

THE FRIENDS OF THE BLUEBIRDS

NEWSLETTER

Number 9

April, 2002

RESULTS FOR 2001. Many thanks to all of you who turned in your results. Details on box occupants were received for 2734 boxes on 70 lines (Table 1). This is 173 more boxes and three more lines than last year. Unfortunately, bluebird numbers did not keep up with the increase in boxes as there were 54 fewer bluebird nestings than in 2000. Mountain bluebirds had a particularly bad year; there were 135 fewer nestings than in the previous year. For the first time ever, there were more nestings of eastern than of mountain bluebirds. Totals were: 331 mountain, 378 eastern, 260 unidentified and 7 cross-nesting bluebird nesting attempts - a **total of 977 bluebird nestings**. In addition, 1262 tree swallow, 112 wren, and 57 house sparrow nestings were reported. The numbers of the last three species were similar to those in 1999 and 2000. In fact, for the last six years, the number of tree swallow nestings reported has remained between 1207 and 1262.

A nuthatch (1), wasp nest (1), chickadees (5), deermice, red squirrels and flying squirrels also found homes in our boxes. As well there were several different but unidentified bird species.

VOLUNTEERS: Thanks to all our volunteers. You're doing a great job **BUT** we can always use more. There are several lines that need monitors including ones at: Bunclody, Alexander, Pratt-Holland and Hwy#5 Carberry-South. Alternatively, if you know of some good bluebird habitat, we can provide boxes for a new line.

MONITORING

- ⇒ **Boxes and extra lids** are available from Barbara Robinson. There is no charge for boxes but we do ask that you submit annual reports to let us know what is using them.
- ⇒ **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.
- ⇒ **Hole size checks:** Do a special check of the size of the holes in your boxes. Mountain bluebirds require a larger hole than easterns – the hole should be at least 1 and 9/16 inches in diameter. Boxes should be checked when wet after a rain; wet wood swells and the holes get smaller. When mountain bluebird numbers are down is not a good time to be excluding them from the boxes by restricting the hole size. If the hole is too small, use a wood rasp to enlarge it.
- ⇒ **Data Sheets:** When you submit your results, send in the data sheets along with the summary sheet. If you want to keep the originals for your own records, we can photocopy them and return the originals.

A VERY SPECIAL THANKS TO DARLA SKWAROK, Geography student at Brandon University, who prepared a map showing the location of our nestlines and to her professor, Dr. Dion Wiseman, who suggested and supervised the project.

ANOTHER SPECIAL THANK YOU to Jack Webb who has continued to build boxes and to provide us with a steady supply of both boxes and spare lids and to **Bob Andrews** for transporting boxes and wood.

TABLE 1. Nestings reported for the years 1985-2001. A nesting is defined as a nest in which at least one egg has been laid.

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
BLUEBIRDS																	
Mountain	580	580	762	894	995	747	719	712	771	901	820	755	491	716	563	466	331
Eastern	100	168	258	276	354	207	191	164	167	337	265	403	289	527	439	349	378
Unidentified	7	24	83	66	51	97	49	73	84	220	170	182	142	218	221	212	261
X-nesting	3	2	1	2	2	6	2	3	0	5	4	2	4	10	5	4	7
Total	690	774	1104	1238	1402	1057	961	952	1022	1463	1259	1342	846	1471	1228	1031	977
OTHERS																	
Tree Swallow	1100	1068	994	1094	994	726	691	841	923	1164	1100	1215	1207	1240	1214	1243	1262
House wren	79	59	57	46	85	91	122	94	192	211	184	154	168	138	92	103	112
House sparrow	35	28	32	38	46	43	28	21	49	26	34	20	35	62	42	51	57
Total Boxes	1838	1899	2045	2382	2039	1678	1548	1843	2202	2691	2471	2641	2586	2650	2554	2561	2734
Monitored Lines						44	34	36	58	68	61	68	65	67	59	67	70

NOTES FROM THE LINE REPORTS

◆ **Ray & Barb Pettinger** have been banding bluebirds for several years. In 2001 they banded 29 eastern bluebirds (4 after hatch year females (AHY-F) and 25 young of the year) and 65 mountain bluebirds (6 AHY-F and 59 young of the year) on their lines at St. Lazare, Birtle and Shoal Lake. They also recaptured three female mountain bluebirds: two were siblings banded in 2000 and one was banded in 1999 – all three were banded as young of the year within a mile of the recapture box. The boxes with the two yearling females had two nestings and produced eight young each. As the birds were only captured once, we can't say for sure that the same female was involved in both nestings. The two-year-old is only known to have nested once producing five young. Another banded female and a banded male mountain bluebird were seen but not recaptured. Watch for any banded birds that might turn up on your line and if you can't catch them to read the band let either Ray Pettinger or Ann Smith know where they are located. So far, the only recapture on another line of a bird banded by Ray is a female mountain bluebird that appeared on Bill Walley's line at Birtle. It was about five miles from its natal box.

