
Frank Papp - Dexter
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Bud & Jo Riggs - Adrian
Robert Roney - Grosse Pointe Shores
Dean Rust - Lancaster, PA
Kristin Schick - Tecumseh
Don & Marianne Smith - Tecumseh
Shauna Tindall - Ann Arbor
Jerry Valka - St. Clair Shores
Wittenbach Wege/Courtney Cheers - Lowell
David Weinberg - Bloomfield Hills
Dr. David & Joan Wendling - Kalamazoo
Dody Wyman - Manchester

THANK YOU, DONORS!

Noal & Janet Brown - Dexter
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Taylor Garden Club - Garden City
Shauna Tindall - Ann Arbor
David Weinberg - Bloomfield Hills
Wild Birds Unlimited - Ann Arbor
Robert Wittenberg - Byron Center

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 e-mailed to: newsletter@michiganbluebirds.org or mailed to: **The Michigan Bluebird Society, P.O. Box 2028, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-2028.** 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.

County Coordinators

Antrim, Charlevoix, & Kalkaska Counties, Tom Comfort
(231) 676-0565 comfort@torchlake.com

Berrien, Cass, & Van Buren Counties, John Harville
(269) 473-2667
john_s_harville@comcast.net

Cadillac, Wexford, Missaukee, & Osceola Counties, Dave Newhouse
(231) 577-4240
danewhouse@gmail.com

Calhoun County, Kristie Preston
(269) 964-9592
kristie.preston@sbcglobal.net

Benzie, Grand Traverse, Leelenau, & Manistee Counties, Greg Miller
(231) 325-4883
ridgeview@centurytel.net

Genesee & Livingston Counties, Mary Mason
(810) 735-9877 maryleemason@gmail.com

Ingham, Eaton, & Clinton Counties, Gene Wasserman
(517) 339-1161 esw1216@msn.com

Jackson County, Lynn Ward
(517) 581-2961
ward_lynn@comcast.net

Kalamazoo & Barry Counties, Jonathan Morgan
(269) 344-1803 gardenman13@yahoo.com

Kent County, Mark DeHaan
(616) 822-3856
mdehaan59@gmail.com

Lenawee County, Don Smith
(517) 423-7373

Muskegon County, Anita Friend
(231) 724-3457
friendan@co.muskegon.mi.us

Oakland County, Duane Lanyon
(248) 437-4227
dal30950@yahoo.com

Washtenaw County, Ana Hotaling
(734) 475-3622
publicity@michiganbluebirds.org

Shiawasee County, Phil Peterson
(517) 256-4248
ppeterson@michiganbluebirds.org

Board of Directors

PRESIDENT

Kurt Hagemester, Ann Arbor, MI
(734) 663-9746
khagemester@michiganbluebirds.org

VICE PRESIDENT

Phil Peterson, Laingsburg, MI
(517) 256-4248
ppeterson@michiganbluebirds.org

SECRETARY

Liz Hagemester, Ann Arbor, MI
(734) 663-9746
secretary@michiganbluebirds.org

TREASURER

Ann Gaultney, Haslett, MI
(517) 339-1161
treasurer@michiganbluebirds.org

PAST PRESIDENT

Lynn Ward, Jackson, MI
(517) 581-2961
ward_lynn@comcast.net

DIRECTOR-AT-LARGE

Dave Newhouse, Cadillac, MI
(231) 577-4240
danewhouse@gmail.com

WEBMASTER

Jan Graves, Tecumseh, MI
(517) 423-3467
webmaster@michiganbluebirds.org

MEMBERSHIP DIRECTOR

John Harville, Berrien Springs, MI
(269) 473-2667
membership@michiganbluebirds.org

PUBLICITY DIRECTOR

Ana Hotaling, Chelsea, MI
(734) 475-3622
publicity@michiganbluebirds.org

NEWSLETTER DIRECTOR

Gail Chapman, Shorewood, IL
(815) 730-1194
newsletter@michiganbluebirds.org

Another Successful Spring Festival!

This year's Spring Bluebird Festival, held at Pierce Cedar Creek Institute in Hastings on March 19, drew 80 enthusiastic attendees. The PCCI is a beautiful nature and environmental education facility, and the MBS is grateful to Larry Hayward for bringing the PCCI to our attention and paying the rental fee. This year's guest speakers were Joe Rogers who brought in various birds of prey, Tim Nowicki who gave a fascinating lecture on bird migration, and Kurt Hagemeister who discussed nest box materials and mounting systems. Everyone who came seemed to enjoy the day from start to finish! For additional details and pictures, see our website, www.michiganbluebirdsociety.org/about/mbs-news.



Registration, MBS store, & exhibits in the foyer



PCCI auditorium where we held our programs



Prize winners Doris & Jim Cubberly



Prize winner Luann Snyder



One of Joe's owls

Photos of prize winners taken by Don Smith — thank you!

Not pictured: prize winner Karen Bender



BLUEBIRD PANELISTS (from left to right)
Gene Wasserman, John Harville, Kurt Hagemeister



Prize winner Jessica Phillips

