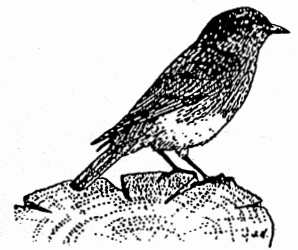


# Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society

## 1995 Fall Newsletter

Editor: Bill Read  
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The OEBS will be hosting the 19th Annual North American Bluebird Society meeting next September 13, 14 and 15, 1996 at the Royal Botanical Gardens (same location as our spring conference). This meeting will take the place of our regular spring meeting. Please mark these dates on your calendar.

Early reports received indicate the 1995 nesting season was one of our better ones. All trail operators I have talked with said both the number of returning pairs and the fledged young totals were much higher than 1994. On my Canadian Wildlife Service trail the number of pairs increased from 55 in 1994 to 78 in 1995 (41.8% increase).

A much milder winter throughout much of Eastern North America meant that more EABLs than usual were able to overwinter successfully and return in the spring to their breeding grounds.<sup>1</sup> The January 1995 mean temperature of -3.5°C was almost 10°C warmer than January 1994's -13.2°C and 3.8°C warmer than the long term average of -7.3°C.

March was much warmer than usual with very warm weather from March 11th to March 16th (on March 15th the temperature reached 20°C). This pattern extended over most of Eastern North America. This brought many pairs of Eastern Bluebirds back early to join those that had overwintered successfully in southern Ontario. These pairs established territories 3 to 4 weeks before the tree swallows arrived. Many reports were received of EABLs that arrived earlier than usual and overwintered successfully.

**TABLE 1**  
Mean Temperature °C

	Actual	Normal
January 1995	-3.5	-7.3
February 1995	-8.3	-6.8
March 1995	1.1	-1.5
April 1995	3.5	5.8
May 1995	12.5	12.5
June 1995	19.5	17
July 1995	20.9	19.9
August 1995	21.2	18.7

### Winter Sightings

*Don Wills*, who monitors an EABL trail near Caledonia, sent in the following report of overwintering activity from December 1994 to March 1995. Don reported his most successful year in 1995 with 79 pairs of EABLs fledging a total of 452 young (5.72 young fledged per pair).

### Eastern Bluebird activity for winter months December 1994 - March 1995 Don Wills, Caledonia

- Dec. 24 - 21 birds in one large group mostly males: this group stayed in the same general area until Jan. 2 then moved to more a protected creek valley.
- Sumac bushes seem to be most popular food along with choke cherries
- Jan. 8 - 12 flew overhead singing
- Jan. 14 - 16 birds landing on boxes, singing like spring & fighting; 2 distinct groups probably related; checked with binoculars all males
- Jan. 17 - 14 flying along sideroad mixed with juncos and song sparrows
- Jan. 24 - 15 birds back at creek valley together with a group of robins and cedar wax wing
- Jan. 27 - 1 solitary male singing early in morning
- Feb.3 - 3 eating sumac: 2 females 1 male; cold spell for 2 weeks - birds disappeared for more sheltered area

<sup>1</sup> OEBS 1994 Spring Newsletter

- Feb. 18-19 - warm weather brought birds back but instead of one large group there were groups of 3 & 4 staking out territory all around my trail
  - Roosting boxes consisted of 5 popular locations before the end of February. By March 5 the birds have roosted in 18 different boxes. No Peterson boxes were used for roosting possibly because of slanted floor.
- Mar. 4-5 - Pairs have now started looking for early insects and are staying close to their probable nest boxes
- Mar. 11 - 1 pair has nest 75% finished; warm weather has made many pairs active.
- Mar. 12 - tundra swans arrive

The warm March weather encouraged some EABLs to nest much earlier than usual. I had two pairs that successfully fledged 4 young each at earlier dates than ever before, one by May 10 and the other by May 17. Peter Carson reported an EABL nesting that fledged 2 young around the first week of May near Port Rowan in the county of Haldimand Norfolk. May's temperature of 12.5°C was right on the long term average. May started out cold but gradually warmed up reaching the highest temperature of 26°C on the last day of the month. Very little weather related nestling mortality occurred in May (in southern Ontario) which meant that most EABLs were able to successfully fledge young on the first nesting.

The summer (June, July and August) was the hottest on record since 1959<sup>2</sup>. See TABLE 1. Very humid conditions existed with much lower than average rainfall. Many ponds, small lakes and reservoirs were either dry or at much lower levels well into the fall. Similar conditions existed in 1988 and in some areas of Ontario the summer of 1988 was slightly hotter.

