



Spring 2014

In This Issue:

The Bluebird Flyer

Newsletter of the Michigan Bluebird Society

From The President's Perch.....2
 Poem: Bluebird Honeymoon2
 A NestWatch Experience3
 2013 Annual Report4
 Papa Blue Story.....5
 Bluebird Q & A5
 Book Review..... 5
 New and Renewing Members..... 6
 MBS Contact List7
 MBS Spring Festival.....8

Spring Bluebird Tips

Now that the long dreary Michigan winter has finally given way to spring, it's time to enjoy our nesting bluebirds. This is the favorite time of year for many bluebirders, with the brilliant blue and orange of America's favorite bird mixing with the palette of blooms and blossoms in our yards.

Although it may seem like a season of plenty, bluebirds still need a lot of help. It may be true they usually don't have to deal with problems like extreme heat or drought, there are some other big challenges like:

- ◆ Insect food shortages
- ◆ Competition from house sparrows
- ◆ Lack of nesting sites
- ◆ Lingering cold and wet weather

As a bluebird landlord, there are things you can do to help "your" bluebirds increase their chances of nesting success. Here are some of our favorite Spring Bluebird tips:

1. Watch closely for competition at your boxes from Tree Swallows and House Sparrows. If Tree Swallows are out-competing the bluebirds for boxes, pair up your nesting boxes to give the blues their own home. If sparrows are plaguing one or more boxes, invest in a universal in-box trap to evict them.
2. Don't forget water. Bluebirds love to drink and bathe in fresh water. So, put out one or two birdbaths and keep them filled.
3. Keep the grass under and around your nest boxes mowed regularly. Tall grass can hide predators more easily.
4. Make sure to put predator guards on all your bluebird nest box poles. Raccoons, snakes, and nest-robbing squirrels are very



common everywhere. See the MBS website page on Problem Solving for a downloadable, easy-to-make plan for a predator guard.

5. At least for April and May, consider supplemental feeding of mealworms to help bluebirds make it through any spells of cold, wet weather. Even two days of this weather can result in nest failure or even the adults dying from starvation.
6. Monitor nest boxes regularly (twice a week) to check for evidence of insect infestation (blow flies, wasps, and ants). Don't assume these pests can't or won't bother nesting birds this early in the season.
7. Record your nest check data regularly. See the downloadable form on the MBS website on the Monitoring Nest Boxes page.
8. Have fun with spring nesting and learn!
9. Don't give up if bluebirds don't nest early. Summer nests often do very well.



MBS News

New Newsletter Director

Our new MBS Newsletter Director is Gail Chapman, a MBS member living in Shorewood, IL. Gail has had bluebirds nesting on her property in Harbert, MI for 5 years and joined the MBS after seeking information about these beautiful birds. If you would like to contribute an article or photograph in an upcoming Bluebird Flyer, email Gail at newsletter@michiganbluebirds.org.

Election of Officers

The MBS held its election of officers on March 29th at the business meeting during the Spring Bluebird Festival. Current officers Kurt Hagemester (President), Phil Peterson (Vice-President), Ann Gaultney (Treasurer) and Liz Hagemester (Secretary) were elected to 3-year terms starting on the 29th. Thank you to Nomination Committee Chair, Gene Wasserman.

Continued on page 6)

From the President's Perch

By Kurt Hagemeister



As I write this column, it's in the low 60s and sunny here in Ann Arbor—a beautiful spring day. And after the winter we just had, this is immensely welcome!

Indeed, the Tree Swallows returned the other day and immediately started courting over the yard and checking out the nest box choices. It didn't take very long for several of them to decide our yard

was a suitable nesting locale. So, the dive bombing began as I made my rounds around the yard!

On wonderfully nice spring days in early April like this, it's easy to think everything will now be hunky-dory for our nesting birds the rest of the season. Nothing could be further from the truth. For openers, inevitably we will get more frigid weather, although hopefully nothing like the days of January or February. But this can make it extremely hard for birds to find enough insect food. Secondly, most of the natural berries and seeds from last fall have been eaten by birds and wildlife over the extremely harsh winter.

So, I always recommend people to consider feeding mealworms throughout April and May to help birds get through to the warmer weather months. Chilly, wet weather can be lethal to nesting birds even if it lasts only a few days. For lots of information about how to feed bluebirds and other cavity nesters, see our website page: www.michiganbluebirds.org/feeding-bluebirds.

