

SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL NESTBOX REPORT FROM BRANDON, MANITOBA

MRS. JOHN LANE, 1701 Lorne Avenue, Brandon; MISS MAMIE McCOWAN, 1415 Eighth Street, Brandon, and MRS. R. H. PATMORE, 1261 Thirteenth Street, Brandon, Manitoba.

Sixteen preceding annual reports were submitted by the Brandon Junior Birders. In 1977 this organization was not active, and the bluebird nestbox project was carried on by the "Friends of the Bluebirds", comprising volunteers interested in this conservation project of the late Dr. John Lane. Mrs. John Lane coordinated efforts of the "Friends" and received their reports, on which this article is based.

At a March meeting, forms for recording observations were supplied. New volunteers were added to the list of helpers and all marked their nest-line areas on topographic maps.

In 1977, 129 new boxes were set out, bringing the total to 4,750. Many old boxes were rebuilt or replaced. For the generous and ever ready stock of excellent nest boxes and extra tops, thanks are due to two Brandon gentlemen, Watty Forsythe and John Plum.

Some nest lines were not checked due to lack of personnel. Of the boxes checked, some fall into the category of being cleaned and repaired; while the remaining 941 boxes were both maintained and monitored. From these records the following report has been compiled (see Table 1).

Twenty-seven nest boxes were reported vacant, five were missing because fences had been taken down, two were vandalized, one box had been chewed by a porcupine.

Jim Spear of Russell supplied some very interesting data. For nest box No. 4477 he reported a single nesting of Mountain Bluebirds with ten eggs. On May 13, he visited this nest box and found nine eggs, which he

photographed. He did not check it again till June 1, and found three young and seven eggs.

On May 1, nest box No. 2848 was occupied by a Black-capped Chickadee. On Mr. Spear's next visit, May 13, he found a female Mountain Bluebird had built her nest over the chickadee nest and had laid four eggs. Mr. Spear writes, "I removed the bluebird nest and found the chickadee nest with six eggs. I took this out and replaced the bluebird nest. She completed her clutch and all six eggs hatched. Removing the nest did not disturb her at all." This is the first known instance of a Black-capped Chickadee in our nest boxes.

Then, too, Mr. Spear discovered a successful way to discourage House Sparrows. After removing their nest, he lowers the box to the bottom of the post, in scrub, and "in every case it would be taken by a bluebird or Tree Swallow. A willow cut and put in front of box worked successfully also." Defeating the House Sparrows has given Mr. Spear great satisfaction. Maybe others will experiment with his method. This year a few of the "Friends" have tried plugging the hole after destroying the sparrow nest, then later the plug would be removed in hopes that the House Sparrow would not occupy the box again.

There were three instances reported of what appeared to be second nestings of Eastern Bluebirds. Mrs. Barbara Robinson reported that nest box No. 552, in the Camp Hughes area, had an Eastern female with six white eggs on June 1. On July 9, 39 days later, No. 552 had ten white eggs, one of them chipped upon the side of the nest. She wondered, "Was it a double

Table 1. OCCUPANCY IN NEST BOXES 1977

Occupant	Number of nestings
Mountain Bluebird.....	405
Eastern Bluebird.....	33
Tree Swallow.....	397
House Sparrow.....	166
Starling.....	3
House Wren.....	48
Black-capped Chickadee.....	1
Mice.....	12
Squirrel.....	2

clutch?" Re-checking on July 10, she saw Eastern Bluebirds nearby. And on May 16, nest box No. 107, also in the Camp Hughes area, was occupied by a female Eastern Bluebird with two eggs. On June 2, No. 107 had five eggs. Visiting this same nest box on July 10, Mrs. Robinson found an Eastern female sitting on four eggs. She writes, "New clutch. Eggs a very brilliant blue. Male Eastern Bluebird and 2 juveniles of first brood on hydro wire close by."

Mr. and Mrs. Perry Hopkins, Hartney, reported that nest box No. 4174 on May 15 had an Eastern female with five eggs. On May 29, three had hatched. The male Eastern was close by. On June 26, adult Eastern Bluebirds were near and five eggs in the nest. July 14 there was no sign of the adults. On August 3, the five eggs had not hatched. Could these adults have been a different pair, or was it a second nesting?

On nest lines where House Sparrows were predominant, nest boxes have been or will be moved to new areas.

There were no reports of black flies (*Simulium venustum*) in 1977. However, there was one case of a Mountain Bluebird nest (No. 730) where three dead nestlings were covered with ants. A fourth nestling was still alive.

The areas with the densest population of both Mountain and

Eastern Bluebirds are Camp Hughes and South Shilo, monitored by Barbara Robinson, Assistant Curator of the B. J. Hales Museum of Natural History, Brandon University. She reported 83 nestings of Mountain Bluebirds and 19 nestings of Eastern Bluebirds. One of the Eastern Bluebird nests was in a natural cavity in a post near the Assiniboine River.

Warmest appreciation and thanks from Mrs. Lane and the Junior Birders go out to the "Friends of the Bluebirds" from Alexander, Manitoba — Ken Shields; Austin — Mr. and Mrs. Percy Ewan, Mr. W. Moncur; Hartney — Mr. and Mrs. Perry Hopkins; Headingly — Mr. Carl Gompf; Killarney — Barry Danard, Lyle McFarlane, Marcel Demeer, Lloyd Powell; Miami — Mr. and Mrs. Dale Robinson; Neepawa — Kitty, Don, Ken, Mac and Mary Murray, Mrs. Sage, Mr. and Mrs. W. G. Moger; Newdale — Roy and Edie Everitt; Oak Lake — Mr. and Mrs. C. Penner; Pratt — Mr. and Mrs. Les North; Russell — Jim and Mildred Spear, Robbie Glasman, Richard Wileman; Shoal Lake — Cliff Findlay; Souris — Art and Joyce Michie; Wawanesa — Ed and Ivy Robinson; Brandon — Mrs. John Lane, Barbara Robinson, Dick and Hazel Patmore, John and Marion Robinson, Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Campbell and family, Ken James, Mamie and Helen McCowan, Chris Martin, Tony Burton, Mr. W. Forsythe and Mr. John Plum.