

TWENTY-FIRST ANNUAL NESTBOX REPORT FROM BRANDON, MANITOBA

MRS. JOHN LANE, 1701 Lorne Avenue, Brandon, Manitoba. R7A 0W2 and
MAMIE McCOWAN, BARBARA ROBINSON, HAZEL PATMORE and ANN SMITH

The year 1981 was an exciting and rewarding one for the group of dedicated volunteers, "The Friends of the Bluebirds". The usual spring and fall get-togethers took place at the home of the co-ordinator, Norah Lane. Both meetings were well attended and new members were enrolled.

January saw the first of many meetings of the planning committees for the Great Northern Plains Conference of the North American Bluebird Society. Lorne Scott, Indian Head, and Norah Lane, both Canadian directors of North American Bluebird Society, had responded to a request from headquarters in Maryland to organize a bluebird conference. With permission to hold it in Brandon University and with Dr. Roger Smith, Department of Zoology, as chairman of the committees formed from members of The Friends of the Bluebirds, Brandon Natural History Society, and faculty and staff at Brandon University, a fine program was planned for June 25-28.

One hundred and sixty-six people registered, representing nine American states (Maryland, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Virginia, Georgia, Missouri, Indiana, Montana and Oregon) and four Canadian provinces (Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta); and there were two people from England.

Field trips along the Carberry-Spruce Woods nestlines to observe nesting Mountain and Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows and on to the Souris River Bend Wildlife Management Area to observe other species gave the conference a good start. Lectures, a nature art exhibit, displays of nestline maps and bluebird-related items, books and

souvenir shop, and a wind-up banquet, were other highlights, interspersed with coffee breaks and exchanges of bluebird experiences.

Dr. Lawrence Zeleny, founder of the North American Bluebird Society, Mary Janetatos, Executive Director, and Chuck Dupree, Treasurer, all of Maryland, spoke of the history of bluebird conservation in North America and told of the work of the Central Office, Maryland. Speakers on the topic of bluebirds in their areas were Herbert Prescott, Portland, Oregon; Duncan Mackintosh, Lethbridge; Norah Lane, Brandon; Don Stiles, Calgary; Art Aylesworth, Ronan, Montana; Lorne Scott, Indian Head; Richard Rounds, Brandon. Adding variety with lecture topics on other bird life were Phil Horch, Winnipeg; Stuart Houston, Saskatoon; Fred McGuinness, Brandon; Robert Nero, Winnipeg.

Leaders for the field trips, including those special Sunday morning ones, were Peter Sawatzky, Barbara Robinson, Herb Goulden, Mamie McCowan, Kae Longrigg, Cliff Findlay and Dick Rounds.

Meeting bluebirders from across the continent made us aware of the value of the North American Bluebird Society. And because Brian Shantz of Nanton, Alberta, is our new Canadian director, we look forward to a possible regional meeting farther west.

In our local area three important research projects on our nestlines have added scientific interest and results.

Hugh Munro completed his Master's program. A copy of his thesis published by the University of Manitoba, titled "An

Analysis of Use of Nest Boxes by Mountain Bluebirds in Southwestern Manitoba'', is in our hands, a gift from him.

Two summer projects set up by Dr. Richard Rounds and Dr. Roger Smith, Brandon University, were carried out by undergraduate students. Judy Hickson, Geography student, experimented with micro-climate of artificial nest boxes. There were 72 boxes of 24 different designs. Linda Macson, Zoology student, made observations of the behavior of Mountain Bluebirds at three nest boxes in each of two different habitats. It is hoped that the results of the research by these two students will be published.

The *Auk* accepted and published a paper "The Fertility of Albinistic Eggs", by Richard Rounds, Donita and Hugh Munro.

The *Wilson Bulletin* published "A Review of Hybridization in *Sialia*", by Richard Rounds and Hugh Munro.

