



"Bringing back Bluebirds for Future Generations!"

# Bluebird News

Volume 33 Issue 3

Summer 2023

## The Story of an Albino Bluebird by Mary Roen, River Falls, WI

On June 19, 2023, I was monitoring my Bluebird trail when I came upon a nest with an unusual looking Bluebird. It was more undeveloped than its 3 siblings and the feathers starting to come out were white! Could this be an albino chick in the nest? I snapped a couple of pictures and left quickly. This was day 8.



I went back two days later on June 21, day 10. It was doing well, and had feathered out more. I wondered if the parents were feeding it as much as its normal siblings but it seemed they were. I left a few mealworms on the top of the nest box for them.



I normally check my nest boxes once a week, but I wanted to keep track on how the little albino was doing so I went back in two more days on June 23, day 12. I had seen its red eyes so I knew it was albino. It was doing well, still smaller than its normal colored siblings, but alert and had feathered out more.

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I went back on June 25, day 14. It was completely feathered out and looked healthy, but still smaller than the others. With the modified Gilwood nest box built by Joe Adelman, I was able to take pictures with the door closed so they would not fledge prematurely.



On June 26, day 15, the albino was growing and looking well. It was close to the size of its siblings.



## The Story of an Albino Bluebird (continued)

On June 27, day 16, the albino was the only nestling in the box. The others had fledged. It looked alert and healthy.



I expected the albino to be gone when I went back on June 28th and it was. The nest was empty. It fledged on day number 17, just one day after the rest.



There is a tree line close to the nest box and I thought that would be a likely place for the fledglings to be. I walked closer and the Bluebird parents started scolding me, like they did when I did a nest box check. Luckily, I had my binoculars and camera with me. I checked out the trees for about 15-20 minutes and I saw the albino! It was sitting on a branch quite far up, right by

the trunk of the tree. Had it been further back I would never have seen it. It was one in a million chance, and I found it! It just sat there on that branch for about 15 minutes while I was taking pictures. I hated to leave, knowing I would probably never see it again.



Albinos are not common. One source said one in 1764 hatchlings. Both parents have to carry the recessive trait. I have monitored nest boxes for 34 years and fledged over 3800 Bluebirds, and this is the first one I have seen. Albinos usually have a short life span. They are so much more obvious to predators. Without melanin, the feathers wear out faster. Also, albinos are subject to eye problems, so their vision isn't as good as normally colored birds. Despite all this, the little albino survived to fledge and my hope is that he beats the odds and survives to come back next year. I will be watching for it.

## Facebook Post From Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania

Posted by Kathy Kremnitzer, past president of the Maryland Bluebird Society and current president of NABS

Well, that was traumatic! Checking my friend Jenny's section at Antietam this morning. What I thought would be a quick visit turned into quite the adventure! Nestbox after nestbox infested with ants, now heavily dosed with cinnamon (no birds in those boxes) and then to this box which I thought I would find empty. Jenny's notes said the young were fledging as she checked last week. However, nothing is that simple. I heard movement as I approached the box and could see a baby trying to climb out of the entrance. The adult bluebirds were on the wire above me, making it clear they did not approve of me being there. The baby jumped out of the box when I opened it but he could not fly. If his siblings had fledged, it stood to reason that he should be able to as well. I had to examine him to see if there was a problem.

The photo shows what can happen inside a nest-



box during extended rainy periods. Insects are not readily available so sometimes the babies will be fed earthworms and other foods that give them diarrhea. These feces can sodden and sully a nest and can also act as a glue or cement, preventing a baby from fledging by being stuck in the nest.

This little one was lucky that his parents were still feeding him after a week since his legs and feet were so thickly coated in dried fecal matter that he was trapped inside the nestbox, unable to fledge. The kind park staff allowed me the use of a sink, some soap and warm water so that his feet and feathers could be cleaned. He is now cozy in his nestbox, which was a disaster but now boasts a fresh, dry if not perfectly formed nest, and his parents have been visiting. I hope he is able to fledge successfully very soon. As for me, I'm going to check a few more boxes and then go watch my grandsons play baseball.



## Lost Creek Trail Summer Update, Jean Olsen, Pine County Coordinator

Another cool, wet spring delayed nesting for about a month again this year. First bluebird sighting was 4/13/23. First nests were recorded on 5/3/23, 4 of them. After that, activity picked up like crazy. Swallows are prolific this year, occupying 32 of the 59 boxes, but the bluebirds are holding their own despite this. Box check on 6/21 showed 31 fledged, 15 chicks still in the nest and 7 eggs laid for a second brood. A warm, dryer spring might have resulted in less swallow nests in the bluebird boxes, as the swallows arrive after the bluebirds up here. Maybe next year.

