



Winter 2014

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The Bluebird Flyer

Newsletter of the Michigan Bluebird Society

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Nest Box Monitoring—What Data is Important To Collect?

By Kurt Hagemester

You may or may not be collecting nest box data right now. The important thing is **TO MONITOR** your houses regularly during the nesting season. But, why collect data at all you may ask.

First, in my opinion, the most important reason to collect data for your boxes is so you can improve the success of your housing over time. Collecting data to share with others like MBS or Cornell is a good thing to do. But, it won't do nearly as much good as helping you spot potential problems with individual boxes on your trail so you can fix them.

Second, if you have more than just a few nest boxes, it's really useful to have a system of keeping track of what's going on in each one. Collecting data forces you to have a formal, standard approach to monitoring.

Third, by knowing how your boxes are doing in numerical terms, you can brag at meetings about it! Seriously though, keeping year-to-year records helps you to gauge how your trail is doing and can motivate you to improving it further.

So, what data is important to track? Well, the basic pieces of data are:

1. No. of nests started
2. No. of nests that were successful
3. No. of eggs laid
4. No. of eggs that hatched
5. No. of young at a given point of time.
6. No. of birds that fledged.

You also want to keep some qualitative data like the species of bird nesting in each box, the date the nest was started, and the date the birds



fledged.

Beyond these basics, it will depend on your personal preferences and what factors that are important to you. It's always good when doing nest checks to write down notes and observations. This can include things like whether you found broken eggs, parasites, predation by sparrows, snakes, or animals, dead adult birds, or unhatched (infertile) eggs. You can also make observations about the weather, since this can greatly affect nesting success.

Greg Miller of Benzie County likes to record the date when the bluebirds arrive in his area each spring. Then, he compares it from year to year to see how it impacts that year's results.

For those of you who would like to keep data in a **more organized manner**, MBS has created a **Monitoring Data Form** to record your nest checks on. See page 8. The form is set up by box. So, if you have say, 4 boxes, you'll need 4 copies of the form. Then, just put the pages on a clipboard or notebook, and

(Continued on Page 6)

10

CELEBRATING

YEARS

Come To The....
**2014 Spring
Bluebird
Festival**

**Help Celebrate
The MBS 10 Year
Anniversary!**

**Saturday March 29th
in Traverse City at
the Hagerty Center**

- ◆ Interesting Programs
- ◆ Bluebird Expert Panel Discussion
- ◆ Business Session
- ◆ Bluebird Expo—stock up on bluebird supplies & gifts
- ◆ Kid's Activities
- ◆ Build-A-Nest Box workshops
- ◆ Lunch

**Reserve Your Spot
Today! See page 3 for
all the details.**

From the President's Perch

By Kurt Hagemeister



Happy New Year to everyone! I hope you're as excited as I am about the upcoming bluebird season. Doesn't it seem like we were all just taking in our nest boxes for the year a few short weeks ago?

Winter in Michigan can be difficult to endure sometimes (like our January Arctic cold-wave). But I always find it's rejuvenating to take a winter

hike through the fields and woods to enjoy nature at its quietest time of the year. Still, you can frequently hear a buzzing red squirrel or raucous Blue Jay breaking the silence.

My favorite winter sighting (not surprisingly) is still the beautiful blue and orange of a bluebird sitting in a bare tree. Here in southern Michigan we're lucky to have bluebirds all winter. They may not be in our yard every day or every week. But, it's reassuring to know they are never far off. In fact, just a few days ago, a pair of male bluebirds landed briefly to warm up on my southern-facing window sill near the computer.

Well, 2014 is an exciting year for all of us in the Michigan Bluebird Society, being the group's 10 year anniversary. It's hard to believe that it's been ten years since we officially became a non-profit organization. But, that was after almost 3 years of hard work getting the group off the ground, writing the by-laws, and other tasks.

We'd like to invite you to help us celebrate the MBS 10 Year Anniversary at our **Spring Bluebird Festival** this year in Traverse City on March 29th.

This event has gotten bigger and better each year, with more programs and more things to see and do. Make sure to check out the next page to see all the details. Traverse City is a wonderful city year-round, and makes a great destination for an early spring get-away. Our last spring meeting there in 2011 was a lot of fun and well-attended.

We will have information on our website on how to get to the meeting location, and a few hotels where we have worked out special prices for attendees.

Finally, I'd like to thank all of you who sent in your Nesting Season Summary reports. There is a summary of the results on Page 4. Overall it was a good nesting season with some trails experiencing better results than previous seasons. We will try to have the 2014 Report available on the website by the beginning of the nesting season. And to make it easier for you to collect data, we've come up with a form you can use to record what you find on your nest checks. A copy of the form is on page 8 and we also have a downloadable copy on the website.

