

EIGHTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE BRANDON JUNIORS' NEST-BOX PROJECT, 1968

by **Brian Cutforth**, Creighton Blvd., Brandon, Manitoba

Our club has continued with great success in the nest-box project. We built up our total to 1850 boxes and hope to make this 2,000 by the end of this year. Two new nest lines were established this year: 62 boxes were set out between Neepawa and Ste. Rose, and 50 were set out between Griswold and a point south of Clariere, Manitoba.

Again this year the Mountain Bluebirds increased wonderfully, while the scarcer Eastern Bluebirds hardly exceeded their 1967 total of first-brood nests.

Vandalism is still the worst problem, and we lost about 20 bluebird broods from this cause. A rare case of a chipmunk invading the nest of an Eastern Bluebird (*Blue Jay*, 26: 145) was noted. We also observed both

a Mountain Bluebird female and an Eastern Bluebird female caring for their families with no male bird in evidence.

The following totals for the year 1968 will show how the nest project has built up from the 11 boxes set out in 1959, or from the totals shown in our first report to *Blue Jay* (20:45) for 1961, when no bluebirds were recorded out of 121 nests.

Mountain Bluebird — 242 first-brood nests.

Eastern Bluebird — 60 first-brood nests.

Tree Swallow—an est. 1200 nestings.

House Wrens—an est. 20 nestings.

House Sparrows — a few.

The 12 duck nest-boxes in the Rackham area were not checked this summer.

REPORT ON NEST-BOX SUCCESSES IN THE INDIAN HEAD AREA FOR 1968

by **Lorne Scott**, Indian Head, Saskatchewan

This past spring I put up another 100 birdhouses to bring my total to over 500. Most of the new boxes were placed in an easterly direction along the old No. 1 Highway between Indian Head and Broadview. Mr. John Lane and the Brandon Junior Bird Club of Brandon, Manitoba have extended their houses west to Broadview. Thus we have now completed a bluebird trail from Indian Head, Saskatchewan to Brandon, Manitoba.

The first Mountain Bluebird of the season arrived at Indian Head on March 5, 1968 and was seen by my brothers Glen and Brian near our farm-yard. This is the earliest spring record for this species in the Indian Head area. Previously, the earliest arrival date was March 12, 1966.

Due to the early spring, the Mountain Bluebirds nested about a week earlier than is usual. They had another

successful nesting season as there were 51 nests, from which 218 young were fledged. Last year 24 nest boxes were used by bluebirds.

The main cause of nesting failure of bluebirds and Tree Swallows appears to be the destruction of their eggs by House Wrens. At least 12 nests were destroyed this year in this way. House Wrens nested in 43 houses and produced about 230 young. The number of houses occupied by them was about the same as last year (1967) despite the fact that there were 100 additional houses put up. I believe that this is mainly due to the fact that the last 100 houses were placed farther away from trees than the previous houses. House Wrens seldom venture beyond 100 yards from the nearest cover of trees and shrubs.

The number of houses occupied by Tree Swallows has increased greatly

from 70 nests in 1967 to 178 nests in 1968, and over 900 young were fledged this year. Yellow-shafted Flickers took up nesting activities in two houses and raised a total of 10 young, while one pair of Starlings nested and raised five young. House Sparrows used 116 houses for nest sites, most of them being the first ones that I made which are located around our farm-yard. I was, at first, pleased to have them nesting because, at that time, I did not know how to attract Mountain Bluebirds and Tree Swallows. In spite of the large number of House Sparrows nesting around the farm, there are very few houses occupied by them in the surrounding fields. Another interesting fact is that the House Sparrow population does not appear to be increasing on our farm.

Vandals took their toll of 21 houses this year. Some were stolen while

others were pulled down and left lying on the ground. A few were used as targets for shooting and some were just literally demolished. Stubble fires and cattle destroyed eight of them.

A total of 65 houses have been distributed to various people in Saskatchewan but I have not received reports from them.

After everything is accounted for and totalled up it leaves about 30 houses unoccupied during the 1968 breeding season. Therefore, it has been another successful year for my projects.

I plan on making another 100-150 houses this winter and putting them out in a northeasterly direction to link up with those being set up by the Yorkton Natural History Society thus completing a second bluebird trail.

AN ATTEMPT BY A RUFFED GROUSE TO EAT A MOUSE

by **Robert W. Nero**, Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature,
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A dead Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) with the tail and hind quarters of a large mouse protruding from its gaping bill was found in mid-June, 1967 at Big Whiteshell Lake in eastern Manitoba by Allan G. Watts, Winnipeg. The latter delivered it to Ken Hawkins, a local taxidermist, who shortly thereafter invited us to make a brief examination of the frozen but still intact bird and mouse. The size and position of the mouse, which was lodged in the bird's throat, seemingly could have caused the death of the grouse through suffocation. Further examination recently became possible after the grouse, a healthy-looking adult male, had been skinned in preparation for mounting.

Before attempting to eat the mouse the grouse had foraged on a variety of plants. A small handful of green leaf-tips from its gizzard was comprised of mainly wild strawberry

(*Fragaria* sp.), a bramble (*Rubus* sp.) and a currant (*Ribes* sp.). Hawkweed (*Crepis* ?), alumroot (*Heuchera richardsonii*), and gill-over-the-ground or ground ivy (*Glechoma hederaceae*) were present, along with a number of unidentified species. Two pond snails (*Stagnicola* sp.) were also found in the gizzard.

The mouse was an adult male Deer Mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*) about four inches long, not including the tail. Judging by its condition the mouse must have been fresh when picked up by the grouse. Damage to its skull could have been caused by the grouse. It was thought that the mouse may have become caught in the throat membrane by a broken bone, but there was nothing to indicate this; evidently it was simply too bulky to swallow. This is supported by the fact that it was difficult to extract from the bird and that its ribs had