Spring 2013

April 2013

The Fledgling

The Missouri Bluebird Society is an Affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society

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MOBS
PO BOX 105830
Jefferson City, MO 65110
www.missouribluebird.org

Letter from the President

*What an interesting Spring we have had here in Missouri. It seemed as though Spring just would not get here and stay with us! Of course, this means the start to nesting season has been very different than last season. This time last year many of us had eggs hatching. This year it seems some of you have eggs hatching while others have birds just now selecting a box and putting in nesting material! Who knows what the rest of the season holds. I can tell you, however, about a few things sure to be helpful to all bluebirders: Please take a few minutes to look over the information I have enclosed on the new "House Sparrow Project". I am sure many of you could provide valuable information to this study. Also, Please be sure to note the information Steve Smith has submitted on the upcoming **MOBS Field Trip in June**. I know I plan to be there and am sure I will learn a lot. Of course, you'll also want to hurry and send in your Registration for the **2013 Missouri Bluebird Conference (July 12-14th).** There will be so much to discover at this years conference to benefit all of us AND our native cavity-nesters. Plus, the gorgeous Powell Gardens is a terrific setting and the planned field trips and programs are sure to provide valuable data, great experience, and wonderful camaraderie with other Bluebirders!*

Photo by Steve Garr

Do what you can to help the Bluebirds,

Steve Garr, MOBS president

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Vice- President..Larry Dobson lldobson@aol.com 816-331-2888

Secretary & Fledgling Editor...Regina Garr regina@birds-i-view.biz 573-638-2473

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Board Member….Steve Smith sws582003@yahoo.com 636-629-8267

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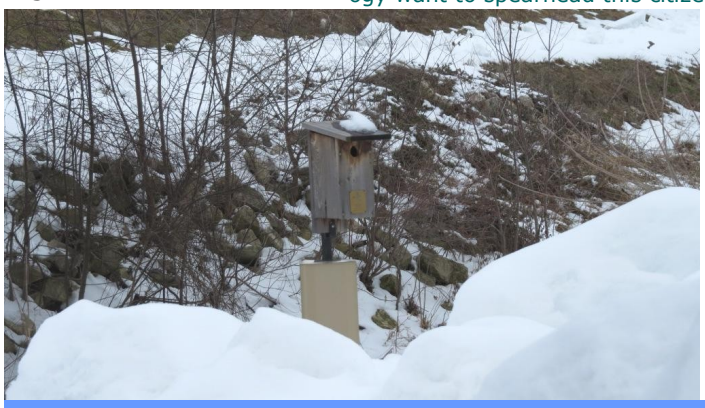
New Citizen Science "House Sparrow Project"

by Steve Garr

With the Start-and-Stop Spring we have had this year our native birds have had a rough time getting started into the nesting season! Bluebirds and other native cavity nesters were claiming boxes and even bringing in nesting material, when suddenly they'd be hit by cold weather and / or snow ...AGAIN. To make matters worse***, whether or not it is due to this odd spring,*** it does appear that House Sparrow issues are particularly prevalent and House sparrows claiming boxes this spring seem to be especially well-established. On my own trail (Nest Boxes and Purple Martin Houses) and from reports from many other bluebirders, most of us are dealing with more House Sparrows than usual.



Pictured above: one of the Nest Boxes on my Trail March 3, 2013 ! Check out all the snow.

So, I believe the timing for a project like the one outlined on this page is good. It is a project dedicated to not only learning more about the invasive, non-native House sparrow, but also to finding **effective methods for controlling them**. Please look over the following information from the "The House sparrow Project Team" and determine in what ways you might be able to participate. Our native cavity-nesting birds will thank you!

MOBS member Norm Stucky displays one of the several boxes he made for "his" Bluebirds. (Plans on Pg 3)

"The House Sparrow Project" :

Researchers at Hunter College and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology want to spearhead this citizen science research project in collaboration with *YOU*! Here are more details on how you can participate:

Participate in discussion groups online to share your insight and ideas. The topics will include house sparrow behavior and ecology, brood parasitism, egg recognition research, management of house sparrows as invasive pests, management of house sparrows in their native range, design of research experiments, the natural history of house sparrows and their interactions with people, news about the declining house sparrow populations in the UK, and more. These will begin soon, so sign up now!

Advance research by collecting much needed data on nesting behavior and egg recognition. Help us learn about the cues birds use to recognize and reject eggs based on egg pigmentation. The research is fun: color eggs, take photos, collect, share and compare information with others. Birds are a great model to ask questions about self-recognition: they don't need a mirror, because they can look at the eggs directly!

