



Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society

2023 Fall Newsletter ~ Editor Bill Read

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Welcome to the 2023 fall newsletter. By most accounts it was a successful year for both Tree Swallows and bluebirds. **Our next AGM is on March 9, 2024. We also have a new location, the First Unitarian Church of Hamilton located at 170 Dundurn Street South.** A map will be included in the next newsletter. The Royal Botanical Gardens just became too expensive to rent. If we returned in 2024 the fee would have been over \$800. Looking back it has been an excellent facility over the last 34 years. This included two North American Bluebird Society conferences in 1996 and 2010 that we hosted. Both very successful.

The OEBS board has unanimously agreed to purchase directors and liability insurance. This will cover us for some of the offsite activities that we want to engage in, particularly nest box workshops. The meteorological winter (December, January and February) 2022- 2023 was the third warmest on record. March has been average. This was followed by a very warm and wet April. The average first egg date for April 2023 was April 18th. The overall April temperature was 2 degrees higher than the average. This was followed by a very dry May with average temperatures. The May night time lows were 1.5 degrees below average. Some mortality of nestlings that were not fully feathered and not brooded were reported during the cold nights that we experienced during this period. Renée Hallman was successful at keeping nestlings alive during these cold nights by placing 12 and 18 hour hand warmers under the nest. June and July were ideal for breeding success. (Weather data from the University of Waterloo weather station)

Notice from 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 is currently one open position on the Board. All OEBS members present and in good standing at the AGM on Saturday, March 9th, 2024 will be asked to vote for an individual to fill this vacant position.

There is currently one nominee for the open position: Carly Davenport, Director at Large

Any member in good standing interested in serving in the open position can do so by submitting a notification of their interest by letter or email to the Chair of the Elections committee by March 2nd, 2024.

Applications can be submitted to;

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

2022 OEBS Conservation Award

The award for 2022 was given to Jessica Hale. Jessica monitors 60 nest boxes in the Niagara region. She fledged 117 bluebirds and 142 Tree Swallows from those boxes. She also had nests of Black Capped Chickadees and House Wrens.



Jessica Hale, 2022 OEBS Conservation Award recipient



Left: Jessica's boxes on the edge of a soybean crop.

Centre: Here Jessica is monitoring one of her boxes. All are greased midway up the metal pole.

Top-Right: One of the sites had Northern Flying Squirrels nesting in the nest box. Sitting on the box is an adult Flying Squirrel.

Bottom-Right: Jessica is holding one of the young from that nest box. Although cute they can also be very destructive. They will usurp the nest box and will eat newly hatched young.

Nest Boxes and Bluebird Feeders For Sale

A special thank you to **Chris Mouriopoulos** and his **father** for building and selling 27 bluebird feeders and nest boxes and donating the money to OEBS. A cheque for \$675 was sent to our treasurer.

They have also agreed to continue this program in 2023. Chris can be contacted at - chris@applebygroup.ca

Directors of OEBS

John Balga has tendered his resignation as a director on our OEBS board. John thanks the directors for all their support over the years and for their constant vigilance and support of the Eastern Bluebird. We will miss John, his wise counsel and frank discussions on running the bluebird society. He was an integral part of our bluebird team and he will be greatly missed. John has a very successful Purple Martin colony along with bluebird and Tree Swallow nest boxes at his home in the Leamington area of Essex County.

Provincial Partner – Ontario Nature

By Lane Henderson

In our board meeting held in October the board passed a motion to apply for membership into the Ontario Nature's Nature Network program as Provincial Partners. In doing so all the members of Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society can receive benefits such as

Group Benefits

Being a member of the Nature Network allows groups to interact with like-minded organizations across the province and receive benefits, such as:

- **Nature Network News:** Receive Ontario Nature's monthly e-newsletter.
- **Regional Meetings:** Invitation to attend spring and fall regional meetings with neighbouring conservation groups.
- **Influence:** Become part of the provincial voice for nature in Ontario.
- **Environmental Awareness:** Receive information



This is a picture of your president and founder Bill Read examining the contents of a nest box in the Orchard Home Orchard north of St. George. This box was part of a 31 year study to examine the health of birds that nest in apple orchards. A talk outlining the results of that study was given at the last AGM.

about issues such as land-use planning.

