



Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society

2021 Fall Newsletter ~ Editor Bill Read

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Membership Dues are payable on December 31 each year. Go to our website oebs.ca and click on Join, Renew or Donate.

Welcome to the 2021 Fall newsletter. We have scheduled our next AGM for Saturday, March 19, 2022 at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington. We are hopeful that we can meet in person for the first time in 3 years. At our board meeting on October 14 we decided that we would have an in person meeting at our usual location at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington. No one will be allowed to attend unless they are fully vaccinated. If conditions change and we can't meet in person we will have a virtual AGM.

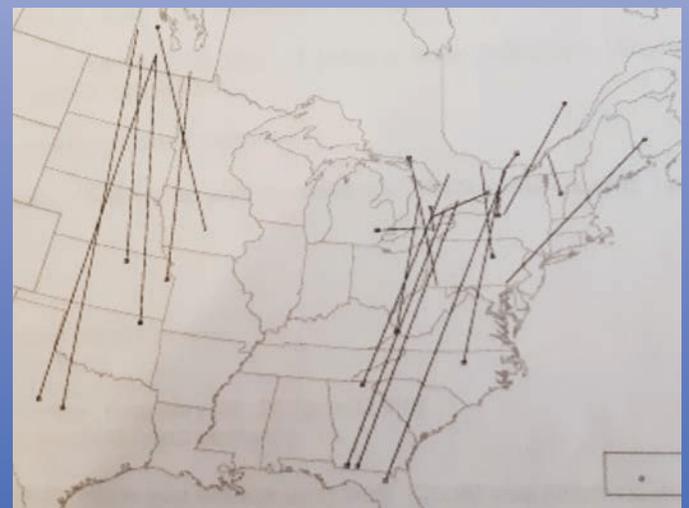
Last winter we experienced a polar vortex that lasted from the beginning of February 2021 to about the 20th. Below average temperatures extended well into the lower US with a lot of rain, snow and ice. On February 15th and 16th all of the state of Texas was under a winter storm warning. Almost four million people were without power in Texas. In Kansas with the wind chill, temperatures dropped to as low as -34°C in some areas. This polar vortex extended all the way across to the eastern seaboard but was most severe in areas around Texas and Kansas. Mostly eastern and some Mountain Bluebirds that nest in Manitoba migrate as the map shows to Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas. Bluebirds that nest above the western end of Lake Superior and the areas around Thunder Bay and the Rainy River district would follow the same migration routes as the Manitoba Bluebirds. Reports from these areas indicate there was a marked decline in returning bluebird numbers in 2021. Phil Weiss (Friends of the bluebirds) said there were widespread reports from members of occupancy down approximately 80% or more in South Western Manitoba. Henry Miller from Rainy River reported that bluebirds were very scarce with only a few pairs that nested. It is very likely that lower numbers of returning eastern and Mountain Bluebirds in these areas are a direct result of higher than usual overwintering mortality caused by this weather event.

Henry also said that Tree Swallows had an exceptional year with 79 pairs fledging over 400 nestlings. Early reports from southern and central Ontario indicate that Tree Swallows also had a very productive year. .

The first Two weeks of April in southern Ontario were unseasonably warm. This stirred bluebirds to nest a bit earlier than normal. A few days can make a big difference in being successful or not. It started to get much colder towards the

end of the month. A stretch of below average temperatures and lows of 0°C and -1°C combined with strong N W winds from early May to May 11 caused widespread nestling mortality. Very similar to 2020. I lost 11 nests during this period that had young or were still on eggs. A lot of these pairs moved on because of the failure. This cold also affected hatching success with somewhat smaller broods. The end of May was also unseasonably cold. May 28 was only 4°C with continual rain all day. This combined with strong east winds resulted in more nestling mortality. On May 29 I removed 27 dead Eastern Bluebird nestlings. What started out to be a record year with 50 pairs on May 1 quickly went downhill in a hurry. Overall a good year for most but with somewhat reduced numbers. We will know the overall picture of breeding success in 2021 when I get more reports in as some people did extremely well. Weather is always the most important factor affecting breeding success and overwintering survival.

Margaret Kalogeropoulos. It is with sadness that I tell you that long time bluebird member Margaret Kalogeropoulos passed away on Sept 14, 2020. She had been in charge of the bluebird monitoring program at Short Hills in the Niagara Region for many years. She was also an active Bruce Trail hiker. The Bruce Trail Conservancy named a trail (860 M Margaret Kalogeropoulos trail) to honour Margaret, in memory of her dedication and support of the Bruce Trail. Our condolences to the family.



Migration map Eastern Bluebird

Canadian Atlas of Bird Banding, Environment Canada. David Brewer et al



Salvaged nest boxes from the Canadian Wildlife Service



Finished product

2021 Nest Box Reporting Form

This form can be downloaded from the website. oebs.ca Just go to the section on nest boxes. It is right at the end of that section.

