

THE ONTARIO EASTERN BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

SPRING NEWSLETTER - MARCH 1990

2-165 Green Valley Drive,
Kitchener, Ontario, N2P 1K3

Welcome to the Spring 1990 Newsletter. Hope your winter has been a good one and that, as you receive this newsletter, you have already seen your first EABL of 1990.

The weather this past winter has been highly unusual. December was -7°C below normal, the second coldest December on record. January was about 3 to 4°C above normal; and February has also been well above normal, with an ice storm on the 15th and 16th and a severe storm with extreme cold on the 24th and 25th.

I have already seen my first EABL, on February 18th. (My earliest spring record was March 8th in 1987.) A singing male displaying territorial behaviour near my nestbox trail just south of Cambridge, Ontario--it was flying from treetop perches and calling for a female. I would not have been looking if I had not received a call from Larry Lamb, who had seen six EABL's on February 14th in this same area. Immediately after Larry's call on Sunday, I got in my car and drove to this spot. I walked along an old abandoned rail line and just at the end of my walk located the singing male near a remnant section of provincially rare tall grass prairie. It seemed impervious to the cold, gusty wind which was blowing and was intent with the more important business of finding a mate. Bluebirds are much harder than people realize.

I always count the days between the last sighting from the previous year--November 6th, 1989 (five EABL's)--and the first sighting the following spring--this year, February 18th. This is definitely the shortest time span I have recorded and is probably a result of the warm winter and the fact that there are more EABL's in Ontario.

I have had numerous reports of EABL's staying all winter in Norfolk County and areas along Lake Erie. Their numbers have been increasing on Christmas bird counts in the southern parts of the province throughout the 1980's.

I am not sure what kind of weather to expect in March and April, but let's hope we don't have to make up for the warm weather we received in January and February.

OEBS Memberships

We are sending this newsletter to everyone who received the Fall 1989 Newsletter. If you have not renewed your membership, please do so: We depend on this money to keep the OEBS going and to keep the yearly dues at \$6.00. The OEBS is completely volunteer and all monies go toward expenses: Stamps, envelopes, typing, photocopying, education, etc. One of the expenses is our annual nestbox survey, which is our major objective. If you have not sent in your 1989 Nestbox Survey,

please do so. There is still time before my telephone calls to delinquent respondents. If you do not have time to fill out the survey, just drop a line indicating the number of nestboxes and number of fledged EABL's or successful nestings.

OEBS Conference

I hope you can attend the 1st OEBS Conference, to be held April 7th, 1990, at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Hamilton. See the enclosed pre-registration form and speakers line-up. The talks will be informative, but we hope it will be informal enough for lots of discussion time with other bluebirders at the conference. See you there.

Nestbox Monitoring and Banding by William Read.

Checking nestboxes is important in assessing breeding success and for preventing some forms of parasitism. But it must be cautioned that visiting nestboxes also greatly increases the chance of predation by mamallian predators, especially raccoons. Human scent is left on the box and post and around the ground. Raccoons in particular have learned that if you follow human scent long enough, food will be nearby. (In this case, the adult female, young or eggs will be consumed.)

Beginning bluebirders are often guilty of checking nestboxes much too often. You can love your bluebirds to death. If boxes are fully protected against predation (i.e., a metal cone around the post under the nestbox), periodic checking causes very little interference to the bluebirds unless it is done during the nestbox selection process or the nest building phase.

I recommend observing the bluebirds from a distance for the first nesting season and only interfering if trouble arises. (Much can be learned from observation from a distance with binoculars.) Make sure to clean the nest out after the young fledge, in preparation for a second nesting.

Yearly records are extremely valuable in monitoring population trends, and egg counts are important, but not to the extent that they jeopardize nesting success. Common sense must be used in making these decisions. If predation occurs, you should consider not checking boxes so frequently and making sure they are predator-proof. It is very difficult to discourage raccoons once they learn a food source. Upon finding food in one nestbox, they may investigate all the nestboxes on your trail.

This same message applies to birdbanders. Birds should not be banded if it jeopardizes nesting success, and individual banding programs should have an objective to them. I have been involved in a banding program with EABL's in apple orchards around the Cambridge area. Birds are retrapped in consecutive years to determine the effects of chemical sprays on reproductive success. We must know if returning birds have nested successfully in orchards in previous years.

Neil Burghess of the Canadian Wildlife Service will be giving a presentation on April 7th on the effects of organophosphate

insecticides on birds nesting in apple orchards.