- **ON Nature magazine:** Complimentary copies of our award-winning magazine, ON Nature.
- **Resources:** Access to the latest information on natural history, conservation and organizational management.

Other Benefits

Through the Nature Network member groups can increase their profile both locally and provincially.

- Liability Insurance Coverage
- Special Event and Publicity Opportunities
- Ontario Nature's Annual Gathering
- Conservation Awards
- Advice and Resources

As a Board we were especially interested in accessing the Insurance program offered with this membership. With the Insurance we would be able to host workshops for schools and other community groups and in so doing be able to expand the general public's knowledge of not only Bluebirds and Tree Swallows but eco systems, migrations etc etc. In hosting these types of events it would be imperative to protect the organization from liability due to mishap and such.

In addition to the general liability we are also picking up Directors and Officers liability protection for those that generously donate their time to keep the organization moving forward.

This insurance if purchased by the society as a "stand alone" product would be extremely expensive and the reason it has never been utilized in the past. Through

Ontario Nature the cost for \$5,000,000.00 in coverage is less than \$1,000.00.

I am sure a large number of our members who are members of other Nature Clubs are aware of this product as their home clubs are already members of the Nature Network and have availed themselves of the protection.

We will be working throughout the coming months to come up with some activities for our members which will enhance the experience of being a member of the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society.

Any feedback, ideas or suggestions in things that can be offered to the membership to enhance your experience with us is more than welcome and would be greatly appreciated.

Nest Box Building Workshop

This nest box building workshop was put on by Naomi Saunders at the Nottawasaga Conservation authority main building. They have an education program where schools bring students from grades 4 to 8 to learn about migratory birds. Each student as part of a team build their own bluebird nesting box. Using a grant from Nature Canada Lane Henderson purchased wood from a local sawmill sufficient to build 65 nest boxes. Lane and his wife Clare cut out all the wood and packaged them as kits which were then delivered to the conservation authority. Tom Kott with the Glanbrook Conservation Association organized many of these workshops in the past and OEBS would like to carry on this tradition.



Student teams at their designated assembly stations.



Team leaders provide instruction for the assemblers.

OEBS will be conducting more of these workshops involving our youth. It is our intention to not only have participants build a nest box but provide the guidance so they can be successful at attracting both bluebirds and other cavity nesting birds. To this end we have put together a nest box protocol that if followed will lead to success.

1. Plan all phases of the project before starting.
2. Decide on a target species and learn all about that species before starting.
3. Determine nest box locations.
4. Determine what kind of predator protection will be used.
5. Decide who will monitor the nest boxes.
6. Decide who will keep the records.
7. If boxes are to be located in areas of high House Sparrow populations, decide how this risk will be mitigated.
8. Decide how many nest boxes to build.
9. It is best to start small with a few nest boxes and do it properly. More can be added the following year.
10. If the nest boxes are to be erected on private property always seek permission from the landowner before starting.
11. OEBS will not endorse any nest box trail that does not have adequate predator protection.
12. Never put boxes on fence posts, or trees-these are just highways for predators. Always on free standing t-bars or metal poles.



Our conservation director Helen Toner is holding a nestling Ferruginous hawk that she will band. This past summer Helen worked on a project to study the distribution of Great Horned Owls in Saskatchewan. Below is a summary of the results.



Future wildlife biologists survey their completed nest box.

Spotting, trapping and tracking Great Horned Owls in Southwestern Saskatchewan.

Due to their adaptability, Great Horned Owls thrive year round in the barren landscape of Southwestern Saskatchewan. Unfortunately their opportunistic hunting tactics can wreak havoc on wildlife conservation efforts for many species at risk that also reside in the Canadian mixed grass prairie landscape. The University of Regina in partnership with the Royal Saskatchewan Museum sponsored a two year project to assess territory size and requirements of Great Horned Owls in the region to determine whether habitat management could be an effective and efficient method of reducing the risk of predation during reintroduction, augmentation, or protection activities of species at risk projects. Her presentation at our next AGM will follow the adventures of Helen's field team during the project. We will learn all about the study methods, challenges faced, and preliminary results of the study.