Nest Box Trail Registry

When something happens to a trail operator it can be difficult to locate where he or she had their nest boxes. Why not set up a trail registry that includes the locations of all the nest boxes that person has on their trail so if something happens it would be easy to find them. That way would make it easier to reassign them to someone else. We can discuss this at the AGM.

We need your input

What would you like to see in our newsletter. Send me an email with your suggestions [Bill Read billreadsbooks@gmail.com](mailto:BillRead@billreadsbooks@gmail.com)

New Board Members

We need new board members to help run the bluebird Society. We currently have an executive board of 10 people. We are looking for individuals who have good computer skills.

Applications for open position(s) must be received at least 1 week in advance of the AGM, in writing or by email to the chair of the election committee. The chair of the election committee will be listed on our about us page on the website. Should applications received exceed the number of open positions, the applicant(s) will be selected by vote at the AGM. Individuals interested in joining the board can be appointed to the board in an interim position during the middle of a term but must be voted in at the next AGM to become an official board representative.

76 nest boxes ready for 2022

Bill Read

Now and over the winter is the time to get yourself ready for the next bluebird season. A seniors center with a wood shop is a good place to do your construction work. I am

lucky to be able to use the Durwood seniors center wood shop in Cambridge. Anyone over the age of 50 is eligible. The cost is minimal at \$75 per year. I salvaged these nest boxes from the Canadian Wildlife Service and rebuilt them. Each nest box is fastened to a metal pole or T-bar using hose clamps and protected by grease.

Brock and **Sherri Fenton** have graciously provided a series of pictures of native cavity nesting birds in flight for inclusion in our newsletter. Brock Fenton is a noted bat



Barn Swallow with young



Bank Swallow



Bank Swallow with young



Cliff Swallow with young



Great Crested Flycatcher



Tree Swallow with food

ecologist and researcher. He received his Ph.D. in 1969 for his work on the ecology and behaviour of bats. Pictures of some of our native cavity nester's are shown here.

Dan Baarda had an unusual experience in on of his Gilbertson nest boxes this year. An Eastern Bluebird layed 3 eggs in one of his boxes near Beamsville, after something happened to the female a pair of Tree Swallows took over the nest box and laid 4 more eggs. All of the eggs hatched except one bluebird egg. Dan had another bluebird nest with 4 eggs that weren't hatching so he removed those eggs and put in the two young bluebirds from the first nest. Parts of the infertile egg shells were also put in the nest along with the two young bluebirds to simulate hatching. They were accepted immediately and fledged successfully along with the four Tree Swallows from nest number one. This pair had another successful nest with only one egg that didn't hatch. All pictures by **Dan Baarda**.

Editors note - I had a similar event happen in 2010 when a female bluebird laid five eggs and then disappeared, a second year female Tree Swallow took over the nest and laid one additional egg. All of the eggs hatched except one bluebird egg that was infertile. After 3-4 days the one Tree Swallow young was being out competed for food. Don Wills had a nest with 5 infertile eggs so we removed those eggs and put in the four bluebird young from my nest. They accepted them immediately and all four fledged along with the one Tree Swallow from the initial nest. Allowing the bluebirds to fledge from the Tree Swallow nest would result in the deaths of the bluebirds as the Tree Swallows would not feed them. Bluebirds fly into a tree when they fledge and wait there for the parents to come with food for them. Tree Swallows are able the fly very well after they fledge and are only fed by the adults for a very short period of time, maybe a day before they are on their own. I always look for Tree Swallow nests that have a lot of accumulated fecal matter in the nest after fledging that indicates they have stayed in the nest the right amount of time before fledging. Tree Swallows

adults do not remove fecal sacs the last few days before the young leave.

On occasion I have used Tree Swallows as foster parents for bluebird young after they became orphaned well I looked for a suitable nest to put them in. The picture shows two bluebirds in with Tree Swallow young. I only put them in nests where both swallows and bluebirds were able to reach their heads up to the same level so they would be fed equally. The combination of bluebirds and Tree Swallows could be no more that six. Tree Swallows feed their young insects and are excellent providers. I never had any fatalities of either swallows or bluebirds as all fledged successfully. All bluebirds were eventually put in other bluebird nests.



Eastern Bluebird and Tree Swallow nestlings

Georg Hentsch

On one other occasion I was brought 4 newly fledged bluebirds in a box to my house. What to do? I knew of one nest of bluebirds that a few days earlier had fledged young into a tree at the back of an apple orchard. I put them in a cardboard box with a screen over the side and placed the box on the ground below where the adults and fledged young were in the trees above. I wanted to see if they would accept them. As soon as the young made their food begging calls the adults immediately came down to investigate and to encourage them to fly up into a tree. I knew then they would be accepted and fed with a good chance of being successful bluebirds. I then removed the screen so could fly up.

What is the best size for a bluebird nest box?

