

FALL 2013

October 2013

The Fledgling



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

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Letter from the President

Let's talk Bluebirds! As we learn more and more about our wonderful Bluebirds we often want to share some of our experiences. Our bluebirds in Missouri are basically year round residents and many of us get a chance to enjoy flocks of bluebirds during the winter. Studies have shown that many Bluebirds in Missouri are with us throughout the year. Although many of us have had triumphs to share on our bluebirds trails there has also been difficult and unusual nesting seasons. Please, read Linda Pridgeon's submission about her trail this year. She was kind enough to share with us some of the heartbreaks this past year. That heartbreak did turn to joy with the appearance of a flock of juvenile bluebirds that visited her yard after nesting season. It is times like this that we enjoy our triumphs from years past. The young fledglings could very well be the offspring of the bluebirds she raised years before.

Photo by Steve Garr



For me this year, the flooding on my trails put an overwhelming strain on some bluebirds while they were trying to feed the young. Even though I was not as successful as years past I still see or hear bluebirds when I walk my trails. Overall the Eastern Bluebird is doing very well in Missouri and makes a wonderful State Bird.

Please remember that your nest box summary reports are so important, regardless of the type of year you have. Please send yours to the address on the enclosed form as soon as possible.

Here is some great news: Bet Zimmerman Smith (of the website sialis.org fame, and a NABS Board Member) has accepted our invitation to be our keynote speaker at the 2014 Missouri Bluebird Conference! You won't want to miss it.

Steve Garr, MOBS president

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Northern Saw-whet Owls: A Special Missouri Project

Editor's Note:

Northern Saw-Whet Owls are indeed a cavity-nesting species, however, their breeding range is actually north of Missouri. Thanks to a terrific research project by the Missouri River Bird Observatory (MRBO), there is much evidence that these adorable little owls winter in Missouri and migrate through our state in far greater numbers than most of us were aware! Dana Ripper and Ethan Duke, MRBO founders, are supportive MOBS members as well and a definite blessing to bird conservation in Missouri. **The following article is taken directly from their website.**

I greatly appreciate MRBO for allowing me to reprint their report here in order to share their very interesting findings concerning this little cavity-nester! Do visit their website (www.mrbo.org) for more info on this project. I heartily encourage you to consider membership in the Missouri River Bird Observatory and support their important work for Missouri birds.

From the MRBO website:

Fall 2012 was an excellent season for the MRBO Northern Saw-whet Owl (NSWO) project. At our two sites in Marshall - Indian Foot-

hills Park and MRBO Home - we caught a total of 40 owls during nightly operation from October 23rd to November 27th. The majority of captures occurred in the window of October 26th to November 15th. We also caught three owls, probably over-wintering birds, on December 3rd in rural Carroll County. An incredibly exciting capture oc-



Photo provided by MRBO

Northern Saw-whet Owls are the subject of a special study by the Missouri River Bird Observatory...a study producing some very interesting results!

curred on the night of October 29th. We caught a NWSO that had been banded on September 13th in central Saskatchewan. This represents MRBO's first foreign recovery, and displays that this After-Second-Year female owl traveled over 2,000 km in six weeks.

The Fall 2011 NSWO season, our first full season with nightly op-

eration, was also a great success! Over the month of November we caught 18 owls at our permanent site in Marshall, MO at Indian Foot-hills Park. We also caught two owls at Powell Gardens in mid-November and two more outside of Rolla.

It's not over yet...now that we've determined that this species regularly uses central Missouri for fall migration, we want to know if and where the NSWO winters in Missouri. Throughout the winter each year we will attempt trapping in several locations throughout the state.

MRBO's involvement with NSWOs began in 2010. Inspired by Gene Jacobs in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, and Jerry Toll of Hitchcock Nature Center, Council Bluffs, Iowa, we made several attempts at trapping these small owls in November 2010.