OEBS & American Kestrels

By Stewart McLellan

The American Kestrel is the smallest of our raptors and is generally a bird of open agricultural areas. The kestrel used to be a much more common sight and many of you will remember seeing them hunting from hydro wires along country concessions.

Unfortunately, the kestrel population has been in a long term decline with the North American population estimated to have lost approximately 2million birds since the early 1970's. While many researchers have been working to identify why this decline is happening, the underlying cause or causes remain elusive.

The American Kestrel is a cavity nester, utilizing natural and manmade cavities for nesting sites.

The ease with which kestrels take to manmade cavities (i.e nest boxes) and their ability to withstand human activities at the nest site makes them a relatively easy species to monitor through their breeding cycle.

A group of volunteers, including OEBS members and non members, have been working with American Kestrels for approximately 7 years. Our work includes constructing nest boxes for kestrels, placing these boxes in appropriate habitat, monitoring the boxes for use by kestrels throughout the breeding season and the collection of data

on the success of each nest.

We have worked with Boise State University in the collection of feathers as part of the American Kestrel Genoscape Project. We have also worked with Hawk Mountain Sanctuary collecting blood samples from kestrels in southern Ontario as part of an agricultural study.

We also band kestrels and in the 2023 breeding season we applied colour bands to kestrel nestlings for the first time. These bands were applied to assist in the identification of individual birds in the field during future breeding seasons without the need for trapping.

All of our work is carried out under a Wildlife Scientific Collectors Authorization (WSCA) issued by the Ontario Ministry of Forestry and Natural Resources and under a Banding Permit issued by the Banding Office of the Canadian Wildlife Service.

We are currently monitoring nest boxes in Durham Region, Bruce County and Waterloo Region.



A typical American Kestrel nest box installed in suitable habitat with appropriate predator protection.



Male American Kestrel watching over nest box with incubating female

"The kestrel population has lost 2 million birds since the early 1970s"

2023 marks the third year that we have banded American Kestrels in our study area and in each of the three years, we have had one kestrel fledgling recovered for a total of three individual recoveries.

"During the three year period of banding nestlings, one banded nestling has been recovered in each year with two of the recoveries having been banded as nestling in the same box"

On September 11, 2021 a male kestrel banded by us on June 13, 2021 at a box in North Pickering was trapped at the Hawk Cliff Banding Station. This kestrel had travelled a distance of approximately 224 kilometers from the nest box and was likely in the process of migrating along the north shore of Lake Erie when he was trapped.



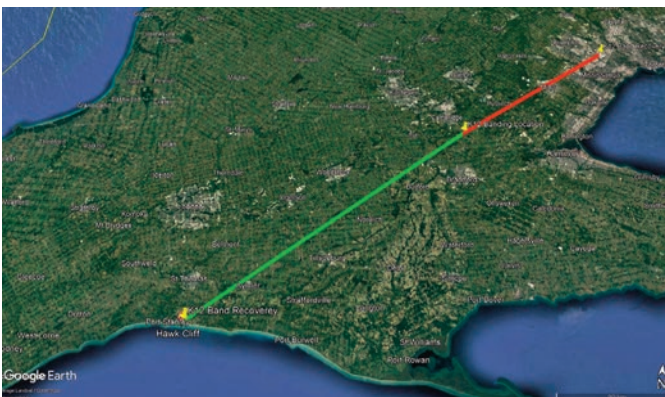
2021 Male kestrel banding and trapping locations. This kestrel was banded as a nestling in the upper right corner of the image and was trapped at the Hawk Cliff Banding Station while on migration at the lower left corner of the image.

On August 10, 2022, we were notified by the Banding Office of a hatch year bird recovered after striking a building at Toronto Pearson Airport. This female kestrel was banded by us on June 1, 2022 at a nest box in Branchton, Ontario and had travelled a distance of approximately 67 kilometers NE of its banding location. Unfortunately, this kestrel was euthanized at Toronto Wildlife Centre as its injuries prevented it from flying and recovery was deemed to be unlikely.

This kestrel had travelled in a NE direction from its nest box location and was recovered at a time when we would anticipate that it would have been close to starting its migration.

The recovery of this bird at Toronto Pearson Airport may indicate that it was wandering ahead of migration or potentially this was a bird from a population that migrates along the north shore of Lake Ontario before heading south.