A CKX-TV half-hour Wildlife Special featuring Dr. Richard Rounds on the bluebird nestlines in Southwestern Manitoba, proved a huge success. CKX has received requests from viewers to have it repeated over their stations.

Reporting on the work of The Friends of the Bluebirds, a summary of nesting success in monitored boxes during 1981 is given in Table I. The numbers are similar to those reported for 1980 but the two years are not directly comparable as some of the nest boxes and nestlines were different in the two years. The apparent increase in mice is due to increased reports outside of the bluebird nesting season from the early spring and the fall clean-up of boxes.

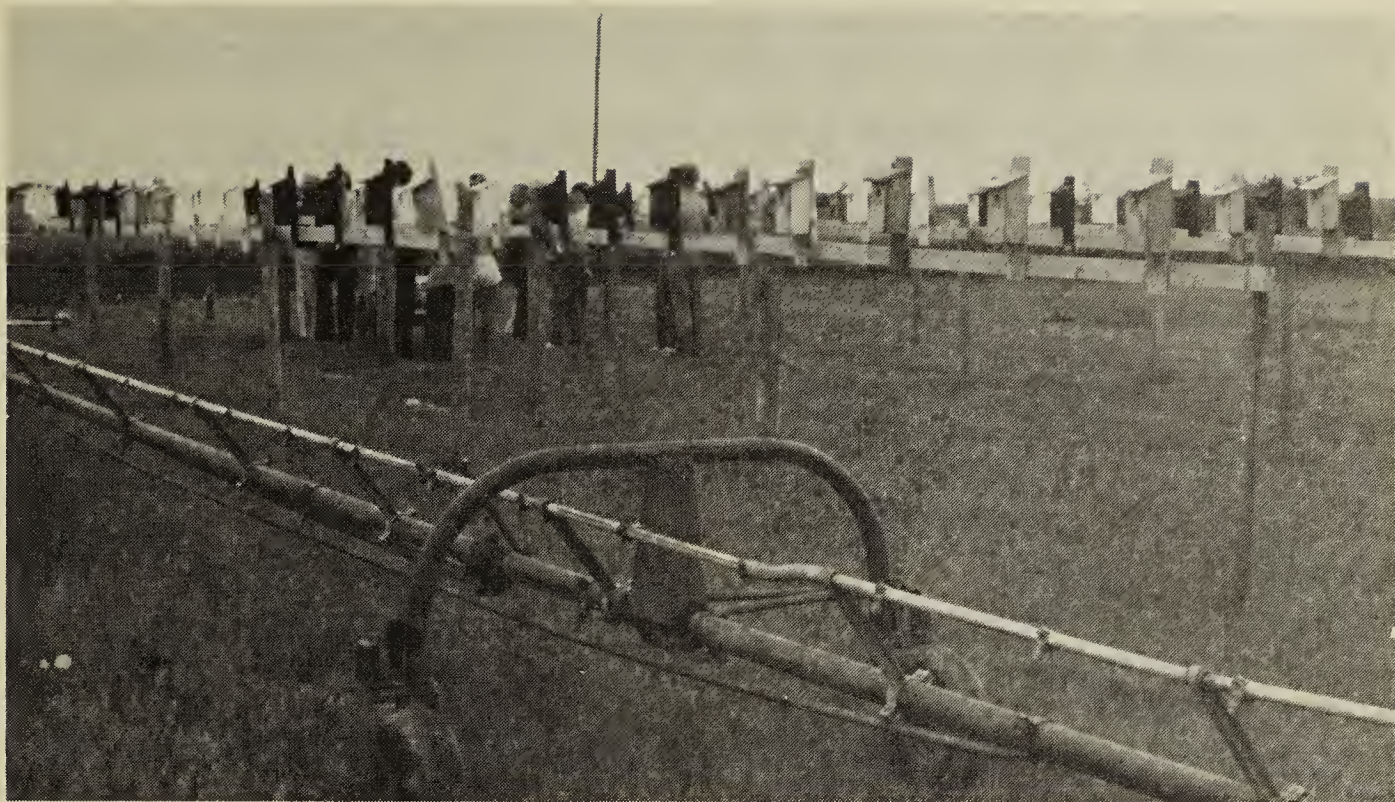
Again the Eastern Bluebird seemed to be concentrated in the sandy areas of the Carberry and Lauder Sandhills. It is interesting to note that Mr. and Mrs. J.B. Thomas, Hartney, reported three boxes where two broods of Eastern Bluebirds were raised.