Several records were broken in June and July. 35°C on the 19th of June was a new record high. Overnight lows of 21°C on July 16, 17 and 26 were new records. There was some concern about nestling mortality caused by the extreme heat but no reports have been received. On my trail, 397 young fledged and on Don Wills 452 young. No problems were experienced with extreme heat.

**Eastern Bluebird Weights**

Throughout the 1995 breeding season, I trapped as many AHY EABLs as possible to either band or check the band number if previously banded. These birds were captured as part of a Canadian Wildlife service study to examine reproductive success in apple orchards. Below is a table showing the 1994<sup>3</sup> and 1995 average weights as recorded in the orchards. All birds were weighed using a small bag and pesola scale.

	1994	1995	Difference Between Years
Female EABL AHY	30.12g (s=27)	30.72g (s=38)	0.6g
Male EABL AHY	29.64 (s=21)	30.24 (s=27)	0.6g

The average weights in 1994 were less than the 1995 weights in both males and females. The difference between males and females was exactly the same in both years:  
 1994 Female 30.12 - male 29.64 = 0.48g  
 1995 Female 30.72 - male 30.24 = 0.48g

**1995 Bailee Birdathon**

Thanks to Sylvia Van Walsum (\$460) and Rick Ryan (\$160) for raising \$620 for the Birdathon, 25% of which goes back to the OEBS. Thanks again Sylvia and Rick for this contribution to OEBS.

<sup>2</sup> As recorded at the Waterloo-Wellington Environment Canada Weather Office. In some areas of Ontario the summer of 1988 was actually hotter.

<sup>3</sup> OEBS 1994 Fall Newsletter. P.2

### Nestboxes For Sale - George Coker

Over the summer and fall, last year's recipient of the OEBS annual conservation award, George Coker, has built 80 nestboxes (50 regular and 30 Peterson). George is selling these at 7 dollars each with all proceeds to the OEBS. Some T-bars are available at \$1.50 each and George will bolt these to the boxes for you. This same box if bought commercially with T-bar would cost around \$20-25 plus tax. George will show you how to put the T-bar into the ground using a method he has perfected and will also explain how to place and monitor the nestboxes for best results.

George can be contacted at 1-905-643-2033 or write George Coker, 1330 Hwy #8, Winona ON L8E 5K6.

Thanks again, George, for your efforts in support of both EABLs and OEBS.

### Problems with House Sparrows

I have received many reports and letters in 1995 of house sparrows killing adult tree swallows (TRES) and adult EABLs and young to take over nestboxes.

**Experienced bluebird trail operators do not let HOSPs nest successfully in their boxes.** They either remove the nests or eggs or trap the adults and relocate or humanely destroy them. Only the nests of HOSPs and European Starlings can be dealt with in this way.<sup>4</sup> Other cavity nesters including house wrens and tree swallows are protected under the Migratory Bird's Act of 1917 and cannot be tampered with.

The problem starts when well intentioned individuals living near successful nestbox trails see EABLs and immediately put up nestboxes to attract them. What usually happens is that house sparrows take over these boxes and fledge young. The HOSPs then spread out and take over boxes on the EABL trail preventing EABLs from nesting. What you end up with is a whole lot of HOSPs and a lot fewer EABLs and TRESs. I try to locate these people and inform them of what is happening. Most don't realize the problems that they are causing. Some will tell you that "Oh no, we can't remove HOSPs from a nestbox or we will just let nature take its course!"

At one of my more successful orchards in 1995, I was continually plagued by HOSPs and had one nesting of four young killed by a male HOSP when they were about 12 days old. Up until this year I had very few problems with HOSPs and no young or adults killed in the past 4 years. I finally located the problem, a homeowner nearby seeing EABLs put up 3 boxes in her yard. I went to the homeowner to ask if HOSPs were nesting in the boxes and sure enough absolutely no monitoring of the boxes was occurring.

After telling them about HOSPs killing EABLs and TRESs and about raccoon predation of poorly placed nestboxes, we visited the first box located on a telephone pole. There were feathers everywhere, a raccoon had visited the nestbox and eaten all the nestling HOSPs. I muttered to myself - first lesson. We then proceeded to the second box and carefully opened it to find a fledged HOSP nest and underneath a dead TRES that had been bludgeoned to death by a male HOSP - second lesson. The third box also contained a fledged HOSP nest. The husband who doesn't really like HOSPs has promised to remove them in 1996. Time will tell if today's lessons result in tomorrow's bluebirds. Let's hope so. Losses caused by HOSPs were the worst in the past 8 years. I had one female AHY EABL and 4 nests of EABLs killed by HOSPs. No losses were experienced in the past four years.