Until recently, Northern Saw-whet Owls were thought to migrate only as far south as northern Illinois and Iowa. Recent work by banders at more southerly locations has shown that during most winters, these owls will move as far south as Alabama.

Successful trapping here in Marshall, and GREAT success (nine Saw-whet Owls in 6 hours) at the home of Jo and Jack Spicer in Benton County in 2010, has shown that these small owls do migrate through and winter in Missouri.



Northern Saw-whet Owls are slightly smaller than the more familiar Eastern Screech Owl (apprx 8 inches) and they lack the "ear tufts" Screech Owls sport.

www.mrbo.org

Buffalo Gnats Devastate Birds in Northeast Missouri

By MOBS member Linda Pridgeon, Frankford, MO

It was a rainy spring this year but our bluebird houses had been repaired and water-sealed in the fall and we were ready for a bountiful spring full of bluebirds. Our trail is a small neighborhood one with approximately 10 boxes. We were soon to discover that 2013 was a year to remember for much different reasons.

This was an active year with many of the bluebird houses occupied or in the process of battling over ownership as usual. Mid-May we began to find nestlings dead in their nests and we suspected the weather. But Mother Nature had delivered another blow that came from left field. Buffalo Gnats had invaded our area and were wreaking havoc. They took out 5 clutches of Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, and even a House Sparrow clutch I was monitoring as part of a Sparrow Project.

Of the 10 nest-boxes we lost 5 clutches that month. I think the biggest shock was from my favorite box with a 5x5 floor. TRES claimed the box against BB's and had 5 chicks. The couple fussed over them in the nest and kept us away dive-bombing us. We should have looked anyway because by the 17th we found the babies had been dead for a while and had maggots.

My neighbor shared a story from her egg supplier who had been wiped out by these aggressive gnats during this time we experienced this loss. She lives nearby and almost every

hen in her hen house had been killed by suffocation. They attack their airways filling the nose and mouth so they are unable to breathe. Sounds like something from a science fiction movie but these are real. Although we bought a special repellent against these gnats just to work in our yard, we had no idea they were capable of killing our nestlings. We were about to get a hard lesson.

None of my nest boxes produced babies again until July this year. However, the Bluebirds had been successful elsewhere in the neighborhood because juvies started showing up at my feeder and birdbath in troves. They came every day hanging out by hiding against the deck posts. There were approximately 15 or more immature BBs that came every day washing away the terrible spring season for me. I thank God that He has populated our area now with so many Bluebirds. I've never had so many snacking on my mealworms at one time. Most have moved south now that it's colder but 2013 was a year to remember.

We bought a natural DEET-free repellent that repels these gnats called "Buggins". Although it's plant-based vanilla mint and rose it is NOT for birds. But using Vanilla extract seems to repel them and after the fact we used the extract around the birdhouse entrances of the few active nests left.

I'm including some graphic pictures of my nest boxes but you

can never capture the impact of finding fully feathered nestlings dead on your watch.



Some of Linda's Trail Notes:

Southwest Corner of property #0:
Cedar House with U-entrance.
Species: TRES
Date: 6/26/2013
Result: 4 babies dead in box with no apparent injuries. Severe rains led me to suspect hypothermia. Final: Suspected Buffalo Gnats were strong suspect.
Weather: Spring rains.
Northeast location #9: blue house
Species: BB
Date 6/26/2013
Result: 5 chicks. 6/17/13 3 predatorized? 6/26/13 2 dead of suspected buffalo gnats
East Prater Lot #4: Wild Birds Unlimited 5x5 floor (favorite of HS)
Species: TRES
Date 5/6/13
Result: 6 chicks dead. Suspect buffalo gnats
Note: cowbird found dead just outside the box. Suspect BB defending.
Northwest #5: plain house with new cedar roof.
Species: HS
Date: 6/4/13
Result: 6 HS babies dead in box with no injuries. Nest building was immature. Suspect Buffalo Gnats
Southeast corner #11: blue Peterson box
Species: BB
Date 6/26/13
Result: 5 BB babies on 6/17/13 but by 6/26/13 3 were missing (predation?) leaving only 2 BB nestlings dead of apparent Buffalo Gnat infestation.



