

16th ANNUAL NESTBOX REPORT OF THE BRANDON JUNIOR BIRDERS — 1976

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CHRIS MARTIN, 1312 Tenth Street, Brandon.

During the spring and summer of 1976 the Brandon Junior Birders' nestbox project was kept alive by the great interest and assistance of a group of volunteers, whom we have named "Friends of the Bluebirds". Some of these people had aided the late Dr. John Lane for many years; others were first timers. At a March meeting, nestlines to be covered were chosen by volunteers and forms for recording observations were supplied to them. Some "Friends" offered to be drivers for the Junior Birders.

In early October reports were brought in, and experiences and information were shared. It became evident that our main priority is to maintain the habitat for the bluebirds. This requires cleaning and repairing of nestboxes and monitoring as often as possible.

A few reports have not come in yet. Those received fall into two categories. A total of 280 nestboxes were maintained through cleaning and repairing but information on occupants was not complete. For an additional 1,109 boxes checked, specific records were submitted and have been compiled as follows:

Occupant	Number of nestings
Mountain Bluebirds	286
Eastern Bluebirds	26
Bluebirds, both species	136
Bluebirds, cross breeding	4
Tree Swallows	393
House Wrens	27
Starlings	8
House Sparrows	185
Flickers	1
Mice	39
Squirrels	4



The late John Lane banding bluebirds.

One hundred new nestboxes were set out, bringing the total to 4,621. It was not possible to check nestlines in certain areas due to shortage of personnel.

Some interesting data were reported. There were several observations of feathers being used by bluebirds in nest construction, ranging from one or two feathers to "a great many". Three nestings of Mountain Bluebirds with white, rather than pale blue, eggs were reported.

We are curious about Nest Box No. 1435. The report on this one shows: May 22, Eastern Bluebirds, 5 eggs; June 18, nest vacated; July 7, Eastern Bluebirds, 4 eggs. Might this have been an instance of two broods for the same pair of Eastern Bluebirds, or is the time interval between nestings too long?



Juniors' Christmas party — 1974.

John Lane

Jim Spear of Russell reported two instances of cross breeding: in box No. 2845 a Mountain male and a hybrid bluebird (Mountain. Eastern) female with 5 eggs and 5 hatched; in box No. 2846 Mountain male with a hybrid bluebird female, 6 eggs, all hatched. - Mr. Spear reports that this pair were bothered by Tree Swallows when preparing for second nesting, so another nestbox was placed on the fence across the road on May 23 for the Tree Swallows, but the bluebirds decided to move into the new box and had 5 eggs and 5 hatched. Then in the same nest they had a third clutch of 3 eggs in the last week of June. He did not get back to see if these hatched.

In nestbox No. 4143 north of Deleau, Brandon Junior Birders caught a female Mountain Bluebird with band No. 820-20572. This bird had been banded by the late Dr. J. Lane on June 16, 1973, as a juvenile in nestbox No. 738 located in the same area.

It is interesting to note that the main enemies of the bluebirds in areas north and northwest of Brandon were House Sparrows. Over one hundred nestboxes will have to be moved for the spring 1977. In nestbox No. 52 three consecutive occupants — Mountain Bluebird, then Eastern Bluebird, and finally a Tree Swallow — were all killed by House Sparrows.

In areas southwest and southeast of Brandon, during a period of approximately 3 weeks, black flies (*Simulium venustum*) plagued the bluebirds, causing considerably mortality of the young, and often prevented monitoring of the nestboxes.

Reports received show 11 nestboxes destroyed through vandalism; 15 nestboxes disappeared.

Roy Everitt, Newdale, reported that magpies were reaching in and taking eggs and killing bluebirds in the shorter type nestboxes he had built. He plans to use our deeper pattern for next year.

In 5 instances, porcupines (*Erethizon dorsatum*) had chewed away portions of nestboxes. These were replaced.

Mr. Ted Muir, Wildlife Extension Specialist, Manitoba Department of Renewable Resources and Transportation Services, Winnipeg, expressed a desire to learn about the project and to give any assistance he could. He came to Brandon on September 8th for a meeting with Mrs. Lane, the Junior Birders, and three "Friends of the Bluebirds", at which it was agreed that the nestlines should be shown on adequate maps and that the Department would give publicity to legislation protecting birds. A supply of suitable maps has since been received from the Department and put into use.



Adult Eastern Bluebird with
one young at box.

John Lane

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"Friends of the Bluebirds" include:
Austin, Manitoba: Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Brown; Mr. and Mrs. Percy Ewen.
Boissevain: Charlie Reid and Malcolm Denny. **Killarney:** Lloyd Powell. **Miami:** Dale and Joan Robinson. **Neepawa:** Don and Mac Murray; Mrs. Sage; Mr. and Mrs. W. G. Moger. **Newdale:** Roy and Edie Everitt. **Pratt:** Mr. and Mrs. Les North. **Russell:** Jim and Mildred Spear; Richard Wileman, Robbie Glasman. **Shoal Lake:** Cliff Findlay. **Souris:** Art and Joyce Michie. **Wawanesa:** Ed and Ivy Robinson. **Brandon:** Mrs. John Lane; Brandon Junior Birders; Barbara Robinson; Dick and Hazel Patmore; David Randall; John and Marion Robinson; Mr. A. L. Campbell, Lisa and Patrick; Ken James; Barbara Robertson; Phyllis Ilsley; Betty Shankland; Margaret, Helen and Mamie McCowan; the Bauman family; Dr. R. Hamilton and daughters; John and Dorothy Mayhew; also Watty Forsythe and John Plum, who kept us supplied with new nest-boxes.



WESTERN KINGBIRDS AND HOUSE SPARROWS

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I was interested in the article on the Western Kingbird killing a House Sparrow as we had an entirely opposite situation occur this summer.

Western Kingbirds frequently arrive here, build nests, fight with their neighbours and eventually leave the area, having been unsuccessful in nesting attempts. This year one was seen on June 2nd and two more on June 3rd and all three stayed. A pair built in a blue spruce about 20 feet high, 10 feet from our porch and 6 feet from the walk to the house; the nest was not far from the top of the tree. There was some swearing at cats and dogs, and at the third kingbird who turned up for visits and sat on a wire a short distance away. The male kingbird sat on a telephone wire about 8 feet from the nest and shared this wire with robins, sparrows, mourning doves, and, particularly, a male House Sparrow in the latter stages.

The kingbirds appeared to have their nest completed June 20th and were observed feeding young on July 18th (the first successful nesting I know for these birds in our yard).

I have no date for their leaving the nest but I believe two young made successful exits over the heads of sleeping dogs and cats.

Four or 5 days later I was surprised to see the House Sparrows feeding young at a nest not much more than a foot beneath the kingbird's evacuated one. I knew House Sparrows had been building from the untidy mess just beneath the kingbird's nest but was surprised at their hatching so soon after the kingbirds' leaving. The female sparrow must have been pretty circumspect to have remained there while the kingbirds were feeding their young.

