THE FRIENDS OF THE BLUEBIRDS

Number 7

April, 2000

THIS IS OUR 25^{TR} ANNIVERSARY YEAR. Twenty-five years ago this spring the first members of the Friends of the Bluebirds began monitoring nest boxes put up around SW Manitoba by John & Norah Lane and the Brandon Junior Birders. John had died in July 1975 and his wife and friends wanted to ensure that his work continued. That year, 16 individuals or small groups monitored 1109 boxes. Over the years our numbers of both boxes monitored and people doing the monitoring have increased. Some of you are now monitoring lines that you put up yourselves. However, as the Junior Birders put up their first boxes for the 1960 season many of you are looking after boxes on lines that have been in the same area for almost 40 years.

That first year (1976), the Friends of the Bludbirds recorded: 286 mountain, 26 eastern, 136 unidentified and 4 cross-nesting bluebird and 452 tree swallow nestings. Those first Friends were: The Junior Birders with Mr. Forsyth & Tony Burton, A.L.Campbell & kids, Mamie & Helen McCowan, Jim Spear, Mac & Don Murray, Roy Everitt, Lloyd Powell, Leslie & Doreen North, Mr & Mrs. Wayne Brown, Charles Reid, Cliff Findlay, the Hamiltons, the Mogers, John & Marion Robinsong, Barbara Robinson and Hazel (Patmore) Skuce.

RESULTS FOR 1999: Thank you all for turning in your results. Our numbers for this year are lower than last year. The flooding in SW Manitoba left several of our usual lines completely inaccessible until late in the season. Other lines had some boxes that could not be reached because of the water levels. Details on nestbox occupants were received for 59 lines (2554 boxes). There were 563 mountain, 439 eastern, 221 unidentified and 5 cross-nesting bluebird nesting attempts for a total of 1228 nestings of bluebirds. In addition, 1214 tree swallow, 92 wren, and 42 house sparrow nestings were reported. Deermice, red squirrels and flying squirrels were also found. As you can see from Table 1, the number of boxes monitored was down slightly from last year and so were the number of nesting attempts for all

species. Eastern bluebirds appear to be less affected than mountain bluebirds. Nestings are still higher than those obtained in 1997 when a comparable number of boxes was monitored. It is to be hoped that our nice weather continues and the bluebirds have a successful season. Getting the maximum number of boxes into service will help. Keep up the good work all of you!!

BOXES: Boxes and extra lids are available by calling Barbara Robinson at 728-4029. Our supply of finished boxes is limited (about 70) but Jerry Wollman and the Newdale Hutterite colony have just donated a 4th load of scrap lumber. In the past, this lumber has been converted into boxes by Raymond Gladden and more recently by Jack Webb. Don Proven has built over 60 new boxes and replaced old dilapidated ones in the Carberry area. **Many thanks to all our box builders!**

VOLUNTEERS: Thanks to all our volunteers BUT we can always use more. There are a few lines (near Carberry, Waggle Springs, Hwy#250 Alexander to Souris, Oak Lake area) that need monitors or, if you know of some good habitat, we can provide boxes for a new line. If you know anyone you think might be interested, take them out on your line and introduce them to bluebirds!

MONITORING:

 \Rightarrow Box checks: Remember to check the hole size of your boxes (should be 1-9/16"/40mm); if your numbers are worn off, check with Ann Smith to obtain new ones.

 \Rightarrow Unusual Nest occupants: If you have trouble identifying an unusual nest occupant, please contact Barb Robinson (728-4029) or Jean Horton (728-4672). It would be nice to know the identity of our occasional nest occupants.

 \Rightarrow Blowflies: Watch for blowfly pupal cases when you clean the boxes. They are reddish brown to black with a shiny surface and are about '4" long. Greyish larvae (maggots) may be found attached to the nestlings where the feathers and skin are thin (around beak & ears, under the wings or at the base of the claw) or in the nest material.

TABLE 1. Nestings reported for the years 1983-1999. A nesting is defined as a nest in which at least one egg has been laid.																	
	NUMBER OF NESTINGS																
	1983	<u>1</u> 984	1985	1986	1987	<u> 198</u> 8	1989	1990	<u> 1991</u>	<u>1</u> 992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	<u>1999</u>
BLUEBIRDS													_				
Mountain	*494	506	580	580	762	894	995	747	719	712	771	901	820	755	491	716	563
Eastern	87	54	100	168	258	276	354	207	191	164	167	337	265	403	289	527	439
Unidentified	18	6	7	24	83	66	51	97	49	73	84	220	170	182	142	218	221
X-nesting	1	0	3	2	1	2	2	6	2	3	0	5	4	2	4	10	5
Total	600	566	690	774	1104	1238	1402	1057	961	952	1022	1463	1259	1342	846	1471	1228
<u>OTHERS</u>																	
Tree Swallow	872	11 9 4	1100	1068	9 9 4	1094	994	726	691	841	923	1164	1100	1215	1207	1240	1214
House wren	84	74	79	59	57	46	85	91	122	94	192	211	184	154	168	138	92
House sparrow	127	87	35	28	32	38	46	43	28	21	49	26	34	20	35	62	42
Total Boxes	2020	2123	1838	1899	2045	2382	2039	1678	1548	1843	2202	2691	2471	2641	2586	2650	2554
Monitored Lines								44	34	36	58	68	61	68	65	67	59
*106 additional nests v	were foun	d with fro	ozen egge	L .													