So, I hope to see you in Traverse City in March. And if not, maybe at another event later in the year.



2014 Officer Elections

The Michigan Bluebird Society will be holding an election at the **Spring Bluebird Festival** in March to elect all 4 officer positions: President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and Secretary.

According to the MBS By-Laws as they are currently written, the election of officers is to be held at the organization's annual business meeting of members (the Spring Festival currently), with all present active members being allowed to vote. Officers must get a majority of the votes cast to be elected and the total number of members voting must represent at least 5% of the total membership for the election to be valid.

Note that in the near future, you will be receiving proposed changes that if passed, would allow members to vote by mailed ballots.

The Nominating Committee composed of Gene Wasserman, Don Smith, and Mark DeHaan has presented the following candidates for the election:

President—Kurt Hagemeister

Vice President—Phil Peterson

Treasurer—Ann Gaultney

Secretary—Liz Hagemeister

No other members were nominated for any of the above offices. Note that other members can still be nominated in person at the spring business meeting.



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Help MBS save money, paper, and resources.

If you would like to only receive this newsletter electronically, send us an email to newsletter@michiganbluebirds.org. Provide us with a good email address where we can send you a link where you can 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.

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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NEWSLETTER DIRECTOR

Open

Nest Box Monitoring (continued from pg. 1)

take them out with you in the field.

Over time, keeping good nesting data helps you spot areas where you can improve the fledging rate of your box locations. For example, if Tree Swallows seem to be claiming a particular nest box each year, you can put a 2nd box in this location to provide the bluebirds a place to nest.

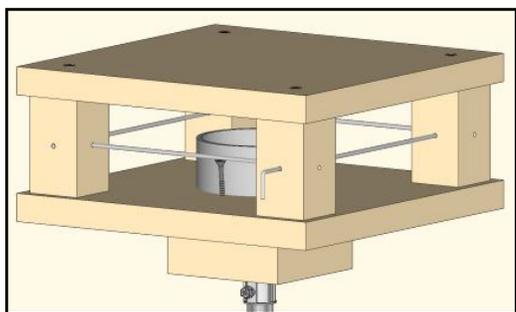
Another example is if you are seeing one or two nest boxes that are not attracting birds at all over time, then it's probably an indication they need to be moved. Or possibly there is something wrong with the box itself. In that case you can try a new box design.

The reality is that no two nesting seasons are the same. You will have some very successful years, some mediocre ones, and unfortunately, some poor seasons. Having nesting data over years time will provide an historical perspective to each current season, that will help you identify factors that may be impacting your success one way or the other.

So, if you haven't been keeping nesting data in the past, consider giving it a try this year. The form provided on page 8 will give you a good way to collect all the data and information you'll need. If you would like to customize this form for your own uses and are familiar with using Excel, let me know and I'd be glad to send you the spreadsheet file. I can be contacted at khgameister@michiganbluebirds.org.

An Innovative, Easy-To-Build Bluebird Feeder

If you're looking for a good bluebird feeder design that you can build yourself, this is it. This well-thought out design comes from MBS member and bluebird expert Steve Gilbertson of Aitkin, Minnesota. It's made mostly of 2x4, 2x2, and 1x10



cedar, some 1/8" wood dowel, and a tuna can (for the meal-worms). All the cuts are straight, and it's

easy to assemble.

The dowel "bars" and feeder height help exclude larger birds like Starlings and Robins. And it can easily be mounted to 1/2" electrical conduit.

For a detailed design and material list, download the PDF file at: <http://www.nestboxbuilder.com/pdf/mealworm-feeder-sg.pdf>

(Note: the drawing is courtesy of Fred Stille, Sr. at NestBoxBuilder.com.)

Thank You!

The MBS is grateful to the following people who have recently joined or renewed their memberships:

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS....

Nancy Sickles—Port Huron

Steven Cooley—Hastings

Brenda J. Ostrander-Jones—Delton

Sharon Katopodis—Fowlerville

William Routhier—Millington

Doris Cubberly—Tecumseh

Mary Lou Hall—Alger

Charles Bernard—Grand Rapids

WELCOME BACK RENEWING MEMBERS...

John Harville—Berrien Springs

Carol LaPres-Beyer—Norton Shores

Jonathan Morgan—Kalamazoo

Michael Novak—Niles

Carolyn Osolind—South Lyon

Ken Cooper—Clio

Sandra Evans—Columbiaville

Marcy Dreher—Fruitport

THANK YOU DONORS..

