



# Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society

## 2023 Spring Newsletter ~ Editor Bill Read

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Welcome to the 2023 spring newsletter. I am excited to announce that we will hold an in person AGM at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington on Saturday, March 18th, 2023. This will be our 34th annual meeting and the first in person meeting in three years. Mask wearing will be up to each attendee. Last year 2022 was the sixth driest year since records began in the Waterloo region in 1914. June to September were very dry with only 40% of the average precipitation. It was the lowest total precipitation in the Waterloo area since 1963. Herb Furniss who has nest boxes in the Carden Plain area (Victoria County) remarked that it was so dry there were no second nesting's of bluebirds, just no insects. He said this has never happened before. This January 2023 was the 4th warmest January since records were started in the Waterloo region in 1914 at 4.5°C above average. The last warmer one was in 2006 and then you have to go all the way back to 1932 and 1933. For comparison January 2022 was 4°C below average. Except for a couple of bitterly cold days at the start of February 2023 it is looking much like it did last month with record breaking temperatures. As long as we don't end up with an ice storm as we did in 2003 this could be an excellent year for bluebirds. My only concern is that being so warm with no snow bluebirds will nest earlier making them more vulnerable to the cold we usually get in early May. More and more bluebirds are being reported further north each year. The Owen Sound Naturalists reported seeing a flock of 5 bluebirds on February 1, 2023 near Owen Sound.

We are also arranging video streaming of the meeting for those unable to attend in person. An admission fee of \$10 will be charged for in person attendance and for those watching the video streaming. Donuts and coffee will be provided. We will again have the bucket raffle. Please bring your bucket raffle items to the meeting. Money collected from the admission fee and the **bucket raffle** helps OEBS cover the costs of the room rental, video streaming and speaker honorariums.

We are planning to have 4 speakers plus the bucket raffle. The morning session will have 2 speakers, the first one on bluebirds in apple orchards by Bill Read and the second by the Fatal Light Awareness group on how to stop window kills. The first afternoon session will be a talk on bird control at the Pearson International Airport by Amanda Rollinson and the second a video by Peter Rea on

the Wood Duck life cycle. Amanda will bring one of her Harris Hawks that are used to clear birds off the runways. The bucket raffle will follow.

Looking forward to seeing everyone on the 18th.

### ***Notice From the OEBS Board Election Committee***

The OEBS constitution requires that open positions on the OEBS board be filled by election at the Society's Annual General Meeting.

There are currently 4 open positions on the board and all members present and in good standing at the Saturday, March 18th, 2023 AGM will be asked to vote for individuals to fill these 4 vacant positions.

*The following two pictures by Peter Rea show a natural tree cavity 60-70 feet up in an old woodpecker hole that fledged four bluebirds on August 26, 2021. Located in a conservation area near Hamilton. The forest near this spot borders a meadow where the late Kurt Frei and Peter set up nest boxes 20+ years ago. Observed by Marjorie Middleton and Peter Rea the day the four nestlings fledged from this 70 foot high cavity. They flew short distances to branches nearby.*



There are currently 4 nominations for these open positions, and these are as follows:

John Balga, Director at Large  
Helen Toner, Director at Large  
Sarah Sharp, Director at Large  
Chris Mouriolopoulos, Director at Large

Any member in good standing interested in serving in one of the open positions can do so by submitting in writing or email to the chair of the elections committee by no later than March 11th, 2023.

Applications can be submitted to :

Stewart Mclellan, Chair of the Elections  
Committee  
219 Lee Avenue  
Whitby, Ontario, L1N5L4  
stewart.mclellan@cardinalenviro.ca

## ***Nest Box Reports 2022***

The 2022 breeding season will go down as one of the best years ever for both Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows. Weather was a huge factor as it was cold in April which resulted in fewer bluebirds nesting too early as they have done the last 2 years. It appeared that clutch sizes for first broods were smaller this year than 2021. And they were. Clutch sizes for nests initiated before June 1 was 4.86 eggs per nest in 2021 and 4.63 eggs for 2022. Not sure why that was, possibly the cold weather in April influenced clutch size. I calculated average first egg dates in April for both 2021 and 2022. In 2021 it was April 17th and in 2022 it was April 23. This is a six day difference which did make a huge difference in reproductive success when comparing both years. This later first egg date combined with warm weather in May created ideal conditions for nest box success. The rest of the summer was ideal for nest box success. The number of pairs of returning bluebirds was also higher this year on most well managed nest box trails. My final count was 88 pairs. Last year I had 64 pairs. There were just more bluebirds in 2022. Most reports indicate that on well managed nest box trails Tree Swallows also had a good year.

