

## Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society

2012 Spring Newsletter- Editor Bill Read [info@billreadsbooks.com](mailto:info@billreadsbooks.com)

**The AGM is set for Saturday, March 17th, 2012** at the **Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington**, Ontario. Our feature speaker is **Lyle Friesen** who will discuss his work on **Wood Thrush** in fragmented woodlots.

To date we are having almost the same kind of winter that we did in **2001-2002** with warmer than average temperatures and below normal amounts of snow accumulation. Environment Canada weather forecaster David Philips called that winter **the year without winter**. This allowed more bluebirds than normal to survive and breed in 2002 which resulted in record numbers of Eastern Bluebirds on the following year Christmas bird counts across the Northeastern part of North America. A total of **93,083** Eastern Bluebirds were counted on Christmas bird counts on the 103rd count. ( 2002-2003 ). The record of **779** bluebirds was seen in Ontario on the 103rd count. The Hamilton CBC recorded 52 EABL on the 103rd count which has been equaled this year on the 112th count. ( 2011-2012 ) As always happens we pay for this at some point in the future. Fast forward to the spring of 2003 and the ice storm is upon us. A thick coating of ice covered the ground during the first part of April until around the 8th, 2003. On the following U.S.CBC (104th -2003-2004 ) a total of **60,774** bluebirds were reported, **a decline of 34.7%**. A total of **547** bluebirds were recorded on the 104th Ontario CBC. This represents a decline of **30%** from the previous year.

Late spring can be difficult for returning bluebirds as most of the wild fruit has been consumed and they must rely mainly on insects. With a thick coating of ice on the ground and trees it proved disastrous as most of the bluebirds had already returned. There were many reports of dead bluebirds caused by this weather event both in Ontario, New York State and across most of Eastern North America. Don Wills who checked all of his boxes before the ice storm found **12 dead bluebirds** in boxes after the storm and none before. I found **3 dead EABL's** in my boxes. The devastation in New York State was even worse. There were other reports of bluebirds seen near nest boxes before the ice storm and none after. This meant that fewer bluebirds nested in 2003. Weather related declines have been observed from time to time over the Eastern Bluebirds history in Eastern North America from the time of settlement.

This was also around the time of the worst effects of the **West Nile virus** that proved particularly deadly on more northern species. I recently read an article by **S.LaDeau in Nature International Weekly Journal of Science** that reported that the Eastern Bluebird population suffered quite significant declines after 2002, dropping down by **44%**, which is tightly correlated with the human epidemic of West Nile virus in the Northeastern United States. Most of this was based on Breeding Bird Survey data from 2003. Christmas Bird Count data was not used in this correlation. There may have been some effect caused by West Nile virus but most of the decline in my opinion was **weather related**. The good thing about

this decline was a quick rebound within 3 years to a new record number of Eastern Bluebirds seen on the **107th U.S CBC ( 95,295 )**. This quick rebound is indicative of a healthy bluebird population and an army of bluebirders with predator proof nest box trails.

This winter I have received numerous reports of over wintering Eastern Bluebirds all across Southern Ontario. **Norm North** sent in pictures of 2 bluebirds from the Peterborough area. **Garth Baker** also reported seeing a male Eastern Bluebird about 6 miles east of Bellville in mid February. This will probably be reflected in higher numbers breeding and on the 113<sup>th</sup> Christmas Bird Counts. Below is a chart of both Ontario and the United States CBC numbers.

### Christmas Bird Count numbers U.S and Ontario

	Count	Ontario	United States
111 <sup>th</sup>	2010-2011	466	NA
110 <sup>th</sup>	2009-2010	505	80,105
109 <sup>th</sup>	2008-2009	703	86,656
108 <sup>th</sup>	2007-2008	484	81,597
107 <sup>th</sup>	2006-2007	511	<b>95,295 Rebound</b>
106 <sup>th</sup>	2005-2006	580	73,628
105 <sup>th</sup>	2004-2005	223	73,505
104 <sup>th</sup>	2003-2004	547	<b>60,774 Weather related</b>
<b>decline of 34.7%</b>			
103 <sup>rd</sup>	2002-2003	779	<b>93,083</b>
102 <sup>nd</sup>	2001-2002	406	86,529
101	2000-2001	495	66,712
100 <sup>th</sup>	1999-2000	622	82,027

This year could be another year like 2002 where we have good numbers of bluebirds breeding. Let's hope the weather co-operates.