If you are interested in banding or would like to take part in a banding training program, please contact George Wallace of the Ontario Bird Banding Association at: 30 Extra Street, Guelph, Ontario, N1H 1Y9; phone: 1-519-836-7173.

George is in charge of bander training and may be able to give you the address of a bander in your area.

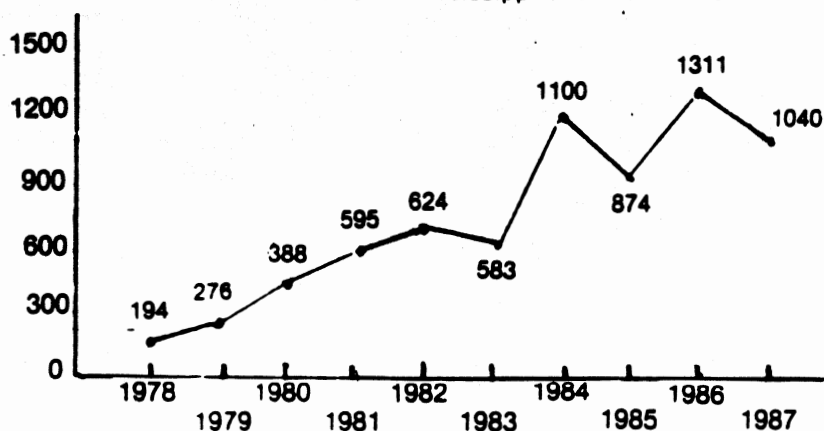
This article is printed here with the permission of
the North American Bluebird Society.

"Where Are the Bluebirds at Christmas Time?" by Reber Layton.

"Have you often wondered where bluebirds are during the winter months? Finding the answer to this poses a problem. Perhaps the best indicator, and maybe the only one, is the Christmas Bird Count. As you perhaps know, counts are made on designated territories from dawn to dusk or even later on specified days during the two weeks of Christmas. They are carried out in an organized manner throughout the United States and Canada under the auspices of the National Audubon Society. Results are published in American Birds. This has gone on for the past 89 years.

"Using these data, I tabulated the Eastern Bluebird count for Mississippi over the past ten years. That is the duration of the Jackson Audubon Society Bluebird Project, a part of NABS' bluebird emphasis. Bluebird houses during the ten year period have been made and sold at cost, resulting in over 36,000 bluebird boxes being placed throughout the state. I found that the number of bluebirds tallied on these counts rose steadily from 194 in 1978 to 1040 in 1987 (Figure 1).

