

THE FRIENDS OF THE BLUEBIRDS

NEWSLETTER

Number 10

April, 2003

RESULTS FOR 2002. A big thank you to all of you who submitted reports. These covered a total of 2584 boxes on 62 lines. The details of the box occupants are given in Table 1. There were 385 mountain, 395 eastern, 262 unidentified and 6 cross-nesting bluebirds for a total of 1048 bluebird nestings. As well, there were 1213 tree swallow, 106 wren and 51 house sparrow nestings. Some less common species also inhabited the boxes: a chickadee, an eastern kingbird (the lid was off), a flying squirrel, several red squirrels and some deer mice.

The total number of bluebird nestings increased by 71 mostly due to an increase of 54 in the number of mountain bluebird nestings. The mountains still have a long way to go to regain the levels of 1989 (995 nestings) and 1994 (901 nestings) but numbers are moving in the right direction. Tree swallow nestings remained within the limits seen over the last seven years (1207 – 1262). Several monitors reported that the survival to fledging of tree swallow nestlings was lower than usual. We can only hope that the weather cooperates and we have a great year for all our cavity nesters.

VOLUNTEERS: Thanks to all our volunteers. You're doing a great job! Of course, we can always use more. Several lines need new monitors, including ones at Hartney, Alexander, Kemnay, and Brookdale south. Alternatively, if you know of some good bluebird habitat, we can provide boxes for a new line. Dr. Hugh Hornbeck is also looking for help with boxes around Swan River.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU to the people who build boxes and who supply us with wood. The **MTS Pioneers** built 37 boxes for which they supplied their own wood. **Jerry Wollman and the Newdale Hutterite Colony** have provided us with great quantities of scrap lumber which is gradually being converted to nest boxes by **Jack Webb**. Other builders are **Don Proven, Clarke Snell and Bob Andrews**. If you are building your own boxes, please feel free to draw on our scrap lumber stores. Check with Bob Andrews (Tel:727-8985) or Carole and Murray Sangster (Tel:728-7489) if you need lumber.

MONITORING

⇒ **Boxes and extra lids** are available from Barbara Robinson (Tel:728-4029, 1441-8th St., Brandon) and from Bob Andrews (Tel:727-8985, 56 Basswood Bay, Brandon). There is no charge for boxes but we do ask that you submit annual reports on the occupants.

⇒ **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.

⇒ **WARNING !!** Incubation times can occasionally vary – incubation may not start immediately after the last egg is laid. Don't assume that eggs are infertile and remove them if they don't hatch when you expect. The other thing that can happen is that the original eggs may have been lost and replaced with a second clutch that isn't due to hatch for days. So – unless an egg is broken, leave it for the birds to take care of or for the fall clean out.

TABLE 1. Nestings reported for the years 1986-2002. A nesting is defined as a nest in which at least one egg has been laid.

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
BLUEBIRDS																	
Mountain	580	762	894	995	747	719	712	771	901	820	755	491	716	563	466	331	385
Eastern	168	258	276	354	207	191	164	167	337	265	403	289	527	439	349	378	395
Unidentified	24	83	66	51	97	49	73	84	220	170	182	142	218	221	212	261	262
X-nesting	2	1	2	2	6	2	3	0	5	4	2	4	10	5	4	7	6
Total	774	1104	1238	1402	1057	961	952	1022	1463	1259	1342	846	1471	1228	1031	977	1048
OTHERS																	
Tree Swallow	1068	994	1094	994	726	691	841	923	1164	1100	1215	1207	1240	1214	1243	1262	1213
House wren	59	57	46	85	91	122	94	192	211	184	154	168	138	92	103	112	106
House sparrow	28	32	38	46	43	28	21	49	26	34	20	35	62	42	51	37	51
Total Boxes	1899	2045	2382	2039	1678	1548	1843	2202	2691	2471	2641	2586	2650	2554	2561	2734	2584
Monitored Lines					44	34	36	58	68	61	68	65	67	59	67	70	62

NOTES FROM THE LINE REPORTS

◆ **Bill Koscielny** at Onanole has a variety of experimental boxes at different heights and of different sizes. A boreal owl nested in one that was about 25' from the ground. The owls left in mid-June and when he checked the box he found nearly 3" of waste, a few feathers and the remains of mouse bones, etc.