### OEBS AGM Agenda March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

8.15-9.00am	Registration -Wayne and Linda Buck
9.00-9.30am	Presidents Report and introductions-Bill Read Business Meeting Slate of Executives for 2012-Tom Kott Membership Report -Anne Davidson Treasurer's Report- Anne Davidson Announcement of conservation Award –Don Wills Conservation report –Don wills
9.30-10.00am	Coffee Break
10.00-10.25am	Members nest box reports.

10.25-11.45pm Wood Duck discussion –Alfie Stanevicius  
11.45-12.00pm Kestrel nest box design- Bill Read

12.05-1.30pm Lunch  
1.30 - 2.25pm Wood Thrush in fragmented woodlots-Lyle Friesen  
2.25 – 3.00pm Coffee Break and viewing of bucket raffle items.  
3.00 – 3.30pm Nest platforms for Phoebe and proper location of  
EABL nest boxes  
3.30-4.00pm Bucket Raffle -Tom hunt

**OEBS Eastern Bluebird Field Trip** This years trip is on **Sunday, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012**. We will meet at 9am at the Orchard Home apple orchard. The farm is located 1 concession north of St. George on Howell Road. See the home page of our website for more details. [www.oeps.ca](http://www.oeps.ca) Please confirm by email [info@billreadsbooks.com](mailto:info@billreadsbooks.com) or phone at 519-620 0744 **Bill Read**

**Bird Box Building Workshop - Saturday April 28<sup>th</sup> 2012. 9:a.m – 12:00pm** Location 4182 Sideroad 20 South Puslinch

Equipment and experienced woodworkers will be on hand to help you with your projects. Direct your enquiries to **Marion at 519-763-0370** or email at [rm.robertson@xplorenet.ca](mailto:rm.robertson@xplorenet.ca)

### Weekly Bird Monitoring Walks

Begins April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2012. The bluebird trail at Crieff Hills is ready and waiting. For more information call **Marion at 519-763-0370**

**Raptor fest** at the **Peach King Center in Grimsby** on Saturday, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2012.

Come and visit our **Eastern Bluebird** display to learn more about setting up a bluebird nest box trail. **Don Wills** will be there to talk about bluebirds and Prothonotary Warblers. Admission is free.

### Mountain Bluebirds in Ontario

There have been **3** confirmed sightings of **Mountain Bluebirds** in Ontario over the winter, all were females. The one female near London has been associating

with a female EABL for most of the winter. The Female MTBL near Crieff just south of Guelph has at times been seen with a male EABL. I was able to get permission to put a paired set of nest boxes up on the property she has been frequenting. Female MTBL's will nest with male EABL's. The other female has been seen near Prince Edward point near Bellville. All had very prominent eye rings and in the right light a faint peachy appearance on the upper breast.

In the spring of 2011 another female Mountain bluebird was seen above the escarpment near Grimsby. This bird was with a male EABL most of the time. Both disappeared after a bad snow storm in March and were not relocated. The two pictures of the female Mountain Bluebird found near Crieff that are included in this newsletter were taken by **Tom Thomas**. She has a **cutworm larva** in her mouth and was observed feeding on a number of these in mid January. The lack of snow cover probably made it easier to locate them. Many insects are active in winter, especially when it warms up. Cutworm larva can grow as long as two inches. They may go through as many as three generations a year. Native cutworms overwinter in weedy areas, grassy fields or pastures.

## Reports from the Field

**Jerry and Ellen Horak** of Glen Morris had a successful year with around 10 bluebirds fledged from 2 pairs. One pair nested twice in a box on their side lawn fledging 6 young ( 3 from each nesting ) I Banded the young and recaptured both adults at each nesting. The **ASY male 2341-53325** was banded as a nestling at the Radio Towers field near Glen Morris on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009. The **SY female 2341-53482** was banded as a nestling in the Vanymeren Apple Orchard just south of Glen Morris on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Two banded adults have been seen looking at the nest boxes over the winter. Probably the same pair.