House Wrens remain as the number 1 reason more bluebirds were not successful. Many bluebird nests were lost to House Wren egg removal. The best strategy is to not let them nest. If after either bluebirds or Tree Swallows have fledged and it looks like a House Wren is about to nest cover the nest hole with a wood cover. ( see 2022 Fall newsletter for picture ). House wrens are a federally protected species under the Migratory Birds Convention Act and their nests, eggs and young cannot be tampered with. Putting a cover over the nest hole before they attempt to nest does not violate any of the above. House Sparrows have declined but still one male killed 4 young bluebirds



***House Wren guard***

in one of my boxes. Renee Hallman also lost a nest with four young to a male House Sparrow. The bluebird Society recommends removing all House Sparrows and humanely dispatching them. A recent Survey put the world House Sparrow population at 1.4 billion. The European Starling population world wide was pegged at 1.2 billion.

After 2 of 4 bluebird eggs had been laid a male House Wren was spotted nearby singing. I (Renee Hallman) erected this simple cardboard guard. (see picture). Backed my car up and observed female bluebird going in the box after about 15 minutes. Every subsequent nest check the male House Wren was nearby singing but did not interfere with the nest. When the babies fledged I put on a nest box cover to prevent the House Wren from attempting to nest I tried this at another box where 1 bluebird egg had been laid from a new female but she abandoned and the House Wren removed the egg. I then put a cover over the nest hole to prevent the House Wren from nesting. A further note - Renee said I would do it after the first egg was laid if it was their second brood. I think the other one abandoned because it was a new pair and a new box to them.

***Editors note.*** House Wrens being protected by law present a more difficult management approach. The one approach I use is to cover the nest hole and leave it closed until the wrens have left or remove the nest box and place it in another wren free location.

***Renee Hallman*** manages 20 nest boxes in Oxford County. A total of **65** bluebirds fledged from the 81 eggs that were laid. There were 7 successful double clutches. Eggs were lost to House Wren interference in 4 boxes and a male House Sparrow killed 4 young in another box. Also fledged were 42 Tree Swallows. Two adult House Sparrows were trapped and removed. All boxes were covered at the end of the season to prevent House Wrens from nesting and Deer mice from overwintering in the nest box. All nestling bluebirds were banded by Bill Read who provided support in the management of this trail.



**John Balga** monitors 17 nest boxes in Essex County and had 4 bluebirds fledge from one pair. The other 16 boxes produced 79 Tree Swallows from the 84 eggs that were laid. John uses Dorrie nest boxes on T-bars that are well greased. Also fledged from John's colony were 291 Purple Martins from 71 pair. The **Ontario Purple Martin Association** had a cumulative total of 5652 fledged Purple Martins from 1379 pairs.

**Karen** and **Glenn Root** fledged 22 bluebirds from 4 pair on their farm in Halton. They monitor 14 nest boxes and all are protected by grease or stove pipe type guards. Seven nests of Tree Swallows were successful with only 1 nest failure.

**Jessica Hale** fledged 117 bluebirds from her 60 nest boxes in Niagara Region. This is from 140 eggs which is 117/140 – 83.57 % egg to fledged young. Anything over 70% is considered good.

Eighteen eggs did not hatch. Poles are greased to prevent raccoon predation. Also fledged were 142 Tree Swallows, 5 Black Capped Chickadees and 2 House Wrens. Only 3 Tree Swallow nests were unsuccessful. All House Sparrow nests are removed. House Sparrows and raccoons were listed 1 and 2 as the presumed cause if eggs or nestlings were lost. Overall an excellent year.

**Courtcliffe Park** - Karen and Glenn monitored this site in 2022 and fledged 23 bluebirds from the 27 nest boxes located there. Also fledged successfully were 19 nests of Tree Swallows with only 2 unsuccessful nests. All nest boxes have predator protection.

Unfortunately this site will not be monitored by the Roots in 2023. Continual interference by one person made it very difficult to monitor and unsafe to do so. View the Carlisle Facebook group post of December 8, 2022 by Karen Root where she explains why they are leaving this site. All nest boxes belonging to the Roots and the Bluebird Society have been removed. After the December 8th Facebook post many people in the immediate area have come forward with support and new areas to relocate these nest boxes. Some of these new locations were monitored by the late Dan Welsh.

The **Halton Bluebird Club** had a record year with **78** bluebirds fledged. They also had a nest of 3 bluebirds that fledged from a robins nest. This group manages 72 nest boxes- (38-West trail, 34- East trail). All boxes are on t-bars. Also fledged were 160 Tree Swallows from 206 eggs. Six nests were unsuccessful. House Wrens were recorded as the # 2 presumed cause if eggs or nestlings were lost. A total of 25 bluebird eggs and 6 nestlings were lost along with a female bluebird found dead over 4 eggs. There were 23 active nests of House Wrens in 22 boxes that fledged 90 young. This is down from 99 in 2021. Thanks to Joyce Lechasseur for coordinating this group.

