



Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society

2024 Fall Newsletter ~ Editor Bill Read

billreadsbooks@gmail.com

Welcome to the 2024 Fall OEBS newsletter.

Our 2025 AGM will be held at the First Hamilton Unitarian Church on 170 Dundurn Street South in Hamilton on **March 22, 2025**. Just a reminder, the AGM location is a nut free environment so any members bringing their own food, please ensure that it does not contain nuts.

This year's nest box reports tell us that it has been a very successful year for both Tree Swallow and bluebird reproductive success. The weather has certainly cooperated with very little cold weather in May which greatly reduced nestling mortality. I can remember some years when cold spells in May have led to extremely high nestling deaths. Young are particularly vulnerable when the female stops brooding and the young are not fully feathered.

OEBS Constitution Update

The bluebird society has always been a society that has championed the Eastern Bluebird but has also supported all other native cavity nesting species; Don Wills with Prothonotary Warblers, Peter Rea with Wood Ducks, John Balga with Purple Martins, Stewart McLellan and Carly Davenport with American Kestrels and Bill Read with Tree Swallows and Eastern Bluebirds to name a few.

When I formed the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society in 1987 I did so by following the example of the North American Bluebird Society which was formed in 1978. Indeed, all of the bluebird societies across North America were formed from the NABS example.

The Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society has hosted two North American Bluebird Society conferences both in Hamilton in 1996 and 2010. The NABS mission statement clearly states that they support all other native cavity nesting species besides the three species of bluebirds, and we have endeavored to follow this example.

The objectives in our constitution do not reflect the fact that we also support other cavity nesting species. Our current Objectives make it difficult for us to support valuable conservation work targeted towards other cavity nesting species and we want to change our constitution so

that it does. Modifying the objective of the Society was discussed at our last AGM and there was broad support for doing this among attendees.

These proposed changes will be presented to the members in writing prior to the next AGM.

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 and a second position will become vacant at our 2025 AGM. All OEBS members present and in good standing at the AGM on Saturday, March 22nd, 2025 will be asked to vote for individuals to fill these vacant positions.

Bookkeeper Wanted

Our current Treasurer will be stepping down from his position at our 2025 AGM. I would like to thank Lane Henderson for all of his hard work as he filled this position for us. Do you have bookkeeping skills that you would like to use in a small not-for profit Organization? If you are interested in taking on this valuable task, please contact Stewart McLellan at stewart.mclellan@cardinalenviro.ca.

Directors of OEBS

Chris Mouriopolous has tendered his resignation as a director on our OEBS board.

We will miss Chris, 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.

Chris was instrumental in the success of our hybrid AGM meeting with Chris along with his daughter, Olivia, taking care of the technical requirements of streaming our AGM over Zoom so that members which could not attend in person could participate in the meeting. Chris, along with his father, has also donated significant amounts to OEBS through the construction and sale of bluebird nest boxes and feeders, a project he intends to continue with.

Membership Renewals are due January 1, 2025. go to Join, Renew or Donate on the OEBS home page - oebs.ca Individual \$15, Family \$20.

The Betsy Horn Bluebird Prize

This year we formalized a five year, \$1000 a year, scholarship with the University of Guelph to be called the Betsy Horn Bluebird Prize. This award recognizes the nest box trail work that Betsy Horn undertook in the Orangeville area and was made possible by donations made to OEBS in Betsy's' memory.

When awarding the Scholarship, Preference will be given to students who have participated in activities in the field of ornithology. We hope to establish other awards or scholarships at other universities in the near future.

OFO Youth Camp

In addition to the Betsy Horn Blue Bird Prize, we also provided funding to the Ontario Field Ornithologists youth camp which is held annually in Algonquin Park. OEBS provided a grant in the amount of \$2000 to this valuable program which will allow some of the best young naturalists in the province to improve their natural history skills.

Birds Canada Donations

OEBS awarded Birds Canada \$2000 to fund two projects that are aimed at cavity nesting birds.

The first \$500 was to provide enhanced predator protection for the Tree Swallows at the tip of the long Point Tree Swallow grid. The second \$1500 was for the purchase of motus tags that are to be put on kestrels at Hawk Cliff near Port Stanley. Both Tree Swallows and Kestrels are native Ontario cavity nesters.

Kestrels have seen a precipitous decline in the last 30 years and Birds Canada and the OEBS are trying to find out why.