**The Ottawa Duck Club** monitors 76 nest boxes in the counties of Ottawa Carleton. They fledged **38 bluebirds** and had 33 successful nesting's of Tree Swallow and 2 of House Wren. Thanks to **Ben Mancini** for sending in the data.

Long time supporters of OEBS **David and Sharon Turner** fledged 17 bluebirds from the 45 nest boxes on their trail in Grey County. Weather was listed as the number 1 presumed cause of nest failure. They had 19 nesting's of TRES and 1 of House Wren.

**Jean and Al Burbidge** report at least **14** bluebirds fledged from their 12 nest boxes they monitor on the **Dragons Fire Golf Course** in Wentworth County. Tree Swallows and 1 nest of Black Capped Chickadees used the other boxes. **Jean and Al** were close friends of the late **John Millman** who encouraged them to set up a trail on the golf course beside their home. It has proven to be very successful with good numbers of Tree Swallows fledging from the boxes not used by the bluebirds.

**The Orillia Naturalists Club nesting box trails** fledged **41 bluebirds** from the trails that are monitored by various members of the club in Simcoe County near Barrie. **Ray Kiff** started monitoring the trail in 1983 ( the trail had already been in existence for 10 years ). **Gord Luker** joined Ray in 1988 and continued until his passing in 2005. **Leanore Wiancko** has managed this trail since 2005. Also fledged were 3 nests of Tree Swallows and 1 nest of House Wren.

**BFNC's** ( Brereton Field Naturalists club )**Bluebird Nest Box Program** This is their second year of maintaining and monitoring a nest box trail. **Pat Duncan** and her husband **Rob Cook** have been coordinating this program. Boxes are located in Essa Township (24 boxes ) and Oro-Medonte ( 20 boxes ) near Barrie. **Brian and Lynne Gibbon, Peter Webster and Dan MacNeil** also have boxes on their property. A total of **33 bluebirds** and **101 Tree Swallows** were fledged in 2011. An additional 24 Dorrie style nest boxes were built by **John Doll, Marc Roy, Anthony Taliana and Liz Van Niekerk**.

**Dan Welsh** had a very successful year with **214** bluebirds fledged from **36** pairs. This represents a fledged young per pair total of **5.94**. This is very high compared with other trails in 2011. Way to go, hopefully 2012 will be just as good. Many of the pairs nested twice and many more young were fledged in August than in other months. Dan's 110 nest box trail is in the Strabane area north of Hamilton. The boxes that did not have bluebirds had Tree Swallows. Dan remarked that this has been the best Tree Swallow year ever.

**Wood duck Alfie ( Alfie Stanevicius )** had another good year with over **4000 eggs** laid of 4 species in his trail of 200 boxes. **Wood duck, Hooded Merganser, Great Crested Flycatcher, and Screech Owl** nested in his boxes.

The **Halton Bluebird Club** set a new record of **50** fledged bluebirds in 2011. Congratulations to all. This is a group effort with the following individuals. **Sylvia van Walsum, David McCamus, Floyd Elder, Bobbi Greenleese, Clive Hodder, Janet Truant, Joyce Le Chasseur, Karen and Bob Wood, Don Morrison, William and John Karner, John Bennett, Bill Evans, Anne Gillespie, and Laura Weihs**.

Long time supporters of OEBS, **John and Janet Foster** had a bad season for bluebirds but a good one for Tree Swallows with 170 fledged. ( a new record ) When they arrived back from a trip to Vancouver Island where they were doing some award winning nature photography only 3 TRES nests remained. Each swallow laid 4 eggs in these clutches but only 1 survived in 1 box while the other two had 2 young each. Janet attributes this to insect availability at this time of year. Only 1 pair of bluebirds was present and they were able to fledge 2 young. Hopefully 2012 will be a better year for bluebirds. Without the record rainfall we had in the early part of 2011. Late clutches of Tree Swallows never seem to do as well as the ones that hatch in early May. Overall Tree Swallows in Ontario had one of their best years in Southern Ontario.