Another great year for **John Powers** who fledged 216 bluebirds from an estimated 42 pairs - 216/42- 5.14 young per pair. John has 162 nest boxes on his trail. There were 4 white bluebirds eggs among the 240 that were laid. Boxes are on steel posts with pvc pipe protection. Also fledged were 410 Tree Swallows from 464 eggs that were laid. ( 79 successful nests ). John noted that swallows had smaller clutches this year. Another excellent year.

**Gerard Powers** had a rebound year with 289 bluebirds fledged. This is from a total of 330 eggs and represents 44 pair of bluebirds. Nine of the 330 eggs were white. Gerard commented that it was a great year weather wise which resulted in fewer failures than the last two years. Also fledged were 440 Tree Swallows from 81 successful nests. All boxes are on T-bars and heavily greased. Jerry monitors 156 nest boxes located in Grey County. Boxes are checked bi- weekly or more if necessary. Jerry would like to thank all the farmers that have helped him in making this a very successful nest box trail.

**Stewart Mclellan** - 2022 was a good year for American Kestrels with 7 boxes in Durham Region and 1 in Cambridge used by kestrels. All 8 boxes had clutches of 5 eggs and all 40 eggs hatched for a hatch rate of 100%. All fledged. During the 2022 season, blood samples were collected from all 40 nestlings and these samples are currently at Cornell University awaiting analysis for agricultural chemical concentrations in the samples. For the 2023 season we have received approval for colour banding of kestrel chicks from the 11 boxes. A total of 61 Tree Swallows fledged from 11 nest boxes. 2022 marked the first year that bluebirds nested in one of the boxes fledging 3 young from 4 eggs (3 hatched ).

**Darlene Chesney** had a good year with 14 bluebirds fledged from 4 nests. One nest of 4 young was lost during May and adult bluebird feathers were found on the ground. If it was a Merlin or Coopers Hawk they would carry the prey away and eat it somewhere else. They hunt birds on the wing. Sounds like a raccoon. They would eat the adult below the nest box and usually leave the wings there. There were 5 successful nests of Tree Swallows. Overall a good year.

Your editor **Bill Read** had an excellent year with **475** bluebirds fledged from 88 pair of bluebirds. 475/88- **5.4** young per pair. This broke the previous bluebird fledged record by 80 bluebirds. A total of 648 eggs were laid which is an egg to fledge percentage of 475/648-**73.3%**. Anywhere between 70-75% is very good. Over 600 were banded. A total of 166 adults were trapped of which 80 were previously banded. The other 86 were banded when I trapped them. I have re-trapped in total 1653 bluebirds, these records are now being analyzed by Environment and Climate Change Canada. A total of 1039 Tree Swallows also

fledged. This total includes my boxes, the Doon golf course, Blair Flats ( part of the rare Charitable Research Reserve in Cambridge ) and Toyota. Renee Hallman and I monitored the nest boxes at Toyota for the last 5 years. I will not be monitoring Blair Flats or Toyota in 2023.

The **Orillia Naturalists Club** c/o **Marilyn Clark** had an excellent year with 65 bluebirds fledged. Forty -four boxes are monitored on this trail located in Simcoe County. Tree Swallows also had a good year with 40 fledged young. Also fledged were 7 House Wren, 8 Black Capped Chickadee and 1 nest of House Sparrow. Weather was recorded as the number 1 presumed cause if nestlings or eggs were lost.

**Dan** and **Manley Baarda** fledged 60 bluebirds from their 23 year old trail of 74 nest boxes in Lincoln County. A total of 126 eggs were laid of which 4 were white. Hatching success was not good in 2022 with 50 eggs unhatched. House Wrens, weather and House Sparrows were listed as the 1-2-3 presumed cause if eggs or nestlings were lost. There were 21 successful nests of Tree Swallows that fledged 96 young. Only 3 unsuccessful nests of Tree Swallows. There were 22 pairs of Eastern Bluebirds on this trail. Boxes are mounted on ½ inch steel conduit with inverted large coffee can below the nest box.

**Oro-Medonte Leanore Wiancko** reports that her boxes fledged 20 bluebirds and a record total of 35 Tree Swallows. Leanore said that this is the lowest number for bluebirds ever. Also fledged were 22 House Wrens.

**Lane Henderson** and **Clare Holden** currently monitor Nature Barrie's nest box trail of 80 boxes. This year they installed another 16 nest boxes on the Trans Canada Trail in Essa Township, to capture data for the third breeding bird atlas. A number of individual nest boxes from other members brings the total monitored to 105. Bluebirds fledged 100 young from 30 nests and 123 eggs. Also fledged were 203 Tree Swallows, 76 House Wrens and 6 Black Capped Chickadee. Overall a very successful year.