One box had 4 eggs laid on the bare bottom of the box, with no nest built at all. I was curious to watch this unfold, but unfortunately a bear hit that box, tipping it over, and it was abandoned by the parents. (See picture below).

Bears hit 7 boxes in the last 2 weeks, 3 bluebird and 4 swallow nests. New bluebird nests were started in 4 of those after they were repaired and remounted. No bear predation since then.

The new style boxes held up great to this predation, suffering no damage. Straightening out the conduit poles and remounting was all that was needed. The 1 Peterson style box hit by a bear was torn to pieces, though.

A couple of things I've done to the new style boxes to improve them:

\*For those with the BBRP labels on; I've covered the labels with clear, wide tape, as some of the labels were weathered/peeling off already. The tape is holding up good so far.

\*For the wooden floors of the boxes, I've inserted a plastic food container cover on the bottom, for easier clean out. I did this because one box of four chicks died and by the time I checked the box the next week, it was a gooey, stinky mess that had soaked into the wood. Took a bit of cleaning/disinfecting to get that out of the wood. I experimented with 5 boxes to begin with. The bluebird (and swallows) seem to have no problem with this, nesting as normal. I'm putting those all the new boxes now. The pic of the nest-less box with 4 eggs shows the red cover I used in the bottom of that one.



### *Bluebird Recovery Program of MN*

Bluebird Recovery Program Membership Enrollment in the Bluebird Program includes: Initial Information Packet containing a full color Trail Guide, Top Ten Tips including colored Nest Guide, Record Keeping booklet, Pole assembly instruction sheet, yearly Report Form and quarterly Newsletter. There are also annual meetings and a yearly Bluebird Expo. Consultation and advice are available by phone, e-mail, correspondence or in the field.

Enrollment Contributions are TAX Deductible. \_\_\_\_\_ New Member \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal

Membership Periods Are:

2 years \_\_\_\_\_ \$23.00      5 years \_\_\_\_\_ \$55.00      Lifetime \_\_\_\_\_ \$150.00

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Please indicate how you'd like to receive the BBRP quarterly Newsletter \_\_\_\_ via email or \_\_\_\_ via USPS

If giving a membership as a gift please enter your name below so the recipient can be aware of your generosity:

Please mail form and payment to:

**BBRP c/o Brianna Frisch, 11018 Taylor Hill Road Minnieska, MN 55910**

## 2023 BBRP Outreach

Here are some of the events we were involved in to educate and inspire the public:

Three 'Essentials of Bluebirding' classes were held in late March and early April: in-person at Afton State Park, a Zoom class for Lake Maria State Park and in-person for the City of South St. Paul. These classes are provided free of charge to these organizations to help them recruit volunteers to monitor their bluebird trails.

The following are community events where a bluebird booth informed attendees about BBRP's programs and to answer bluebird related questions staffed by County coordinators and/or board members:

- Rice County Master Gardener's event at St. Olaf College – March 11
- Gammelgarden Museum opening weekend event – Scandia MN – May 5
- National Loon Center spring event – Cross Lake MN – May 16
- Bird Festival – Detroit Lakes – May 20
- Gathering Partners – MN Master Naturalist conference – U of M Landscape Arboretum – May 20 & 21
- Booth at the MN Zoo at their Wild Night event – June 8
- Presentation at 125 Live, the Center for Active Adults in Rochester, MN, Monday, June 12
- Gammel Museum Midsommer Festival - Scandia MN – June 24
- Gammel Dag in Peterson, MN – June 24
- Camden State Park – June 24
- Little Falls – annual Green Fair – August 2
- Booth at the MN Zoo at their Wild Night event – August 17
- Henderson Hummingbird Hurrah – Aug. 19th
- State Fair with MPCA in the Eco-Experience building – August 29
- Rice Co. Steam & Gas engine show – September 1, 2, & 3

### Upcoming Events

- Inver Glen Library – Inver Grove Heights – September 18, staffing a BBRP information table 3 – 5 pm
- Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge and the Friends of Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge - 28th Annual Wildlife Festival on September 30, 2023
- Dangerous Man Brewer – NE Minneapolis – Partnering with The National Park Service for an event in October - DTBD

## An Educational Tradition Continues, by Mary C. Bailey

In keeping with a tradition of at least 20 years, on Wednesday, May 17, Bill & Mary Bailey participated in the annual field trip for Chatfield Elementary School's third graders to experience the delights of Savanna Spring Nature Area, north of Chatfield High School on US Route 52.