2013 Missouri Bluebird Conference!

The Fledgling Fall 2013

Seventy six Bluebird enthusiasts joined in the fun and learning at the 2013 Missouri Bluebird Conference in July. See lots more pics on the MOBS website.

Photo by Ann Smith



Powell Gardens in Kingsville, MO was a wonderful venue for the Saturday portion of the Bluebird Conference. The weather could not have been more cooperative!

Photo by S. Garr



Photo by Ann Smith



Above: Everyone loved speaker Dave Tylka's presentation. So informative, and also so practical and ...fun! We all came away with information about Native Landscaping we can use and practice in our own "space".



Left: Conference speaker (and MOBS Board member) Jim Rathert's Wildlife photography and anecdotes are always a hit with attendees.

Below: Conference speaker and MOBS President Steve Garr details plans for protecting our cavity-nesters from devastating heat issues .

Photos by Ann Smith



Above Left: the Silent Auction and Raffle produced some great items for attendees to take home- and much appreciated income for the upcoming 2014 conference. Great job everyone!.

Above Right: MOBS Treasurer Susan Reinagel (L) and MOBS Supporter member Anita Hartwig (r) dispensing raffle tickets to hopeful conference attendees. Thanks again to those who brought things to auction or raffle, AND to those who purchased them!



Below: MOBS members manning the MOBS information Booth. THIS is what makes a successful conference....members all pitching in to make it work. Thank You!



More Bluebird Conference...

Photo by R. Garr



Above: After a wonderful presentation, Dave Tylka shared his keen knowledge of plants by leading our group on a tour around Powell Gardens! The walk lasted well over two hours and was certainly one of the highlights of the entire conference! **Thank you Dave!**



Above: A big thank you to MOBS members Sandy Sullivan and Mary Hamblin for taking time to show and talk with us about some of the nest boxes they monitor on the Powell Gardens property. They are doing good work there and we commend them!

Photo by Carol Ware



Above: Some of the Sunday morning Field Trip attendees gather for a picture. We offer a hearty "Well Done!" and thank you to the wonderful folks of the "Loch Lloyd Garden Club Conservation/Bluebird Committee" (**AKA "The Bluebird Team"!**) for all their hard work and time organizing a tour of their trail for us. It was beautifully executed and a very special part of our conference.



Above: During the Friday evening "Bluebird Banquet" we were treated to a marvelous presentation (above center) by Carol Ware detailing the work being accomplished on the Loch Lloyd Golf course Bluebird Trail (site of our Sunday morning field trip). Above Right: MOBS VP Larry Dobson receives a well-deserved award during the banquet: the MOBS **"True Blue Service Award"** for all his support for MOBS, but particularly for the many presentations he has done on MOBS behalf. The award was presented by Steve Garr and designed and produced by Jim Rathert.



Photo by S. Garr

Left: "team" member Jo Carol Johnson leads part of the group on a tour of nest boxes at the Loch Lloyd Golf Course on Sunday morning.



Photo by Steve Garr

Above: Carol Ware give us a quick review of the tools of the trade she and her team use in monitoring nest boxes. Very informative and a great addition to the tour!

MOBS Members doing Outreach!

The following members have presented Educational programs (on behalf of Bluebirds and other cavity nesters) recently.

We commend these folks AND we'd love to know what YOU have been up to! Email regina@birds-i-view.biz or mail to: PO Box 105830/ Jefferson City, Mo 65110. (please NOTE that your item is for "members doing outreach" when you contact us)

- **Russ Heindselman**—Open house at his farm where everyone was invited to see his bluebird trail in early October
- **Larry Dobson:** Bluebird Booth at Colonial Nursery in Blue Springs, presentations for the Tri County Master Gardeners Conference (Cole Camp) and Mill Creek Upper Elementary (and probably many other presentations!!)
- **Dana Ripper and Ethan Duke** (Missouri River Bird Observatory): Nest Box building programs at the Arrow Rock Heritage Craft Festival. (and in "period costume", no less!)