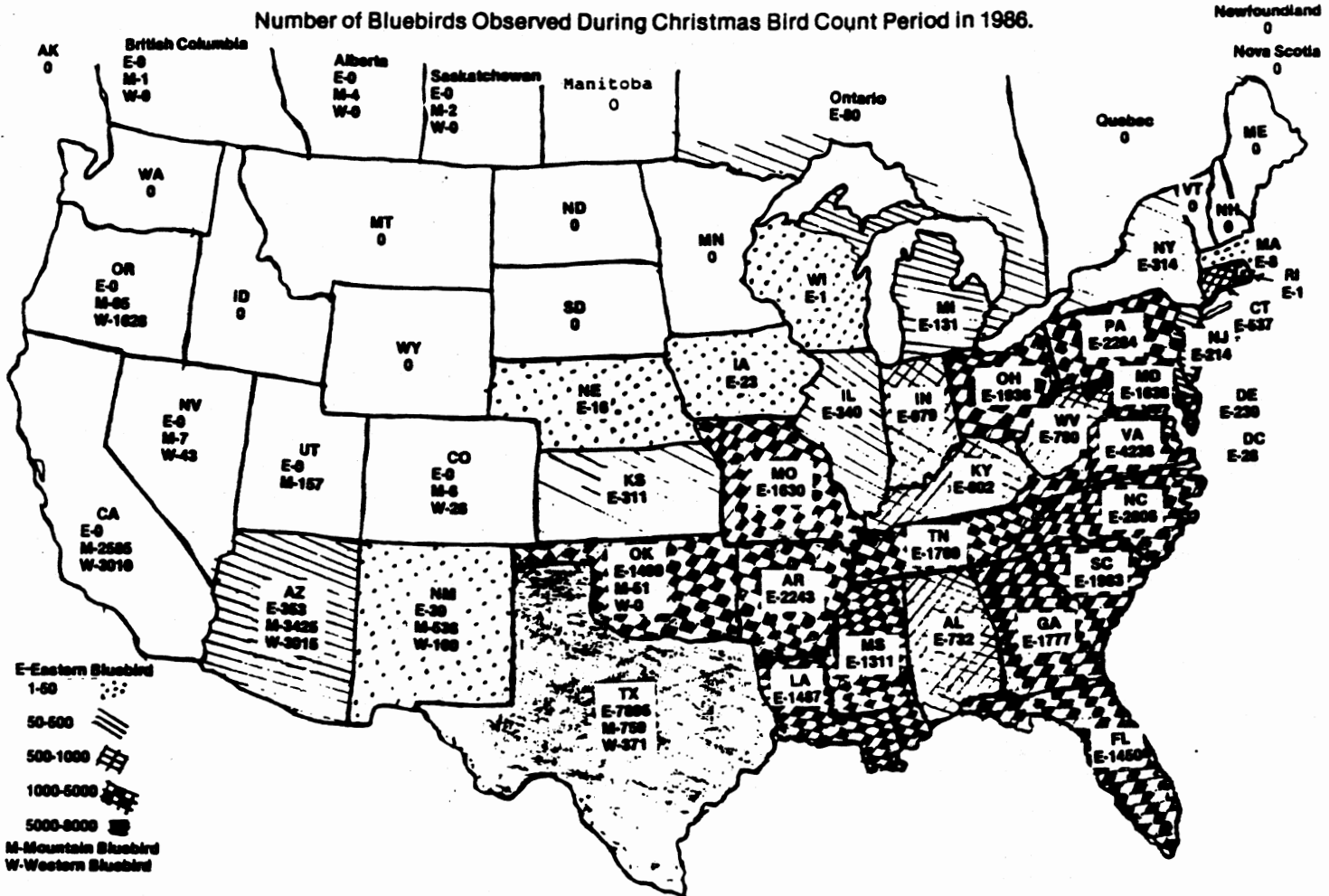
Figure 1. Christmas Bluebird Counts for Mississippi Over the Past 10 Years.



"Review of the tabulated data whetted my appetite to see just where bluebirds are during the Christmas season throughout North America. I selected 1986, a year in which the data were tabulated in a columnar fashion providing easier data gathering for my purpose than the narrative arrangement found for other years. I realized, of

course, that the Christmas Bird Counts could not be considered to be a scientific comparison of states, for one could hardly compare the results of California, with over 3,000 persons counting, to that of Mississippi with only 192 counting. By dividing the total count of bluebirds for each state by the number of persons counting for that state, a usable comparative result might be reached. However, these data can be used within each state to indicate the changes in population of a species and to show migration patterns of a species within the continent.

"The map shows the location of bluebirds during the Christmas period for each state of the United States and the provinces of Canada as revealed by the Christmas Bird Count.



"As one might expect, the concentration of the Eastern Bluebird is across the South, but Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Missouri hold a large number during the Christmas period. California, Arizona, and New Mexico are states selected by Mountain and Western Bluebirds for their winter sojourn--with Texas retaining its share of all three species. The 80 Eastern Bluebirds counted in Ontario, Canada, certainly seem to

indicate that all bluebirds do not migrate from their residential area to warmer climates."

I would recommend for all nest box operators to become members of NABS--the address is written below. Their 10th Anniversary Edition 1988 has compiled some of the best articles written about Bluebirds over a ten-year period. I would recommend it highly, as I would a subscription to the NABS.

North American Bluebird Society,
Box 6295, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A., 20906-0295;
Membership: Regular--\$15.00 U.S.

House Sparrow Control Program by William Read.

When bluebird trails are unsuccessful, the blame may usually be traced to either improper location of the nesting boxes or failure to prevent House Sparrows from taking over.¹

If House Sparrows are allowed to nest successfully in boxes, the young will in turn seek out boxes in which to nest. This will result in an increase in boxes occupied by House Sparrows and actually pose a greater threat to Bluebirds than if the boxes were not put up in the first place, the opposite of what was intended.

A number of methods can be employed to reduce the number of House Sparrows on your bluebird trail:

- (1) House Sparrows can be removed by using a special nestbox trap referred to as the Hüber House Sparrow Trap. This trap, and the book on how to control House Sparrows by Don Grussing, are available from:

North American Bluebird Society,
Box 6295, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A., 20906-0295; and

The Ellis Bird Farm Ltd.,
Box 2980, Lacombe, Alberta, Canada, T0C 1S0; phone (403) 346-2211.

