

2007 Fall Newsletter

Welcome to the 2007 fall newsletter. **The AGM is set for Saturday March 22, 2008** at The Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington.

The summer of 2007 in southern Ontario wasn't the hottest summer we have seen, but it still came in at 0.7oC above average. Only two of the last 10 years of summer temperatures recorded at the University of Waterloo weather station, has been below average.^{1 2}

There were very few reports of nesting failures that were weather-related. Many trail monitors reported numbers of returning EABL's were lower than 2006. March was an average month but April was 1.4oC below average. There was a period of two straight weeks where it was colder than average everyday.¹ Even with the very warm days that broke that streak; it wasn't enough to overcome those early very cold temperatures. Along with the cold temperatures, adding to the dreariness of the first half of April was the lack of sunny days and lots of days with a little bit of precipitation.

The cold ended on April 19th when it finally warmed up. By that time it was too late for some early returning tree swallows and eastern bluebirds. Other birds such as phoebes and woodcock also succumbed during this prolonged cold period. I found 15 dead tree swallows in nestboxes, six in one box, one of which was banded by Dave Lamble near Fergus. All died from starvation during this cold period. The first tree swallow was seen at Long Point on March 23rd and on my trail near St. George on March 26. They usually survive during cold periods but not for such a long duration with no warm temperatures. Don Wills found 4 dead eastern bluebirds in his boxes near Caledonia.

Other areas of eastern North America faired far worse than Ontario - John Rogers from New York reported he found 14 dead bluebirds in his boxes this spring. In one box, John found 2 dead males and one dead female. On the ground outside the box was another dead female. All were emaciated but with no other apparent damage. He also found 227 dead tree swallows on his trail at the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge. John also received an email from Barry Parker from Henderson, N.Y. who reported finding 51 dead tree swallows in one box. Early spring can sometimes be a difficult time for bluebirds as most of the edible berries have been eaten by this time and they must rely more heavily on insects.

May was slightly colder than average, but we did not have the extremes in temperature as we did last May 2006, especially during the May 21 Victoria Day weekend. The rest of the summer for the most part was ideal for nesting success.

Over all, it was a very successful nesting season with very few losses reported because of cold weather. The only downside was that we had fewer pairs returning on most trails than the previous year.

1. weather@ciumail.uwaterloo.ca
2. Long term averages based on 1971-2000 data for the Waterloo Wellington Airport.

Reports from the Field 2007

Dennis and Gwen Lewington fledged 104 bluebirds from their trail near Sauble Beach. Some losses occurred from cold weather in early June in that area. **Sylvia Van Walsum** of the Halton Bluebird Club reported much better nesting success than last year with 30 young fledged from 4 pairs, 156 tree swallows fledged from 198 eggs laid. Sylvia was our bird-a-thon

representative and along with her husband **William Poaps** raised \$600 of which \$150 is returned to the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society.

Herb Furniss and **Don Parkes** had a record year with 255 bluebirds fledged from 74 boxes. They use George Coker's mudroom box for most of their trail, which is located 4 miles north of Kirkfield on the Carden Alvar. Their first bluebird fledgings were not until June 8.

Ken Reger reported a very successful year with 341 bluebirds fledged from 141 boxes. His trail is located near St. Jacobs and north of Elmira.

Don Wills was able to fledge 583 bluebirds from his 420 nestbox trail near Caledonia. Don reported fewer returning pairs but almost perfect nesting success. Don had 1 pair of EABL's that laid their first egg on April 1st and were able to fledge 3 young despite the cold weather that lasted until April 19th.

Gerrard Powers near Owen Sound, fledged 289 bluebirds from 66 nests (4.375 fledged per successful nest). Gerrard also fledged 934 tree swallows. The only problem occurred with a number of nests that had eggs that did not hatch, otherwise a very successful year.

Don Bissonette of the Essex County Field naturalists reported 133 bluebirds fledged representing 24 pairs and 201 nestboxes. There were also 113 pairs of tree swallows and 32 pairs of house wrens - there were no reports of dead tree swallows in any boxes.

Bill Read, your long time and only newsletter editor, had 192 bluebirds fledged from boxes in apple orchards and surrounding areas near St. George and north of Hamilton.

Congratulations to all on a very successful year!!

I just received the November weather report from the University of Waterloo weather station. November was the coldest in the 10 years they have been operating. The prediction by Environment Canada is that this winter could be one of the coldest in the last 15 years. We are certainly off to a good start to make that prediction come true with a major winter storm on December 2, 2007. How will this affect bluebirds overwintering in Ontario and adjacent states around the Great Lakes?

The Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society mourns the loss of two dedicated bluebirders. Joe Hurst and Hank Zuzek, both died in 2007.

I first met Hank and his wife Ivanka on a bluebird field trip through the Federation of Ontario Naturalists that I led in the summer of 1986. Hank became a member of OEBS in 1988 and continued until his accidental death this year. Hank monitored a very successful bluebird trail near Beamsville and fledged between 75 and 100 bluebirds each year.