There were six educational stations: Water Quality, Wildflowers, Binocular Use, Nature Crafts, Trees, and Birds.

At the station for Trees, Bill explained many aspects of the forest, including invasive species and their control and tree rings to determine a tree's age

and growth stages. He showed oddities such as a regrafting of a tree limb which he called "firewood with a handle."

At the station for Birds, Mary encouraged the youngsters to identify pictures of birds and had soft toy birds for them to identify. She also had a nest with "bluebird eggs" (actually realistically painted wood) for them to see what happens in a real bluebird nestbox. The children also had bird stories of their own, frequently what happens at their grandmother's house!

## Environmental Learning Center Features Bill & Mary Bailey

On Saturday, April 22, Bill & Mary Bailey, of Chatfield spoke to a sold-out audience of over 96 people at the Dinner on the Bluff series at Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center in Lanesboro, MN.

After a 3-course dinner made by Eagle Bluff's in-house chefs, Bill & Mary used a PowerPoint presentation to explain that their focus was the future of the natural world. They translated this into visual examples of careful farming practices, timber stand improvement, promoting habitat for wildlife in their forest areas, and encouraging people of all ages to enjoy the local Lost Creek Hiking Trail in Chatfield. They spoke on their respective specialties: Bill in forest and land management and Mary with her 30



years of experience with eastern bluebirds and wildlife sanctuary ownership. They explained that their focus is the future in preserving natural areas, both public and private, for education and enjoyment.

Monday, June 12, Mary Bailey spoke at 125 Live, the Center for Active Adults in Rochester, MN, for their "One Topic, One Hour" series. Her topic was "A Bluebird Walks Through Nature." She explained to the audience what she does as a bluebird trail monitor and BBRP County Coordinator for Olmsted and Fillmore Counties and showed visuals of what anyone can find walking in a natural area.

## Tidbits

**Save the Date for next year's Expo!** Saturday April 20th, at Redwood Falls. We've already blocked off rooms at the Redwood Lodge which is within walking distance to our venue. Call 507-644-5700 and ask for a Bluebird Recovery Program room. We look forward to seeing you there!

**Reminder to submit your Trail Reports.** We need to know your statistics whether you have fledged hundreds of chicks or none at all. Please take the time to completely and accurately fill in your trail report form either online or with the enclosed form. Reports are due by December 31, 2023.

### From Loren "Murph" Murhpy

This was a real shock to me - and I have seen a lot!!



Photos by Stacy Shuda & Murph

This beautiful Bluebird Dad died in flight on his way to feed his kids. He had no trauma (I even rolled him over to check), wings extended and legs tucked in.

No wounds that I could see. I am sure Mom will feed their babies to fledging. Makes me wonder what my fate will be....at my age, could it all be done?

And it sounds like we are going to lose this wonderful print shop that has for many years printed and mailed out this newsletter. Ardy & I and our labeling team will surely miss it!

**[From the editor:** Yes, Faribault Printing will be closing before the next issue of Bluebird News comes out. Thanks to Milo for formatting the newsletter and a special thank you to Ardy, Murph and their whole team who have gotten our newsletter ready to mail, labelling, sorting, and bundling them. They have saved the organization from paying for a mailing service for many years by volunteering to do this task.]

**The board is sad that we are saying goodbye to Joni Welda,** who is resigning her position as our secretary. She and her husband are moving to Wisconsin. She has been our Expo Silent Auction Coordinator the last two years and her many years of bluebirding experience were such an asset to the board. Wishing her all the best!



## Prothonotary Warbler Trail 2023, Joni Welda, La Crescent Minnesota

The Spring of 2023 was a difficult year for starting a Prothonotary Warbler nestbox trail along the Upper Mississippi River. Every year has its challenges along the river, but this year was a particularly difficult one because of impending flooding. Because of the heavy snowfall and subsequent melt of that snow from the North, we were forced to make quick decisions as to getting the boxes out before the flood even though it was only early April. The weather allowed for us to get out despite the river level being 9.2 feet. It was easy to reach the overhanging tree branches where habitat is best standing on the bow of our boat. 11 boxes in all were placed and GPS markings were placed for further monitoring. The boxes were built and graciously provided by our BBRP member, Jack Hauser. We knew we wouldn't be able to visit the boxes again until the river came back down to a more normal level-whenver that may be. There were many Prothonotaries on the islands along the sloughs where we placed them, so we knew it would be a good location.