Sandra Evans—Columbiaville

Marcy Dreher—Fruitport

MBS Newsletter Director Needed

The Michigan Bluebird Society is very much in need of someone to put together The Bluebird Flyer newsletter once a quarter. It just requires someone who enjoys writing and bluebirds, and can assemble articles/pictures/graphics into a document with a publishing program like MS Publisher or Adobe. Much of the content is provided by others. This job doesn't take that many hours each month, and the printing and mailing is done by someone else. So if you can help out the Society by taking on this volunteer position, please contact Kurt Hagemeister at khgameister@michiganbluebirds.org or 734-663-9746.

Plan To Attend The 2014.....

MBS Spring Bluebird Festival

Saturday March 29th

9:45 to 4:45

**Hagerty Center at Northwestern
Michigan College**

Traverse City, Michigan



FREE Admission

Lunch is \$7.50 for adults &
\$5.00 for kids

FESTIVAL SCHEDULE

- 9:45—10:30** Coffee/Refreshments, Meet fellow bluebirders
- 10:30—11:45** **Bluebird Panel Discussion**—get all your questions answered by our expert panel of experienced bluebirders.
- 11:45—12:45** Lunch
- 12:45—1:15** **MBS Annual Business Meeting**—update of 2013, elections
- 1:15—4:45** **AFTERNOON PROGRAMS**
- ◆ **Birding By Ear - Bluebirds and Other Song Birds** by Jim & Carol McGrath of Nature Discovery. Learn how to identify birds by their call and about apps and computer programs to assist in bird ID.
 - ◆ **Break**—Visit the Bluebird Expo, Kid's Corner, and Build-A-Nest-Box workshop.
 - ◆ **Sleeping Bear Birding Trail** with Dave Barrons—a founding member of the Sleeping Bear Birding Trail, Mr. Barrons will discuss the year-old trail and the strides made in its development.
 - ◆ **How To Get Started In Bluebirding In One Day**—by Kurt Hagemeyer. All the basics to start a nest box program that attracts bluebirds.
 - ◆ **Bluebird Expo**—get your bluebird box set-ups, visit the Kid's Activity Corner, including the Build-A-Nest Box workshop and fun craft projects.

HOTELS: MBS has a special price worked out with 2 hotels. **Fairfield Inn & Suites** at 3701 North Country Dr. in Traverse City of \$75 per night plus tax. Mention code MBBS. The hotel can be reached at 231-922-7900. Also, next door to the Hagerty Center is the **West Bay Beach Hotel** at 615 E. Front St. Price is \$96/night plus taxes. 231-947-3700. www.twestbay.com.

DINING: For those arriving on Friday, MBS has organized an informal dinner at **Sleder's Family Tavern** at 717 Randolph St. at 7 p.m. Call them at 231-947-9213 for directions or go to www.sleders.com. See you there!

3rd Annual...

Bluebird Expo

Going on all day .You'll
be able to buy.....



- Nesting boxes
- Sparrow Traps
- Poles
- Bluebird Gifts
- Bluebird Feeders
- Mealworms
- MBS shirts and hats
- Books
- AND MORE!

Directions: The Hagerty Center is located at 715 East Front St, Traverse City. Call them at 231-995-1146, or go to their website at: www.nmc.edu/resources/hagerty-center

To Register:

Help us plan for food & seating by either 1) calling Lynette Myers at 517-206-7066, or 2) emailing her at membership@michiganbluebirds.org. Make sure to leave your name, phone, and # attending. You can also register online on the MBS website (michiganbluebirds.org).

2013 Nesting Season Summary

By Kurt Hagemester

In my opinion, ALL nesting seasons are successful as long as we have bluebirds fledging. Obviously, some seasons are more successful than others in terms of sheer numbers. But 2013 seemed to have a lot of positive results in many yards and trails.

First of all, thank you to all who submitted nesting season results. We received 9.6% more reports than we did in 2012, so it's always good to see more submissions. We did however receive a number of multiple trail reports, so the actual number of people or organizations submitting results may have been the same or less. Also, several reports had to be excluded from the results because incomplete data was submitted.

The total number of bluebirds fledged showed what on the surface would be an alarming drop of 15.6%. But upon further analysis, much of the difference was the result of 2 large trail reports we received in 2012, but not in 2013 (at least as of the time this summary was written). This is also reflected in the large drop of 22% in the average number of boxes per trail.

The average number of successful nests per box was slightly better. But, the box and nest productivity of bluebirds fledged

dropped in the 5 to 6 percent range.

We included some comparison numbers of the type of bluebird boxes used. The trend as shown seems to be the increased use of Gilbertson and Gilwood boxes, and decreased use of Peterson boxes. This is not surprising in that the MBS has been selling and promoting the use of both the Steve Gilbertson nest boxes at our events and on the website. Also, Peterson boxes, although successful, are harder to find than they used to be, and also hard to build.

The new and simpler nesting data summary form seems to be working well. I encourage everyone to review the form before the nesting season begins to ensure that all data is being collected as the season progresses. This should help reduce the amount of incomplete reports that we receive.