Barb Ferris and I developed a new website so that all the banding information (including Kestrel data) from hawk cliff can be viewed going back to 1970 (<https://hawkcliffbanding.ca/>).

The American Kestrel used to be a bird that was a common sight perched on hydro wires as one drove through the countryside. Stewart McLellan, Carly Davenport and Bill Read have been working on monitoring a trail of Kestrel boxes in the Whitby and Cambridge areas. In 2024 fifteen nest boxes produced a total of 75 kestrel young.

Future OEBS Funding

Possible funding for projects next year includes placing motus tags on Eastern Bluebirds to determine migration routes above Lake Superior. Recently Carly Davenport saw 2 Eastern Bluebirds on Moose Factory Island across from Moosonee which is a town in Northern Ontario on the Moose River approximately 19 km south of James Bay.

Eastern Bluebirds can be found hundreds of kilometers



Bluebird in Moosonee Cemetery

Carly Davenport

above Lake Superior where they nest in clear cuts, forest burn areas and areas of human habitations.

The Thunder Cape Bird Observatory located at the southern tip of the Sibley Peninsula, at the foot of the Sleeping Giant Provincial Park, east of Thunder Bay, Ontario has recorded as many as 740 Eastern Bluebirds during fall migration.

There would seem to be a location somewhere along the Northern Lake Superior shoreline, where bluebirds reaching Lake Superior either go west or east along the shoreline. Those that go east would likely migrate to the central regions of the Eastern United States while those that go west would likely end up going through Minnesota on their way to overwinter in the Texas-Kansas area of the Southern US.

There are two distinct populations of Eastern bluebirds that overwinter in different areas of the United States. (see distribution map on page 4 of the 2024 spring newsletter). All past OEBS newsletters are accessible online at www.oeps.ca.

On September 15 Carly Davenport visited Moosonee. She was able to photograph two Eastern Bluebirds at a cemetery on the island of Moose Factory.

Moosonee is located at the southern end of James Bay. Eastern Bluebirds have a distribution that covers most of the province. In the northern portion of their range, they nest in human habitations, clear cuts and forest burn areas above Lake Superior. The Thunder Cape Bird Observatory just east of Thunder Bay records bluebirds both in the fall and spring during their migration.

Contribute your Bluebird trail data to Birds Canada's Project NestWatch

Carly Davenport

For the 2024 nestbox season, the OEBS wants to encourage members to submit nestbox data to Birds Canada's Project NestWatch. For those who may not be familiar, Birds Canada is a national charitable organization

dedicated to bird conservation. They have various community science projects that anyone can contribute to, like the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, SwiftWatch, Nocturnal Owl Surveys, Nightjar Surveys, Project FeederWatch, Marsh Monitoring, and Canadian Lakes Loon Surveys, to name just a few.

Project NestWatch is a long-term monitoring program for all bird species, including the Eastern Bluebird. It helps document the distribution of breeding birds, monitor changes to breeding populations, evaluate changes in the landscape and long-term climate patterns, and better understand nest timing across Canada.

We encourage members to submit their nest data through Birds Canada online database portal called Nature Counts. You will need to create an account, and then you can submit data online through the project page on the Nature Counts website. Instructions to guide you through this process can be found at <https://www.birdscanada.org/bird-science/project-nestwatch>.

The OEBS is also hard at work creating an instructional video to walk members through the process that we will share at our AGM and online. While we encourage those able to, to report online, there is also a paper form you can print off and mail to: Project NestWatch, Birds Canada P.O. Box 6436 STN Main, Sackville, NB E4L 1G6.

Nest Box reports can also be sent to the bluebird society (as well as project nest watch) for inclusion in our newsletter. At the bottom of our nest box section on our website you will find the reporting forms (<https://oebs.ca/nest-boxes-trails/>).

Bill Read

Since 1987, I have collected nest box data from bluebird trail operators across Ontario. This data was initially collected by mail as there was no internet. The first nest box data I collected in 1987 was made into a report which the Canadian Wildlife Service used to produce a document titled "Bluebird Nest Box Trails in Ontario and their usefulness for bioeffects monitoring of agricultural chemicals. (Technical Report Series No 202.)" This original survey contained the data from 101 trails and over 5000 fledged bluebirds. It was tabulated and the results were sent out in newsletters that year. Each year, nest box reports were tabulated and sent out with the newsletter. All these older newsletters from 1988-2000 containing the results from each year are now being converted to electronic format and will be put on our website under the newsletter section.