On a different topic, it was wonderful to see many of you at our recent **Spring Bluebird Festival** in Traverse City. I think I can speak for all of the attendees in saying how fun and educational of an event it was. All the programs were well received by everyone. Also, the Hagerty Center was beautiful with a gorgeous view of Grand Traverse Bay. Finally, the Bluebird Expo was bigger and better than ever this year and enabled many attendees to get the right bluebird gear for the new nesting season. For more details about the Festival, see page 8.

A real pleasant surprise for me at the Festival was receiving an unexpected award of appreciation from the Society—presented by our Past-President and co-founding member Lynn Ward. The award itself was a book titled **Song and Garden Birds of North America** from the National Geographic Society. I was so excited and surprised by this award, I was practically speechless!



In addition to my Grandmother's influence, the other "spark" that led me to an eventual career path helping wild birds was this book. I first discovered it in my elementary school library and literally checked it out dozens and dozens of times. The beautiful close-up photos of most garden birds (including bluebirds) just enthralled me. As happy as I am to now have the book in my collection, I'm even happier and honored to have been able to help this organization grow over the last 12+ years. Thank you to all of you for helping MBS and bluebirds every day in your yards, trails, and neighborhoods!



Bluebird Honeymoon

By Katharine M. Braun

Come along with me, my love,
And we will roam the sky;
We'll fly across the meadows,
And soar o'er mountains high.

We'll drink of streams' pure waters;
Chase butterflies and bees;
And when we tire of this, my love,
We'll rest in shady trees.

Then we will search in earnest,
Each nook and cranny wide;
Where we can raise our family
Together, side by side.

There it is, my dearest love.
Well, goodness! Bless my soul!
Just waiting there for us, dear one,
Our house upon a pole.

A kind and careful craftsman
Has built it strong and true;
DO enter into it, my love,
And I will follow you.



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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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2013 Annual Report

(Continued from page 4)

Events

The MBS held two meetings in 2013. The Spring Bluebird Festival was held in Lansing in March and attracted upwards of 100 people. To date, this was the biggest and most successful spring meeting event. The Fall Meeting was held at the Dahlem Center in Jackson in September and attracted around 25 people. This is normal, since interest in bluebirds tends to tail off temporarily after the nesting season is over. In addition, the group set up booths at several other large events including CraneFest in Bellevue, MI in October and the Birds, Blooms, and Butterflies Festival in Jackson in August.

Financial

From a cash-flow point of view, the group's expenses for 2013 matched almost exactly with revenues. So, the Society did not need to dip into its reserves to fund activities. The largest expense (close to \$2,000) continued to be printing and mailing the quarterly newsletter. After that, the Spring Festival was the 2nd largest expense. Donations increased by 22% in 2013, which was a positive trend.

MBS News

(Continued from page 1)

Congratulations to Festival Drawing Winners

MBS held a prize drawing at the Spring Bluebird Festival for several bluebird-themed gift baskets and bags. Samantha Grotenhuis of Holland won the kid's gift bag. Adult winners included Molly Pink of S. Bend, IN; Gary Kennedy of Traverse City; and Ann Thomson. Thank you to those who contributed items for the drawing prizes which included a beautiful wrapped bluebird gift package from Wild Birds Unlimited of Ann Arbor and a valuable vintage copy of Lawrence Zeleny's classic book: *The Bluebird—How You Can Help Its Fight for Survival* donated by Peggy Falk of Rockford. Also, thank you to Ann Gaultney, Gene Wasserman, Frank Papp, and Kurt & Liz Hagemeister for donated items.

MBS Seeking More County Coordinators

The MBS is in need of volunteers for counties across Michigan to help spread the word about bluebird conservation. It's easy and doesn't take a lot of time. It just requires enthusiasm about helping others learn about how to be more successful with bluebirds. You don't need to be "an expert". On page 7 you can see which counties have coordinators currently. But even if your county is taken, you can still help out. If you'd like to learn more, contact Kurt Hagemeister via email at khagemeister@michiganbluebirds.org or (734) 663-9746.

Thank You!

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

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS...