Joe Hurst started his trail in 1967 with his first two bluebirds in 1969. His best year was 2003 when he fledged over 300 bluebirds. Joe was one of the top bluebirders in the province. On the 107th count, St. Thomas led all CBC's in Ontario with 82 bluebirds. Most were probably from Joe's boxes. Both Joe and Hank will be sorely missed.

2001 - 2005 Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas

The second Ontario atlas showed significant increases in the province as a whole and in all four regions in which the Eastern bluebird breeds. The Eastern bluebird is one of the few grass land species that has shown a population increase since the first atlas, largely as a result of human intervention. Between 1981 and 2005, breeding bird survey data indicated an annual increase of 8% in Ontario. Based on point counts the Ontario population is now estimated at 40,000. I have enclosed the species account for the Eastern bluebird that will be in the second atlas. It is because of the continued efforts of bluebirders throughout the province that the bluebird story is a success. **Congratulations.**

The relative abundance map shows numerous nodes of high density for the Eastern bluebird in Southern Ontario. Higher densities almost always correlate with areas that have well managed predator-proof nestbox trails.

The Eastern bluebird was delisted in 1996 to the status considered not at risk in Canada based on a cosewic report by Read and Alvo in 1996.

What Bluebirding is all about

The idea behind bluebirding is to provide a safe, predator-proof nestbox for Eastern bluebirds to fledge more young than they would in natural cavities. Boxes should be built with no ventilation holes and the entrance hole should face away from the prevailing winds (in Southern Ontario most storms come out of the northwest and the east). **The Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society will not endorse boxes that do not have full predator protection.** A thorough application of grease on a t-bar or metal pole has proven to be almost 100% effective in keeping raccoons from climbing them. A special stove pipe guard can also be used to stop climbing predators, and is especially effective in stopping snakes such as the fox snake or black rat snake.

Bluebirding has progressed from just nailing up boxes to the nearest tree or fence post (these in most cases become feeding boxes for raccoons), to superior management techniques, supplemental feeding and heat in the box. Top bluebirders spent their own money on nestbox materials and don't rely on money from other sources to keep them going. In fact, the bigger the grant, the less that is done. Bluebird trails with boxes located on fence posts can have a negative effect on bluebird populations. Raccoons, after finding food in a box (a female bluebird or young) will visit other boxes in the area and predate those as well. It is up to you to stop this from happening. Since natural cavities are located on a random basis, only that one nest would be lost. If you are not able to protect your boxes, you should consider removing them in order to help the bluebird population. Unmanaged poorly located boxes continue to hurt the bluebird population.

Have Eastern Bluebirds changed their migration destination over the last 25 years? ¹

by Bill Read

The 107th Audubon Christmas bird counts (CBC's) from December 14, 2006 to January 5, 2007 in North America, recorded 94,771 Eastern bluebirds, 25,715 western bluebirds and 19,706 mountain bluebirds. Ontario and the States around the Great Lakes, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Michigan, accounted for 21.5% or 20,371 Eastern bluebirds on the 107th CBC. (see chart below)

Eastern Bluebirds Recorded on Audubon Christmas Bird Counts

CBC	Ontario	Texas	Georgia	Florida	Michigan	Ohio	Pennsyl- vania	New York
107th	511	8306	2510	2783	2337	5916	9096	2511
106th	580	6267	2410	2004	1777	4266	6036	2019
105th	223	9587	2161	2097	1440	3190	5242	1627
104th	547	5460	1908	1633	1824	3088	4380	1442
103rd	779	11151	2412	3276	3150	3538	6756	2373
102nd	406	7074	1877	2153	2033	5517	8463	2549
101st	496	9780	1389	2035	1302	3278	6158	1242
100th	622	7279	1458	1929	2121	4775	8509	2403
99th	470	9071	1846	2712	1507	3458	6345	1578
98th	269	6161	1803	1811	1373	3533	5284	1352
97th	252	7780	1938	1839	867	2411	5250	998
96th	136	5646	2167	1818	709	3434	5238	1218
95th	128	8111	2331	1603	1090	2849	5257	1166
94th	116	6564	1591	1386	592	2892	4356	1053
93rd	166	9197	2072	1639	532	3929	5038	1082
92nd	316	10952	2249	1632	483	3341	4534	1074
91st	59	8166	2749	1968	392	2012	3138	513
90th	140	8659	1708	1525	451	1793	2539	717
89th	73	5771	1738	1053	312	2268	2941	617
88th	62	10195	1395	1426	152	2080	2093	332
87th	79	7892	1777	1450	131	1939	2284	318
86th	24	5896	1365	817	100	1728	1720	290
85th	44	4900	1501	774	163	2573	1448	236

The 107th Audubon Christmas Bird counts took place from December 14, 2006 to January 5, 2007.

In Ontario, a total of 511 were counted mostly in Carolinian areas on the north shores of Lakes Erie and Ontario. Most Eastern bluebirds have migrated out of the province by the time the CBC took place and would undoubtedly bolster the numbers in the States mentioned especially Michigan, as they migrate along the north shores of Lakes Ontario and Erie and cross into Michigan at the east end of Lake Erie.