Early on, prior to the internet, all reports were received by mail but as time went on fewer and fewer nest box reports were received.

Today there are many different tools that weren't

available in 1987 to measure individual species reproductive success and overall distribution and status.

These include the *Breeding Bird Atlas*, *Christmas Bird Counts*, nest box reports, motus tracking, light sensitive geo markers, breeding bird survey routes and banding to name a few. Because bluebirds have done so well there isn't the concern to continually send in nest box reports today as there was in 1987. Around 2005, I changed to writing anecdotal reports from each of the nest box reports received each year. These included information on the number fledged and most importantly on what kind of predator protection and monitoring were used at each nest box trail.

That way, readers could see which trails did better with the kind of predator protection that was being used. In the earlier tabulated spread sheets, the kind of predator protection and monitoring that were used was not included. A protocol for setting up a nest box trail can be found in our nest box section on the website. This protocol applies to any of our native cavity nesting species that you are setting up boxes for. Proper location on a free-standing pole or T-bar, predator protection and monitoring are still the three most important things that you can do to be successful with your nest boxes. The bluebird society will not endorse any trail that has boxes on trees or fence posts.

Bluebird Rescue

On Monday July 22, 2024, I got a call from Debbie Satelmayer from the Campbellville area about 4 orphaned bluebirds.

They were around 15 days old and in remarkably good health. Both adults had been killed by either an accipiter (Sharp Shinned Hawk or Coopers Hawk) or a kestrel. Debbie sent me a picture of the bluebird feathers on the ground near the nest box. The feather array on the ground points to a Sharp Shinned Hawk as they pluck away all the feathers while the prey is on the ground. A female Sharp Shinned Hawk has a weight of about 160 grams, an Eastern Bluebird around 30 grams.



Philip and Debbie Satelmayer



Feathers from an adult Eastern Bluebird bluebird that had been plucked and eaten by a raptor. Probably a Sharp shinned Hawk or a kestrel.



Four orphaned bluebirds still in nest box



Four orphaned bluebirds begging for food in the nest box.



*Fledgling Western Bluebird being fed by an adult.
Vivian Manning.*

Fortunately, I still had bluebird nestlings in a number of my boxes, now to find some that were the same age as the orphaned birds.

Debbie was hand feeding them dried meal worms and berries. We arranged to meet at Pet Smart on 24 Hwy at 9.15 the next day.

Before we met, I went into Pet Smart and bought some live meal worms that we could feed them when she and husband Philip arrived. The orphaned bluebirds readily accepted the meal worms. We were able to at least give them one good meal before we put them in foster boxes.

By this time, I had figured out what nest boxes would be best to put them in. I put all four in a box just north of Paris. This pair of adults had already fledged 5 young on their first brood and had 2 young on their second nesting that were around 13- 14 days old. I removed those two young and put them in a nest box on Sheffield Road that had two young the same age.

Each box then had 4 young. All were banded and all fledged successfully. The most important part of fostering birds from one nest to another is making sure they are all the same age. I contacted Debbie to give her the good news that all had fledged successfully.

Meal Worms

Members of the Bluebird Society are eligible to purchase 10,000 meal worms for \$50. See the home page on our website for the contact number (<https://oebs.ca/>). The same amount from Pet Smart would cost around \$700.

Doug Tarry Young Ornithologists Workshop (YOW)

This year, two groups took part in the Young Ornithologists workshop organized by Long Point Bird Observatory and Birds Canada. The sessions lasted one week, and participants were stationed at the Old Cut bird banding lab on Long Point. During the week, I gave a presentation to each group on how to set up a nest box trail and information about the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society. Each participant was given a bluebird hat.



Young Ornithologists Workshop participants 2024.



Solid Air, Invisible Killer

Birds behave as if sheet glass are invisible to them. They kill themselves striking clear and reflective planes in all types and sizes of human built structures the world over. The killing is indiscriminate, taking the fit and unfit species of any age category both common and of conservation concern.

Window-kills occur in the billions worldwide annually. The victims are always unintended, unnecessary, harmless, and have no voice or other means to protect themselves. The science documenting this significant scale of loss has been known for decades, but only recently have meaningful efforts to address the problem occurred.