NOTES FROM THE LINE REPORTS

• White eggs occur occasionally (3-5% of eggs laid) but on Hamid Mumin's line NW of Brandon the eggs in three of four mountain bluebird nests (77%) were white. It will be interesting to see if this local population continues to produce a high percentage of white eggs.

• Jack Bryer's banded female mountain bluebird was back again on his line NW of Russell. Jim Spear banded her as a nestling and she returned to nest on the same line (but not in the same box) in 1997, 1998 and 1999.

• Ray and Barb Pettinger had an interesting summer on their line in the Ft. Ellice pasture. On June 18 they spotted the spectacular Scissor-tailed flycatcher with its very long tail. It hovered in the air several times in a five-minute period and sat on a fence in between flights allowing Ray to get a photo. Ray's camera was busy again when they found a nest containing six tree swallow eggs and one bluebird egg. Five tree swallows and the single bluebird fledged. Ray has been banding bluebirds for several years and had a male and four female mountain bluebirds return this year. He also added 155 mountain and 25 eastern bluebirds to his total number of banded birds.

• Sometimes even attentive bluebird parents have no success. When Roger and Ann Smith cleaned their boxes they found one with 15 bluebird eggs and a few pieces of shell. As they had checked more or less weekly it was easy to explain. There were 6 eggs in the nest on May 8 - the female incubated these until near the end of the month. On May 30th a new nest was constructed over the old eggs and the female commenced laying again on June 3-another clutch of 6 eggs. She was still incubating these on June 27 (5 days after the expected hatch day) but by the 4th of July there was another new nest and 1 new egg. A total of 5 eggs were laid in this third clutch; the female was still incubating Aug 7 but had abandoned the nest by Aug 15th. A total of 17 eggs were laid and none hatched. They wonder if the female might be an infertile hybrid as she was quite brown on the breast but they were unable to get a close look at her.

NABS 2000: This year's North American Bluebird Society (NABS) convention will be June 22-25 in Galena, Ill. Galena is located on the Mississippi in the NW corner of the state and is described as the 'town that time forgot'. Eightyfive percent of the town buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The meetings will be at Chestnut Mountain Resort; you may stay there (Double \$95;Quad \$105) or there are lots of RV parks and campgrounds or other alternatives in the vicinity. The keynote speakers are Don and Lillian Stokes who wrote The Bluebird Book and produced the video we are showing at the spring meeting. Thursday the NABS Board and Affiliates meet and programming starts in the evening with presentations on the geology and the birds of the area. Friday there are field trips (3 different ones), then a visit to a winery and a hog roast in the evening: Saturday there are talks on a variety of bird

related topics followed by a banquet. Sunday programs: birding, journal writing, and a Bluebird Collectible Road Show. These conferences are always a great experience. This one takes place at a location that is reachable by car from Manitoba. Galena is 270 miles SE of Minneapolis. More information can be obtained from Joan Harmet (815-845-2390 or via email at jdswcd@humus.com) or from Ann Smith. Information on accommodation can be obtained from the Galena Jo Daviess County Convention & Visitors Bureau 800-747-9377 or www.galena.org. Reservations at Chestnut Mountain Resort should be made by calling toll free 1-800-397-1320 or via email at www.chestnutmn.com

DELTA MARSH BIRDING FESTIVAL-MAY 11-14, 2000

This sounds like a great weekend of birding. Highlights include: 7 guided birding tours daily at Delta Marsh (sharptail grouse leks, beach ridge sites, banding, D.U., canoeing in the marsh), 9 self guiding tours, banquet, fish fry, trade fair with birding organizations, artists, businesses, etc. For more information contact: Russ Mead, University Field Station, Box 38, RR2, Portage la Prairie, MB R1N 3A2 Tel: (204)857-8637 or email: rmead@cc.umanitoba.ca Website: www.dmbo.org/festival

BLUEBIRDS ON THE INTERNET: NABS has a new website address: <www.nabluebirdsociety.org>. This has a lot of great info: box plans, fact sheets, the address of all the bluebird affiliate societies and a complete bibliography of almost all published bluebird articles. Their new email address is info@nabluebirdsociety.org.

Another site of interest is that of the Ellis Bird Farm Inc. at Lacombe, AB <www.ellisbirdfarm.ab.ca>. This has great pictures (including some of last year's convention) and a host of links to other related websites. Bob Lane of Edmonton (son of our Norah & John Lane) took many of the pictures.

HOW OLD ARE YOUR BIRDS? One of the advantages of banding birds is that you obtain information on individuals. *Bluebird* reports that the Calgary Area Bluebird Trails group bands tree swallows as well as bluebirds. In 1999, they recaptured a 9-year old tree swallow. Over the years they have also recaptured three 8-year olds. The North American record for longevity in tree swallows is for a 12year old captured in Ontario.

FEEDBACK: Any comments, suggestions or items for inclusion in the newsletter would be much appreciated.

COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Ann Smith, Chair, 3011 Park Ave.,Bdn. R7B 2K3, 727-5102 Vona Cochrane, Treasurer, 727-2986 Barbara Robinson (Boxes), 1441-8th Street, Brandon, 728-4029 David Barnes, 728-6278 Jean Horton, 728-4672 Carole Sangster, 728-7489 Hazel Skuce, 728-3248