Susan Vrondan – Boyne City
Elaine Bottoms – Dothan, AL
Theresa Dykhuis – Grand Rapids
Margaret Tice – East Liverpool, OH
Martha Flores – Flushing
Louise Parish – Dowagiac
Curtis E. Regentin – Harbor Springs
Kristin Zimmerman – Oxford
Mari Hughes – Muskegon
Norma Galloway – Battle Creek
Rebekah Chapman – Kalamazoo
Denny Dunfield – Fenton
Barbara Roche – Berrien Springs
Carol Towar – Old Mission
Barbara Baker – Kingsley
Joseph Kucharski – Kalkaska
Carol Groves – Traverse City
Gordon Shull – Traverse City
Deb Harp – Traverse City
M.T. Impellizzeri – Cedar
Norman Bistodeau – Cedar
Larry & Cindee DuBey – Lake City
Chuck & Donna Valkner – Manton
Jerry Valka – St. Clair Shores
Cheryl Flory – Petersburg
Samantha Grotenhuis – Holland
Jill Lievense – Suttons Bay
Thomas Ford – Traverse City
Barb Johnson – Interlochen
Cate Gadbar – Traverse City
Lou Ann Church – Arcadia
Liz Kelderhouse – Traverse City
Sharon Supp – Rockford
Donna Kirchhoff – Manton
Tom Rentz – Imlay City
Virginia Anderman – Williamsburg
Bob Baker – Beulah
Wild Birds Unlimited – Traverse City

WELCOME BACK RENEWING MEMBERS...

James & Diane Beutel (Wild Birds Unlimited) - Ann Arbor
Susan Horvath – Ann Arbor
Bud & Jo Riggs -- Blissfield
Ken & Patti Fox – Dowagiac
William Sisson – St. Joseph
Mike Klug – Delton
Harris Nature Center – Okemos
Jerry & Carol Dusek – Saginaw
Maryann McCarthy – Eau Claire
Kent & Suzanne Walker – Towson, MD
Gordon Elliot – Harbor Springs
Marti Driscoll – Muskegon
Carol Young – Dexter
Ed Jacoby – Harbor Springs
Tammy Vandermolen – Leslie
Phillip Peterson – Laingsburg
Chuck Laszyca – Clarkston
Ana Hotaling – Chelsea
Molly Straebel – Traverse City
Duane Lanyon – Milford
Lee Spence – Livonia
Molly Pink – South Bend, IN

THANK YOU DONORS...

James & Diane Beutel (Wild Birds Unlimited) - Ann Arbor

My Experience with NestWatch

Editor's Note: NestWatch, run by Cornell Lab of Ornithology, is a nationwide monitoring program designed to track status and trends in the reproductive biology of birds, including when nesting occurs, number of eggs laid, how many eggs hatch, and how many hatchlings survive.

By Peter Alberda

This story really started in the 1970s when I built my first bluebird boxes. My late uncle Jacob Pater, my mother's brother, spent his life on his and Grandpa's dairy farm. He was an organic farmer his whole life, back when J. I. Rodale was still alive. I imagine he probably read a story about bluebirds in one of his organic books or magazines and started building and setting out houses for insect control. When my wife and I bought our small farm he got us started right away, and we've been hosting bluebirds ever since.

For the majority of those years I only had 8 or 10 boxes out. Most years I'd have one or two pairs of bluebirds, with a chickadee or two, barn and tree swallows and, of course a few wrens. And house sparrows. I'm sure I raised my share of sparrows in those early years. I don't remember my uncle schooling me on sparrow control, but he was such a gentle man he may have let them live. I'm not that gentle – I've seen the horrible things that sparrows and starlings do so now I trap them year round.

I retired from teaching in 2008. We had always raised some sheep and cows but with the extra time I now had, my sons and I started to grow the farm. Since then we've increased our farm to around 100 acres. About half of it is usually in hay or pasture, which is excellent bluebird/tree swallow habitat. So I started building nest boxes with a passion until I had over 60 boxes out.

My boxes are mounted on 1/2" conduit with a 4" PVC baffle, unless on a fiberglass electric fence post when a baffle isn't needed. I pair most of my locations and often get both bluebirds and tree swallows at the same site. And now, not only do my family and I get to enjoy the birds, but everyone who travels past these fields gets to enjoy them, too. Expanding my trail was the best thing I ever did. Total strangers will stop me on the trail or at the local McDonald's to thank me for putting out boxes. And several times I've ridden by as people were shooting pictures from their cars. What a wonderful thing!!

One of my main problems was the difficulty keeping accurate records because I had so many boxes. The easy part was filling up the multiple sheets of paper from the different nest checks, but everything needed to be added up correctly at the end of the year.

Also, I tried numbering my boxes, starting at the home place, and then adding sites away from home. I got them all numbered, but then remembered one or two that were tucked away off in the back, here and there. So my box numbers were wrong right from the start. What a pain. Last year I found www.nestwatch.org and took the test to get started, but I didn't do much with it. I'd rather work around the farm or build bird coops than mess with the computer so it was forgotten.