Send a self-addressed stamped envelope with your enquiry.

- (2) Adult House Sparrows can be removed from the nestbox during incubation by quietly approaching the box while either the female or male are incubating. If you are unsuccessful on the first attempt, they will become extremely wary upon the next visit and may be impossible to capture in this way. Damp, cold days are best, when the House Sparrows are more reluctant to leave the eggs.
- (3) Larger House Sparrow traps are available. A ground trap called a

Footnotes:

- ¹ Zeleny, L. 1986. The Bluebird: How You Can Help Its Fight for Survival. Available from North American Bluebird Society. (Founder NABS.)

HavaHart can be purchased at some hardware stores and may be available from the NABS. It can be extremely effective in areas where House Sparrows are common, especially if the area is baited with seeds prior to using it.

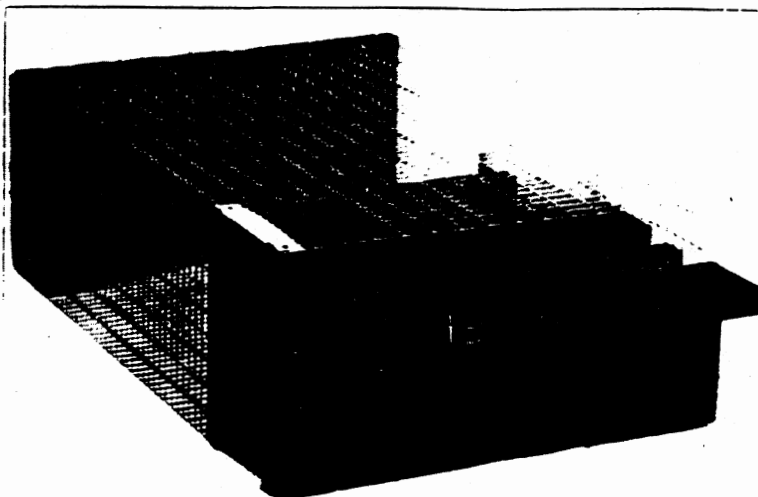
Another trap called the Trio is also very effective at capturing individual birds. It is less expensive and can be purchased from the NABS.

Only House Sparrows and Starlings can be legally removed from these traps. All other birds (House Wrens, Tree Swallows, etc.) are protected under the Migratory Birds Act and their nests cannot be tampered with.

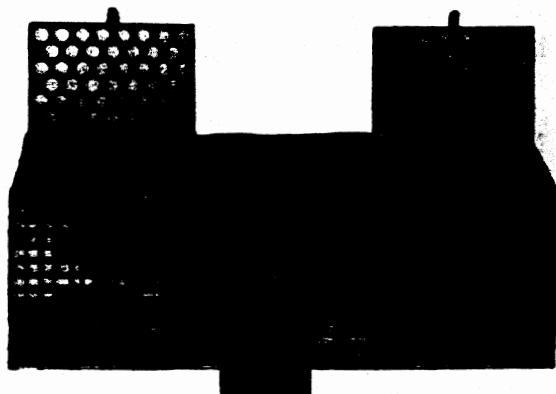
Caution: You should examine the traps regularly and immediately release any native birds which will wander into the traps.

The best time to capture House Sparrows is from late fall to early spring. After this time, they spread out into breeding territories and are much more difficult to trap.

House Sparrows can be driven to areas at least 25 miles from the site of capture and released without fear of them returning to their original nesting areas; or otherwise, they can be humanely disposed of since they are not protected by law.



HavaHart Trap



Trio Trap

1989 Nestbox Survey

I am still in the process of collecting and analyzing nestbox data from the 1989 Survey. The final total of fledged EABL's for Ontario will be over 7,000, with close to 11,000 nestboxes monitored.

Lyme Disease

transmission of Lyme Disease through handling birds. I recently spoke with Dr. Ian Barker about this possibility. According to Dr. Barker, the chances of this happening are extremely slim. The following article is reprinted from the Memorandum to Banders, Number 49, Canadian Wildlife Service, December 1989:

"Michael Biro, from Toronto, wrote us expressing concern about bird-transmitted ticks. He was concerned that field biologists were a high-risk group, and that someone should gather information on the incidence of these ticks. We contacted Dr. Ian Barker at Guelph University and found out the following. Lyme disease is still rare in Canada (less than 10 cases). The ticks that carry Lyme disease are present in the deer at Long Point in southern Ontario but are not present in the mammals on the base of the Point. The two other ticks that could transmit Lyme disease are not common in Ontario but one is fairly common in western Canada. Several horses in southern British Columbia have been diagnosed with Lyme disease based on antibody counts and clinical signs.