Collectively design best practices for house sparrow management. There are many ways to reduce the number of house sparrows using our nest boxes, and different folks have different experiences and preferred methods. The efficiency, effectiveness, and robustness of different methods have not been scientifically evaluated though. **This activity has two phases and you can participate in one or both**: First, participants and researchers will discuss the array of management practices out there and then collectively design a field experiment to evaluate a subset of passive management techniques. Second, participants can opt to carry out the field experiment and/or continue with their usual management and report details to us. By pooling our knowledge and experience, we hope to find better ways of controlling house sparrow populations.

Everyone in the non-native range of the house sparrow is invited to participate.

Visit our website:www.housesparrowproject.com to get more information and sign up today!

Sincerely,

The House Sparrow Project Team
Dr. Mark Hauber
Dr. Caren Cooper
Ms. Dennise Belmaker

Photo by Norm and Beth Stucky

FYI from Steve Garr:
For those of you who might not participate in this program because you don't "do computers", Please do not underestimate the willingness of your local Public Library to help you participate in a Citizen Science Project of this type. Ask them!

Alternate version of the traditional "Miracle Meal" for Bluebirds:

Ingredients:

- 3 ½ Cups yellow Cornmeal (not a mix)
- ½ Cup all Purpose Flour
- 1-tsp corn oil
- 1-Ten ounce package of "Pure Beef Suet cake" (where suet products are sold) OR approx 1 cup of Lard
- ½ Cup Sunflower Hearts (Coarse or chips– as long as there is no shell)
- ½ Cup sterilized, crushed egg shells (see directions right)

1.Melt beef suet or lard and stir in Sunflower hearts and egg shells

2.Mix in corn oil, corn meal and flour

Mixture will be very crumbly – if too soft add more cornmeal, if too dry add more melted suet

3. Put the crumbly mixture in dishes or trays for the bluebirds to eat. We usually only put a small amount out each morning. Freeze or refrigerate the remainder of the batch in plastic Ziploc bags

Sterilizing egg shells to feed birds

Directions for feeding eggshells to birds vary but most sources agree the shells should be sterilized to prevent possible contamination with salmonella bacteria. Baking is one of the easiest ways to accomplish sterilization . If you are using shells from boiled eggs, there is no need to bake if the eggs were boiled for 10 mins)

1.Rinse eggshells (no need to crush yet)

2.Dry and bake at 250 degrees for 10 minutes (instructions vary from 10-20 mins but we find 20 mins seems to burn the shells)

3. After shells cool you may crush them by hand in pieces dime –sized or smaller and offer them in dishes or platforms for the birds to pick up.

For this particular Miracle Meal recipe, we prefer to use a powdery crumble of eggshells so we put the cooled, cooked shells in the blender. Pulse on the crumble setting in small batches until a powder or very fine crumble is achieved.

Will you be ready for Summer Heat ?

The last two summers in Missouri we have experienced above average temperatures. You won't want to miss Steve Garr's program at the **Missouri Bluebird conference in July!**

Here, *Steve has listed the materials needed to construct an Extended Roof* *on nest boxes during the hot part of the summer. During his program Steve will also share a materials list and show how to construct the "**Aluminum Reflective Panels**" (pictured right) which he has also used to greatly reduce the temperature inside the nest box.*

Come to the 2013 Bluebird conference to learn more about how to protect Bluebirds from Summer Heat!

Materials List

for "Extended Roof" for Heat Protection on Nest Boxes:

Extended Roof

- Thin wood approx 18 x 24 inches
- 6 spacers 1/2 inch (spacers can be made from rigid tubing or pieces of wood)
- 6 screws 1 to 1 1/2 inches long (the length of the screws depends on the thickness of the roof).
- The extra roof needs to be installed where it blocks most of the afternoon sun and has air flow between the two roofs.

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Jefferson City, MO 65110

Bluebird Conference Brochure and Registration Form Enclosed!

The Fledgling 2013 Spring Issue

- Landscaping with Natives– why it matters
- **Annual MOBS Field Trip! Details inside**
- **Cornell's "House Sparrow Project"**
- Getting to know MOBS Board Members: Meet our webmaster
- ***Another*** Recipe for food for Bluebirds!
- **Nest Box Plans** & Materials List for an "Extended Roof"

2013 Missouri Bluebird Conference

Brochure & Registration Form Enclosed!