Another case of hybridization was reported, this one by Peter Sawatzky in box No. 677 on the Carberry-Glenboro line. A Mountain Bluebird female and an Eastern Bluebird male successfully raised six young hybrids.

Other occupants of the nest boxes included a Chipping Sparrow, wasps and Thief Ants (*Solenopsis molesta*). The ants were in a nest box under observation by Linda Macson and were observed on extremely thin shelled eggs

Table 1. OCCUPANCY OF NEST BOXES IN THE BRANDON, MANITOBA, AREA — 1981

<i>Occupant</i>	<i>Number of nestings</i>
Mountain Bluebirds	727
Eastern Bluebirds	43
Bluebirds (not identified to species)	12
Cross Nesting Bluebirds (Eastern x Mountain)	1
Tree Swallows	680
House Sparrows	178
House Wrens	54
Starlings	2
Mice	60
Squirrels	8
Others: Thief ants, wasps, Chipping Sparrow and unidentified sparrow	1 each



Research into micro-climate of artificial nest boxes.

R.K. Lane

pierced with small holes. Whether the ants ate the eggs is unknown. The adult birds subsequently abandoned that nest.

Two cases were reported of Cowbird eggs, in boxes occupied by House Sparrows.

A few unusual nests were found. Mrs. Elsie Duthie, Lauder, found Mountain Bluebirds nesting in a stack of rye bales. Mr. Gordon Hammell, Erickson, reported a Mountain Bluebird nest in a hole (made either by rats or a woodpecker) in the fascia board of the eaves of a barn where an addition was under construction. Despite the disturbance the bluebirds raised a family. Barbara Robinson, Brandon, found a nest made of cassette tape.

While not everyone was able to report the remarkable success that Betty Shankland found on her line near Oak Lake resort, it was a successful year for The Friends of the Bluebirds. Betty, by the way, had 51 nestings in the 28 boxes on her line; 35 of these nestings were of Mountain Bluebirds.

A good supply of nest boxes is on

hand, thanks to the contribution of 500 boxes built since January 1981 by Mr. Raymond Gladden, Brandon.

This report was made possible through the work of The Friends of the Bluebirds. Added to the list published in our 20th annual report are these new members: *Altona* — Mrs. Krueger; *Basswood* — Rob MacDonald; *Birtle* — Brian Shaw; *Brandon* — Jean Cross, J.F. and Lillian McCullagh, Dilys Coburn and family, Ginger Young, Colleen Mitchell, Roger and Ann Smith, Herb Goulden, Kirsten McFarlane, Isabelle McGregor; *Carberry* — Nimkin Blue; *Douglas* — Earle Farley; *Erickson* — Harvey and Carol Pengelly, Gordon Hammell; *Forrest* — Jim Dixon; *Griswold* — Mrs. J.G. Cross; *Kirkella* — Stan McGuimpsey; *Lauder* — Mrs. Elsie Duthie; *Minnedosa* — Audrah Caughell, Stan Gugin; *Nesbitt* — 4-H boys Jeffrey Cunningham, David Cunningham and Brian Abbott; *Oak River* — Helen and Bill Cantelon, Mr. and Mrs. F. Mylrea, Mr. Wm. Davidson; *Portage La Prairie* — Garry Parker; *Rapid City* — Laurie and Bernice East; *Sandy Lake* — Valerie Miko; *Wesagaming* — Randy and Judy Mitchell and family.