Please note too that we have a new **MBS Monitoring Form** that you can use to record nest-check data each week. We've included a copy on Page 8 which you can copy off. Also, the form is available to download from the website on the **Monitoring Nest Boxes** page.

2013 MBS Nesting Data Summary			
	2013	2012	% Change
No. of Trail Reports Submitted	57	52	9.6%
Total Number of Nest Boxes	928	1,086	-14.5%
Avg. # of Boxes per trail	16.3	20.9	-22.0%
Total Number of Bluebirds Fledged	1,558	1,845	-15.6%
Avg. # Successful Nests per box	0.45	0.43	4.7%
Avg. # Fledglings per successful nest	3.69	3.93	-6.1%
Avg. # Bluebirds Fledged per box	1.68	1.70	-1.2%
% of Trails using Traditional or NABS boxes	78.9%	78.8%	0.1%
% of Trails using either Gilwood or Gilbertson box	35.1%	25.0%	10.1%
% of Trails using Peterson boxes	29.8%	36.5%	-6.7%

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 again, it's me, Papa Blue. Mrs. Blue and I flew south for the winter in hopes of finding more abundant food and warmer weather. We flew south to Missouri. It is warm and sunny here. There are insects to eat, but some of the trees, shrubs and native birds are different than those in Michigan. Missouri is a great place to spend the winter. How could we go wrong in a state with the Eastern Bluebird as its official state bird?



Artwork by Elaine Morton

We received a letter from one of our kids and they are doing well, cold, but well. They survived an ice storm and had real trouble finding food. Even the berries they found were covered in a layer of ice and they don't have a beak strong enough to break through the ice to eat the berries. All they could do was look at those yummy, frozen berries covered in ice. He also wrote that it had been brutally cold for a few days and that made it even harder to find food and water. Spike admitted they were getting hungry and he was worried they might not survive. Fortunately, Old Man Peterson was leaving mealworms out which made life a bit easier for them.

Mrs. Blue and I met the nicest birds here that I had not seen before. The birds called themselves Blue Grosbeaks. These birds are bright purple-blue and remind me of the Indigo Buntings we see in Michigan. Mrs. Blue said the Indigo Bunting and Blue Grosbeak are related. The Grosbeaks have a very sturdy bill which helps them eat insects, snails (yuck!), seeds and fruit. These birds were fast flyers, but when they ate they foraged on the ground or hopped up on the limbs of bushes to find food.

We are saving up our energy and are starting to get excited about returning to Michigan. We hope to be back by the end of March. We hope to find a nice nest box or tree cavity to raise a brood or two of babies.

See you soon and enjoy the rest of your Michigan winter.

Papa Blue



Bluebird Q & A

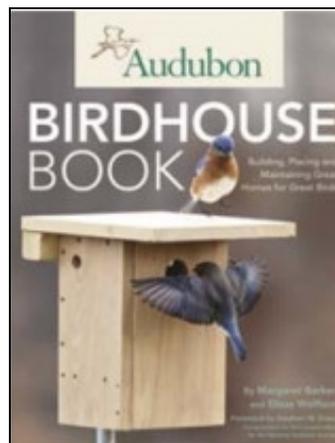
Q. When do bluebirds start nesting in boxes in Michigan?

A. It depends on how far south in Michigan you are and how mild of a late-winter it is. In northern parts of the state, it is most common for bluebirds to start nesting in April. In the south, they can start several weeks earlier. The bluebirds will time egg-laying with how early the spring is temperature-wise, since this determines how soon food becomes available.

Q. I leave several nest boxes out in winter for roosting. Should I check them out before the bluebirds arrive?

A. Absolutely. Roosting birds may leave a mess of droppings inside the box that should be cleaned out before spring nesting. Also, if mice got into the box, it may be extremely fouled with urine, mouse droppings, and debris. If this happened, you should disinfect the box with a 10% bleach, 90% water solution.

New Book: Audubon Birdhouse Book



There's a new book that just came out last year that every birdhouse hobbyist will want to own: **The Audubon Birdhouse Book—Building, Placing, and Maintaining Great Homes for Great Birds.** The book might be the most complete book on attracting every kind of cavity – nesting bird that have been written to date.

The book was co-authored by Margaret Barker and Elissa Wolfson, but there was a lot of input from bluebird experts including MBS members Tom Comfort, Steve Gilbertson, and Dick Tuttle. In addition to having profiles of most eastern and western species of cavity nesting birds, the book has easy to follow and build diagrams of many types of nesting boxes.

This book is so good, MBS has decided to offer it on our website for sale. Members can save \$5.00 off the list price of \$24.99. Go to www.michiganbluebirds.org/mbs-store and pick up your copy today.