This question is debated quite often with the proponents of each nest box claiming theirs is the best design. From my experience over the years bluebirds will nest in just about any nest box provided it is located in suitable habitat. The often held belief is that a larger interior area would be more beneficial than a smaller one. **T.David Pitts** from the University of Tennessee designed a study of nest box size in order to be able to make some determination as to which nest box size is more beneficial to bluebirds. He began by



Gilbertson nest box with bluebird and Tree Swallow eggs



Tree Swallow nestlings and 2 bluebird young



Transferred bluebird young

constructing 10 nest boxes and placed them in pairs. Each pair consisted of a small and large box. They were of standard rectangular shape, the large boxes had a floor size of 4 x 5 inches (22 square inches) and the small boxes were 3 inches x 3.7 inches. (11 square inches). To assure that box size and not some other factor was influencing the birds when they selected a nest site, it was necessary to have the boxes identical except for size. Each of the 10 pairs of nest boxes were monitored once a week during the nesting seasons of 1977-1984. During this time 94 nests were constructed in the paired boxes. The bluebirds in his study area did not show a distinct preference for either size of nest box. They built 50 nests in the large boxes and 44 in the small one. The small deviation from 50% could easily have been due to chance rather than some deliberate choice made by the birds. The average clutch size in the small box was 4.7 compared to 4.6 for the large box. The average number of fledglings from the small box was 4.3 compared to 4.0 for the big box. From **T.David Pitts**. *Studying Eastern Bluebirds. A Biologists Report and Reflections*. I highly recommend reading this book.

2020 Conservation Award Winner Elizabeth Kellogg

The 2020 Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society Conservation award was presented to Elizabeth Kellogg at our virtual AGM



Elizabeth Kellogg

PREVIOUS OEBS CONSERVATION AWARD RECIPIENTS

1995	George Coker	2007	Gerry Powers
1996	Leo Smith	2008	Ken Reger
1997	Hazel Bird	2009	Chris Lyons
1998	Don Wills	2010	Don Bissonnette
1999	Sheldon Anderson and Don Harrison	2011	Henry Miller
2000	Norm Shanz	2012	Lucille Coleman
2001	Robert Burton	2013	David Hampton
2002	Halton Bluebird Club	2014	Josef Kral
2003	Herb Furniss and Don Parkes	2015	Elwood Jones
2004	Glanbrook Conservation Committee	2016	Dan Welsh
2005	Joe Hurst	2017	Kurt Frei and Peter Rae
2006	Ottawa Duck Club	2018	Mary Anne Rose and Karen Tufford Brehn
		2019	Dennis and Gwen Lewington
		2020	Elizabeth Kellogg

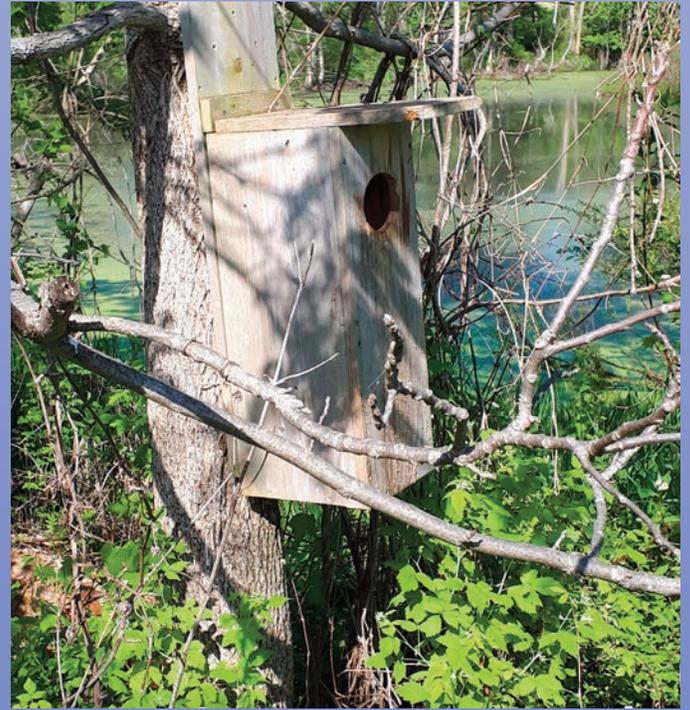


Find the Owl in this picture

on March 20, 2021. For the last 24 years Elizabeth has monitored up to 100 Eastern Bluebird and Tree Swallow nest boxes, primarily at three locations in Northumberland County and one site in Durham region. Elizabeth involves school children in her conservation projects, especially for the nest box trail at the Darlington Nuclear Generating Station. Some may be interested in the construction of nest boxes, some may be interested in monitoring, and some may be interested in compiling and analyzing the data. Elizabeth believes if we mentor young people in projects like this, it might spark a life long interest in the natural world. Elizabeth now joins an exclusive group that includes the likes of Hazel Bird and Leo Smith. Indeed an award well deserved.

Join us on March 19, 2022 to see who the 2021 conservation award winner is.

Wood Duck boxes should never be put up on trees. See the [Wood Duck Society of North America](#) for recommended set up and predator protection. The following shows an example of a poorly erected nest box on a tree that was predated by a raccoon. Both the eggs and incubating female were lost.



Wood Duck box