

TWENTY-THIRD ANNUAL NESTBOX REPORT FROM BRANDON, MANITOBA

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The southwest Manitoba nestbox project was carried out again in 1983 by the volunteer group "The Friends of the Bluebirds". This group held spring and fall meetings and maintained and monitored nest boxes during spring and summer. Over 60 separate reports were submitted and used to prepare this summary. Other members maintained nestlines but did not monitor the boxes closely enough to submit reports. A summary of nestbox occupants is given in Table 1.

In addition, cowbird eggs were found in two nests. Jim Spear noted "one nest contained a cowbird egg which the [Mountain] bluebird hatched and fed, her own three eggs did not hatch." The other was found with House Sparrow eggs and destroyed with them. Other occupants were four squirrels, one Northern Flying Squirrel and 29 mice. Mice were found when

cleaning the boxes in spring and fall and do not appear to be a problem during the nesting season.

Cross breeding occurred again this year. A female Mountain and a male Eastern Bluebird produced five young and one unhatched egg in box #4900 on the line maintained by Perry and Alice Hopkins near Hartney. The Eastern male was killed by a car, but the female continued feeding and all five young fledged. The female raised a second brood with a Mountain male.

The Mountain Bluebird suffered a sharp decline in number of nestings in contrast with the other species, which showed increases. This decline is presumably due to a severe, late spring storm. Records at the Brandon Weather Office show that the temperature declined on 11 May 1983, from the previous day's 20° C. and hovered near zero for six days. 12 May had

Table 1. NUMBER OF NESTINGS IN NEST BOXES IN SOUTHWEST MANITOBA

| <i>Occupant</i> | <i>Number of Nestings</i> |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Mountain Bluebird | 494* |
| Eastern Bluebird | 87 |
| Bluebird species | 18 |
| Mountain X Eastern Bluebird | 1 |
| Tree Swallow | 872 |
| House Wren | 84 |
| House Sparrow | 127 |
| European Starling | 2 |
| Black-capped Chickadee | 1 |

*An additional 107 nests with frozen eggs were reported.



Mountain Bluebird male at nest

John Lane

freezing rain, sleet and snow accompanied by winds of 60 to 65 km/hour. An accumulation of 5 cm of snow had occurred by nightfall on the 13th, and northwest winds of 40 km/hr were

blowing. Snow fell again on the 14th. By the 15th the sky was clear but the temperature reached -11°C . that night and the minimum temperature did not rise above zero until the 17th.

This storm occurred just as the Mountain Bluebirds were laying eggs. A few lines were monitored just before and/or after the storm and illustrate the severity of the problem. The area west and north of Brandon was hit hardest with almost total destruction of eggs. Jim Spear found "36 nestings on the Shellmouth-Churchbridge line, but after the storm only six produced young . . . many eggs were frozen and dead bluebirds and tree swallows were found in the nestboxes."- On several lines all eggs laid were frozen. In the Fort Ellice area Cliff Findlay examined 41 boxes 19 May 1983. Of these, 31 had been occupied by bluebirds. He found 58 frozen eggs and one dead female Mountain Bluebird.

When the Mountain Bluebirds began to renest they were in direct competition for boxes with the Tree Swallows and had lost the advantage that they usually have in earlier nesting. In the Fort Ellice area, of the 31 boxes that had been occupied by bluebirds 13 were taken over by Tree Swallows. On another line that had eight Mountain Bluebird nests before the storm, only half were retained by renesting Mountain Bluebirds. Because of this late start on the first successful nesting, there appear to have been fewer completed second nestings as well.

Although the storm was hardest on the Mountain Bluebirds as they were the only ones that had begun to lay, other species probably suffered considerable losses. Three dead Eastern Bluebirds and one dead Tree Swallow were found near Hartney by J.B. Thomas 15 May 1983. Nine dead Tree Swallows were found packed into a single nest box after the storm by Grace Terry at Rapid City. The area east of Brandon, while it showed some storm-related disasters, appears to have been affected to a much lesser degree.

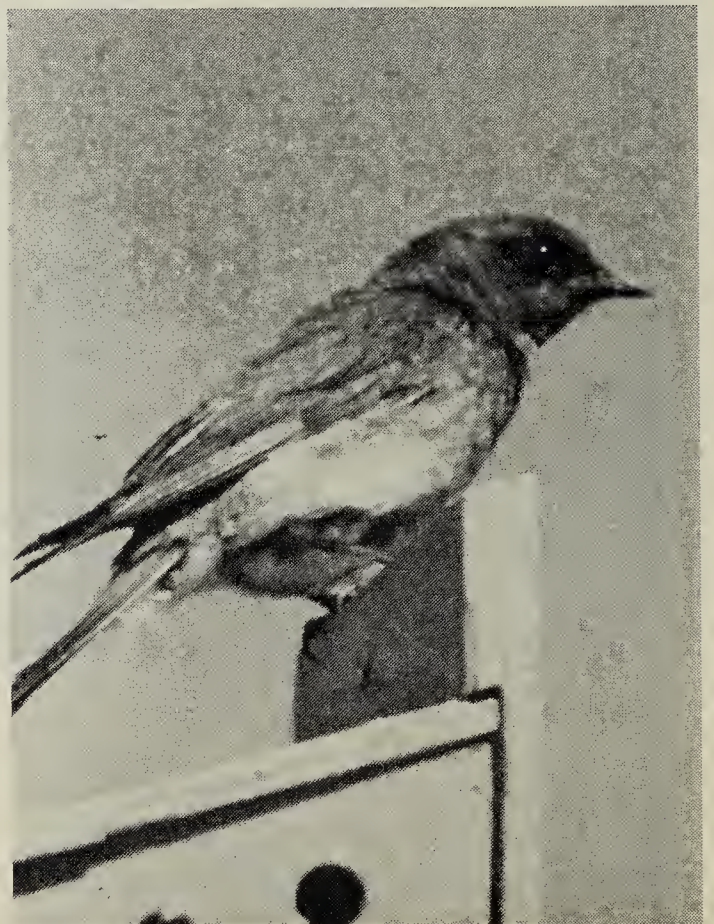
Despite the storm we have an in-

crease in Eastern Bluebird nestings again this year; double that of two years ago. Eastern Bluebirds return later than Mountain Bluebirds and the majority of them may have missed the storm. There was also an increase in Tree Swallows and House Wrens.

New boxes have been supplied again by Raymond Gladden (500 boxes), John Plum (43 boxes), Harold Kneeshaw (66 boxes) and the Neepawa Boy Scouts (50 boxes), so that we have a good supply on hand for the spring. The majority of these boxes are now being made with removable bottoms and 9/16 in. entrance hole.

In addition to local activities, three members attended and greatly enjoyed the program of the Western Regional Meeting of the North American Bluebird Society at Portland, Oregon, in June 1983. A special thrill was seeing the Western Bluebird.

Ann Smith assumed the chairmanship of the Co-ordinating Committee in the fall of 1983. All correspondence should now be addressed to her.



Male Eastern Bluebird — J. Lane.