◆ Six cross-nestings were reported for 2002. **Lloyd Stankey** found a mountain male paired with a female eastern bluebird. An aggressive mountain male was at the nest box alone on April 12 and continued to claim the box although he did not appear to have a mate all through May and well into June. On June 6th he was still on his own but by June 21st there were 5 eggs in the nest, an eastern female was incubating and the very aggressive mountain male was still in attendance. All five young appear to have fledged successfully. **Edith Parsons** (nr. Minnedosa) and **Ray and Barbara Pettinger** (Fort Ellice) also each had a mountain male and eastern female cross-nesting. **Doug and Genella Macintyre** found two crosses, both with eastern males and with hybrid or poorly defined mountain females. **Charlie and Joan Kingdon** had a cross-nesting which was unsuccessful.

◆ As usual, there were reports of problems with raccoons, (**Slawinskys, Macintyres, Snells**), porcupines (**Macintyres**) and hawks, (**Barbara Robinson, Hamid Mumin**). Predation by ants caused the loss of two clutches on **Doug and Genella Macintyre's** line near Camp Hughes.

◆ **Ray and Barbara Pettinger** recaptured two banded mountain bluebird females on their line at Fort Ellice. Both were banded as nestlings (one on May 27/01 and the other on June 18/99) and were recaptured within a mile of the nest where they were banded. Ray and **Jim Spear** are both banding bluebirds, so let Ray know if you spot a bird with a band (Tel: 759-2826).

◆ **Roger and Ann Smith** found two nestings of Eastern Kingbirds. One was in a bluebird box that had lost its lid and the other in a cavity in the top of an old post along the line. The kingbird eggs are larger than those of the bluebird; white with large brown splotches which are bigger in a ring at the larger end of the egg. The first egg was laid on June 22 and they watched the four young fledge on July 31. Another post nearby has had either a bluebird or a tree swallow in it most years.

◆ There have been several reports of complete clutches of eggs failing to hatch even though the female was incubating them faithfully: **Ann and Roger Smith** (2 clutches, 10 eggs in one box); **Bridget and Arnold McPhaden** (2 clutches, 11 eggs in one box). There are probably others as there are many cases of complete clutches of eggs failing to hatch but the reports do not say if the female was still incubating. It would be interesting to try to find out if one of the parents was a hybrid or if there was some other reason for this infertility.

◆ As well as a bluebird line, **Richard Clark** has 13 wood duck nest boxes. The nine boxes around his home at Treesbank all contained eggs although two were 'dump' nests with over 30 eggs each. Two of four boxes at the mouth of the Souris River also had wood duck broods.

◆ There were some really late nestings of bluebirds. Often eggs laid in late July or August are abandoned but **Barbara Robinson** had broods of three and four eastern bluebirds fledge after August 21 (the latest she's ever had); **Vern Gilbertson** had two mountain bluebirds fledge on August 25 on his Bunclody line.

◆ **Don Proven** had excellent success on his line south of Carberry; 55 nestings of bluebirds in 62 boxes including 2 boxes with three successful nestings each. He also had two boxes with three nesting attempts on the line he checked along the Trans-Canada – one of the third nestings was successful; the other was abandoned. Those four boxes successfully fledged 11 broods of bluebirds. Since the parent birds weren't banded, it is impossible to be sure that the same pair was responsible for all three nests in each box.

NABS NOTES

For those of you on the internet, check out the improved NABS website. Articles from the most recent issue of *Bluebird* as well as articles on selected topics from past issues of *Bluebird* and its precursor, *Sialia* are to be found. There are also notes on monitoring, box plans, frequently asked questions and a great selection of links to websites. There is also information on how to become a member of NABS and a coming events section for NABS and any of the affiliates.

The NABS 2003 Conference at Kearney, Nebraska was held in March instead of June so participants could see the sandhill crane migration. The next conference will be in Ithaca, New York, July 7-10, 2004. Field trips include a visit to the School of Ornithology at Cornell University. If you are planning a trip east, try to fit this into your itinerary or plan a trip around this conference. These are great conferences and the Finger Lakes area of New York state is a beautiful spot. For information contact: Phyllis Zenger 716-434-7568, email: zenger@localnet.com

DELTA MARSH BIRDING FESTIVAL-MAY 9-11, 2003

This sounds like a great weekend of birding. Highlights include: lectures, daily guided birding tours at Delta Marsh, self guiding tours, banquet, barbeque, and workshops on First Aid for Birds and Birding by Ear. To register or for more information call: Tel: (204) 857-8637 or check the Website at: www.dmbo.org/festival

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