Protonotary Warblers are one of 2 Warbler species that are cavity nesters (Lucy's Warbler is the other). Prothonotaries have a very distinct melodic song and their beautiful yellow and blue feathers set them apart from other yellow colored warblers-which gives them their nick-name of Golden Swamp Warblers

The river continued to rise to a crest of 16 feet (12 feet is considered Flood Stage) 6 feet higher than when we put in the boxes!!! On May 17th, we were able to get the boat out on the water again and see what damages were done. 2 boxes were still hanging but full of water, 3 were missing completely



(1 was found later on a shore near the tree where it was placed-damaged beyond use). 7 were still hanging and dry but no nests were observed.

As the weeks went by, we finally got one nest with 6 eggs that successfully fledged but interestingly enough, we observed 2 other Prothonotary nests in tree cavities. It was great fun watching them come and go from the tiny hole in the tree that they shared with Tree Swallows. It soon became apparent however, that now the river was going down because of a lack of rainfall to a point where we were not able to get into the slough where the boxes were placed. At a water level of 4'9", we no longer could get our boat to the trees where the boxes were hung and getting to them on foot was not an option, so as of June 8th, the remaining boxes were left assuming there were no nests in them (their breeding season is roughly April through August). At the writing of this article, the water level is still 4.9'-still too shallow to retrieve or monitor the remaining boxes.

As Bluebirders, we have our challenges of predation from other species, wasps, ants and an occasional human predator but in the 40+ years of having a Bluebird trail, I have NEVER had the inability to GET to the boxes!! Next year, the boxes will be re-

located to a different area along the Mississippi River that may be less affected by the rising and falling of the levels and even though this year was particularly challenging, like blue birding, it was a very rewarding challenge. Thank you again to Jack Hauser for providing the nestboxes and information to start this Prothonotary Warbler trail!!!



## Need help or have suggestions? Call your County Coordinator!

If you are an active bluebirder, and would like to donate some of your time to help others help the bluebirds, the BBRP is looking for more county coordinators. If interested, contact Carrol Johnson, State Coordinator, at 507-664-9433 or mnbluebirder@hotmail.com for more information.

<b>AITKIN</b> Steve Gilbertson Aitkin 218-927-1953	<b>DAKOTA</b> David Schmidt Inver Grove Heights 651-457-9195 schmidt_dw@yahoo.com	Pete Meyer Mound 952-472-7449 pjdmeyer@gmail.com	<b>LYON</b> Paul Rasmussen Russell 507-823-4731	<b>RICE</b> Carrol Johnson 507-664-9433 mnbluebirder@hotmail.com	<b>WADENA</b> Paul Sailer Wadena 218-631-4401 lodenbks@gmail.com
<b>ANOKA</b> Richard Sherva Anoka 763-360-5075 rmsherva@gmail.com	Marlys Shirley Farmington 952-469-3510 gshirley@frontiernet.net	<b>HOUSTON</b> Mike Jeresek Rushford 507-864-2573 san@acegroup.cc	Cynthia Sabinske Ghent 507-829-7965 cynthia.sabinske@gmail.com	<b>SCOTT</b> Jon Allen Savage 612-490-8700 jonedwardallen@gmail.com	<b>WASECA</b> Wally Swanson Waterville 507-362-8760 swansonw@frontiernet.net
<b>BELTRAMI</b> Brian Hiller Bemidji 218-755-2212 brian.hiller@bemidji.state.edu	<b>FILLMORE</b> Mary Bailey Chatfield 507-867-9118 marycbluebird@gmail.com	<b>HUBBARD</b> Ron Jensen Park Rapids 218-732-4205 jenspr@unitelc.com	<b>MORRISON</b> Mike & Kelly Fulford Little Falls 612-581-6400 mike@oliverspoint.com	<b>SHERBURNE</b> Jan Wallin Zimmerman 763-442-4390 janwallin37@gmail.com	<b>WASHINGTON</b> David Morgan Stillwater 651-430-2427 Leadsr sheep@aol.com
<b>BENTON</b> Bob & Sandy Rajkowski Rice 320-393-2909	Mike Jeresek Rushford 507-864-2573 san@acegroup.cc	<b>ITASCA</b> Rick Blake Grand Rapids 218-327-3303 rwblake@outlook.com	<b>OLMSTED</b> Mary Bailey Chatfield 507-867-9118 marycbluebird@gmail.com	<b>ST. LOUIS</b> Beth Urban Ely 218-365-5047	George Brown Ramsey 651-245-2435 g.r-b.jr@comcast.net
<b>CARLTON</b> Steve Gilbertson Aitkin 218-927-1953	<b>GOODHUE</b> David Schmidt Inver Grove Heights 651-457-9195 schmidt_dw@yahoo.com	<b>KANABEC</b> Steve Gilbertson Aitkin 218-927-1953	<b>PINE</b> Jeanne Olsen Hinckley 320-384-6163 lostcreekbrds@gmail.com	<b>SWIFT</b> Bill Hoberg Benson 320-843-3988 bjhoberg@charter.net	<b>WINONA</b> Brianna Frisch Minnieska 507-459-4829 bri_kruse@hotmail.com
<b>CROW WING</b> Mary Kalinowski Baxter 218-829-5297 marydee@brainerd.net	<b>HENNEPIN</b> John Hauser Bloomington 952-831-8132 jgshauser@gmail.com	<b>LAKE</b> Beth Urban Ely 218-365-5047	<b>RAMSEY</b> George Brown White Bear Lk 651-245-2435 g.r-b.jr@comcast.net	<b>WABASHA</b> Carol & Dale Nibbe Lake City 651-345-2410 ccnlc@hotmail.com	<b>WRIGHT</b> Mary A Swenson Monticello 763-516-1074 maranswen@aol.com
<b>LE SUEUR</b> Bruce Smisek Montgomery 507-364-8966 montgomerysodco@gmail.com					