Then the winter of '13-'14 hit. There wasn't much else I could do so I got back into NestWatch, and I'm glad I did. The first thing I



Pete and his grandson collect nest box data.

did was name all the properties I had boxes on - the county field, mailbox pasture, Twin Maple Farms, etc. Altogether there are 13 different locations where I have boxes. If I get another field, I can just add it to the list and it doesn't affect any of my earlier numbering systems. Each location then has the boxes listed numerically. Again, you can add boxes without messing up your previous work.

The real beauty of the program is that it's based on the Google earth satellite system. You actually are placing the boxes on the map on your computer exactly where they are located in real life. (One cool thing for me – the satellite picture of one of my hayfields shows me cutting hay near one of my boxes.) After the boxes are placed, there is an electronic sheet attached to every box in which you can enter your nesting result data. Each time you do a nest check you add to the data sheets. And that's it.

At the end of the season, there is no need to add up what was in each box, how many eggs or hatchlings there were, etc. It's all computed and organized for you. As long as you put good info in, the results will be there waiting for you, up to date, at all times. I'm sure some people will do their entry work right on their computer or phone while at the box. I'll probably stick with the paper for now, and then transfer the info to my computer later, as I'm a bit old-school yet.

I have yet to complete a year with the system but I'm already sold on it. It sure does eliminate a lot of the computation and record keeping. Whether you have just a few boxes or many, the system is fun and easy to operate. I hope you give it a try sometime. And put up some extra boxes for the neighbors to enjoy.
Pete

PS. Feel free to call me if you have questions. The people that help out at NestWatch are great to work with as well (and they know a lot more about it than I do.)

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<http://www.twinmaple farms.net/>

Pete Alberda is a longtime MBS member living in Zeeland, MI.

2013 MBS Annual Report

By Kurt Hagemeyer, President

MBS has been an official non-profit organization since 2004, making this year our 10th Anniversary! Each year, we issue a report summarizing the group's previous calendar year. A version of the report below was delivered by myself at the Spring Bluebird Festival on March 29th.

Overall

2013 was generally a very successful year for the Society in which membership grew, AND we were able to accomplish many of the group's missions related to education of the public and to bluebird conservation. Although the MBS' main purpose is to help bluebirds and other cavity nesting birds, we have recognized that on a day-to-day basis, we are a people organization in which serving our membership (you) is paramount. As such, the bulk of our efforts go into publishing our member newsletter, holding educational events, doing programs for groups, maintaining an informative website, assisting with bluebird monitoring and site issues, and generating publicity in the media to spread the message about helping bluebirds.

MBS Board of Directors

The makeup of the board was largely stable throughout the year. However, new Director Jan Graves joined the group during the summer taking on the role of Webmaster. The group held quarterly board meetings in March, June, August, and November. In addition, we held a planning retreat meeting in Haslett in January.

Membership

The Society showed solid growth in membership in 2013, adding 14% more members net (existing members + new members – non-renewing members). As of year-end, there are MBS members in 40 Michigan counties and 11 other states including OH, IN, IL, AK, FL, PA, TX, MN, NE, and CO. The website membership signup and renewal has contributed greatly to the generally increasing overall member level.

Education

MBS continued to be very active in 2013 doing educational programs for groups in different areas of the state. Typical

hosting organizations include nature centers, Audubon Societies, schools, garden clubs, and businesses (like birdfeeding specialty stores). In addition to using the website as a major educational resource, the MBS switched its online social media efforts from Yahoo Groups (which wasn't getting much activity) to Facebook. The latter has been getting much more interaction and has helped get more exposure for both bluebirds and MBS. The page is being maintained by Publicity Director Ana Hotaling.

Website

The website continues to be a tremendous resource for the public and membership on bluebirds. The MBS store page also continues to be a significant source of funds for the group (after membership dues). Sales of merchandise continue to increase, not just to members, but also to out-of-state non-members. **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 compensation or any other benefits from the group.

Improvements were made to the "back office" areas of the website in 2013 including upgrading the software and doing a full site backup. More content was also added to the site over the course of the year and will continue to be added over time.

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 spreading the word about the MBS. At year-end, 30 counties had coordinators in place. There was an increase of 9.6% in the number of nesting season summary reports submitted. This was after a record year in 2012 which saw a 100% increase in reporting. Much of this has to do with the implementation of a simplified report form and making it easier for people to obtain the form. Although there were more people sending in results, the number of reported bluebirds fledged dropped by 15.6%. However, analysis of the data showed that several large trail reports were not submitted by year-end that accounted for most of the drop. The average number of bluebirds fledged per box held steady at 1.7.