**Wayne and Linda Buck** had a successful bluebird year with **28** fledged and **25** successful nesting's of Tree Swallow. Wayne and Linda just retired from the OEBS board but are still volunteering to be at the registration table, a job which they have done for at least the last 15 years and much appreciated. Their 40 nest boxes are located in Perth and Waterloo counties.

**Dennis Lewington** was able to fledge 54 bluebirds from 17 pairs on his 84 nest

box trail which he maintains in Bruce County. Dennis uses T-Bars and grease along with the George Coker Mud room box. This represents **3.17** fledged young per pair. Dennis states that weather wise it was a terrible year. Weather was circled as the number 1 cause of presumed nest failure. Twenty attempted nestings were unsuccessful. Also fledged were **142 Tree Swallows** and **10** nests of **House Wrens**. The record rainfall proved to be a real problem for most trails. Most bluebirders had lower numbers in 2011.

**Ernie Faulhafer** in Perth County had 1 successful nesting of bluebirds in a box in his backyard, **4 EABL fledged**.

**Ron Yorke** from Alliston had 4 successful broods of bluebirds from 5 pairs. Nineteen of 20 eggs hatched. Six nests of Tree Swallow and 1 nest of house wren also fledged.

**Helen Dutka** did not have any bluebirds in her 6 boxes in Halton County. She did have 1 nest of Tree Swallow and 1 nest of House Wren that had 2 broods. Maybe in 2012.

**Henry Miller** from Fort Francis fledged **159 bluebirds, 372 Tree Swallow** and **14 pairs of House wren**. His 226 nest boxes are located in the Rainy River District.

**Henry writes the following**-Spring arrived much earlier than usual. Summer weather occurred throughout April and May; so birds nested earlier. Rainfall was a bit above normal, but it was needed as drought like conditions seem to be the norm.

The rest of the summer was very hot with only 3 days of rain until the end of August. The drought continued throughout the fall. There's very little snow this winter.

Vandalism occurred along two trails north of Barwick. Someone shot the bird boxes with a shotgun in mid June killing nestlings and adults, 6 dead adults were found ( there were probably more ). **See -Conservation Award**.

**Kathy Sayeau** from Norfolk County had **5** young bluebirds fledge from 2 nest attempts ( same pair ). **Eleven Tree Swallows** also fledged from 2 other boxes. Since they nested close to her house she was able to feed them meal worms at least twice a day. To order meal worms see the home page of our website for the phone number.

**Kurt Frei** from Dundas had a very successful year with **55 bluebirds, 401 Tree Swallows** and **52 house wrens** fledged. His 109 nest boxes are located in the Hamilton-Burlington area. He uses mostly Peterson boxes and most are on steel poles and greased. Weather was recorded as the number 1 cause of presumed nest failure.

**Ken Reger** had another outstanding year with **452 bluebirds, 422 Tree**

**Swallows** and **4 nests of house wrens** fledged. Ken has 320 boxes in Waterloo County and 25 in Wellington county. He states that House Sparrows are a major problem in his area due to so many farms. He uses sparrow spookers and slot hole nest boxes to combat them. House Sparrows were recorded as the number 1 cause of presumed nest failure. Ken has maintained a nest box trail for 19 years.

Long time supporter of OEBS **Elwood Jones** fledged **41 bluebirds** from his 70 nest box trail in Northumberland County. He also had 1 successful nest of Black-capped Chickadees. Elwood celebrates his **91st birthday** on April 6<sup>th</sup>. Happy birthday **Elwood** and thanks for your support over the years.

**Willie Moore** of **Simcoe** had **5** bluebirds fledge from one nest in his 7 boxes. He also fledged 1 nest of Tree Swallow and 1 of House Wren. Willie has had at least 1 pair of bluebirds each year since 1984.