◆ A raccoon predated six boxes in a row on **Clarke Snell's** Oakner Line, prompting remedial action on Clarke's part. He is testing predator guards made from corrugated tin siding. Let's hope they are effective.

◆ **Clarke Snell** has also set up his own very impressive website <<http://www.thisishow.com/wespark>>. He has a lot of really good information on looking after a nestbox line, information on the Friends of the Bluebirds, his nestbox and predator guard plans and also a lot of links to other websites. One link that is of particular interest for our group is a link to Bob Lane's tribute to his parents, **John and Norah Lane** who started the bluebird lines in this area. This web site can be found at <http://wep.ab.ca/j&n_lane/>.

◆ **Edie Evans** found a nest constructed of an unusual material – tape ribbon. It's not too clear who was responsible but the first eggs laid were those of a tree swallow. A second nest occupied by a mountain bluebird also had some tape in it.

◆ A nuthatch was a most unusual resident in one of **Bob and Isabelle Smith's** Carberry boxes. They also had chickadees and a box with flying squirrels. Variety is the spice of life!

◆ The boxes along Highway #5 have always been attractive to red squirrels. This year **Pat Bjarnason** had them occupying six of her boxes. The flying squirrels found **Lloyd Powell's** boxes equally to their taste as they occupied six of his boxes. **Barbara Robinson** and **Bob & Isabelle Smith** each had a flying squirrel.

◆ There were several instances of large clutches. In most cases this is probably the result of an abandoned clutch with a second clutch being added without the birds going to the trouble of building a new nest over the old eggs. **Henry & Shirley Neudorf** had one case of nine eastern bluebird eggs in one nest (only four hatched) and one very interesting case where they had four bluebird eggs and four tree swallow eggs. Only the tree swallows hatched. However, **Ellen Blain** found eight tree swallow eggs in one of her boxes and all eight fledged. **Bob Andrews** also had a nest with eight tree swallow eggs that apparently fledged successfully as no eggs or dead young were found in the used nest.

◆ **Don Proven** had the unenviable situation of a wasp nest in one of his boxes. One of the hot topics last week on *Bluebird-L* (email group available through the NABS website) was the massive number of wasp nests in boxes in New England. One woman who had been checking boxes for over 20 years and never had more than one or two a year, found 40+ boxes with wasp nests. She didn't say how many boxes she had in total, but another woman said that every fourth box had a wasp nest. They are blaming their unseasonably warm weather (90°F) for the wasp outbreak. Maybe there's something to be said for our cold weather after all.

◆ There were a total of **seven cross-nestings**. Without actually doing genetic testing on the offspring, it is impossible to be sure that the birds looking after the clutch are the biological parents. However, the pairings, the monitors, and the results were:

Male MOBL x Female EABL L Stankey 5 eggs; 5 nestlings.
 Male MOBL x Female EABL R & B Pettinger 8 eggs; 7 nestlings
 Male MOBL x Female EABL B Robinson 5 eggs; 5 nestlings
 Male MOBL x Female EABL E Blain 3+ Eggs; 2+ nestlings
 Male EABL x Female MOBL B Robinson 6 eggs; 6 nestlings
 EABL x MOBL B Andrews 6 eggs; 3 nestlings
 EABL x MOBL B Andrews 5 white eggs-did not hatch

GPS RECORDS OF BOX LOCATIONS

Bob Andrews started something this year that we hope to be able to expand to other lines. He used the Global Positioning System (GPS) to find the latitude and longitude of each of his boxes. The associated computer software then allowed him to produce accurate maps of his box locations. There will be a couple of maps on display at the spring meeting.

NABS 2002

This year the **North American Bluebird Society conference (NABS 2002)** is being held in Canada. It's at Penticton, B.C., June 13-16 and is hosted by the Southern Interior Bluebird Trail Society. It's sure to be a great conference with a welcome and introduction to the area on Thursday, field trips on Friday, talks on Saturday and a banquet on Saturday night. There is no requirement to be a NABS Member to attend. Last year there were about 350 participants from 37 states, 5 provinces and Bermuda. Registration forms are available on the NABS website <http://nabluebirdsoc.org> or from Ann Smith.

Another event closer to home is the **Delta Marsh Birding Festival**, May 10-12. The dates were set to coincide with the predicted peak of warbler migration. There are guided birding tours (for a fee) or maps of good viewing spots (free), a fish fry, guest speakers, and lots of displays and interpretive activities for the whole family. It is a joint project of the Delta Marsh Bird Observatory, Portage Natural History Group, Delta Field Station (U of M) DU Canada. For schedules and further information see their website <<http://www.dmbio.org/festival>> or phone 857-8637

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

COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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