(Continued on page 6)

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, we finally made it back to Michigan. We had a great winter in Missouri but sure are glad to be back home.

We would have been back earlier but had some real challenges on our trip home. In Illinois, we got stuck for a few days because of the bad weather. First, there was rain and thunder and lightning. It rained so hard it was impossible to fly. We had to take cover in an old woodpecker cavity with three other bluebirds. We were able to stay warm and dry thanks to that woodpecker cavity.



After the rain stopped we continued north but had to stop again because of more bad weather. In Indiana the weather turned foul; rain and very strong winds stopped us this time. It wasn't normal wind, it was scary wind. We couldn't find a tree cavity so had to perch on a tree branch. We were nearly blown away by the wind. Mama Blue reminded me that the wind was from a nearby tornado. We were lucky to have survived.

After the weather improved, we continued on our trip and have just now arrived home. The weather is nice, warm and sunny, and old man Peterson greeted us with a dish of yummy meal worms. I am stuffed. What a treat after all that travel.

Well, we are off to find a cavity to build a nest and raise another brood of bluebirds. Wish us luck and say "hi" when you see us.

Papa



Bluebird Q & A

Q. I've been seeing both Bluebirds and Tree Swallows in my yard, and just noticed a grassy nest in one of my boxes. How can I tell which bird species is nesting there?

A. Bluebirds and Tree Swallows both typically construct nests made mostly of grass that is tightly woven into a round, cup shape. A big difference, however, is that swallows also use feathers to line the nest cup and cover over the tops of the eggs. Much of the time these feathers are white in color. Also, when eggs are present, bluebirds lay mostly blue eggs, whereas swallow eggs are white. This is not always the case, as around 10% of bluebird eggs are white.

Q. What kind of insects do bluebirds normally eat?

A. Bluebirds eat insects they can easily find in the open grassy and field habitats they prefer. They don't often catch flying insects in the air. Instead, they fly down to grab insects on or near the ground that they observe from a higher perch. Typical insects eaten are soft-bodied ones like grasshoppers, caterpillars, crickets, spiders, and beetles. They will also sometimes eat ants, wasps, moths, angleworms, sow bugs, and weevils. And of course, they love mealworms (which are really a form of beetle larva) which you can buy at birdfeeding or pet supply stores and websites. (source: sialis.org)

Book Review by Phil Peterson

Captivating Bluebirds: Exceptional Images and Observations by Stan Tekiela



Stan Tekiela is a naturalist, author, and wildlife photographer who has created a truly remarkable book. He has compiled his personal observations and research into an accurate, informative, and easy-to-read book with an amazing collection of photographs, most of which he has taken

himself.

Among the lesser known facts in the book are the facts that there are eight subspecies of Eastern Bluebird and that male bluebirds don't open their beaks when they sing. Tekiela also provides one of the best explanations of why bluebird feathers are blue and why the color intensity changes during the day.

This paperback is a must-read for any fan of the bluebird and is published by Adventure Publications, Inc. of Cambridge, MN. The book is available online from Amazon (and other retailers) and at the Dahlem Conservancy Gift Shop in Jackson, MI.

2014 Spring Bluebird Festival A Big Hit With Attendees

The 2014 Spring Bluebird Festival on March 29th was a huge success and the organization's best event to date. Over 100 people came out on a chilly but sunny day to the Hagerty Center in Traverse City to learn about bluebirds and native birds. The view of iced-over Grand Traverse Bay from the meeting room was spectacular and helped showcase one of the many beautiful spots in Michigan. In addition to fascinating programs by Jim McGrath, Dave Barrons, and Kurt Hagemester, the bluebird Q&A panel discussion was very popular with attendees. Add to that the Bluebird Expo, Kid's Activity Corner, and a delicious lunch, and you have the makings for a perfect day! Here are a few highlight pictures....



The morning started with a long line at registration. Liz Hagemester & Ann Gaultney kept it moving though!



Lunch is served at the Hagerty Center.



The Bluebird Expo area was busy all day.



The Bluebird Panel Discussion was a big hit. Phil Peterson moderated, with questions answered by Tom Comfort, Lynn Ward, and Kurt H.



Dave Barrons talks about the Sleeping Bear Birding Trail.



Gene Wasserman helps out with the Kid's Activity Corner.



Many bluebird questions were answered!