Eastern Bluebird: Missouri's State Bird

Program designed & provided by the
Missouri Bluebird Society
www.missouribbluebird.org

Don't forget about these great tools to help
spread the word about

Bluebird Conservation:

- The MOBS Educational Power Point Program
- The MOBS Educational Brochure (available on the MOBS website under "Forms" at www.missouribbluebird.org)

Tips for Winter Bluebird Care *by Steve Garr*



- Provide Safe Winter Roosting for Bluebirds (and other native cavity – nesters) by plugging drainage holes and covering ventilation areas in boxes which may be used by these birds to keep warm on cold winter nights.
- Make certain roof overhang on boxes is sufficient to allow birds to exit in the event of freezing rain and ice (usually at least 2.5 inches , preferably more). See photo left.
- **Do Not allow House sparrows to roost in ANY boxes during the winter.** This allows the House sparrows to "bond" to the nest box and makes

life so much more difficult for everyone next spring (especially the Bluebirds!).

- Clean occupied boxes of droppings and debris periodically
- Make any needed Box repairs (ie replacing parts, sealing cracks, etc. Maybe even replacing boxes if needed).
- **Provide Water!** A consistent, clean supply of *unfrozen* water is very helpful to the Bluebirds and in Missouri can provide a season filled with daily bluebird visits!
- Be prepared to provide food for Bluebirds (suet, mealworms, sunflower hearts, etc) in the event that natural food becomes iced-over or depleted (or just for your own enjoyment!)

Trail Monitors needed! Please contact Tom Mc Roberts at tom.mcroberts@us.army.mil if you are interested in monitoring an existing Nest Box trail in either Macon County or Cole County.



Save the Dates!

July 11-13th, 2014

The 2014 Missouri Bluebird Conference

at the spacious meeting facilities of the
George Washington Carver Farm, Lincoln University
3804 Bald Hill Road, Jefferson City, MO 65101

Special Keynote Speaker:

Bet Zimmerman Smith

We are so honored to have Bet with us! Most any bluebird enthusiast is very familiar with her thorough, helpful website:

www.sialis.org

It is undoubtedly the place bluebirders turn to most for all things Bluebird ! Bet monitors a 100 box trail of her own in Northeastern Connecticut. She is a Board Member and Life Member of the North American Bluebird Society, and recipient of several awards and acknowledgements for her many conservation and environmental contributions.

NEW for this conference:



A special hands-on Workshop

“Building Nest Boxes AND Predator Baffles”

Plus a program on **Feeding Bluebirds**

You won't want to miss the fabulous **Field Trip** to the very special farm of **Norm and Beth Stucky!**



This property, on the bank of the Moreau River, is a treat to explore. It features a great variety of native wildlife on habitat that has been lovingly tended by the Stuckys. Naturally, there is a productive Bluebird Trail - Norm and Beth have been enthusiastic supporters of MOBS since its inception.

Of course, the Event will include the annual “Bluebird Banquet” on Friday and a chance to visit with Bluebird Enthusiasts from across the state and beyond !

Hosted by the Missouri Bluebird Society

www.missouribbluebird.org



The Fledgling
The Official Newsletter of
The Missouri Bluebird Society
P.O. BOX 105830
Jefferson City, MO 65110

The Fledgling 2013 FALL Issue

- A special Cavity-nester visits Missouri in Winter
- **MOBS 2013 Bluebird Conference Pictures!**
- What do you know about Buffalo Gnats and Cavity-nesters? (a special MOBS member submission).
- **2014 Bluebird Conference—SAVE THE DATES!**
- Review: Winter-time tips for Bluebird Care
- **Please Report Your nesting Data! *Everyone's Data is IMPORTANT ...whether you have one box or one hundred!***