The highest count was in Pennsylvania with 9096 Eastern bluebirds recorded. The highest one circle count was Millersburg, Ohio with 894 bluebirds. This count circle is unique as 80% of the counters are Amish. The count circle is located in an Amish community and the Amish cover the area by either walking or by bicycle, they do not use cars.

The Ohio Amish community is similar to Pennsylvania's Lancaster County in many ways, but there is one big difference! The Ohio Amish community has embraced birding. For many years, a succession of teachers has encouraged young people to learn about the wonders of nature, especially birds.

**Measured at the Hamilton Airport Weather Station.
Winter December 1 - March 31**

Year	Average temp for decade (both highs and lows)	Average # of cold days (-15c) or below/decade/year
1960's	-4.2°C	21
1970's	-4.2°C	18
1980's	-3.5°C	17
1990's	-3.0°C	15

Numbers of bluebirds recorded on CBC's in Ontario, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Michigan have increased substantially from 1985 to 2007. These increases can be attributed to a concerted effort through nestboxes, but also a general warming trend that has seemed to delay migration so that bluebirds are not migrating as far south as they did 25 years ago. Weather data from the Hamilton airport Environment Canada weather station indicate a general warming during the 1980's and 1990's (see chart above).

Even when bluebirds were common in Ontario in the 1930's, they did not overwinter in the Hamilton area. It wasn't until 1953 that a single EABL was seen overwintering in Hamilton. From 1954 to 1985, bluebirds were recorded on only 4 Hamilton CBC's. From 1986 to 2007, bluebirds have been recorded on every CBC except two, 1993 and 1996 (count week).

In most years, bluebirds are able to overwinter successfully in Ontario. This increase in CBC numbers would indicate a change in migration destination with more and more bluebirds overwintering further north. An Eastern bluebird banded near Bowmanville by Dennis Barry on June 11, 1969 was recovered near Thomasville, Georgia in January 1970, some 951 miles to the south. Dennis Barry and Jim Richards established a very successful bluebird trail near Bowmanville in 1967. Two other Eastern bluebirds banded in Southern Ontario were also recovered in Georgia. One in 1939 and the other in 1951. One other bluebird banded in 1936 near Ottawa was recovered in Lake City Florida.³

The Manitoba population of Eastern bluebirds has historically migrated to Texas and Kansas to overwinter before returning in the spring. There are four records of birds banded in Manitoba recovered in Texas (2) and Kansas (2). If bluebirds are still migrating this far, we would expect to see an increase on CBC's with the population increase. This has not happened in either Florida or Georgia. Bluebirds in Georgia increased from 1501 on the 85 count to only 2510 on the 107th count.

Have they delayed their migration so they arrive later or are they overwintering further north?

In summary, a general warming in Eastern North America in the past 27 years, has changed the Eastern bluebirds migration destination so that more overwinter in Ontario and the States adjacent to the Great Lakes.

1. Article based on Audubon Christmas bird count data from 1985 to 2007
3. Canadian Atlas of Bird Banding Volume 1: (Brewer et al 2006)

OEBS 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. The 2006 award was given to the Ottawa Duck Club, near Kanata Ontario. This club has been a long time member of the OEBS and has had a very successful bluebird trail in that area with Jim Sauer, Barc Dowden and Tony and Gretchen Denton doing most of the monitoring. Congratulations and keep up the good work.

OEBS Conservation Award Recipients	
1995	George Coker
1996	Leo Smith
1996	Hazel Bird
1998	Don Wills
1999	Sheldon Anderson/Doug Harrison
2000	Norm Shantz

OEBS Conservation Award Recipients	
2001	Robert Burton
2002	Halton Bluebird Club
2003	Herb Furniss/Don Parkes
2004	Glanbrook Conservation Committee
2005	Joe Hurst
2006	Ottawa Duck Club

North American Bluebird Society Membership Offer

In our continuing effort to align the NABS closer with affiliates, the NABS Board is extending a discounted membership offer to your members. This offer applies not only to affiliate members who are joining NABS for the first time but also to renewals and extensions. It runs from January 1, 2007 to January 31, 2008, and reduces NABS membership to \$15.00 per year for both single and household memberships. This is a reduction from \$20.00 for single and \$30.00 for household.

Detailed information can be found at a separate location on our website: www.nabluebirdsociety.org/a+ , or /Aplus. For your members who don't have internet access, they can send their new, renewal or extension to NABS, PO Box 43, Miamiville, OH 45147, with a notation that the special A+ offer applies.

North American Bluebird Society Conservation Award

Don Wills was awarded the NABS Conservation Award at the 2007 NABS conference in Athens Georgia.

On March 21, 2007, Don was nominated by the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society for the NABS Conservation Award. After careful consideration by their nomination committee, Don was selected for this award. Don is one of the best bluebirders in Ontario. During the breeding season, he works tirelessly at monitoring his boxes. From 1995 to 2007, Don has fledged 5928 bluebirds from his 420 boxes. Congratulations Don!!