
LETTERS

BLUE JAYS AND WINDOW KILLS

I enjoyed the write up on Blue Jays and window kills in the last issue (*Blue Jay* 49:98). The day before I read the article, I was in the front yard and I saw a Blue Jay carrying a dead bird which it dropped as it flew into a big spruce tree. The bird was a House Sparrow and a fresh kill, possibly due to a crash into a house window.

We have had Blue Jays for ten years and this was the first time I had noticed one with a dead bird.

Window kills and road kills are certainly a big problem with our wildlife.

Bill Dale, 2309 York Avenue, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7J 1J2

GRAYSON ANNUAL REPORT

At the end of winter, we look and listen for the arrival of spring. We walk around with our eyes open, our ears open and our mouths shut. Can we hear songs that are new?

The winter has been very cold and my bird feeder has not been empty. I have had a few chickadees and Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers. A few days ago, a huge flock of Bohemian Waxwings, possibly 100, settled on the Mountain Ash and stripped it of berries. The next day they came back and picked up the ones they had dropped on the ground. Last year, redpolls were very numerous, but so far they have not made their appearance. Hummingbirds came back again last summer but not as many as the year before.

I have some information that may be of interest or arouse interest in some people. I now have 312 bird houses on my trail. In 1990, the houses were occupied by 193 Tree Swallows, 49 House Wrens, and 16 bluebirds. Some houses were homes for sparrows or mice; 59 were empty. Last year, I placed some houses 20 or 30 m apart so that the Tree Swallows would leave some empty for bluebirds. Tree Swallows do not like their own species as neighbours, but tolerate other species, so the bluebirds may find empty nests between those used by the swallows. It has worked in some instances, but there were not enough bluebirds to fill all the empty houses.

Last year, I did a very interesting survey for Environment Canada through the Wildlife Service. I visited the nests every week to check the building progress, egg hatching, feeding of the young and finally the empty nest. It was surprising how rapidly they made progress. The young hatch and very quickly grow feathers. They receive a high protein diet of worms and bugs.

There were 16 nests and 60 young (one died and one egg broke). I had some bluebirds in areas for the first time. This has been some improvement, as some years I asked "Where have all the bluebirds gone?" Some of my friends have put up a few bird houses in their yards and were fortunate to attract one and sometimes two pairs. It reminded me of having a bluebird house in the backyard on the clothes line post for many years. I am glad some people are helping to preserve nature, the little that is left.

I am still building a few houses that I may be able to place when I spot a bluebird in the area. I also built a martin house and last year four pairs occupied some apartments.

Something strange happened with the bluebirds, perhaps some wise person may enlighten me. Last year, I placed some of my bird houses closer together (about 20-30 m). Tree Swallows are territorial and occupy most of the nests. On one occasion, a bluebird nested in one box and laid six eggs. It then moved to another box and laid another six eggs. The female raised the family in the second box, but abandoned the first clutch. Why? Were there two females, but one was killed? Some time later, a Tree Swallow built a nest on top of the abandoned nest and raised a family.

Some areas have good populations of bluebirds, especially where there is still pasture land and trees and brush. Most of my houses are in wooded areas or roadsides where the trees have been left standing. Perhaps other birders have more information about the habits of bluebirds.

John M. Hicke, Box 291, Grayson, Saskatchewan. S0A 1E0



It's coming.....

R.E. Gehlert