In his book *Solid Air, Invisible Killer*, Dr Daniel Klem, Jr. describes and summarizes the challenges and solutions to this important conservation issue for birds and people that can be used by, among others, architects and developers, legislators, legal professionals, urban planners, and homeowners alike.

Unlike the complexities of other environmental challenges, such as climate change, this important conservation issue for birds and people can be solved, and the means to do so are described within the pages of this work to guide this worthy effort.

The author's 44 years of scientific research have revealed answers to create proven bird safe products for sale. This book ultimately tries to make the case that such a commitment is worthwhile and needed. Daniel Klem is a professor of ornithology and conservation biology at Muhlenberg College.



Grey Treefrog Using Nestbox

This is a picture of a Grey Treefrog that was occupying one of my nest boxes in an apple orchard this year. They are a large arboreal species that are common throughout the Eastern U.S and Southeastern Canada.

Grey Treefrogs can have green, brown or grey skin.



2024 American Kestrel Season

By Stewart McLellan

This past summer of 2024 marks the 8th season that we have been working with American Kestrels and it was a very successful season.

Every year, OEBS members Bill Read, myself and Carly Davenport build install and monitor American Kestrel nest boxes in the Hamilton-Cambridge area and Durham Region. Non-member Reiny Packull installs and monitors nest boxes in Bruce County, and we travel each summer to band the kestrels in his boxes before they fledge.

2024 was our most successful season yet with a total of 77 Kestrel nestlings fledging from our boxes. Of these 77 nestlings 38 were males and 39 were females or almost a 50:50 split.

All our kestrels were banded with USGS aluminum bands in 2024, and the majority were also banded with a blue plastic band with white letters, called a colour band. The colour bands help us identify individual Kestrels in the field without having to trap them.

In the 2024 Kestrel season, we observed several events that we have not previously seen. These being:



A recently fledged Male Kestrel sporting a blue colour band on his left leg for easy identification



Kestrel Nest with 6 eggs in North Pickering.

First 6 Egg Clutch

Female Kestrels typically lay between four and six eggs, with five eggs being the most common clutch size we observe. Occasionally, we will encounter four-egg clutches, but until this year, we had never seen a six-egg clutch.

This year, at a box being used by Kestrels for the first time in North Pickering, we encountered our first six-egg clutch. Interestingly, only four of the six eggs hatched. The two unhatched eggs were found to be infertile when broken open for inspection. Of the four eggs that hatched, all four young fledged the box

First Renesting Event

American Kestrels typically lay one clutch per season. However, if the clutch is lost, they may lay a second clutch, particularly if the loss occurs early in the season. We have had nests fail in the past and in all cases, the Kestrels abandoned the box for the season.

On June 7th, we encountered a nest failure in our box located in Branchton, ON. When we checked the box, only one egg from a clutch of four remained, and the egg was cold, indicating it was no longer being incubated



Branchton Box Failed Nest on June 7th, 2024

We surmised that this failure was due to European Starlings removing nesting material early in the season, resulting in the Kestrel eggs being laid on the bare floor of the box. We believe that removal of the nesting material (wood chips) made it difficult for the female to incubate the eggs and the nest was abandoned. In preparation for next season, the box was cleaned out and refilled with wood shavings.



Five Kestrel nestling encountered in Branchton Box on July 27, 2024



Branchton Box Kestrel nestlings during banding on August 11, 2024.

During a regular box check on July 27, 2024 (unused and failed boxes are checked regularly to identify renesting events) five Kestrel nestlings, approximately five days old, were encountered in the box.

The Branchton box was revisited on August 11, at which time the five nestlings were banded. The three male and two female nestlings successfully fledged the box. This was the latest in the season we have had young successfully fledge a box.

Snakes as Prey Items

The final new observation for us was the observation of snakes being brought to nest boxes as prey. American Kestrels are known to feed primarily on insects and small mammals, and we regularly observe grasshoppers, damselflies and dragon flies, voles & field mice and the occasional small bird being fed to nestlings. While they are also known to feed on amphibians and reptiles, we have not previously observed snakes in the Kestrels' diet in our study area. This year, a Kestrel was observed to be flying close to one of our Uxbridge boxes with what appeared to be a snake in its talons, and the remains of a Red-bellied snake were found in one of our boxes in Pickering.