Another productive year for **Herb Furniss** with 157 bluebirds fledged from the 90 nest boxes he monitors in Victoria County (City of Kawartha Lakes ). To date Herb has fledged 4461 Eastern Bluebirds during the 43 years he has had a bluebird trail. A total of 197 eggs were laid which is 157/197- 79.7% egg to fledge percentage. No predator protection is provided. Herb said it is unnecessary here. He uses the Coker box. Weather and House Wrens were recorded as the No 1 presumed cause if eggs or young went missing. Two nests of Tree Swallows fledged 12 young. For the first time ever there were no second nests of bluebirds. This was attributed to the extreme dryness. No insect food available because of the dryness. Because of this some farmers in the area have gone to sun powered pumps to draw well water for their live stock. Keep up the good work Herb.

**Henry Miller** reports that 16 pairs of bluebirds fledged 79 young from his nest box trail of 81 boxes in Rainy River District north west of Thunder Bay. A good rebound from 2021 when few bluebirds returned after over wintering in the Texas, Kansas and the Oklahoma area. Many died from the polar vortex that hit their over wintering areas around the beginning of February that year. Henry writes that in 2022 it was a cool wet start to June, as some bluebirds finally arrived. They did not start nesting till the 16th of June, three weeks later than usual. The young of two late pairs died during a violent thunderstorm just before fledging at the end of August. Henry also had 32 pairs of Tree Swallows that fledged 151 young. He has distributed hundreds of nest boxes to groups and individuals in the area. Many of these monitors reported successful broods.

**Chris Lyons** had a good year with a total of 253 bluebirds fledged from 55 pair. This was from 37 single broods- 131 fledged and 18 double broods fledging 122 young. There were 39 unsuccessful nests including 64 dead nestlings that Chris attributes to neonicotinoids. At least 10 nests of eggs were removed by House Wrens and a male House Sparrow killed a female bluebird that was brooding young.

There were 130 successful nests of Tree Swallows. Also fledged were 8 nests of Wood Duck, 4 nests of Common Merganser and 7 of Black Capped Chickadee. House Wrens removed the eggs from two other nests of Chickadees.



*This hole was likely made by a Downy Woodpecker. It probably roosted in the box previously and when I put the cover on in the fall it could not get in so it made its own entrance. Downy woodpeckers roost in the boxes over the winter.*



## ***Dreaming of Frying up that tasty raccoon you accidentally ran over?***

If you've found some delicious animal that became a victim of a brush with a speeding vehicle, you will need to fill in a form if you intend to keep it. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry says if you want to keep a dead wild animal like a White-tailed deer, moose, elk, black bear, hawk, eagle, owl or other fur bearing mammals that have been killed or found on a roadway, you are required to submit a **Notice of Possession** upon acquiring the dead animal. This allows you to keep the dead wild animal for personal use but you must keep the confirmation of registration for as long as the animal is in your possession. You cannot sell dead wild animals. Special rules apply to endangered or threatened animals. These rules are put in place to prevent someone from shooting a Snowy Owl or other animal and then saying it was hit by a car.



*Grey Phase Screech Owl and nestling Wood Duck. This nest box is in Florida. The story is that the Screech Owl nested in the box and they believe a Wood Duck hen deposited 1 egg in the nest which the owl incubated. They observed the baby Wood Duck jump out of the box and head for a near by pond. Screech Owls occupy Wood Duck boxes over the winter but usually leave in early spring which allows Wood Ducks to nest in that box. Next time you go by a Wood Duck box take a quick look, there may be one sticking its head out sunning itself.*



*Phoebe nest with 5 eggs*



*Phoebe Ledge anchored to the concrete wall.*



*Steel culverts also make for good spots to put the Phoebe ledges.*





*Bluebird eggs in a robins nest near Bronte Provincial Park and reported by the Halton Bluebird Club*



*This bluebird nest with 3 eggs in a robins nest successfully fledged 3 young. Chris Lyons had a similar nest many years ago in the Kingston area.*

## ***Phoebe Nest Ledges***

The late ***Dan Welsh*** promoted the use of nest ledges for Eastern Phoebes. The ledges in these pictures were erected by Kurt Frei and Peter Rea. All were successful at fledging Eastern Phoebes. The ledges can be attached in two ways, one requires the use of a hammer drill and must be pre-drilled with a concrete drill bit before the final bolt is put in. The other way is to use a PL Premium Lepage Epoxy. This epoxy now comes in a toothpaste like tube which makes it easy to apply to the back of the ledge. This epoxy is specially made for attaching wood to concrete. Peter and Kurt use duct tape to keep the ledge tightly in place so the epoxy can set.



*Anchored nest ledge*