**Kelly Person** from Norfolk County had no success this year with her 2 boxes. Hopefully this year.

**Lynda Bere** had 1 pair of bluebirds that laid 4 eggs that did not hatch. Chipmunks make have been responsible for the nest failure. She also had a natural cavity pair that visited her bird bath on a regular basis. **Bird baths must be shallow enough so bluebirds are able to touch the bottom.**

**Lucille Coleman** had **71** bluebirds fledge from **18 pairs of bluebirds** on her trail of 55 nest boxes. This represents **3.94** nestling fledged per pair. Lucille has maintained her trail for the last 5 years. Eleven young and 12 eggs were unsuccessful. All poles are greased. House Sparrows and Raccoons were listed as the #1 and 2 causes of presumed nest failure. House Sparrow nests are removed on a regular basis,. Great results.

**George W Third** from Manitoulin Island ( Little Current ) has 50 nest boxes on his trail. In 2011 he was able to fledge **13** bluebirds fro 3 pair plus **20 nests of Tree Swallows** and 1 of House Wren.

**John DeCloet** from Langton was able to fledge **7 bluebirds** from 1 pair that nested twice. John has 3 nest boxes set out.

**Ruth and Vic Orr** representing the **Kawartha Field Naturalists** report that **108** bluebirds fledged from their nest boxes. This trail of 142 nest boxes is located in the **City of Kawartha Lakes**. House Wrens and weather were recorded as the number 1 and 2 presumed causes of nest failure. Twenty five nests of Tree Swallow, 12 of House Wren and 9 of Black-capped Chickadee also fledged from their boxes.

**Dorothy Hayley** fledged **54 bluebirds** from her 7 year old trail of 38 boxes in

Lanark County near **Perth**. **The boxes were checked once a week during the nesting season.** Dorothy comments- We had an increase in the number of swallows building nests on top of bluebird ones and with house Wrens aggressively building on top of newly laid bluebird eggs on second nest attempts. Her bluebird totals are 2005-**42**, 2006-**48**, 2007-**70**, 2008-**81**, 2009-**75**, 2010-**47**.

**David Lamble** reports that **84** bluebirds fledged from his 105 nest boxes in Dufferin County and **48** bluebirds fledged from his 346 boxes in Wellington County. This represents a combined **49 pairs** of bluebirds or **2.69** fledged young per pair. Dave also had a combined 148 nests of Tree Swallow, 4 of Black-capped Chickadee and 4 of House Wren. A total of 159 bluebirds were banded from these two trails.

**John Powers** fledged **81 bluebirds** from his 90 boxes in Bruce County. Bluebird pair's represented were **15 or 5.4 young per pair**. John also had 35 nests of Tree Swallow that fledged **183 young**. He writes the following- People should not be able to do bluebird boxes unless they take a course either online or in the classroom. Too many put up boxes in the wrong places or direction and loose the whole family and sometimes the adults. **Sounds like a good idea to me.**

Thanks to everyone for submitting their reports. As we all know it takes a tremendous amount of time and effort to properly maintain a bluebird trail. **The OEBS will not endorse bluebird trails that do not have full predator proofing of nest boxes.**

**2012 Baillie Birdathon** Sylvia Van Walsum has represented OEBS for most of the years we have been in existence, Sylvia raised \$1092 during the 2011 birdathon of which \$273 goes back to our club. She will again be representing us on the 2012 birdathon. If you would like to sponsor Sylvia on behalf of OEBS you can contact her at [vanwalsum.poaps@sympatico.ca](mailto:vanwalsum.poaps@sympatico.ca) She will also be at our March 17<sup>th</sup> AGM at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington. Thanks Sylvia for the effort **you have put in on behalf of OEBS.**

### **Why do birds start incubating before they have finished laying eggs?**

Many bird species lay just 1 egg per day. But they don't start incubating full time until they are done ( or nearly done ) laying the entire clutch. In the meantime' the eggs that were laid first are at risk – The longer an egg sits without incubation, the more it is exposed to microbial infection and predation, and the more likely it is to develop improperly due to improper temperatures. Birds with large clutches like the cavity-nesting Wood Duck, which lays 1 egg per day for 10-14 days, face a real challenge in keeping all the eggs viable and safe and on the same developmental schedule.