Band Recovery

Also, this year, we were notified by the banding office of a band recovery in Southern Ohio, USA. The bird recovered was a female Kestrel that we had banded from one of our Pickering boxes in 2023. Unfortunately, the bird was located dead in a farm yard in Malta, Morgan County, Ohio.

This is the fourth year in a row that we have had Kestrels banded by us recovered and it was the first recovery outside of Ontario. This bird was likely on its southerly migration to its wintering grounds when it died of unknown causes.

In a 1998 Study of the migration patterns of American Kestrels, the Ornithologist Bird and Palmer found that birds from our Region typically move only short distances south from their breeding areas, while Kestrels that breed

in northern Canada migrate greater distances to Central or South America.

If our birds are short-distance migrants (which they likely are), it is possible that this bird was overwintering in the area of Southern Ohio where it was found.

Without using tacking devices, it is difficult to predict the route that this Kestrel would have taken to get to Ohio or where its final migration destination would have been. What we do know is that our Kestrels tend to migrate along the shores of the Great Lakes, and it is unlikely that they will cross the open water of the Lakes.

The suspected migration route between this recovered female's banding and recovery locations can be seen below.

The work we do as volunteers with American Kestrels provides valuable data on the health of the species in Southern Ontario. Our work has also allowed us to develop strong relationships with volunteer and professional Kestrel Researchers across North America and data we have collected has been incorporated into several scientific studies.

If you are interested in helping us in our Kestrel Conservation program or if you have a suitable location where you would like to place a Kestrel nest box, please do



Stewart Mc Lellan and Carly Davenport banding a Kestrel nestling.



not hesitate to reach out to us. We have several volunteers who carry out a wide array of tasks including; constructing nest boxes, installing nest boxes, monitoring nest boxes, helping with banding and sample collection and cleaning of nest boxes at the end of the season. I can be contacted at stewart.mclellan@cardinalenviro.ca or at (905) 767-7495.

Below is the first official newsletter of the Ontario Eastern Bluebird society

Spring Newsletter April 1989

Welcome to the first official newsletter of the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society.

Thanks to all those trail operators who sent in survey forms for the 1988 nesting season. I am happy to announce that we have achieved 6000 fledged Eastern Bluebirds from nest boxes in 1988. I had hoped to include a final report with this newsletter but unfortunately more time will be needed to compile all the information contained in over 150 nest box survey forms. The final total of fledged young from nest boxes should be between 6000-6500. The information is being put on computer at the Canadian Wildlife Service office in the Canada Center for inland waters in Burlington, Ontario.

The Canadian Wildlife Service has provided the fledgling OEBS with both financial and technical assistance since its inception, and this has been sincerely appreciated.

Dues for the OEBS will be due on January 1 of each calendar year.

Members will receive a spring newsletter with membership card and an analysis of the previous years nest box survey results. It was hoped that the nest box survey results could be sent out with the spring newsletter, but this may have to be delayed each year to a summer mailing or included in the fall newsletter. The fall newsletter will contain that years nest box survey form and will be mailed sometime in late September or early October.

Objectives of the OEBS

The objectives of the OEBS are:

- To monitor population trends from year to year by surveying the number of boxes in use and the number of



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MISSION:

To engage in such educational, scientific and charitable pursuits as may be beneficial to the prosperity and well being of the three species of bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting bird species.

fledged young produced. The NABS survey gives an indication of nest box breeding success over a large geographic area but makes it someone difficult to determine breeding success and distribution on a more regional level in each state and province. The Ontario survey will be conducted by county so that an overall distribution of breeding success can be correlated with different ecozones or physiographic areas in Ontario.

- To provide information or guidance to new and existing trail operators. On the 1988 survey I asked respondents if they would be willing to share their trail expertise with others. The overwhelming majority said yes. What I hope to do is to be able to give new trail operators the address and phone number of existing trails in their county or region. By utilizing this method, the experience gained by existing nest box trail operators can be shared with individuals starting new Eastern Bluebird trails. It takes years to develop successful management techniques.
- To increase the number of well managed nest box trails in Ontario.
- To provide a newsletter for dispersal of information about E. bluebird trails in Ontario.
- To run a bluebird conference each year where trail operators can share ideas and information and examine other nest box trails.

Special note: a conference has been planned for April 7, 1990 at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington. More information will be included with the fall newsletter. The conference will be hosted by the Canadian Wildlife Service, The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (Community Wildlife Involvement Program) and the OEBS.