### BBRP Board Members

**Brianna Frisch (Membership)**

Minnieska, MN  
507-459-4829

[bri\\_kruse@hotmail.com](mailto:bri_kruse@hotmail.com)

**Carrol Johnson (State Coordinator)**

Northfield, MN  
C-507-649-0126 H-507-664-9433  
[mnbluebirder@hotmail.com](mailto:mnbluebirder@hotmail.com)

**Nancy Engel**

Rosemount, MN  
763-843-6581

[nancyengel16@gmail.com](mailto:nancyengel16@gmail.com)

**Karah Bausch Olson (Secretary)**

Minneapolis, MN  
612-819-0944

[Karah.Bausch@target.com](mailto:Karah.Bausch@target.com)

**David Schmidt (Board Chair)**

Inver Grove Heights, MN  
651-457-9195

[schmidt\\_dw@yahoo.com](mailto:schmidt_dw@yahoo.com)

**Marilyn Suter**

Farmington, MN  
C-651-900-4335

[mbszsuit79@gmail.com](mailto:mbszsuit79@gmail.com)

**Wally Swanson (Treasurer)**

Waterville, MN  
507-380-4106

[dendroica55@gmail.com](mailto:dendroica55@gmail.com)

**Virginia Windschitl (Newsletter)**

Farmington, MN  
651-463-8056

[edbbnews@outlook.com](mailto:edbbnews@outlook.com)



Photo by Joan Schulz



## Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota



*"Raising back Bluebirds for Future Generations!"*

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Farmington, MN 55024

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Editor BB News: Virginia Windschitl,  
[edbbnews@outlook.com](mailto:edbbnews@outlook.com)

Photo by Joan Schulz

## Upcoming Events

**Saturday, September 16**

**17th Annual SE MN Bluebirders' Picnic, Chatfield**

For Information Contact Mary Bailey 507-867-9118 [marycbluebird@gmail.com](mailto:marycbluebird@gmail.com)

**Tuesday, September 19**

**2023 Annual Meeting of the  
North American  
Bluebird Society (onZoom)  
8:00 p.m. Eastern Daylight  
Savings Time**

**Saturday, September 23, 2023**

**National Public Lands Day**

**Saturday, September 30, 2023**

**ANNUAL FALL WILDLIFE FESTIVAL  
Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge –  
Zimmerman MN**



### Our Mission:

*"To encourage, inspire, educate and assist individuals and organizations to become actively involved in the restoration and preservation efforts to sustain a healthy and expanding population of bluebirds and other native cavity nesters."*



Photo by Joan Schulz

*Thank you to everyone who wrote articles, provided photographs or helped with the mailing of this publication of the Bluebird News.*