As it turns out' Wood Ducks don't need to worry so much about microbial infection. The egg whites of cavity -nesting ducks contain an extra enzyme not found in the egg whites of ground-nesting ducks. It is believed that this extra enzyme acts to suppress bacterial infection in the more humid environment of the nest cavity. Also, even though a Wood Duck hen does not start full incubation until after laying the next- to- last egg' all the eggs hatch within a few hours of each other- a neat trick that is apparently facilitated by the chicks chirping to each other from within the eggs and adjusting their development to match that of their siblings.

Most likely, Wood Ducks commence incubation before the clutch is complete in order to shorten the overall incubation period-the sooner the eggs hatch and the young can get out of the nest cavity, the lower the risk of predation or brood parasitism ( when a different hen dumps her eggs in an unguarded nest ).

Johnathan G.Walls, Garry R.Hepp, and Lori G.Eckhardt. 2011.**Effects of incubation delay on viability and microbial growth of Wood Duck (Aix sponsa ) eggs.** The Auk 128:663-670.

## **How do brood size and fledging date affect survival of Purple Martins?**

If you're a young Purple Martin, your odds of surviving your first year of life are greatly enhanced if you hatch early in the season and have few siblings. Why? For one thing it's often the older, more experienced mothers that breed early in the season, and those mothers are better at taking care of their young. Also, more food is available early in the season, so early broods are better fed. And if you hatch early in the season, you have more time to mature and gain flying and foraging experience before taking off for your winter vacation. You're better fed, healthier and more experienced – that adds up to a higher survival rate in the first year.

Similarly, if you have a lot of siblings, your parents may not be able to provide you with adequate nutrition. As a result, you'll leave the nest as a smaller, weaker fledgling compared to birds from small broods. Smaller and weaker adds up to a lower survival rate. On the bright side, coming from a large family is only detrimental during your first weeks out of the nest – if you can learn enough and eat enough to survive until fall migration, your odds of survival are the same as those of birds from smaller broods.

The real risk is migration. More than 80% of the mortalities among first-year birds occur during migration and on the wintering grounds. To effectively conserve migratory species, we need to better understand the threats they face from habitat loss, pesticides, etc in Central and South America.

Scott A.Tarof, Patrick M. Kramer, James R. Hill 111, John Tautin, and Bridget Stutchbury.2011. **Brood Size and Late Breeding are Negatively Related to Juvenile Survival in a Neotropical Migratory Songbird.** The Auk 128: 716-725

## **2011 Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society Conservation Award**

An award is given out each year to an individual or group that has made an outstanding contribution to Eastern Bluebird conservation during the preceding year and over that individual's lifetime. The 2011 conservation award has been awarded to **Henry Miller** of Fort Frances. Henry has maintained a bluebird trail with the help of the Fort Frances Sportsmen's Club since 1991. He was president at the time and decided to build some nest boxes to be set up in that community. Henry also works with the elementary schools to help build the nest boxes. He has also involved the children in tree planting, worm composting, nature hikes and snow shoeing. In 2011 he fledged **159 bluebirds** and **372 Tree Swallows**. **Congratulations Henry** for your contribution to bluebird conservation and for involving school children in the study of the natural world.

### **Previous OEBS Conservation Award Recipients**

- 1995 George Coker**
- 1996 Leo Smith**
- 1997 Hazel Bird**
- 1998 Don Wills**
- 1999 Sheldon Anderson Doug Harrison**
- 2000 Norm Shantz**
- 2001 Robert Burton**
- 2002 Halton Bluebird Club**
- 2003 Herb Furniss Don Parkes**
- 2004 Glanbrook Conservation Committee**
- 2005 Joe Hurst**
- 2006 Ottawa Duck Club**
- 2007 Gerry Powers**
- 2008 Ken Reger**
- 2009 Chris Lyons**
- 2010 Don Bissonnette- representing the Essex field naturalists bluebird committee**
- 2011 Henry Miller**