"The symptoms of Lyme disease are variable, but 70% of the time a red rash expands from the site of the bite, leaving a white central area. Symptoms include fatigue and headache. After 3 - 6 months chronic arthritic-type symptoms may develop. These can be treated with a fairly long session of drug therapy. The sooner Lyme disease is diagnosed the less chance there is of permanent joint damage. In Ontario and Manitoba the public health service labs can diagnose Lyme disease with a blood sample.

"The tick commonly known to carry Lyme disease has been reported in 30 species of birds. A tick which is embedded and engorged in a bird's skin will not let go to attach to a person handling it, but an unattached tick among a bird's feathers could move onto a person holding the bird. The chances of this happening are slim.

"There are two scientists who can identify ticks found on birds. Just drop the tick in 70% alcohol, note the time and date, locality and species of the host bird and send to either:

- (1) Dr. Gordon Surgeoner, Department of Environmental Biology,
University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, N1G 2W1.
 - (2) Dr. Everet Lindquist,
Biosystematics Research Institute, Agriculture Canada,
K.V. Neatby Building, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0C6."
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The following article is reprinted from the Memorandum to Banders, Number 49, Canadian Wildlife Service, December 1989.

"Purple Martin Conservation Area (PMCA)

"The PMCA is trying to locate and register a majority of the martin breeding sites in North America. By doing this they hope to coordinate the efforts of the martin 'landlords' and help pass on to them the best techniques of martin management. You can help by distributing Colony Registration forms to all the purple martin enthusiasts in your community. To volunteer, simply write to the PMCA stating how many registration forms you would be willing to distribute. The address is:

Purple Martin Conservation Association,
Institute for Research and Community Services,
Edinboro University of Pennsylvania,
Edinboro, Pennsylvania, 16444 U.S.A."

Welcome to the OEBS Spring 1990 Conference

Where: Royal Botanical Gardens Headquarters,
Burlington, Ontario. (See enclosed map.)

When: Saturday, April 7th, 1990.
Registration--8:30 to 9:15 a.m.; Program--9:15 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Program Topics:

- The effects of organophosphate insecticides on Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows nesting in apple orchards - Neil Burghess (CWS).
- Nest box trails in Quebec - Andre Dion.
- The North American Bluebird Society--A short history - Sadie Dorber (NABS) Maryland.
- Cavity nesters in Ontario CWIP - Mark Stabb (MNR).
- Eastern Bluebird population trends in Ontario, and a short history of the OEBS - Bill Read.

Lunch: We will make arrangements for lunch at one of the local restaurants, or bring your own and tour the gardens at the RBG during lunchtime.

Door Prizes .. Exhibits .. Film: "Bring 'Em Back--EABL's in Minnesota"
Sale Items: Patches, decals, books, journals, etc.

Please return by March 27th, 1990. Mail to:
William F. Read, 2-165 Green Valley Drive, Kitchener, Ontario, N2P. 1K2.

YES, we're coming to the conference.

Name(s) _____ Telephone: () _____
Address _____

Pre-Registration Fee: \$4.00 - At the door,
or can be included with this return.

Addendum to the 1988 Eastern Bluebird (EABL)
Ontario Nestbox Survey Sheet
issued with the Fall 1989 OEBS Newsletter.

Statistical information in this summary sheet was taken directly from the 1988 EABL nestbox survey forms received by the author.

Estimates were made for EABL fledged young if they were not included on the survey forms. For example, if a respondent indicated six successful nestings, but made no estimate of total fledged young, I would estimate (4 x 6) or 24 fledged young EABL's. Estimates were not made in other cases. For example, if egg totals were not included on nestbox survey forms, then no estimate would be made on the respondents' survey forms. This is why the egg total is actually lower than the EABL fledged young total. The egg total would probably be around 10,000 if all trail operators counted and recorded on their survey sheets the eggs laid. (See article on nestbox monitoring and banding in the Spring 1990 OEBS Newsletter.) In order to analyze data in a statistical manner, individual survey forms would have to be examined.

The information collected and analyzed on the summary sheets is a good indicator of population changes or trends from year to year. The survey started in 1987 and will continue as one of the major objectives of the OEBS.

- William F. Read.