In future years, we are hoping to introduce tracking to our program to provide data that can be used to confirm the migratory pathways of the birds that breed in Southern Ontario and over winter in the Southern US or in Northern South America.



2022 Female and 2023 Male kestrel banding and trapping locations. Both the 2022 (red track) and 2023 (green track) kestrels were banded as nestlings in the Branchton box in the center right of the image. The 2022

female was recovered after striking a building at Toronto Pearson Airport while the 2023 male was trapped at the Hawk Cliff Lake Banding Station on Lake Erie.

The 2023 breeding season was the first year where we included the application of colour bands into our program.

This enhancement to our program was possible through a grant from the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society which covered the cost of the first years supply of colour bands.

“Introduction of colour banding into our program would not have been possible without a grant from the OEBS”



Female Kestrel showing blue and white colour band on left leg and aluminum band on right leg.

For those of you who are familiar with seeing kestrels on backroads you will know that they have a high, or longer, Flight Initiation Distance (FID) meaning that they quickly take flight when a perceived danger (i.e. a human) is approaching. This high FID makes it difficult to read aluminum band numbers even with the use of a high powered spotting scope.

In an effort to provide data on returning kestrels, without the need for trapping, approval was granted by the Banding Office for the use of blue bands with white alpha lettering. These blue and white bands were placed on all 2023 nestlings and early testing in the field has shown that they are easily readable from distances outside the typical FID of the kestrel.

On September 2, 2023 we were notified of a colour banded male kestrel trapped at the Hawk Cliff Lake Banding Station.

This kestrel was also hatched in our Branchton Box

marking the second year in a row that a fledgling from this Box has been retrapped or recovered. We banded this kestrel on June 19th, 2023 at an age of approximately 17 days old.

The colour band appeared to be in good condition at the time of trapping and this recovery provides valuable data on not only the potential migratory pathways of these birds but also confirms that the colour bands we are using can withstand the nestling and early fledgling



Male Kestrel with blue and white colour band BJ at Hawk Cliff Banding Station on September 2nd, 2023

As mentioned above, we are grateful to the OEBS for their grant to allow us to undertake our colour banding program. Avian conservation typically does not take place in isolation and we are lucky to have a group of dedicated volunteers who help us with the kestrel program. If you are interested in more information or in volunteering with our program, please contact me by eMail at stewart.mclellan@cardinalenviro.ca.



Relessey Church and Relessey Cemetery



Road Trip 2023

This past Sunday Lyn and I drove to Mono Centre which is north of Orangeville. I wanted to visit the cemetery where two of our former conservation award members are buried, Leo Smith and Sheldon Anderson. Both are buried in the cemetery located beside the Relessey Church in the small community of Relessey just east of Mono Centre. It is a quaint old church that was built in 1870. I am sure some of our older members will remember Leo and Shelly. And by the way there are still some available spots.

Leo Smith died on October 19, 1999. He was given the bluebird conservation award in 1996, this is the same year OEBS hosted the North American Bluebird conference at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington. Leo had a bluebird trail in the Caledon area from 1968-1995. He is credited with fledging over 10,000 bluebirds.

During the early 1980s I worked at a Natural Science school just north of Orangeville. I went out with Leo numerous times both banding his bluebirds and learning the methods he used to be successful. He always stressed the importance of monitoring and predator protection. For more on Leo see the OEBS 2017 spring newsletter.



Right: Leo Smith Gravestone. Inscription - A Dedicated Naturalist, Leo Worked Tirelessly for the Bluebird of Happiness, Sialia Sialis.



J. Sheldon Anderson died on February 4th, 2004. He received the bluebird conservation award in 1999. He maintained a bluebird trail in the Orangeville area for many years. He was a dedicated naturalist, his ancestors were some of the early settlers of this area. One of his particular interests was forestry. In 1949 Shelly persuaded the local school board to volunteer students to plant trees

in the local area, which they did for twenty years.

On our way back from the cemetery we stopped at the Bluebird Cafe in Orangeville. We took some pictures, unfortunately it was Sunday and they were closed for the day. I have eaten there in the past, they opened in 1989. Last time I was there I dropped off some OEBS pamphlets.