Several factors have allowed HOSPs to increase on EABL trails in 1995 although overall population monitoring indicates a continuing downward trend.

1. Winter feeding of HOSPs
2. Unmonitored poorly placed nestboxes fledging HOSPs
3. An unusually warm 94-95 winter resulted in lower than usual mortality. HOSPs are non-migratory and have a small home range.

**NOTE: Poorly placed unmonitored nestboxes put up by well intentioned individuals or groups are causing great difficulty for EABLs and tree swallows. If you can't monitor your boxes then take them down!**

### 1996 NABS Annual General Meeting

The OEBS will be hosting the 19th Annual North American Bluebird Society meeting next September 13, 14 and 15, 1996 at the Royal Botanical Gardens (same location as our spring conference). This meeting will take the place of our regular spring meeting. Please mark these dates on your calendar.

The full program has not been finalized but most of the speakers and field trips have been confirmed. Below is a tentative schedule of events. The Spring Newsletter will contain a full schedule and application form.

<sup>4</sup> Because HOSPs are non migratory and have a small home range they can be relocated far enough away so they will not return.

Thursday	September 12	NABS board meeting
Friday	AM	Tour of Canada Centre for Inland Waters
	&	Boat Cruise of Hamilton Harbour
	PM	Tour of Dundurn Castle
	Evening	A guided tour of one of the Royal Botanical Gardens
Saturday	A total of 9 speakers with an evening banquet featuring Kay McKeever of the Owl Rehabilitation Foundation	

### Morning & Afternoon Speakers (confirmed)

James R. Hill	Purple Martin Conservation Association
Dr. Chris Darling	Entomologist Royal Ontario Museum Blowflies
Myrna Pearman	Ellis Bird Farm
Joe Uyenaka	OMAF Integrated Pest Management in Apple Orchards
Bill Read/C. Bishop	CWS Long term EABL Reproductive Study in Apple Orchards
Photography Presentation	To Be Arranged
Michael Mesure	FLAP Fatal Light Attraction Process

### Sunday Field Trips

Two bus trips to the Long Point Bird Observatory and Hawk Cliff near Port Stanley are planned. There will be a bus fee for these two full day trips. Other trips will be half to 3/4 day trips (Bill Read/Joe Uyenaka: Apple Orchards, Rehabilitation of Cootes Paradise; Royal Botanical Gardens Tour; Morning bird migration count and possible trip to Niagara Falls).

### Purple Martin Conservation Association

The PMCA is the only organization devoted exclusively to the scientific study of purple martins, their biology and habitat requirements. PMCA is a non-profit organization and 85% of the money they generate through memberships and sales of martin products is used for educational programs, conservation and scientific research.

If you have a martin colony, the PMCA would like to hear about it so it can be registered and you can learn how to better manage your colony. To receive their catalogue and become a member, write :

James R. Hill III  
Purple Martin Conservation Association  
Edinboro University of Pennsylvania  
Edinboro PA 16444

### Conference Committees (Conference Chairperson: Bill Read)

A number of committees have been formed so that we can run the conference smoothly. We will need help from our own members in running the conference. If you would like to help, phone or write to one of these committees to offer your assistance (addresses and phone numbers on next page).

- Publicity Sylvia Van Walsum
- Accommodations/Billeting Christel Charlton: For those staying at hotels or motels we will arrange for a shuttle service to and from the conference centre at a cost of \$10 per person for the weekend.
- Conference Treasurer Darlene and Rick Ryan
- Registration Art and Margaret Russell: All registrations for the conference will be sent to them. Help may be needed during the conference to look after and register people as they arrive.
- Conference Program Bill Read (including field trips)
- Banquet and lunch Bill Read
- Photo Salon Hank & Ivanka Zuzek
- Bucket Raffle Hank & Ivanka Zuzek : If you have an item you would like to donate to the raffle, please let Hank & Ivanka know.
- Speaker Facilitation Wayne Buck: Includes introductions and thank you's for speakers, gifts and making sure slide carousels, etc. are in each room: help needed!
- Conference Brochure Bill Read: Draw up brochure and arrange printing
- Buses Bill Read: for field trips and hotel shuttle

- Conference Facilitators Bill Read: help needed to assist out of town guests during the conference
- Displays Ted Presant: responsible for all displays in RBG foyer: help needed!

**Lawrence Zeleny 1904-1995**  
(from *Sialia*, Summer 1995 Volume 17, Number 3)

The bluebird world lost one of its brightest luminaries, Lawrence Zeleny, on May 27, 1995, when he succumbed to a heart attack. Larry had celebrated his 91st birthday on April 30, 1995, in his home at University Park, Maryland. For the last several years he had remained at his home in a second "retirement," while others had taken on the task of monitoring his 65 box bluebird trail at the USDA Beltsville Agricultural Research Center. This followed a retirement from a long career as a biochemist in the USDA. He had devoted that retirement time to promoting bluebird conservation throughout first the State of Maryland, and then continent-wide by writing articles for the then Purple Martin News. His book: *The Bluebird: How You Can Help Its Fight For Survival* published by Indiana University Press appeared in 1976. In 1977's June issue of *National Geographic Magazine* his article "Song Of Hope For The Bluebirds" stimulated such widespread interest that a group of colleagues gathered around Larry as Founder and the North American Bluebird Society was formed. Larry maintained a voluminous correspondence and telephone advisory system with bluebird enthusiasts everywhere. His gentle unassuming way endeared him to his many audiences when through his "bluebird talks" he could inspire his listeners, be they Lions Club members, garden club members, a youth group, or bird club members. Larry's beloved wife, Olive, preceded him in death by eight years. He is survived by a son, Bill, and a daughter, Nancy Zeleny Kuhn, and four grandchildren. He leaves behind him a legacy of love for nature and for caring for one of God's most beautiful creatures – the bluebird. His friends and followers in the bluebird conservation movement will miss a leader they loved, and we can rest assured that the Author of Creation is blessing Larry with the best of all consolations!

-Mary D. Janetatos

**Nesting Persistence of House Sparrows**  
Wayne H. Davis and Beth A. Blankenship  
(from *Sialia*, Summer 1995 Volume 17, Number 3)

House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) have the reputation of being persistent after claiming a nest box. The male is said to adopt a site and defend it throughout the breeding season. It has been reported that unless the male House Sparrow is destroyed or deported, the box will not be available for bluebirds or other cavity nesting species (Zeleny 1976; Grussing 1980).

It has been our observation, however, that many individual House Sparrows are not persistent. During several years of monitoring nest boxes in experiments on use of various box styles by Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*), we have systematically removed nests and completed clutches of House Sparrows but have not harmed the adults. We have noticed that, more frequently than not, the sparrows abandon their nesting attempts after such experiences.

We, therefore, decided to measure persistence of nesting behavior in House Sparrows. In September 1993, we erected 150 nest boxes at the University of Kentucky agricultural farms at Lexington. The boxes had a floor of 4 x 4 inches (10 cm x 10 cm), a depth of 5 inches (12.5 cm) and a slot entrance 4 inches (10 cm) wide and 1 1/8 inches (29 mm) high. Boxes were mounted on electrical conduit and placed about 4 to 8 feet (1.3 to 2.5 m) above the ground.

Once a House Sparrow completed a clutch, we removed either the entire clutch, leaving the nest, or we removed both nest and

eggs. When sparrows completed another clutch in one of these boxes, we counted that as a repeat. We had 15 repeats after removing nest and eggs and 11 repeats after removing the eggs only. Since this difference was not significant (chi squared test: P=0.4) we combined these data. Results are shown in Table 1.

House Sparrows did not repeat clutches in nearly half of the instances. The repeats may have involved the same or different birds. These data indicate that removal or death of the male House Sparrow is not always necessary to deter the sparrow from the nest box. Bluebirds completed clutches in seven of the boxes after a clutch of sparrow eggs was removed, and in twelve of the boxes after the nest and eggs of the sparrow were removed. By removing the completed House Sparrow clutch, bluebirds often have an opportunity to use the nest box.

**References**

- Grussing, Don. 1980. *How to Control House Sparrows*. Roseville, Minnesota: Roseville Publishing House.
- Zeleny, Lawrence. 1976. *The Bluebird. How You Can Help Its Fight For Survival*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

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**Table 1. Nesting Persistence by House Sparrows**

No repeats	One repeat	Two repeats	Three repeats	Four repeats	Seven repeats	Total
38	22	8	9	1	1	79

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NABS Founder Lawrence Zelery at the 1986 annual meeting in Wagoner, Oklahoma. Photograph by John Findley, III.